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**Learning Classic
Debate**

***A Student’s Guide to***

***Classic Debate Competition***

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**Revised 2007**

1. **The benefits of debate**
* **Fun**

• **Teammates**: An additional benefit of getting involved is building friendships with teammates

who enjoy similar interests.

• **Public Speaking Skills:** Most people naturally avoid public speaking--debate provides a nonthreatening

environment to practice these skills so that down the road when you’re called on

to speak in college or on the job, you’ll have the skills necessary to do a great job. This

increases your chances of doing well in important interviews for jobs or scholarships.

**• Analytical Skills:** The ability to critically analyze a problem and propose workable solutions

is invaluable.

• **Research Skills:** From traditional library research to the Internet, debate teaches you to

become a world-class researcher. Ask any college student and they’ll tell you how valuable

this is.

• **Listening & Note taking Skills:** Debate requires that you become a careful listener and good

note taker. This helps students get better grades and learn faster.

1. **Writing your constructive speeches**

As you already know, your team will present a six minute constructive speech during each

debate. The purpose of the constructive speech is to make and support your main arguments in

favor of the resolution when you are affirmative) or against the resolution (when you are

negative).

Your constructive speech should always accomplish the following:

• It will present your primary arguments

• It will provide support for those arguments in the form of evidence and reasoning

• It should be persuasively written (should include introduction, transitions, & a conclusion)

Beyond those basic guidelines, you have the freedom to create a case that makes sense to you

and that you believe will persuade the judge. Let’s take a closer look at some of the basic

requirements.

1. **The Introduction**

Your case should always begin with an introduction. The introduction needs to accomplish two

things.

1) State the resolution and your position (in favor of it or opposed to it)

2) Provide a persuasive attention-getter to encourage the audience to listen to your speech.

Sample:

“Every year in the United States, our government executes dozens of convicted murderers. Their crimes are so terrible, that our legal system assigns death as the ultimate punishment. What is truly tragic and hypocritical is that every so often our legal system gets the wrong person. Instead of punishing someone for taking an innocent life, it is our government itself that is taking an innocent life. Because my partner and I believe that this should never happen again, we stand Resolved that the death penalty should be abolished in the United States. First, we’ll prove that the death penalty results in miscarriages of justice…”

1. **The Contentions**

Your main argument are called contentions. They should be labeled as Contentions and numbered (traditionally Roman Numerals are used because this follows the outline format).

Your contentions are statements that must be proven.

Sample:

“Contention I. Innocent People Are Wrongly Executed”

1. **Conclusion**

After you have stated your Contention, you must provide reasoning and evidence to support it.

The length of the Contention is up to you (you only have 6 minutes, so they will be fairly brief).

Also, the number of Contentions that you have is up to you. Usually, a case will have 2 to 4 main contentions.

You may chose to further divide your contentions into sub-points. Sub-points should be labeled with capital letters (following the outline format). Sub-points provide additional organizational structure to help clarify your argument.

After you have made and supported all of your contentions, you should end your case with a brief conclusion. In your conclusion, you should restate your main ideas and end with a persuasive appeal to your audience.

Sample: “In today’s debate, the affirmative team has proven that the death penalty results in two major harms to society. First, innocent people are sometimes wrongly executed. Second, the death penalty is discriminatory because it is used more frequently against minorities. Finally, We have shown that the death penalty has no major benefit because it does not reduce crime rates. In light of this evidence, the right thing to do is to abolish this unfair and ineffective punishment. I am now open for cross-examination.”

**III. Refutation**

Refutation is the process of disproving an argument. Not all of your opponent’s arguments

require refutation. There are generally three ways to answer an argument. First, you may simply

agree with it. Second, you can partially agree but modify (e.g. “we agree that air pollution

causes health problems, however, you overstate the impact”). Thirdly, you can refute the

argument (prove it wrong). Let’s look at how each method may be used effectively.

***Agreement***

Why would you want to agree with an argument made by your opponent? There are three main

reasons.

