

DEBATE GUIDE: RESOURCE 5

Getting Debate Started: For Speakers

Debate is about being able to articulate the big picture of an issue, while at the same time, analyzing and unpacking the nuances of each argument.

It is a lot to do off the top of your head, so make sure you are prepared by staying current about issues, practicing your outlining and note-taking skills, and improving your ability to explain, synthesize, prioritize, and extend the most important arguments. Use this guide to remind yourself to stay level-headed and analytical in your next debate. Note: These suggestions can take place in any order that works for you and should be used as a set of reminders, not a formula. Feel free to skip suggestions that do not work for you or the situation you are in—make it your own!

Be Aware and Stay Current

- 1) Take the time to inform your opinions by staying up-to-date with what is happening in the world. Be familiar with key terms, figures, places, and names.
- 2) Be aware of how people are conversing about a topic. What makes people emotional? What seem to be the sticking points?

Analyze Both Sides of a Topic

- 1) Before you put together your arguments, discuss both sides of the issue. Set aside your own bias and think objectively about why someone would take each side.
- 2) When you come up with an argument on one side, rigorously write down counter-arguments. What examples contradict you?

Quickly Outline Arguments

- 1) Practice writing down your thoughts with rough notes only, just getting down enough information to guide your thoughts.
- 2) Create your own code. Use abbreviations and symbols and never write full sentences. It's more important to get the gist and teach your brain to fill in the rest.

Listen Carefully and Take Notes

- 1) Selective note-taking is the key to success during debate. If you are familiar with the issue, what they are saying shouldn't be entirely new. Take notes on examples and what clash they emphasize.
- 2) Work on listening skills to think about your own arguments at the same time as thinking about theirs.

Prioritize Areas of Clash

- 1) Debate starts off being about details, but it is powerful if you can boil it down and explain the big picture of the issues at hand.
- 2) As you listen, think about the theme of their arguments. How does it differ from your theme? In your notes, circle and number the most important arguments.

Synthesize, Explain, and Extend

- 1) In practice, redo closing speeches and improve how you summarize main issues and explain complex ideas. Strive to make things clear.
- 2) Work on extending, where you state the implications of the argument, the results, the ripple effects, and weigh which issues are more important and why.

