Debating

A debate is a two-sided presentation of an issue with one side advocating a position and the other side negating the position. Debates may end with a “winner” who does a better job of advocating his or her side. Debates differ from forums, which usually involves more than two viewpoints and may seek a compromise as the result instead of a “winner.”

TO ADVOCATE OR PROPOSE:

Know what you are advocating: What type of issue are you going to be discussing? State your topic and position clearly in the opening of the debate.

- Fact – This type of issue asks a “Yes/No” or “True/False”
- Value – This type of issue asks about attitudes or beliefs.
- Policy – This issue concerns a plan or proposition and involves a course of action.

Know the basic argument model: If you make a statement (claim), you must have reasons (proof) to back it up.

Claim → Proof

Proof can be data, statistics, logical explanation or testimony. Always give the source of your information.

Know how to impact arguments: After you make a claim and give proof, explain why it is important to the topic.

Don’t merely repeat your claim; give reasons why the claim is important. Relate the claim back to the topic and to your position.

Structure your debate like a speech: Use the Introduction—Body—Conclusion model for your presentation.

Learn the specifics of the debate: How many people will speak? How long is each speech? How many times will each person speak? Will questions be allowed?

Listen carefully to the opposition and take good notes on the points presented by the other side. Use these notes during subsequent speeches to directly answer any points and refute the ideas presented by the other side.

Keep your cool! Remember it is the other person’s job to attack your ideas. Don’t take it personally.
TO OPPOSE OR DEFEND:
It is important to remember that opposing a topic does not mean that you have to take the opposite perspective. Often times you can oppose the topic by offering an alternative solution, idea, or plan.

Know what you are opposing: Are you opposing the topic, the plan, or the points brought up by the other speakers?
   - If you oppose the topic, what is your exact stance?
   - If you oppose the plan, do you have to suggest a new plan?
   - If you oppose the other speaker, will you point out flaws in logic or offer other ideas?

Be able to identify what is wrong with the proposition: It is not enough to say something is wrong; clearly identify what the problem or error is.
   - Harm: Does the proposed idea cause a harm not mentioned?
   - Solvency: Does the proposed idea actually fix the problem?
   - Cost – Benefit: Does the cost of the idea outweigh the benefits?
   - Barriers: Are the barriers in the system (such as laws) that will prevent the idea from working?
   - Fallacies: Is the idea free from fallacious logic?

Be mutually exclusive: If you suggest a different plan or idea, your plan cannot occur at the same time as the other plan.

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Structure your debate like a speech:
   - Use the Introduction—Body—Conclusion model
   - Use the same order for the body as your opponent.

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