1. Occasionally, your opponent may make an argument that actually helps you. In this case,

simply explain to the judge why the argument actually supports your position.

2. Your opponent’s argument may be irrelevant to the debate. In this case, explain why the

argument is irrelevant.

3. Your opponent’s argument may be true. If you know that your opponent has made a true

argument, it may not be worth your time fighting against it. Instead, you may grant the

argument and use your time to explain that while your opponent’s individual argument is

true, you should still win the debate.

***Modification***

Often, you will agree with part of your opponent’s argument, but will disagree with the amount

of weight they try to assign it. This most often happens when you feel that your opponent is

exaggerating. Example: “While I agree with my opponent that President Bush deserves *some*

blame for the faltering US economy, the truth is that he only deserves a small share of the

blame.”

***Refutation***

There are several good ways to attack or disprove a debate argument. Here are some effective

strategies:

1) Attack the argument’s support: You may explain that the argument lacks adequate support.

This may be because of insufficient reasoning, no evidence, poor evidence, or misapplied or

mis-tagged evidence.

As you think about how to respond to your opponent, you may ask yourself:

\_ Is the argument supported at all? (If so, continue down the checklist)

\_ Does the evidence match the claim/tag?

\_ Does the evidence have a credible source?

\_ Does the evidence provide reasoning?

2) Present Counter-arguments and evidence. Even well supported arguments often have equally

persuasive counter arguments. These counter-arguments can be reasoning, evidence, or

(hopefully) both. It then becomes your job to convince the judge that your reasoning and

evidence is superior. For example, experts disagree about whether tougher prison sentences

reduce crime rates. Your opponent may have very credible evidence that giving dangerous

criminals more prison time makes America safer. But, because experts disagree, you may

present evidence from an equally reliable source to indicate that tough sentences don’t really

reduce crime rates.

1. **Extension**

When you “extend” your argument it means that you are restating and strengthening it in a later

speech. To effectively extend an argument, you need to do more than repeat what you said

earlier. Often debaters mistake repetition for extension (“if I just say it again, the judge will

understand and will vote for me.” Effective extension includes the following:

1) Clarification: You must make sure that the judge understands your argument. Be the one

who clarifies the debate.

2) Presenting additional reasoning and evidence: You simply need to strengthen your position

with more (and better) support.

3) Add new (additional) argumentation: Sometimes it may be advantageous for you to add new

ideas in support of a position. For example, your general position may be that coal harms the

environment. In the first affirmative constructive, you argue that coal causes air pollution,

acid rain, and global warming. In the first affirmative rebuttal, you may further explain the

health impacts of these environmental problems.

Often, extension and refutation go hand in hand and must be carefully blended

***FAQ: Can I bring up “new” arguments in rebuttals?***

Debaters often want to know what they can and can’t bring up in rebuttals. The answer is

somewhat dependent on the specific round of debate, but here are some general guidelines:

• You are always allowed to directly answer your opponents’ arguments.

• You may extend arguments you made earlier by presenting clarification and additional

supporting evidence.

• You should not bring up totally new main ideas in rebuttals. This is unfair to your

opponent because they will have less time to refute these new ideas. Imagine a debate in

which you are winning all of the major issues. It would be unfair for your opponent to

bring up a whole new set of main issues in one of the last speeches of the debate. This is

why debaters should not bring up new main arguments in rebuttals.

1. **Summary speeches**
* The final speeches of the debate should be used to synthesize various arguments into a few critical points for the judge to consider. One might introduce their summary with a statement like “in light of the arguments made in today’s debate, we have upheld the resolution because…”
* This summary statement is difficult for several reasons. First, because of the general nature of the closing argument, the speaker must focus on the “big picture” and less on specific details.
* Second, the speaker must extend his/her best arguments while answering his/her opponent’s best arguments. This requires a careful balance. Of course, each round of debate will lead to unique summary statements.

However, here are some general tips for making successful summary statements.

