## Answering Counterplans

### Introduction

Now that you are familiar with how the negative team may introduce a particular counterplan, it is important to know how you can answer a counterplan when you are affirmative. Below, I have included an acronym to remember – which lists the particular types of responses you should give to a counterplan.

#### PLOTS

Permutation

Links to their net-benefits

Offense

Theory

Solvency Deficit

It is important to remember that the purpose of a counterplan (in most cases) is to solve all or some of the affirmative’s advantages. With this in mind, counterplans can be very dangerous for your affirmative if you do not answer them correctly. Since your job as the affirmative is to prove that the affirmative is a good idea. If the negative proves that their counterplan solves for all of the reasons you would want to adopt the affirmative plan, while avoiding some external cost that your plan causes…you would lose since the counterplan is a better option than the plan.

Each of the parts of the PLOTS acronym above gives you one level of response to the counterplan. It is preferable that your 2AC includes all or most of the parts of the acronym, as it gives you more in roads to beating the counterplan. Below, I will explain each of these types of responses.

### Permutations

A counterplan is a plan advocated by the negative that is an alternative to the affirmative’s plan. The most essential defining element of a counterplan is that it is competitive – the negative must prove that the counterplan is better than the affirmative plan and a combination of the plan and all or part of the counterplan.

General use of the Perm

The real world definition of permutation is a way, especially one of several possible variations, in which a set or number of things can be ordered or arranged. In debate, permutations are ways to combine the plan and the counterplan to test whether or not the counterplan is actually mutually exclusive to the plan (i.e. whether the counterplan must exist in a world without the plan). When you are affirmative, at a minimum you need to say what the perm is and how it avoids the disads that the negative team argued linked to the plan, but not to the cp. You should write it out. Most counterplans prove that they are mutually exclusive by Winning that they cannot happen at the same time, and there is a reason the cp is better than the plan (a net benefit). Sometimes an affirmative team could win that realistically the plan and counterplan can happen at the same time, proving the permutation is possible, but still lose that the plan and counterplan are mutually exclusive because if the positions are combined, the disad (net benefit) that linked to the plan occurs. For example – if the plan is to go to mcdonalds and the counterplan is to go to burger king, a permutation to go to mcdonalds and burger king is possible, but the counterplan would still be mutually exclusive if the net benefit to the counterplan was a disadvantage that said going to mcdonalds gives you food poisoning. Does that make sense? In the world of the permutation, we could go to mickey d’s and burger king, but that still means we get food poisoning, so the cp alone is superior.

Here is a different example where the permutation resolves the net benefit. Imagine that I suggest that we take a lunch break to go to McDonald’s. Going to McDonald’s is my plan. You suggest that we should go to Burger King (BK) instead of going to McDonald’s. You say it is better to go to BK than McDonald’s because BK has chicken fries.

If they demonstrate that it is better to go to BK because BK has chicken fries they have made it through the first hoop – proving that the counterplan is better than the plan. What they have not proven, however, is that it wouldn’t be wise to go to both. As the original advocate of going to McDonald’s, I’ll suggest a permutation – combining the affirmative plan with all or part of the counterplan – to go to McDonald’s and BK. This captures the benefit of going to BK – to get the chicken fries – while still maintaining that we should go to McDonald’s. The permutation proves that going to BK isn’t a reason not to go to McDonald’s – or that the counterplan isn’t a reason to not support the affirmative’s plan.

By the way, permutations were invented at Iowa University by Dale Hrbeck, Boston College’s John Katsulas, and Baylor University's Karla Leeper.

If you are the affirmative you should always write out the permutation; if you are the negative you should always ask for a written copy of the permutation. Don't let them finish CX without writing it down.

The number of permutations may matter; most people will accept 2 or 3 but think that 4 or more is excessive. There are arguments to be made about more than one perm being bad

#### Perm do both

The most common permutation is to just combine the plan and the counterplan advocacies. Sometimes just adding the counterplan to the plan can shield the plan from the link to the disadvantage they claim as the net benefit – the chicken fries example was an example of this case. NO MATTER WHAT. YOU SHOULD ALWAYS SAY PERM DO BOTH ON COUNTERPLANS.

Seriously. Do it.

Do it.

Did you write that down.

PERM DO BOTH. It will save your life. Or at least help you not lose a debate in many debates.

