



DEBATING

A Brief Introduction for Beginners



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WHAT IS DEBATING?

We live in a world where we communicate with others all the time. Debating is a more formal way of communicating. It builds confidence and self-esteem, and develops critical thinking and reasoning skills.

If we can speak publicly and convey our ideas and thoughts coherently, we have a valuable tool that can aid us in our public, private and future lives.



Debating is different to public speaking because it includes rebuttal; proving that the opposition has arguments that are wrong.

Rules

A debate has a Chairman who conducts the debate and a timekeeper who records the time of each speaker. There are two teams:

- an Affirmative – the team that agrees with the topic; and
- a Negative – the team that disagrees with the topic.

Each side consists of three members; first, second and third speakers.

The First Affirmative speaker begins the debate. When s/he is finished and returns to her/his seat, the first Negative speaker comes forward.

Then, the Second Affirmative speaks next, followed by the Second Negative, and finally, the Third Affirmative, and the Third Negative.

Each speaker speaks for a set time, with a warning bell from the timekeeper ringing once 30 seconds before the finish of the debate, giving the debater a little time to sum up and finish, followed by a final bell, which rings twice. Each debater may speak 30 seconds after the final bell, however a continuous bell will ring after that and the speaker may then be penalised.

Each speaker has certain 'duties' to attend to as they speak (see 'Duties of Speakers').

All debaters must begin with "Good afternoon (or evening) Madam/Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen".

Arrive 15 minutes before the debate.

Affirmative teams provide a Chairman while Negative teams provide a timekeeper.

The Affirmative team collects all the paperwork for the debate from the front desk, including:

- a Chairman/Timekeeper form
- Speaker Award Certificate
- Newsletters for the room

The Chairman has to fill out two forms: the Chairman form; and the Adjudicator form with the first and last names of the debaters of both teams, and other information. The Chairman hands the Adjudicator form and the Debating Award Certificate to the Adjudicator and keeps the Chairman form for themselves.

Speakers should say “thank you” when they finish their debate.

When the debate is finished the Adjudicator will give feedback and give a decision on which team has won.

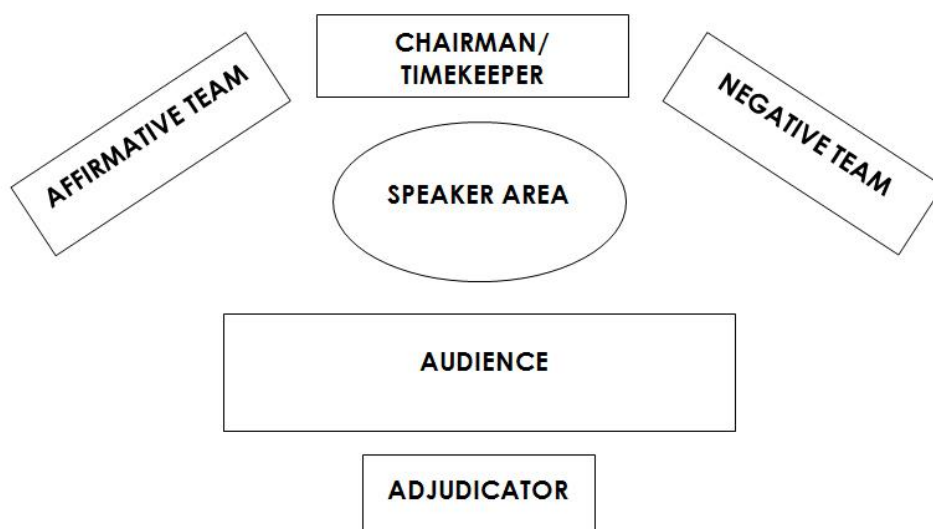
Unless the Adjudicator asks you a question you sit silently, and don't interrupt.

A speaker from each team gives a vote of thanks.

Each team then shakes hands with the opposition as a gesture of good sportsmanship.

Room Layout

A debate is set up as shown in the diagram below.



