

AE Academic English UK

An Introduction to Debates



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Debates

What is a debate?

A debate is, basically, a for or against argument. You have to debate why your position is correct and why your opponents are wrong. You are allocated a time to present your arguments and add rebuttals to the opposing points. You need to support your ideas with evidence such as facts, figures, stats and sources.

The topic

The topic is often current issues of public importance ('Climate change should be taken more seriously') or about general philosophies or ideas ('beauty is better than brains'). The team that agrees with the topic is called the AFFIRMATIVE and the team that disagrees with the topic is called the NEGATIVE (or the opposition).

The set up

Usually, the debate consists of two teams of three speakers. There should be a time-keeper and a judge(s) (sometimes this is the audience). Each presenter has a specific time (4 minutes) to present ideas and their rebuttals and after each presenter has spoken, the judge(s) evaluates the debate on the basis of the content, style and strategy of speeches.

A Basic Debate

[4 minutes per person]

First Speaker Affirmative

Definition / keywords.

Introduces team's argument.

[time keeper rings bell once at 3 minutes & twice at 4 minutes = time up]

Second Speaker Negative

Defines keywords / terms.

Introduces team's argument.

Rebuttal.

['rebuttal' means choose a point from the opposite team and prove why this is wrong]

Third Speaker Affirmative / Fourth Speaker Negative

Continue arguments and rebuttals.

Fifth Speaker Affirmative / Sixth Speaker Affirmative

Rebut opposition's debate & summarise their key points.

The adjudicators / judges

Decide who won the debate.

The teams

Thank each other.

Debate Tips

Video: Top Debate Tips from Wellesley College

The Wellesley College Debate Society offers a helpful list of the top tips you want to utilize in a debate. Watch this video to learn the best ways to prepare for, and successfully perform during a debate.



Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWX4q6QBEC4&t=1s>

Listen to the video and take notes:

Questions: Top Debate Tips from Wellesley College

Use your notes to fill in the table below. Some sections have been filled in.

1. Before the debate:	
i)	<i>Be prepared.</i>
ii)	
iii)	<i>Bring water and cough drops.</i>
iv)	
v)	
2. During the debate	
Claim	
Warrant	<i>Backing up what you're saying with facts and statistics. Explaining what you're going to say and why it has relevance.</i>
Impact	
3. Opponent is speaking	
i)	
ii)	<i>Think before you speak.</i>
iii)	
4. During your rebuttal	
i)	
ii)	<i>Be concise, prioritise and concede ground strategically.</i>
5. Don't...	
i)	
ii)	<i>Don't dismiss your opponent's arguments.</i>
6. Final tips	
i)	<i>Be courteous (particularly towards your moderator).</i>
ii)	
iii)	
iv)	<i>Be aware of yourself as the audience can always see you.</i>
7. After the debate concludes	
i)	
ii)	<i>Don't forget to review your performance.</i>

Total Score __ / 12

*Answers on the last page.

Debating language

Opening the debate:

[a nice opening is using a quote]

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to this debate.

The motion for debate today is: ... defining the motion...

Now we as today's proposition/opposition strongly believe that this is true/not true.

Let us first define some important terms in this debate...

We believe that what is meant by ... is... / that ... are ... When we say ... should ... we mean that ..

Presenting the team-line:

We as today's proposition/opposition have structured our case as follows:

I, as the first speaker, will be talking about ...

Our second speaker, ..., will elaborate on the fact that ...

And our third speaker, ..., will do the rebuttal.

Rebutting arguments, rebuilding your case:

But before I come to my own arguments, let us first have a look at what has been said.

I will continue our case in a minute, but before that...

There are some things about the... speech that need to be addressed.

The first proposition/opposition speaker has told us ...; on the contrary ...

S/he also said that ... but in fact ...

S/he was claiming that ... but as my first speaker already told you, ...

Introducing arguments:

Let me come to my first/second/next argument...

My first argument is...

The first reason why we're prop/opposing this motion is...

Giving examples:

There are many examples for this ... for instance...

In fact, you can find many examples for this in real life. Just think of...

And there are similar cases, such as..., ...

So, in this simple example we can clearly see the effect of ...

Now because of this ..., we have to support this motion.

Summarising & ending your speech:

So, Ladies and Gentlemen, what have I told you today?

Firstly ..., Secondly... [some nice closing words]

And for all of these reasons, the motion must stand/fall.

Making / rejecting / accepting / answering points of information

On that point.

Wouldn't you have to agree ...?

Doesn't what you're saying contradict with ...? What about the ...?