#### Intrinsic Perms

Strictly speaking, a perm should only combine parts of the plan and the counterplan. If it includes actions that are in neither the plan or the counterplan it is an intrinsic perm – old school debate called this an "offset" perm. For example, if the plan sends food aid the counterplan could send economic advisors, claim it was cheaper, and run a deficits disad. The perm could be to do both and balance the budget in other areas or cut something expensive, like SDI. In this case the perm is "offsetting" the link to the disad. This practice may be questionable (see the "Perm answers" block below). If you are affirmative and they don't question the legitimacy of the offset perm you can beat them over the head with it; GO FOR this in the 2AR if they don't say that the practice is theoretically defunct.

#### Time Frame Perms

Often the perm will simply time-order the plan and the counterplan. The perm will be to do the affirmative and then the counterplan or the counterplan and then the affirmative. Occasionally, this will mean leaving the affirmative plan on the books while the counterplan does the bulk of the work toward getting the advantage. If the affirmative plan re-prioritizes food aid and the counterplan bans all aid (claiming banning aid will solve for hunger), for example, the perm may be to do the affirmative first then the counterplan, and if aid is ever restored after the counterplan is enacted it would have to be in the affirmative priority. This is a time-order perm that leaves the affirmative plan obtaining no advantage; both the time- ordering and the fact that the plan no longer gets any advantage may be illegitimate (see "Perm answers" block).

### Links to DA

As you learned in the counterplan 101 reading, counterplans have to be mutually exclusive and net beneficial to the plan. So, as an affirmative team – you can win that the cp is either not mutually exclusive (by winning the permutation) or that it is not net beneficial by defeating the net benefit. While permutations act to resolve the reason that the plan triggers the link to the net benefit, you can also argue that the counterplan also triggers the link. I’ll use the mcdonald’s example from before

If the disadvantage to going to mcdonalds is that there are not chicken fries at mcdonalds, so the counterplan to go to burger king solves the disadvantage, since BK has chicken fries. A 2AC “Links to the disadvantage” argument would say that BK does NOT have chicken fries, so the counterplan would not resolve the chicken fry dilemma.

Let’s give an example for this topic. Let’s say the the affirmative is to pull the fifth fleet out of Bahrain. A counterplan could be to phase out the fleet over a period of 10 years. The negative says that phasing out the troops solves the affirmative’s advantage but it avoids a disadvantage related to how quick pull out would harm allied relations, since they get scared when we reduce military presence. A “links to disad” argument for this counterplan could be to say the counterplan still causes the disad bc they are still reducing military presence, even if it is a phase out.

Here’s another example. What if your plan had congress act as the agent to reduce military presence, and the counterplan had Obama sign an executive order to do the same team. The negative says the net benefit is that congressional action about the military causes congress to fight, preventing them from cooperating over another item on the agenda that needs to pass. For example, congress gets so busy fighting over passing the plan that they don’t pass a bill to help the economy. The negative would argue that having Obama do the plan instead via an executive order keeps congress out of it, giving them the ability to keep cooperating on the economic initiative. The obvious answer the 2ac could make for why the cp still links to the da is that executive orders still get a shit ton of attention by congress. I mean, just a couple years ago congress flipped shit over Obama doing air strikes in Libya without congressional approval. Pretty sure if he did the plan, it would still keep congress too busy fighting over the executive order to solve the economic issues.

### Offense

Present disadvantages to the counterplan. You should try to find arguments that link to the counterplan. For example, if the counterplan spends money and your plan does not you could run a spending disadvantage to the counterplan.

You always need to be careful that the disadvantages that you run against the counterplan do not link to your own affirmative plan. If you run disadvantages to the counterplan that also link to the plan, and you the negative then decides to jettison the counterplan, you may be in trouble because the negative will argue that those disadvantages link to your plan – and now only to your plan.

-- Are you link turning the disad? If you are and the counterplan doesn't get the link turn you don't have to answer the counterplan; the link turn is an affirmative net benefit.

-- Are you impact turning the disad? If so, and the counterplan doesn't link to the disad, the disad becomes a net benefit for you. You don't have to answer the counterplan.

### Theory

Argue that the counterplan is theoretically illegitimate. I will go over this section briefly, but I know that there will be a future article about theory so you should also read that. There are a number of theoretical controversies regarding counterplans. Affirmatives can make arguments that certain types of counterplans are theoretically illegitimate and that the negative shouldn’t be able to get rid of the counterplan after they have been read.

