**How to Cut Cards**

Modified with permission of Tara Tate, Glenbrook South HS

***“Cutting Cards”*** is debate lingo for finding evidence and putting it into a format suitable for easy consumption for debate. The process is really the same for any debate event, so this applies to Public Forum, Lincoln-Douglas, or even Policy Debate. Here goes:

**1. Find an article on your topic with information you believe is pertinent/important/credible**. Use some common sense when considering sources and you should be fine. Here are some potentially good starting points:

***Current Event focused evidence***

* **Christian Science Monitor** - <http://www.csmonitor.com/> - One of the best sources for information on current events, updated daily.
* **LA Times** - <http://www.latimes.com/> - One of the “major papers” in the United States.
* **New York Times** – <http://www.nytimes.com> - One of the “major papers” in the United States.
* **Washington Post** - <http://www.washingtonpost.com> - One of the “major papers” in the United States.
* **Time** - <http://www.time.com/time/> - Another magazine devoted to current events.
* **U.S. News and World Report** - <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/home.htm> - Another magazine devoted to current events.
* **CNN** – <http://www.cnn.com> – A good, general news site.
* **Gallup Poll** - <http://www.galluppoll.com/> - One of the nation’s leading polling services, great for using in introductions.

***Deeper Analysis focused evidence***

* **Cato Institute** – <http://www.cato.org> – The Cato Institute is a large organization with information divided by topic area.
* **Heritage Foundation** - <http://www.heritage.org/> - The Heritage Foundation is another “think tank” organization like Cato, just on the opposite political spectrum.
* **Brookings Institute** - <http://www.brook.edu/> - Another “think tank” like Cato.
* **Congressional Quarterly** - <http://www.cq.com> – Information about Congress and what is happening in the United States.
* **Foreign Affairs** - <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/> - A website regarding foreign policies.
* **Foreign Policy** – <http://www.foreignpolicy.com> – A website regarding, you guessed it, foreign policy.
* **Financial Times** - <http://www.ft.com/home/us> - Great source for information about the business world.

***Legal Briefs and other High Level evidence***

Do you have a brother/sister/friend in college who wants to let you use their login information? Great! Explore using **Lexis-Nexis**, **JSTOR**, and/or **Project Muse**. Through your NSDA account, you may also have access to **Hein Online**—check with your coach. Great databases, once mastered. Not for the faint of heart though – but invaluable once you learn to master them.

**2. Copy your card**. Read the article and find 1-2 paragraphs that give a specific point which you feel is important. You should include all relevant info from the article that deals with the particular issue you want to discuss. If you feel there are multiple “cards” from a single article, no problem – just make them different cards. Copy and paste the content into Word or the word processing program of your choice. YES – I said copy/paste – how often have you heard someone tell you to do that?

**3. Make your MLA citation**. Above your 1-2 paragraphs, give a full MLA citation for your evidence. YES – every single piece of evidence should have this information available. You may not always need it in a round, but when it is asked for – you must have it available upon request. All evidence should be from credible sources. In a debate, you can:

* Ask for your opponent’s information
* Discredit them for source quality, outdated evidence, or biased author attack
* If they don’t have it, you can question the credibility entirely!
* Regardless, you should always have the information available.

If you don’t know how to setup a proper MLA citation, try out [www.easybib.com](http://www.easybib.com). Just realize the “Auto Citation” function screws up more than it works right. Just go through the process yourself…it will save you time in the long run. Put “**Author in Year writes**” above your MLA citation – you’ll actually say that in the debate, the MLA citation is just for clarification questions. Feel free to make it painfully small print, to save paper and make it less distracting when reading your case. I usually go with font size 8.

**4. Make your claim**. What does your evidence prove in regards to your debate topic? State it in your own words. We’re talking a sentence maximum, but usually just an abridged shortened form of what your evidence talks about.

If your evidence is going to give statistical information on crime recidivism, your claim can be “Criminal recidivism rises/falls with rehabilitation.”

Short and sweet – connecting what your evidence will prove to your topic area. This will be the first thing you say when talking about your point, so put it above your “Author in Year writes” and MLA citation. I know it seems like I’m going out of order, but I’m going in the actual order I would use when cutting cards.

**5. Cutting the card time**. Go through the 1 – 2 paragraphs you copied/pasted from the article. Find the sentences that matter the most to your particular point you are making. Bold/Underline those words. The rest, you can shrink to size 8 font. This way, you still have the entire original context, but are only reading the info you feel is vital to your case. Your opponent can never accuse you of altering the intent of the author if you have all of the original wording right in front of them.

**6. Write your impact**. After your evidence, explain how it relates to your topic and why it matters in the round. This is your analysis on what the evidence does in the debate round for you. Explain why your argument helps you win the round. Your impact is your chance to explain how you connect the dots from what the author of a paper said to what you are actually stating during the debate.

***The final product will follow this structure:***

**CLAIM** – what you believe is true, in your own words

**WARRANT** – the proof/evidence you offer to back up your claim, composed of:

Author in Year writes,

FULL MLA CITATION

Copied/pasted 1-2 paragraphs from a particular article, bolding/underlining the important stuff and shrinking the rest.

**IMPACT** – why it matters in your own words, connecting the evidence to your particular debate topic.

***Here’s an example, from an old case:***

**Russia has interfered with peace around the world**

***Lantos in 2007 writes,***

[Tom; Representative from California; **“**Russia on the Eve of National Elections;**”** Hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee; 30 October 2007; Lexis]

For reasons that are perhaps not clear, the Putin government has repeatedly shown an irresponsible attitude toward global threats to peace, especially with regard to Iran. **The Russians say that they are opposed to a nuclear Iran. Indeed, Putin recently said that the two countries most threatened by an Iranian bomb would be Israel and Russia.**

**Even so, Putin insists upon fishing in these very troubled waters. He refuses to join with the civilized world in placing meaningful sanctions on Iran, and he goes so far as to sell to Iran advanced anti-aircraft missiles.**

**Putin has also hindered the United Nations efforts to preserve peace in the Balkans by resolving the final status of Kosova. His threats to veto any UN resolution that would grant long-deserved independence to Kosova make it unlikely that a unified international agreement will be found. If the United States and its European allies unilaterally recognize an independent Kosova** -- as I strongly support and seems most likely at this stage – **Putin has threatened to recognize Abkhazia, a move likely to destabilize an already fragile situation in the Caucuses.**

Russia is opposing the United States’ efforts to ensure that Iran remains non-nuclear. They refuse to allow sanctions to be placed on them, despite Iran’s repeated disregard for the United States and the United Nations. Not only that, but they also oppose an independent Kosovo – an ally of the United States. All of these efforts show that Russia is a threat to our interests.

**So, now go forth and make cards!** Cards are good for a number of reasons:

* You don’t have to have the entire article with you at all times, since you have the context always.
* You can easily see what info is from the article and what info is from you – at a glance
* You have the citation information for easy comparison
* You will make your judge happy, if evidence credibility is an issue – you look professional
* You meet NFL rules – you need full citation info and you have it – in style
* These will (eventually) form the majority of your contention level offense
* The remainder will be for your rebuttal preparation – so everything will have a purpose

Hope this helps you when cutting cards.