1. Ask yourself, what are our most powerful arguments? After selecting your most powerful

arguments you must explain why you have won these arguments and why this means you

have won the debate. In other words, explain the *impact of your best arguments.*

2) Ask yourself, “what are the weaknesses in my opponent’s best arguments?” Explain these

weaknesses to the judge.

3) The summary must be an extension of the debate. It should show what your team has

accomplished during the debate. It should not be new ideas or perspectives that haven’t been

brought up.

4) The summary should set up a decision-making criteria for the judge. What factors should be

given the most weight in making a decision? For example, let’s say that the affirmative has

proven that adopting the resolution will save a species from extinction. The negative team,

on the other hand, is able to prove that adopting the resolution would cost the US $10Billion.

In this debate, the two sides would have to weigh saving a species to spending billions of

dollars. It is your job as a debater to provide analysis that helps the judge arrive at his or her

decision.

1. **Post-debate discussion and assessment**

When the formal debate is finished, allow time for debriefing and discussion. Members of the audience should be given an opportunity to ask questions and to contribute their own thoughts and opinions on the arguments presented. Members of the debate teams may also wish to reflect on their performance and seek feedback from the audience, including the teacher. If some form of assessment was part of the debate plan, it would be conducted at this time.

Assessment could be conducted by the teacher, the judging team, or the entire class. (See BLM

G-15: Debate Assessment Rubric.)

1. **The role of the judge**

Each debate round will have a judge who will decide which team does the better job of debating.

-The judge is instructed to base his/her decision on the arguments made in the debate round, not on his/her personal beliefs about the issues.

-Usually, a judge will take notes and do his or her best to follow all of the arguments you make.

-At the conclusion of the debate, the judge will write a ballot which explains his/her decision. You will get your ballot back at the end of the tournament.

-Judges are hired by the schools that attend a debate tournament. They may be teachers, parents, former high school debaters, or other interested adults. Some judges are very experienced, but many are not. Undoubtedly, at some point in your debate career you will be disappointed by a decision that a judge makes. It is best to assume that your judge is doing their best.

-Remember, debate is subjective and will be seen differently by different people.

**VIII. Delivery**

There are at least two requirements for successful debating. First, a debater must have quality

arguments. And, second, a debater must effectively communicate their arguments to the judge or

audience. The focus of this chapter is on effective communication.

**Articulation**

Let’s start with the basics. If the words you say are not understood by the audience, you are not

communicating effectively. To articulate well means to speak clearly and to correctly pronounce

the words you use.

Articulation Problems to Watch For:

• Mumbling or slurring (this is usually a result of not pronouncing words carefully).

• Common mispronunciations (gonna instead of going to, cuz instead of because, etc.)

**Volume**

Every speaking situation requires the speakers to adjust his or her volume for the circumstances.

Of course, a speaker must be loud enough to be clearly heard by the audience. On the other

hand, if a speaker is too loud, the audience will become annoyed or uncomfortable. It is a good

idea for a speaker to vary his/her volume during the speech to emphasize certain key points. A

slight increase or decrease in volume can call attention to an important point the speaker wants to

make.

**Rate**

Like volume, your rate of speech can be too fast or too slow. Very slow speech will bore the

audience. On the other hand, delivery that is too rapid will cause the audience to miss important

points or maybe even to tune out. Different speaking circumstances call for different rates. For

debaters, a good model is the rate of delivery used by television news reporters. Listen to an

anchor on CNN for an idea of an appropriate rate of delivery.

Sometimes debaters will speak at fast rate in order to fit more into their speeches. In some

debate formats, this has been taken to an extreme. Because the judges are not evaluating

speakers on their delivery skills, debaters in these formats have used extremely rapid delivery.

In Classic Debate, however, judges are specifically instructed to evaluate student’s delivery

along with their arguments. In fact, judges are instructed to award a loss to a team which speaks

at an unnaturally rapid rate which results in a competitive advantage.

**Vocal Variety**

When you articulate well with an appropriate rate and volume, you ensure that the audience will

hear your words. What else can you do to make them want to listen? One key is vocal variety.

A speaker with little variety is often called monotone (or boring!). You can vary your voice by

adjusting volume or rate. You can also change your pitch and tone. This is called inflection.