There is always some theory argument that can be made against counterplans. You should argue make at least some theory arguments in the 2AC because this will force the negative to spend a lot of time on these arguments in the 2NC or the 1NR since they are all or nothing arguments for the negative. If the affirmative wins one of these arguments then the negative will at least lose the option of extending the counterplan, and may even lose the debate.

Are the different types of counterplans fair? There is a debate about the merits of each of the individual types of counterplans discussed above? Is it legitimate (fair and/or educational) to simply switch the affirmative’s agent, counterplan with most of their plan (a PIC), change the process through which their plan is implemented, or solves affirmative’s non-uniqueness arguments? Most theoretical violations to reading certain types of counterplans stem off of how those counterplans are harmful to affirmative strategy or ground in a debate, since they are way too similar to the plan. It makes it almost like an affirmative has to debate against their own plan, which is unfair.

Does the negative have advocate the counterplan in the 2NR if they advance it in the 1NC? Negatives can “kick” out of disadvantages or topicality arguments that they advance in the debate. Their ability to do that is unquestioned. They do not need to advance every argument in the 2NR that they originally initiate in the debate. They only need to advance a combination of arguments that proves that the status quo, the counterplan, or the kritik alternatives are better than the affirmative. But, some argue, the negative should have to extend the counterplan in the 2NR if they advance it in the 1NC.

If the negative argues that they can kick the counterplan whenever they want (any condition), then the counterplan is said to be “conditional.” Conditionality can also be defined to include that the judge determines after the debate if the counterplan is in play. This would occur when the 2NR goes for a conditional counterplan and instructs the judge to first evaluate the debate with the counterplan in mind, but if the judge were to conclude that the negative would lose the debate, the judge would then evaluate the debate without the counterplan to determine if negative could then win the debate.

A more “limited” form of counterplan conditionality is called “dispositionality.” Dispositionality is generally defined to mean that the negative can dispose of the counterplan unless the affirmative only argues that it is bad if the affirmative “straight turns” it – to borrow the language of disadvantages. Many judges find “dispositionality good” (also called “dispo good”) arguments to be persuasive.

### Solvency Defecit

-- Does the counterplan get the advantage? If it doesn't you simply have to outweigh the disad. Normal link and brink presses to the disad may reduce the risk enough that the advantage outweighs it.

-- Does the counterplan solve the advantage? If it doesn't, does the advantage outweigh the net benefit? Do they have solvency evidence or are they just saying that they can solve?

Attack the counterplan solvency. In attacking the solvency of the counterplan, you want to argue that the counterplan will not solve for the affirmative’s case advantage(s). Often, the counterplan will clearly solve one or more of the advantages, but not other advantages(s). If the counterplan obviously doesn’t solve one of the advantages, point that out and then make as many arguments as you can as to why it doesn’t solve the others. Your arguments do not need to be complete – you do not need to win that it will not solve the advantages at all. If you can reduce the solvency some, you should be able to argue that voting affirmative is net-beneficial because it the remaining amount of affirmative advantage that the counterplan doesn’t solve for outweighs the negative’s disadvantage that doesn’t link to the counterplan.

It is important in the 2AC that you keep in mind what advantage(s) the counterplan doesn’t solve, or at least doesn’t solve very well when allocating your time covering the negative’s case arguments. You want to focus on extending the advantage(s) the counterplan doesn’t solve very well because it is those that you’ll certainly need to win by the end of the debate.

### PSOLT

While PLOTS is a great acronym, it would not be strategic to do it in this order because if you run out of time and do not get to one of these, you do not want the argument that you don’t make to be the Solvency deficit.

Your affirmative is your first line of offense in any debate when you are aff. If you do not make an argument in the 2ac for WHY the negative’s cp doesn’t solve your 1ac…you are up a creek without a paddle. All they have to win at that point is there is even a .1% reason the cp is better than the plan since the cp solves everything the plan does. You need to be able to weigh your advantages against the net benefit, and you can only do that if you have something of the aff that the counterplan doesn’t solve.

My recommendation for order is to

PSOLT

Perms are a quick answer, so you should always get that done first. If you win a perm, that makes the counterplan completely go away, so that answer should be given priority

Next is solvency deficit, for the rant I made above.

Then is offense, because if you lose that the cp solves your aff you could win that there is an external disadvantage to doing the cp and then that becomes an advantage to preferring the plan.

Links to the net benefit are important, since they neutralize the competition between the plan and cp

And finally theory, because you don’t necessarily need it to beat a cp, but it definitely can make your job easier to do so.