DEBATING CONTENT

Each speaker is awarded a score out of 100 which is divided as follows: -

Argument	50
Presentation	30
Structure	20

Argument is the argument, evidence and proof of the team's case and the rebuttal of the other side's case. It also includes the definition and interpretation of the topic.

Presentation is how the speaker presents his/her arguments physically, and includes things like eye contact, gestures, stance, and voice.

Structure is the organisation and order of a speaker's speech (see debating template).

Definition and Interpretation

The **definition** of the topic consists in the first instance of defining individual or key words of the topic.

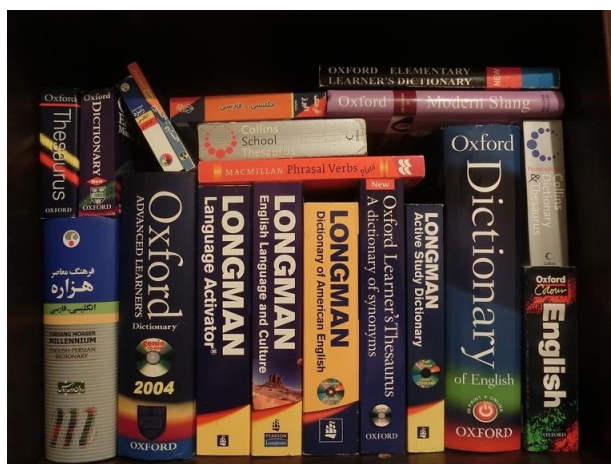
The **interpretation** of the topic is what we understand the words to mean in the context of the topic.

For example, in the argument "That cats are better than dogs", if a team defined "cats" as "tigers and lions" and "dogs" as "foxes and wolves", although technically, that is a definition from the Dictionary, in this context, we understand it to mean domestic cats and dogs.

The definition and interpretation of the topic should be outlined by the First Affirmative speaker. The Negative team must either agree or disagree with the Affirmative team's definition and interpretation.

How to define the topic:

1. Select the key words from the topic and look up their meanings in a range of dictionaries, choosing the most appropriate definition for each word.
2. Interpret the topic.
3. Formulate a sentence or short paragraph explaining what the topic means.



Topic Interpretation

No one side has a right to the definition.

Occasionally, the two teams may have a different interpretation of the topic.

Each team must defend their definition, and attack that of the other team.

You can disagree with the definition, but still attack the arguments in any event.

Attack the opposition's argument with rebuttal with the statement "even if we agreed to the topic which we don't, the opposition arguments are wrong because...".

A team which adopts a quirky interpretation often has a hard time finding evidence to support its case.

Your own views

In debating, we sometimes have to argue a case that we disagree with.

It is important to be able to argue the case, no matter what your own view is.

The positive thing about this is that it gives you an opportunity to understand a view different to your own.



PREPARING YOUR ARGUMENTS

As a debater, it's important that you make points that are clear, relevant and easy to understand. The use of a verbal illustration or an analogy may help you to clarify complicated terms.

In presenting and developing your argument remember to explain what you mean to prove, what the scope and implication will be, and why it is true with facts and evidence (not just assertions) to support your case.

Debaters often ask how many points they should have. There is no right or wrong answer. However, realise that you have limited time in which to discuss your points. The more points, the less in-depth each point can be explored.

As you prepare your case you might think about your rebuttal.

Planning

There are a number of things that you can do in preparation for a debate. Below are some suggestions.

- Assign speaker roles to your members
- Meet with your team members as often as you can
- Practice your debate, and record it so you can see what you look like
- Talk to other people, ask for their help
- Write out your debate on cue cards in your own words
- Use a dictionary or thesaurus to improve your vocabulary



Developing your team case

After your team has their interpretation and definition ready, it's time to look at all the arguments to support your case.

Firstly, before you get on the computer, brainstorm the topic with your team.

This means **THINKING** about the points that can support your case.

Only after you have thought as much as you can about your topic, should you use the computer to look for evidence and proof of your points.



Cue Cards

It is better to use cue cards for your debate than sheets of paper.

Cue cards are easy to use, and keeps your debate organised and structured.

