



Debate Training Guide

Training debaters is a continual process. There is not enough time to adequately prepare students for everything they need to know in debate. Therefore, this guide is to help you understand the most important features students need to understand to get started in debate.

OVERVIEW

Ultimately, the number one thing new debaters need to know is that they are not capable of knowing everything prior to their first tournament. They may encounter scenarios you haven't prepared them for in a round. The goal is not for them to feel lost or frustrated, but to come back to you after the tournament to discuss the things they did not know. A former debater, Grant Nelson of Dowling Catholic, once said "I learned everything I don't know yet." He was optimistic because he felt that he knew the deficits and could control filling those voids by using the resources at his disposal. If your students can attend tournaments and identify things they need to learn about in the future - regardless of outcome - it was a worthwhile competitive experience.

OVERALL DEBATE CONCEPTS

Regardless of the format of debate, there are some important concepts for students to understand.

STRUCTURING AN ARGUMENT

First, the general structure of an argument applies to all formats of debate. An argument must contain these three elements: **claim, warrant, and impact**.

A claim is a declarative statement - it establishes your argument.

A warrant is the justification for your claim. It establishes why your claim is true.

An impact is the significance of your argument. It outlines why people should care about your argument.

An argument is not complete with each of these elements. The part of the argument that requires the most development, generally, is the warrant. It's easy to come up with one line reasons why something is true, however, in debate, it's important to put sufficient analysis, research, and thought behind each of your claims. Having multiple reasons why something is true, or layering your warrants, is something to explore as well. While one sentence could be a sufficient warrant for some claims, it's important to properly justify the claim so you can access your impact.

An example:

Civil disobedience trivializes good laws even if it targets only bad laws. Civil disobedience involves breaking the laws that order daily life. For example, protestors might block a street or refuse to cooperate with the police. However, once we allow protestors to break these laws, citizens will exploit these loopholes. Professor Matthew Hall explains: "Unfortunately, we have reached that point. Both disobedients and scholars advocate the abolition of punishment for civilly disobedient acts. Freedom from punishment removes a crucial deterrent that restrains civil disobedience. Acceptance of punishment establishes that civil disobedience respects the rule of law and ensures its weighty, rather than petty, character within the political debate. Another [One] danger lies with those protestors who claim participation in the tradition of civil disobedience even though they direct their conduct toward private parties, rather than the government, and thus wrongly reposition civil disobedience as direct action designed to stop particular conduct rather than as political discourse

intended to produce systemic change. On yet another front, public officials cloak their defiance of the law in the mantle of civil disobedience, posing a distinct danger, not just to the obligation to obey the law, but [and] to the need for consistent administration of the law by the legal system itself."

REFUTING AN ARGUMENT

Second, forms of refutation apply to each type of debate. Regardless of the form of debate, your students should understand how to respond to other arguments brought up in the round. Students need to understand how to properly refute what their opponent said. By understanding the structure of an argument, it becomes easier to understand basic approaches to answering it.

To answer the warrant, you would want to show that it's untrue. Essentially, you're denying the validity of the claim. You can do this by proving it false, or by proving the opponent's plan is more harmful. For instance, if an opponent claims and justifies that your plan raises taxes, you could simply show how your plan doesn't raise taxes. Additionally, you could go one step further and show how your plan doesn't raise taxes, but that your opponent's does.

To answer the impact, you would want to show the warrant is not true (see above), which establishes the impact does not happen. This is the most common strategy for dealing with an impact because typically, impacts aren't contestable. It's bad for people to die, rights to be violated, etc. However, sometimes the impact is contestable. For instance, if your opponent says that you raise taxes and that's bad for the economy, you could argue the opposite and establish why taxes being raised is good.

There are multiple strategies to attacking an argument, but these are the most basic ones to begin teaching your students.

