

DEBATING: GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS (SECONDARY)#esufestivalofspeaking

GETTING STARTED

Your teacher/parent can help you with this. But here are some comprehensive techniques which the best debaters use.

There are four oracy skill sets and it is really worth thinking about these and critiquing each other's speeches constructively when preparing. IF this was a competition - and it is not - these are the areas that the judges would consider! This can easily be done remotely with platforms like Zoom, Teams etc.

Oracy Skill Set 1: Reasoning and Evidence

When you know what motion you are going to debate and have decided who is on which side (Proposition or Opposition), it is time to gather your team at home or remotely and start to prepare!

Try:

- 1) Mind mapping or brainstorming the motion with your team.
- 2) Exploring arguments for both sides of the debate; it is important to think about the other side's arguments to think of ways to rebut them.
- 3) In addition, looking for arguments that might at first seem closer to the other side's case can be helpful. Sometimes, debates come down to the more nuanced arguments, so it is good to be prepared.
- 4) Once you have done an initial brainstorm, grouping the thoughts into themes and work out who is going to research what.

Research

While you are researching, there are several things to think about:

The reliability of your sources is very important. Whilst the internet is a fantastic place to access newspapers, academic journals, podcasts etc., some sites such as Wikipedia, which allow any internet user to edit the content, may not give you the most accurate information for your speech.

Similarly, if using statistics in your speech, think about whether the data is misleading, e.g. '75% of students agree that school uniform is good'. If only four students were surveyed, is this a reliable or accurate statistic?





When looking at newspapers, consider whether you think the journalist is putting forward facts, or their own opinion on a topic. Does this newspaper seem to have any bias towards a particular political or social view point?

Is your information up to date? Keep a note of where information came from so your team can refer to the exact source in their speech.

Always check where the 'facts' come from. Even if you do not use them, the other team may do; knowing where their information is from can be a great starting point for challenging it.

The ESU has published Pros and Cons: A Debater's Handbook (19th Edition, Routledge 2014) which is available on Amazon.co.uk.

NEXT STEPS

- Get together at home or remotely to get all your ideas in one place
- Look at two areas: 'In favour/Pros' and 'Against/Cons'.
- Write up all the arguments including weak/ poor ones. Some arguments that were initially
 dismissed may turn out to be valuable main points, supporting points or rebuttal once you
 have a list of all the arguments which are likely to come up.
- The first arguments you come up with often raise questions about what the motion means. These are useful in helping to define the motion.

Defining the motion

The definition is delivered at the start of the first Proposition speech and is very important, although it must also be kept short and to the point (30-60 seconds). Without a solid definition, the debate does not have a clear purpose. Defining the motion is about much more than just getting out a dictionary. There are several key questions that must be asked:

Who?

If the motion proposes a specific policy or course of action ('This House would abolish the United Nations' or 'This House would bring back the death penalty'), you might need to clarify 'who' is implementing it. This is often included in the motion. The UN motion implies that 'This House' includes all members of the UN. Bringing back the death penalty implies a UK focus; other countries have the death penalty already and criminal justice is generally a domestic matter. A motion like 'This House would censor the Internet' leaves it more open; the UK? the EU? a worldwide organisation? In defining this motion, a simpler interpretation (e.g UK) is often better.

What?

What is the policy about? Would the death penalty be by lethal injection or hanging? Would it be for murder only, or other crimes, too? Exactly what would be censored on the internet (e.g. pornography, racist content)? Does the internet include email?





How?

How is the policy going to be implemented? Without a mechanism, model or a plan, your definition may lack the clarity necessary to set up a clear and clean debate. For instance, would you simply abolish the UN and let the world get on without it, or would you propose a replacement?

Would you do it immediately, or would you allow for a phasing out period? The mechanism should not be so elaborate that it leads the debate away from the main topic, i.e. a Proposition case for abolishing the UN must focus on the UN's bad points, not an elaborate new plan.

Limitations?