Number your cue cards from 1 to however many cards you have.

Put the number in the top right-hand corner. If you drop your cards, it's easy to put them back in order.

Do not write on the back of cards.

If you make a mistake on your card, get a new one.

Debating is not writing an essay. As you become more experienced try to speak to dot points on your cards instead of writing out everything in full.



During the debate as you listen to the opposition you write rebuttal on your rebuttal cards.

Timing

Before your debate, you need to run through roughly what you are to say so that you can be confident of your timing.

You have 30 seconds after the first bell to finish your debate.

If your speech is too short, expand on some of your points.

If your speech is too long, check for irrelevant information or padding.



PRESENTATION

Everyone has their own personality and style when it comes to debating but there are some things that need to be considered.

Speaking

A number of things make up how we sound to other people when we speak. These are some of those elements that make up our speech:

Volume

Speaking loudly or softly. There are some venues that are noisy so you will have to speak more loudly. If you are in a big room, you may need to speak up.

Cadence and pitch

The way your voice gets higher and lower as you speak.

Modulation

The variation of the speed of your voice.

HINTS

Speak clearly.

Pronounce words correctly

Don't speak too quickly

Pauses are effective

Avoid "ums" and "errs"

Body language

Stance

How you stand and move your head, eyes and hands, will help to convey your message in a very powerful way. Stand tall, shoulders back. You'll look and feel confident.

Eye contact

Engage with the audience. Maintain good eye contact by looking at individuals within the audience (this also gives you feedback – are they going to sleep? Do you need to speak with more emotion? They look puzzled. Are you speaking too quickly or softly?)

Hand gestures

Use your arms and hands to emphasise your points.



HINTS

Keep your hair away from your face.

Stand with your feet slightly apart. Shifting your weight from foot to foot repeatedly is a nervous reaction which is distracting to the audience so put one foot slightly ahead of the other.

Reading your notes. When your head is bowed it's hard to hear, and you lose eye contact with the audience. Put a red dot at the end of an important point to remind you to look up at the audience.

Make sure that you look neat and tidy in your school uniform. Make sure your socks are pulled up, your shoes are tied and polished and shirts tucked in.

STRUCTURE

Structure is comprised of the following two elements:

1. **Individual speaker form**

How the speech was constructed. Was it easy to follow? Was it in a logical sequence, and ordered? Did it follow an organised plan with a good introduction and conclusion?

2. **Team plan**

Did the speaker (as in the case of the First Affirmative and Negative) introduce the remaining speakers and what they were going to do? Did s/he refer to the team outline and plan, e.g. "as our first speaker said ..."

Points may be deducted if a speaker does not perform the tasks expected of him/her.

Debates are not only three individual speeches but the combined effort of the entire team.

Each team has a case, an outline and a theme.

All speakers need to link into their own speakers, and not contradict each other. They must vigorously defend their case, and rebut (except the first Affirmative speaker) the other side.



DUTIES OF SPEAKERS - AFFIRMATIVE

1st Speaker

Introduction

Definition and interpretation

Introduction of speakers (also called Team Split)

Arguments, reasons and evidence

Summary of own case

Conclusion (also called Ending)

2nd Speaker

Introduction

Rebuttal

Summary of own first speaker.

Arguments, reasons and evidence

Summary of team case

Conclusion (also called Ending)

3rd Speaker

Introduction

Rebuttal

Summary of team arguments and case.

No new arguments except as specific rebuttal.

Conclusion (also called Ending)

DUTIES OF SPEAKERS - NEGATIVE

1st Speaker

Introduction

Definition: agree, amend, or reject definition of Affirmative. If reject then justify.

Rebuttal

Introduction of speakers (also called Team Split)

Arguments, reasons and evidence

Summary of own case

Conclusion (also called Ending)

2nd Speaker

Introduction

Rebuttal

Summary of own first speaker.

Arguments, reasons and evidence

Summary of team arguments and case

Conclusion (also called Ending)

3rd Speaker

Introduction

Rebuttal

Summary of team case

Conclusion (also called Ending)

No new arguments except as specific rebuttal.