FLOWING

Each event will require students to flow, or take notes on their opponent's arguments. Flowing in LD, Policy, and Public Forum can be very similar; however, they can also require some differences. Congressional Debate is unique from the other events. In all forms of flowing, it's important for you to come up with abbreviations for common words and/or phrases. Some examples include:

- Increase – ↑
- Decrease – ↓
- Leads to – →
- Justice – J
- Morality – M
- Human Rights – HRts
- Obligation – ob
- Statistics – stats
- Eliminate – Ø
- Equals – =
- Money – \$

There is no need to force students to use the same abbreviations. What makes sense to one student, may not work for the other. Provide them examples and allow them to test what works best for them.

EVENT SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

While the core of debate can be viewed as the same for each event, there are unique elements to each format. While it's important to understand the basic differences between events, it's always important to remember that there are few actual rules and regulations about how events are conducted. Therefore, when preparing students for their event, it's key to give them



tools to be successful, while ensuring they understand there are multiple approaches that could be taken.

PUBLIC FORUM

Public Forum involves opposing teams of two, debating a topic concerning a current event. Proceeding a coin toss, the winners choose which side to debate (PRO or CON) or which speaker position they prefer (1st or 2nd), and the other team receives the remaining option. Students present cases, engage in rebuttal and refutation, and also participate in a “crossfire” (similar to a cross examination) with the opportunity to question the opposing team. Often times community members are recruited to judge this event.

To learn more about **Public Forum Debate**, you should visit www.speechanddebate.org/publicforum for a more in-depth introduction to the event.

LINCOLN DOUGLAS DEBATE

In this one-on-one format, students debate a topic provided by the National Speech & Debate Association. Topics range from individual freedom versus the collective good to economic development versus environmental protection. Students may consult evidence gathered prior to the debate but may not use the Internet in round. An entire debate is roughly 45 minutes and consists of constructive speeches, rebuttals, and cross-examination.

To learn more about **Lincoln Douglas Debate**, you should visit www.speechanddebate.org/lincolndouglas for a more in-depth introduction to the event.

POLICY DEBATE

A two-on-two debate that focuses on a policy question for the duration of the academic year, this format tests a student’s research, analytical, and delivery skills. Policy debate involves the proposal of a plan by the affirmative team to enact a policy, while the negative team offers reasons to reject that proposal. Throughout the debate, students have the opportunity to cross-examine one another. A judge or panel of judges determines the winner based on the arguments presented.

To learn more about **Policy Debate**, you should visit www.speechanddebate.org/policy for a more in-depth introduction to the event.

CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE

A simulation of the U.S. legislative process, students generate a series of bills and resolutions for debate in Congressional Debate. Debaters alternate delivering speeches for and against the topic in a group setting. An elected student serves as a presiding officer to ensure debate flows smoothly. Students are assessed on their research, argumentation, and delivery skills, as well as their knowledge and use of parliamentary procedure.

To learn more about **Congressional Debate**, you should visit www.speechanddebate.org/congress for a more in-depth introduction to the event.

WORLD SCHOOLS DEBATE

World Schools Debate features a dynamic format combining the concepts of “prepared” topics with “impromptu” topics, encouraging debaters to focus on specified issues rather than debate theory or procedural arguments. This highly interactive style of debate allows debaters to engage each other, even during speeches. This challenging format requires good teamwork and in-depth quality argumentation.

To learn more about **World Schools Debate**, you should visit www.speechanddebate.org/worldschoolsdebate.

OTHER RESOURCES

The **National Speech & Debate Association provides a plethora of resources for all events**. Members should access their dashboards for lesson plans, videos, classroom activities, and more. There are specific lessons on flowing, refutation, and more. There are videos on how to understand basic, foundational concepts. There are so many resources at your disposal - familiarize yourself with our site and begin exploring at www.speechanddebate.org!



EVALUATION

It’s important to assess your student’s understanding after debate tournaments. Check with them about the things they felt good about. Every tournament - every student - does something effectively. It’s important to remember that, and always keep it at the forefront of what you teach your novices. After this is established, ask what they could’ve done better. Then have them outline steps they can take to work on that issue.

QUESTIONS?

We’re here to help! Supporting materials can be found at www.speechanddebate.org by logging in to the District Leader Dashboard, or contact your National Speech & Debate Association staff liaison for more information.