

DEBATE GUIDE: RESOURCE 10

The Art of Synthesis and Summary

Debates can be overwhelming to the listener, since they can contain a lot of back-and-forth around complex material.

Debaters who can clearly tell the story of the debate and prioritize issues for the listener are likely to be the most persuasive, especially if they can also communicate the heart of a controversial issue in a passionate, compelling way. The best way to practice the art of synthesis is to make a habit of “redo”-ing your closing speeches whenever you finish a debate round, focusing on making it even clearer and more compelling than it was in the original debate.

Skill and Technique	Guidance
1. Find the Heart of the Debate	<p>As you listen to your opponent’s speeches, take a step back and look at the issues being debated. Hopefully, you’ve taken good notes, so circle any crucial points and number them in terms of which ones are highest priority. Ask yourself:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the best arguments on each side? • Which arguments have the most ripple effects? • Which arguments directly contradict what I have been saying throughout the debate? • Where do the two sides differ philosophically?
2. Tell the Story of the Round	<p>Good stories have a beginning, middle, and an end. In your closing speech, take your listener on a journey looking back on what has happened in the debate. Review with the listener:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was important at the start of the debate? • What arguments have dropped away and what is left? • How have you proved the points that are left?
3. Explain Complex Ideas	<p>Confusion isn’t persuasive. Even if you already have, take time to remind listeners about key definitions and explain anything that is still confusing. A good way to practice this outside of a round is to give yourself complicated subjects (i.e. how health care works or impeachment or cycles of poverty) and practice explaining what they are without making any arguments.</p>
4. Weigh the Issues	<p>Weighing is a technique where you directly compare issues on your side of the debate versus the other side and say why the issues you prove are more important or impactful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put yourself in the listener’s shoes: what issues are they wrestling with? How can you summarize what they are weighing in their minds? • Do not bring up new issues at this point. Instead, keep your summaries to what has already been debated.



Skill and Technique	Guidance
5. Bring the Passion	<p>Passionate delivery is important throughout the debate, but it is especially important when you summarize key issues. Your summaries are a representation of everything you've been building throughout the debate. Get excited or urgent about it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use your voice (red and gray vocal tones) to communicate urgency, passion, and enthusiasm.• Make sure you use your voice to clearly differentiate between what is good (i.e. you) and what is bad.• Increase speed and volume throughout, but use strategic pauses and points that are conversational.