Also, using pauses of different lengths can make your speech easier to listen to.

**Posture & Gestures**

You want your audience to see you as professional, relaxed, and confident. In order to achieve

this positive image, you should pay attention to posture and gestures. The number one rule is

don’t do things that will distract your audience. Proper speaking posture is simply standing up

straight with your feet pointed toward your audience. Avoid slouching, leaning against walls or

tables, and pointing your feet to one side or another.

Gestures are more difficult to master. First, your gestures may often be impeded by what you

have in your hands—evidence or notes. This is understood to be part of debate. When you are

able to gesture, some general rules are:

--Always gesture above the waste

--Gesture to add emphasis. Your gestures should be purposeful.

--Vary your gestures. Avoid repetitive gestures.

**Eye Contact**

When possible, look your audience straight in the eye. Of course, you will need to look down at

your notes and evidence. At the same time, do not spend the majority of your speech looking

down. Speakers who look their audience in the eye are found to be more persuasive. You may

also get important non-verbal feedback from your audience that you may use to make your

speech better. Is the audience interested, confused, having trouble hearing you, agreeing with

you? You can learn a lot by looking at your audience. When there is more than a single person

in the audience, you should spend time looking at each person.

**Appearance**

Many consider your appearance to be part of your delivery. Different debate competitions have

different dress expectations. At times, you will be asked to dress professionally (like you would

for a business interview). Other times, you will be expected to be more “dress-casual.” Your

coach will have suggestions for how to dress for competition. Just remember, appearance does

make an impact on the audience. You attire sends a message. What message do you want to

send?

*Suggestions for Improvement*

Practice, practice, practice! Delivery can always be improved. There are many ways to practice.

You can practice by yourself by giving a particular speech several times, concentrating on

improving your delivery. You can practice with teammates by helping evaluate each other.

And, of course, you can practice with a coach, teacher, or parent. Simply give your speech and

ask for feedback on delivery. Or, ask for help with a particular component of delivery. The

more you practice, the better you will be.

**CONCLUSION**

Polls show that most Americans fear public speaking more than death! Luckily for you, debate

will help you overcome that fear. Like all aspects of debate, your delivery will get better with

practice. You will also get used to standing in front of an audience and making an argument.

These skills are great to have—just ask anyone in the professional world.

Appendices

**Strategies**

1. If you don't want to debate a point, don't bring it up.

2. Don't get mad—get even through use of logic.

3. Use the moderator to your advantage. Know the rules and insist they be followed.

4. Control the floor when it's your turn. Asking an open question gives the floor to the other

side.

5. Negative body language (like rolling the eyes) does not serve to give the judge/audience a

positive impression of you.

6. Appear to be listening sympathetically—then devastate the other side with logical attack.

7. Use formal language. Slang, name-calling or cursing makes you appear unintelligent and illprepared.

8. Ham it up. Speak with passion and intensity, but not melodrama.

9. Loud is not logic. A quiet voice can command the most attention. An old trick of politicians

is to lower the voice so that everyone listens more closely.

10. Choose your experts and sources wisely. One young woman who has had an abortion is not

an expert on the subject.

11. Take time to read or quote the literature exactly.

12. Use short anecdotes and famous quotes when possible.

13. Know the position of the other side as well as you know your own. This way you won't be

surprised.

14. Study the logical fallacies and hold the opposition accountable for logic blunders.

15. Save your best quote, strongest point and highest-impact emotional appeal for summation

and final statement.

16. Don't sound patronizing or condescending. It doesn't come across well.

17. If possible, stand to speak. Walk around courtroom style. It's very impressive and

intimidating to the opposition.

18. Don't overuse any single strategy.

19. Don't say "I don't know" or "you're right" without following it up with a redirecting statement

such as, "That may be true, but have you ever thought about . . ."

http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Krieger-Debate.html

**Evaluating the Reliability of Sources**

1. What is the source of the information being considered?

2. List the factors that are relevant to the reliability of the source in the following categories:

• **Publication**

Date - is the information current, or does it need to be current?

