

# DEBATESPEAK: A GUIDE FOR BEGINNERS

by Mark W. Podvia

A separate language has developed among high school debaters. This unique language has its own distinct vocal sounds, words and word combinations that confuse and baffle the uninitiated: **Debatespeak**.

The following is intended to guide the novice debater, judge or innocent bystander through the Debatespeak maze. The novice should be warned that Debatespeak can be very habit forming. The only known cure is immediate reassignment to poetry or prose events.

**AC** Affirmative constructive speech. One of the two eight-minute constructive speeches presented by the affirmative team during a debate round. **AC** is normally preceded by the number one (1) or two (2) to indicate first affirmative or second affirmative constructive. *"As I told you in my 1AC..."*

**AR** Affirmative rebuttal. One of the two four-minute rebuttals presented by the affirmative team during a debate round. **AR** is normally preceded by the number one (1) or (2). *"In her 1AR my partner said..."*

**Card** Any piece of debate evidence, regardless of format. **Cards** generally take the form of books or briefs. In extremely rare instances, actual file cards may be used. *"Let's look at the negative team's cards."*

**CX** Cross-Examination. The period of questioning following each constructive speech. *"The 1AC admitted in CX..."*

**Disad** Disadvantage. A negative argument that problems within the affirmative plan make the adoption of that plan undesirable. *"I'll prove two disads to the affirmative case."*

**Flip** Turn an argument by the opposing team in your favor. *"This card flips the 1NC Disad."*

**Grace** The 30-second period immediately following the time allotted for each constructive and rebuttal in which the debater continues speaking. This period is called **grace** because judges use these 30 seconds to offer a silent prayer asking that God will cause the debater to shut up and sit down.

**NC** Negative constructive speech. One of the two eight-minute constructive speeches presented by the negative team during a debate round. **NC** is normally preceded by the number one (1) or two (2) to indicate first negative constructive or second negative constructive. *"In her 2NC she said..."*

**NR** Negative rebuttal. One of the two four-minute rebuttals presented by the negative team during a debate round. As with NC, **NR** is normally preceded by the number one (1) or (2).

**NucWar** Nuclear warfare. A negative team will almost always contend that any plan presented by an affirmative team will result in **NucWar**. *"The plan in 1AC will cause NucWar."*

**PMN** Plan meets need. A negative argument that the affirmative plan will not solve the problem. *I would like to bring up the following PMN."*

**Prep** Preparation time. The time allotted to each team to be used to prepare speeches. *"How much prep time do I have left?"*

**Pull** Follow an argument throughout the debate, generally by use of the flow chart. *"Pull this across the flow."*

**Signpost** An outline presented by a debater prior to a speech indicating what attacks are planned and in what order they will be made. In novice debate, signposting may take longer than the actual speech.

**Squirrel** A case dealing with an obscure, irrelevant or highly unusual area of the topic. Such plans are designed to avoid negative attacks because no rational person would expect such a plan would be offered.

**Squirrel Killer** Evidence prepared for use against squirrel plans.

**Spread** A peculiar dialect of Debatespeak wherein the debater speaks in an extremely rapid and often unintelligible manner, ignoring proper grammar, punctuation and the need to breathe. Judges who are faced with a **spread** round should have an oxygen tank nearby in case of emergency. Many debaters who speak in this dialect find that they are unable to perform any useful role in society. Instead they go on to become members of the United States Congress.

**T** Topicality. **T**, as it is used in Debatespeak, should not be confused with tea (See: The Sound of Music), tee (See: Dorf on Golf). *"I will first attack T."*

**Vicious Circle** An argument that the affirmative plan will spiral out of control, thereby causing some cataclysmic event. **Vicious Circles** generally end with NucWar.

*(Mark W. Podvia is assistant librarian and archivist at the Dickinson School of Law in Philadelphia.)*