Is this policy going to affect everyone, or only some people? Are there any limitations on the policy? For instance, a common limitation on the death penalty excludes children.

Note that the definition should make the debate clear, accessible and fair for both sides. It should not be used to make life easier for the Proposition by unfairly excluding difficult things they don't want to talk about or tricking the Opposition by proposing a topic they couldn't have been expected to prepare for. The definition should mean the debate ends up as close as possible to what an ordinary, well-informed person would reasonably expect to be debated.

Here are two examples:

1) 'This House would abolish the UN'

The United Nations should immediately be completely disbanded, including all subsidiary institutions such as the Security Council, UNESCO and the WHO. No replacement organisation will be established.

2) 'This House would legalise cannabis'

This debate is about the UK. We would make the production and sale of cannabis legal under licence and allow it to be sold in shops with the same age restrictions as tobacco.

With both of these examples, the Opposition team and anyone watching/listening will all know the grounds of the debate within less than 30 seconds and tying the debate to existing precedents, like the sale of tobacco, means that you do not need to waste a lot of time creating a licensing body and justifying age restrictions. What is vital though is that anything relating to the mechanism (who would do the action, where the revenue would go, how it would be enforced etc.) must be in the first part of the first speech.





Analysis Debates

Sometimes a motion is set that does not propose a specific policy. Instead, your role is to argue for the truth or falsity of the statement given. An example would be, 'This House believes the UN is a failure'. No action is proposed; instead, the Proposition must outline criteria for considering the UN a failure, and explain how these criteria have been met.

Here is an example:

1) 'This House believes the UN is a failure'

The UN has failed because it has not met its own stated aims of maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations or making enough progress in alleviating international economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems.

Both teams should take care to remember throughout the debate that specific examples (in this case, failures/successes of the UN) or policies (whether we should therefore abolish the UN) are only of interest when explained in the context of demonstrating the truth or falsity of the statement 'the UN is a failure'.

Be bold!

A bold Proposition usually makes for a better debate than a timid or 'soft' model. For example, if a debate calls for a tax on fatty food, a 300% tax could make a real difference. A 3% tax would do what the motion says but would have so little impact that it would almost certainly make for a poor debate!

Alternatively, if the debate is about compulsory organ donation, then allowing exemptions on religious grounds might make the Proposition side easier, but it also closes down a really interesting area of debate.

Oracy Skill Set 2: Organisation and Prioritization

Structuring arguments is key.

During the preparation period, you should have thought of all possible arguments for your speeches and, if you are the Proposition team, come up with a definition. Put the list of your opponents' possible arguments to one side for the moment, but go through it again before the debate to make sure that you have a reply or piece of rebuttal ready for every argument the Opposition might make. Now your team should concentrate on their speeches, so that you can choose which arguments you are going to use, and in what order.





Why is structure important?

When making a speech, a lot of information is being delivered in a short space of time. It is helpful for your audience for you to break down your team's case into small sections (particularly as your audience is not physically in room with you during the debate):

- What usually works best is to have no more than three arguments in each speech.
- Try not to put all of your points in your first speech, make sure to leave the second speaker with something to say!
- One or two key arguments in a speech is also fine (especially for later speakers who do lots of rebuttal).

Structuring your case

First your team needs to decide which speaker is going to make which points. You are likely to have some arguments that are very powerful or are based on principles important to your team's case. These should come first so that the audience knows from the start why you believe what you do.

Divide the remaining points between the two speakers according to themes or types (e.g. political arguments, effects on society etc.). Sometimes one or both speeches might develop a theme (e.g. economic arguments or practicalities). On other occasions, the division is made simply because some points are more important than others.

You should also leave time in your speech to respond to what the other side can say or has said. This is important because your audience will be comparing what the two sides are both saying to decide who they think has been most convincing and won the debate. The more you engage with the other side, the easier that gets. All speakers should keep room in their speeches for these points of rebuttal and slot them in where it is appropriate during the debate.

