

## Debates – Student Handout

This is a guide to help you prepare for a debate. It answers questions you may have.

### What are we trying to do?

*Your task is to prepare to argue and support a position assigned to you by your teacher. You will do the necessary research to support your ideas, prepare to both pose and answer questions and practice your presentation so that it's well polished.*

### How do we win?

*Your goal is not necessarily to win, but to prepare to defend your side as best you are able. You will be marked on the quality of your evidence, your ability to defeat your opponent's arguments, adherence to rules and the confidence of your presentation. Nevertheless, your teacher, along with some fellow students will determine a "winner". You will need to present a more coherent and forceful set of arguments in a polished manner to prevail over your opponent.*

### What is the format?

*You must follow a strict set of guidelines that tell you when you may speak. Your teacher may have a specific set you must respect. Timelines will vary by grade level. Main speeches are usually 7 or 10 minutes but may be shorter as your teacher decides. This is an outline that might be used. There is a short break before rebuttals begin.*

1. **Affirmative:** The affirmative team presents their proposition (resolution). The group defines the situation, presents proposed alternatives, explains the plan for change and provides a brief summary.
2. **Negative:** Then negative team presents their position. The group may be directly arguing that there is no need for change as is being proposed by the affirmative team. The negative team states their reasoning for the status quo. They may, only if necessary, argue the definition of the situation as defined by the affirmative team. The team raises questions about the affirmative position.
3. **Affirmative:** The second affirmative speaker will summarize the arguments on both sides noting where the positions conflict. The speaker will try to demonstrate the superiority of their reasoning. The speaker also has the task of answering any questions raised by the first negative speaker. It's important to address any particularly difficult questions. The answers should leave the audience satisfied. Present a plan.
4. **Negative:** The second negative speaker restates the position of the team. He or she will address important questions raised. The main task however is to attack the plan as proposed by the affirmative team. The speaker may show that the plan is unworkable or expose unconsidered negative implications. The goal of this speaker is to demonstrate that the proposed resolution is uncalled for and/or unneeded and/or unworkable.
5. **1<sup>st</sup> Rebuttal – Negative**
6. **1<sup>st</sup> Rebuttal – Affirmative**
7. **2<sup>nd</sup> Rebuttal – Negative**
8. **2<sup>nd</sup> Rebuttal – Affirmative**

*Rebuttal speeches are shorter (3-5 minutes or as dictated) and may not present new evidence. Their sole purpose is to defend your case and defeat the case of the opposition.*

## Points of Note

- *Address comments/questions to the “chair”. This is likely your teacher who is responsible for running the debate. Ex. Mr./Madame Chairperson, at this time I wish to address the issue of fairness....*
- *Take care with the amount of time you have. Practice beforehand. Use recipe cards to record important notes.*
- *Appearance may be evaluated. Dress properly.*
- *Complete each speaking opportunity with a brief summary.*
- *Listen carefully to the opposing team. They may make a significant point your team had not thought of during your preparation. You will want to address them in your rebuttal. A strong point left unchallenged makes your side appear all the weaker.*
- *Back up your statements/assertions. Anybody can have an opinion but rationale wins the debate.*
- *Take notes during the debate.*

## How do we prepare?

*Once assigned a side in the debate, it is your task to research the topic. You will gather evidence that will be used to support your group’s position. Using this evidence as an aid, the team prepares a set of persuasive arguments designed to sway the judges to your side. Use the best of what you have found and house it in effective, confident delivery. Practice makes perfect. It is the combination of solid evidence and polished delivery that leads to success. It is also critical to consider what the opposition will say. Think through all the possible arguments your opponents will make. Success in a debate hinges on the ability to show that the opposing team’s reasoning is weaker than yours. Use the preparation document to organize your findings.*

## Timetable – summary

*Your teacher will set the timetable for the debate. There are strict rules for this in formal competitions but they may not be used in a classroom. Here is an example.*

- *Affirmative – 5 min*
- *Negative – 5 min*
- *Affirmative – 5 min*
- *Negative – 5 min*
- ***Break – 3 min (use this time to make last minute changes to your rebuttal)***
- *Rebuttal negative – 3 min*
- *Rebuttal positive – 3 min*
- *Rebuttal negative – 3 min (with concluding statements)*
- *Rebuttal positive – 3 min (with concluding statements)*