How would you explain that ...?

Giving summarising speeches

It is now my pleasure to summarize this debate...

Take a look at what both sides have said and see what the outcome of this debate actually is.

A first/second major clash was: ...

Today's proposition/opposition told us ...

And for all these reasons, I beg you to...

Mini-debates

Practice

In small groups, you have 30 minutes to prepare for a short 15-20-minute debate on a simple general subject. Spend 15 minutes researching and 15 minutes discussing and pooling the information in your group.

Topics

You teacher will choose one of these topics to debate and whether you will be affirmative or negative.

1. Dogs make better pets than cats.
2. Men and women can never be equal.
3. Living in a city is better than living in the country.
4. Winters are better than summers.
5. Beauty is better than brains.
6. The important thing about a job is the money.
7. Smoking should be banned.
8. University education should be free.
9. Social media has changed our lives for the better.
10. Everyone should be a vegetarian.

Preparation

- Divide into small groups of 4 or 5.
- Nominate a leader.
- Spend 15 minutes researching the topic individually.
- Share and pool your information in your group.
- The leader decides who will focus on which areas.
- Spend the remaining time preparing.

The debate

You will be paired with an opposing group. Follow 'a basic debate' schedule from the first page and begin with first speaker affirmative: definition, keywords and introduces team's argument (4 minutes) etc...

At the end the two groups decide who gave the strongest arguments and won the debate.

Self-evaluation

Fill this in after the debate. How did you do in the debates?

		Yes	No
i)	I managed to speak for 4 minutes.		
ii)	I was understood by the other students.		
iii)	I gave examples to support my ideas.		
iv)	I cited facts and figures from my research.		
v)	I cited the source of research (author's names).		
vi)	My arguments were strong.		
vii)	I used debating language.		
viii)	I'm happy with my overall performance in the debate		
ix)	What I need to do to improve is...		

Debate Topics

Public importance (2023)

1. Can terrorism be prevented?
2. Was Brexit economic suicide?
3. Should developed countries provide aid to developing countries devastated by hurricanes?
4. Should the US go to war against Russia?
5. Is Facebook too big to prevent grooming?
6. Is nuclear energy the best investment for power in the UK?
7. Can immigration from Africa to Europe be restricted?
8. Are university vice-principals over paid?
9. Will white-supremacy ever be out lawed?
10. Should use-once plastics be banned?

General

1. Does life exist on other planets?
2. Is America's 'War on Terror' justifiable?
3. Does the death penalty prevent crime?
4. Are single-sex schools better?
5. Is cloning ethical?
6. Is euthanasia justified?
7. Does technology make us more alone?
8. Do violent video games lead to violence?
9. Can money buy happiness?
10. Should higher education be free?
11. Is it ethical to eat meat?
12. Can politicians be trusted?
13. Is world peace achievable?
14. Is CCTV an invasion of privacy?
15. Can the news media be trusted in providing unbiased news reporting?
16. Are we becoming too dependent on Google?
17. Is gender inequality still prevalent?
18. Should we colonize Mars?

Top Debate Tips from Wellesley College **ANSWERS**

1. Before the debate:	
i)	<i>Be prepared.</i>
ii)	Know your facts, stats and sources.
iii)	<i>Bring water and cough drops.</i>
iv)	Be aware of your venue & it's acoustics.
v)	Go through your routine to get your head in the game.
2. During the debate	
Claim	Accessible, coherent and consistent and know your strongest arguments.
Warrant	<i>Backing up what you're saying with facts and statistics. Explaining what you're going to say and why it has relevance.</i>
Impact	Tell us why we should care. Use overviews, identify values and frameworks. Make your stakes crystal clear.
3. Opponent is speaking	
i)	Listen.
ii)	<i>Think before you speak.</i>
iii)	Interruption is a tool but don't overuse it.
4. During your rebuttal	
i)	Understand your opponent's arguments. Reframe it, so you can highlight inconsistencies in the strongest version of their argument.
ii)	<i>Be concise, prioritise and concede ground strategically.</i>
5. Don't...	
i)	Don't be afraid to ask clarifying questions
ii)	<i>Don't dismiss your opponent's arguments.</i>
6. Final tips	
i)	<i>Be courteous (particularly towards your moderator).</i>
ii)	When you time is up stop talking.
iii)	Watch your pace and tone.
iv)	<i>Be aware of yourself as the audience can always see you.</i>
7. After the debate concludes	
1)	Take a deep breath, you did it.
2)	<i>Don't forget to review your performance.</i>