Signposting

Make sure your introduction outlines all the points you will make. Then keep the audience informed of where the speech is going by using phrases like, "And now onto my second point ..." and by using pauses.

Timing

Good timing of your speech shows great use of organisation and prioritization skills! Try to keep within the time limits given. In the Festival of Speaking, speeches should not be longer than 5 minutes maximum.

If there are two points of equal importance, make sure the speaker spends the same amount of time on both; do not overrun on the first and try to fit the second into the last minute.





You can use either a phone timer or a stopwatch during a speech to keep track of your timing. Practise speaking within the allotted time.

Make arguments using REAL

REAL is a system developed by the ESU to help debaters structure each individual argument in a speech:

Reason	One of the arguments why we should agree with your team's side of the motion.
Evidence	Give some facts or examples that support your team's reason.
Analysis	Show us exactly how your team's evidence supports your team's reason.
Link	Link everything back to why we should agree with your team's side.

For example in 'This House would abolish the UN':

Reason	The UN has not stopped wars.
Evidence	War in the Balkans and in Lebanon.
Analysis	The UN took far too long to act in both cases and, even when they did, they did not do much. There is just too much disagreement between members.
Link	The UN has not created peace, one of its main aims - so we should abolish this failed institution.

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Oracy Skill Set 3: Expression and Delivery

As well as debating being about the arguments made and how they're structured, it is also about engaging with the other team and any audience. Although it is vital what you are saying, it is also important to think about how you say it.

Can you be heard?

It is really important to speak loudly and clearly enough so that people watching remotely can hear the debate. Sometimes this takes practice! Teachers have lots of practice in not only speaking clearly in front of large groups, but also varying their tone of voice, their pace etc. Ask your teachers for some top tips!

Variation in tone and pace

Although you might have lots of points to fit in, try not to speak too quickly or in the same tone all the way through. This can make it difficult for the judges and audience to follow your argument.

To avoid this, try assigning a different mood to each section of each speech, thinking about which mood best fits your point.

Examples of good 'mood tags' include:

- Calm
- Pacy
- Deliberate
- Passionate
- Powerful
- Light-hearted.

A pause between each point can be a good way to change gear and let the audience know the speech is setting off in a new direction.

'Tagging' your speech notes with how to deliver each point in coloured pens, or using stickers with different emotions, speeds and volumes, can be a useful visual reminder.

Body language

Eye contact with the audience is important. A confident speaker is able to look into the camera whilst delivering their speech because they are not relying entirely on notes.

Try to practise in front of your family or with your teacher and friends remotely. You could ask for feedback on body language and your tone of voice.

This is something that may require practice, but remember that even trainee lawyers spend much of their time practising in front of the mirror in order to become better at persuading their 'audience'!





Word choice

Make sure that you explain any technical terms or abbreviations as needed.

Using the correct terminology and showing that you understand what it means, will help to show that you are well-researched and knowledgeable. Using powerful adjectives and carefully chosen emotional vocabulary will help to give you an engaging argument and style. However, do not rely too much on emotive language during your speeches as this might distract from the analysis of your main arguments.

All speakers should aim to sound natural. Speakers do not need to use traditional debating vocabulary such as 'the honourable gentleman'! You are not in the House of Commons (yet...) Humour can be a useful tool depending on the topic being discussed, but you should be careful to use only relevant and appropriate humour. Offensive or otherwise inappropriate comments undermine the persuasiveness of your speech.

You should feel that:

- You are given the same high level of respect due to all
- You are never in a position where you feel under physical or psychological threat
- You will never be judged on things you cannot change.
- Your opinions and beliefs can be challenged, but will always be respected.
- If your safety and well-being is threatened, others will listen and support you.

The ESU likes to set challenging and topical motions for you to debate. Teams often feel passionately about their side of the argument, but we expect all debaters to treat everyone else with respect. We have a very clear Equity Policy, which means that our debates should be welcoming, inclusive and supportive events, where people feel that they are able to express themselves.