Reputation of publication - is the source well known and reputable?

Kind of publication - is it a scientific report, eyewitness account, a work of fiction?

• **Author or Speaker**

Qualifications - is he an expert in his field?

Bias - is he one-sided in his point-of-view?

Values - what does the author value in regards to the topic?

Chance for personal gain - does the author stand to benefit from his position?

• **Consistency of Information**

Confirmation or corroboration - can anyone else make the same claims?

• **Means of Obtaining the Information**

1. Witness or researcher - was the author or speaker a first-hand witness to the
2. information or did he gather it from some other source?

Equipment - what kind of equipment was used to record information?

 3. Answer as many of the questions as you can, and determine if the answer would indicate a reliable

source, an unreliable source, or an uncertainty for each.

 4. Weigh the factors present and your ratings of the evidence and make a reasoned judgment of

reliability of the source.

**Classic Debate**

Format and Time Limits

***3rd In-term Exam***

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Affirmative constructive 1(Affirmative leader)  | 2 Minutes  | In this prepared speech, the affirmative presents their 1st argument in favor of the resolution. The speech should bepre-written. *Introduction: Define the issue, position and surrounding terminology.*  |
| Cross-examination | 1 Minute | The 1st negative speaker cross-examines the 1st affirmative speaker |
| Negative constructive 1(Negative leader) | 2 Minutes | In this prepared speech, the negative presents their 1st argument in opposition to the resolution. The speech should be pre-written and is not expected to directly address the arguments made during the affirmative constructive.*Introduction: Define the issue, position and surrounding terminology*.  |
| Cross-examination | 1 Minute | The 1st affirmative speaker cross-examines the 1st negative speaker |
| Affirmative constructive 2 | 2 Minutes | In this prepared speech, the affirmative presents their 2nd argument in favor of the resolution.  |
| Cross-examination | 1 Minute | The 2nd negative speaker cross-examines the 2nd affirmative speaker |
| Negative constructive 2 | 2 Minutes | In this prepared speech, the negative presents their 2nd argument in opposition to the resolution.  |
| Cross-examination | 1 Minute | The 2nd affirmative speaker cross-examines the 2nd negative speaker |
| Affirmative constructive 3 | 2 Minutes | In this prepared speech, the affirmative presents their 3rd argument in favor of the resolution.  |
| Cross-examination | 1 Minute | The 3rd negative speaker cross-examines the 3rd affirmative speaker |
| Negative constructive 3 | 2 Minutes | In this prepared speech, the negative presents their 3rd argument in opposition to the resolution.  |
| Cross-examination | 1 Minute | The 3rd affirmative speaker cross-examines the 3rd negative speaker |
| Affirmative constructive 4 | 2 Minutes | In this prepared speech, the affirmative presents their 4th argument in favor of the resolution and she summarizes their position.  |
| Cross-examination | 1 Minute | The 4th negative speaker cross-examines the 4th affirmative speaker |
| Negative constructive 4 | 2 Minutes | In this prepared speech, the negative presents their 4th argument in opposition to the resolution and she summarizes their position.  |
| Cross-examination | 1 Minute | The 4th affirmative speaker cross-examines the 4th negative speaker. |
| Recess | 10 Minutes |  |
| 1st Affirmative rebuttal  | 2 Minutes | The purpose of this speech is for the 1st affirmative speaker to refute the arguments presented in the negative constructive. |
| 1st Negative rebuttal  | 2 Minutes | The 1st negative speaker should first refute the argumentspresented in the affirmative constructive. Then, the speakershould answer the attacks made during the 1st affirmativerebuttal. |
| 2nd Affirmative rebuttal  | 2 Minutes | The 2nd affirmative speaker should divide this speechbetween the negative and affirmative cases. The debatermust both rebuild the affirmative attacks on the negativeconstructive and then rebuild his or her own case. |
| 2nd Negative rebuttal  | 2 Minutes | The 2nd negative speaker should divide this speech between the negative and affirmative cases. The debater must both rebuild the negative attacks on the affirmative constructive and then rebuild his or her own case. |
| The same goes for the 3rd and the 4th speakers in each group.  |
| Preparation time | 5 Minutes |  |
| Affirmative summary | 2 Minutes | An affirmative speaker presents their closing argument. This speech should summarize the primary reasons for thejudge to affirm the resolution based on the arguments made and evidence presented throughout the debate. |
| Negative summary  | 2 Minutes | A negative speaker presents their closing argument.This speech should summarize the primary reasons for thejudge to reject the resolution based on the arguments madeand evidence presented throughout the debate. |
| Post-debate discussion and assessment | 5 Minutes | When the formal debate is finished, there will be some time for debriefing and discussion. Members of the audience should be given an opportunity to ask questions and to contribute their own thoughts and opinions on the arguments presented. Members of the debate teams may also wish to reflect on their performance and seek feedback from the audience, including the teacher. If some form of assessment was part of the debate plan, it would be conducted at this time. |

