



EFFECTIVE DEBATING

Use this sheet to help you:

- understand the main procedures and responsibilities for formal debates
- debate in an acceptable and persuasive way

5 minute self test

Before you read this Helpsheet, consider the following questions:

1. What makes a successful debate?
2. What skills are required for a great debate?
3. How may the skills that you can build by debating be valuable?
4. How can you develop these skills?

Read on for answers

Introduction

Formal debates are often held in schools and universities in Australia, and can sometimes be seen on television. The University of Melbourne even has a debating society that you can join.

See: <http://union.unimelb.edu.au/clubs/special-interest#deb>

It is possible that at some time in your studies, your lecturer or tutor may ask you to run a formal debate in your tutorial or seminar. But, do you know what a formal debate is?

There are different guidelines for debating in different courses, institutions and countries. The following are the most common. For further details, speak to the organiser of your specific debate.

Participants

In formal debating there are two teams: affirmative and negative. There are usually three main speakers on each team:

- First Affirmative Speaker
- Second Affirmative Speaker
- Third Affirmative Speaker

And, correspondingly, First Negative Speaker ... and so on.

The Adjudicator, your teacher, is addressed as: *Mr/Ms/Mrs* Adjudicator. Alternatively, a male chairperson can be addressed as Mr. Chairman. A female chairperson can be referred to as the Chairperson, Chair or Madam Chair.

The affirmative team sits on the right of the Chairperson; the negative team on the left.

Procedure

The Adjudicator first gives the class a debating topic or statement. For example:

"That ethics is to business what justice is to the law". (Usually debating topics are incomplete sentences beginning with "That").

1. First, the class divides into two equal groups: affirmative and negative. The affirmative team has to prove how and why the statement is true; the negative team must do the opposite.
2. Each team elects the three members of the debating team (different students are elected for subsequent debates). The non-speaking members of the teams provide arguments and ideas and act as an encouraging audience.

3. The groups brainstorm arguments for their position. The best thing for your group to do is to think of as many arguments as possible for your position and think of counter arguments for arguments that the opposing team will probably raise (this latter point is of critical importance).
4. Write your arguments down. Think of examples you can use to support each point. Statistical information and facts are always good. Current events examples are good too. Do some research before the debate.
5. Think of a connecting thread for all of your arguments. This is called the "Team Line" For example if you are on the affirmative side of a debate that capitalism is better than socialism, your arguments might include:
 - Capitalism has been the most successful social and economic system in history
 - Capitalism increases living standards for many people
 - Capitalism offers incentive for people to strive and work hard

Your team line might be: Capitalism is better than socialism because it offers more opportunities and advantages for people and it has done so throughout history.

Of course, the negative team would need an equally compelling team line for a position that favours socialism, or which shows that capitalism is not better than socialism.

It is important that all of your points ultimately relate to this Team Line. This gives your team's arguments the appearance of unity and cohesion.

6. Now build your case by trying to guess your opponent's Team Line. If you can guess what they are going to say you can rebut them and so advance your own case. Write down as many of the opposition's arguments as you can think of and consider responses to each argument. These are known as "Rebuttal Points".
7. List your arguments. Put the strongest arguments first. Make sure each argument has at least one clear example to go with it.
8. Do not write out your speeches in full. Your aim is to persuade others with body language, eye contact and clever arguments. Make sure you use rhetorical language to emphasise your points. For example: "This goes to show, Ladies and Gentlemen, that we are right in saying that capitalism is better than socialism", and "Do the members of the negative/affirmative really mean that ...?"
9. Put your arguments on cards and number them. Do the same for your rebuttal points.

Responsibilities of each speaker

First affirmative

- Provide a formal introduction
- Address definitions: interpret the topic in light of definition (for example, what does your team mean by “capitalism”)
- Explain the team line and outline how the argument will be divided between the speakers
- Outline one or two arguments and detail them. Illustrate each point with examples
- Relate all details back to the Team Line
- Summarise and leave a snappy ending

First negative

- Provide a formal introduction
- Address definitions: if you accept the First Affirmative’s, definitions say so, otherwise present your own and say why they are wrong
- State the Negative Team Line. Attack why the Affirmative Team’s team line is wrong
- Outline one or two arguments and detail them. Illustrate each point with examples.
- Relate all details back to the Team Line
- Rebut previous speaker in terms of detailed arguments presented
- Summarise and leave a snappy ending

Second affirmative and second negative

- Same as above without the team lines. The second speakers will generally present more arguments than either the first or third speakers

Third affirmative

- Provide a formal introduction
- Challenge definitions on important issues if necessary
- Clarify issues: rebut the opposition’s TL and state own TL; provide further counterarguments and rebuttal points
- Provide a final comparison of cases
- Provide a summary (Essential)
- Provide an overview of the First Affirmative’s and Second Affirmative’s arguments
- Provide an overview of Team Line
- Provide closing remarks

Third negative

- Same as the Third Affirmative, but do not raise any new points except in rebuttal.

Timekeeping

A member of the audience should be elected as timekeeper. Each speaker is allotted four minutes to speak. This time should not be exceeded. A bell should be rung one minute before the end of each four minute period and again at the end of four minutes.

Etiquette

All instructions from the Adjudicator must be obeyed.

The leader of the winning team should always propose a vote of thanks for all involved (the opposition team, the Adjudicator, the time keeper and the audience). The leader should begin:

“Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr/Ms Adjudicator, members of the audience, on behalf of the Affirmative/Negative Team, I propose a vote of thanks ...”

Always begin each speech with:

“Thank you Mr Chairman. Good afternoon/morning Ladies and Gentlemen ...” or: “Mr/Madam Adjudicator, Members of the Opposition Team, Ladies and Gentlemen ...”

Finally

Enjoy the debate! Debates can be a lot of fun, and the skills you can develop can help you in all sorts of ways in your life beyond university.