

Creating casebooks

What is a casebook?

A casebook is a written collection of all the debate research/speeches you have run in practice or at tournaments during your debate career. A casebook might be all your recipe note cards clipped together, or hand written or typed notes in a binder or an electronic file.

The format may be as simple as a list of pro and con arguments and evidence for a topic, resolution or theme, or as complex as complete speeches.

To begin with, casebooks can be organized chronologically by resolution. But you should begin to see themes emerging. You might have environmental debates, human rights debates, economic debates, etc. that you could group together.

Although the subject and wording of resolutions may differ, debaters should eventually be able to identify an underlying theme and know what the expected arguments should be - this is what we call a "common case."

There are a handful of common cases that exist. Once debaters know some of the common cases, they can then quickly recognize the underlying theme, the debate that needs to happen, and the common arguments, regardless of the depth of their specific knowledge about a topic. Building a debate case for almost any topic becomes much easier, especially for impromptu topics.

Once you start seeing commonalities, you might want to create a summary of your group of resolutions that includes the theme, potential caselines and arguments for both sides, and other resolutions likely to have that theme.

Just a note of warning: don't rely solely on common cases - they do not replace good thorough research on a variety of topics or taking an authentic critical thinking and investigative approach to any resolution.

Debaters should challenge themselves to build a casebook that includes topics, resolutions and themes beyond what is being debated at tournaments during the season. Good debaters spend time preparing a variety of cases, "just-in-case"!