***Debate Practice Sessions***

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Affirmative constructive 1(Affirmative leader)  | 2 Minutes  | In this prepared speech, the affirmative presents their arguments in favor of the resolution. The speech should bepre-written. *Introduction: Define the issue, position and surrounding terminology.*  |
| Cross-examination | 1 Minute | The 1st negative speaker cross-examines the 1st affirmative speaker |
| Negative constructive 1(Negative leader) | 2 Minutes | In this prepared speech, the negative presents arguments in opposition to the resolution. The speech should be pre-written and is not expected to directly address the arguments made during the affirmative constructive.*Introduction: Define the issue, position and surrounding terminology*.  |
| Cross-examination | 1 Minute | The 1st affirmative speaker cross-examines the 1st negative speaker |
| Affirmative constructive 2 | 2 Minutes | In this prepared speech, the affirmative presents other arguments in favor of the resolution and summarizes their position.  |
| Cross-examination | 1 Minute | The 2nd negative speaker cross-examines the 2nd affirmative speaker |
| Negative constructive 2 | 2 Minutes | In this prepared speech, the negative presents their otherarguments in opposition to the resolution and summarizes their position.  |
| Cross-examination | 1 Minute | The 2nd affirmative speaker cross-examines the 2nd negative speaker |
| Recess | 10 Minutes |  |
| 1st Affirmative rebuttal  | 2 Minutes | The purpose of this speech is for the 3rd affirmative speaker to refute the arguments presented in the negative constructive. |
| 1st Negative rebuttal  | 2 Minutes | The 3rd negative speaker should first refute the argumentspresented in the affirmative constructive. Then, the speakershould answer the attacks made during the 1st affirmativerebuttal. |
| 2nd Affirmative rebuttal  | 2 Minutes | The 4th affirmative speaker should divide this speechbetween the negative and affirmative cases. The debatermust both rebuild the affirmative attacks on the negativeconstructive and then rebuild his or her own case. |
| 2nd Negative rebuttal  | 2 Minutes | The 4th negative speaker should divide this speech between the negative and affirmative cases. The debater must both rebuild the negative attacks on the affirmative constructive and then rebuild his or her own case. |
| Preparation time | 5 Minutes |  |
| Affirmative summary | 2 Minutes | The first two affirmative speakers present their closing argument. This speech should summarize the primary reasons for the judge to affirm the resolution based on the arguments made and evidence presented throughout the debate. |
| Negative summary  | 2 Minutes | The first two negative speakers present their closing argument. This speech should summarize the primary reasons for the judge to reject the resolution based on the arguments made and evidence presented throughout the debate. |
| Post-debate discussion and assessment | 5 Minutes | When the formal debate is finished, there will be some time for debriefing and discussion. Members of the audience should be given an opportunity to ask questions and to contribute their own thoughts and opinions on the arguments presented. Members of the debate teams may also wish to reflect on their performance and seek feedback from the audience, including the teacher. If some form of assessment was part of the debate plan, it would be conducted at this time. |