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Oracy Skill Set 4: Listening and Response

It is important to address the other side's arguments during your own speech. This is called 'rebuttal'.

The aim of rebuttal is to undermine the opposing team's case, thus leaving your case looking even stronger by comparison. All speakers (except the First Proposition, who does not have a speech to which to respond - only possibly some points of information accepted) are expected to rebut the previous speakers' arguments, even if some of their arguments surprise you or seem very convincing.

As the debate moves on, the amount of rebuttal done by each speaker should increase, as they have heard more arguments to respond to. In a typical debate where there is more than one speaker on each side, the First Opposition speaker may rebut for 1-2 minutes, the Second Proposition speaker for 2+ minutes and Second Opposition for 2-3 minutes.

Rebuttal can come at the start of your speech, or be worked into your main arguments; just make sure it is clear to the audience that you are addressing the other side's arguments, so they can see you are rebutting.

You might do this by starting each point of rebuttal by briefly quoting what the other side said, or by naming one of your opponents and the argument of theirs that you will rebut.

For example

In First Proposition, Marvin made a speech on why we should abolish the UN, including the following points:

The UN has failed to stop wars.

Countries ignore the UN.

The UN favours the West, fueling terrorism.

On the Opposition team, Lily might already have planned to make the following points during her speech:

Success of UN peacekeepers.

UN aid programmes help to reduce terror.

UN is a good forum for non-violent debate.

Here is one way that Lily could restructure her speech to rebut Marvin's points effectively:





Use 30 seconds at the start of her speech to rebut the point about people ignoring the UN, using facts she has prepared.

Lily's main points about UN peacekeepers and non-violent debate can both be used to rebut Marvin's 'Peace' point, so she could move these to be her first two points and flag to the audience that they are also rebuttal on 'Peace'.

Make her third point about aid reducing terror, pointing out again that it rebuts the other side.

Another way of delivering rebuttal is a simple list:

"I have two main points in my speech; the effect on the economy and the impact on female participation in the labour market. But first, I have three points of rebuttal.

Firstly, James said "......" he is wrong because "......"

Secondly, he then contradicted himself when he said both "....." and "....." in his speech, they cannot both be true.

And finally, he misunderstood my partner's point about "...." when he said "...."

Points of Information (POIs)

Points of Information (along with rebuttal) are central to the inter-activity of debate. They demonstrate your ability to engage with your opponent's arguments. POIs are allowed during the middle 5 minutes of speeches.

Each speaker has a period of 'protected time' at the beginning and end of their speech so they can get started without being interrupted. After this minute has elapsed, the other team can offer an interruption.

To do this, they indicate that they want to make a point by saying, "On a point of information," or "on that point."

The person who is giving their speech is in control at all times and can either accept the interruption by saying "accepted", "go ahead" or "yes, please", or decline by saying "declined", "no thank you" or by indicating with their hand that the person offering the POI should resume their seat. Sometimes the speaker could also say "I'll take you in a moment" and finish their point before accepting the POI, during which the person offering the POI should wait.





If accepted, the person offering the POI has 10 seconds to point out something (a fact, or a contradiction in the argument) which disproves the argument being made by the speaker, or to ask a short question (for example to ask for clarification if you think they are not saying something important).

Try to avoid offering too many POIs.

It is not sensible to take too many points either, or you might run out of time to make your own points.

It is a good idea to decline POIs that come too early. In the second minute of your speech, you are likely to either still be outlining your case or giving rebuttal, which is not a sensible time to take a POI. We would also recommend that you leave a little time between accepting POIs, not taking too many back to back.

If a POI has been made and the speaker has responded to it, there is no automatic right to a follow up, meaning that the person making the point cannot offer a response immediately. They would have to ask again and be accepted again.

TOP TIP

This ability to accept or decline is a key tactic. The speaker can also:

Keep the person offering the POI waiting until they have finished their sentence. Ask them (politely!) to sit down if their question lasts longer than 10 seconds.

Points of Information are a key part of debate, so it is important that all speakers try to offer at least two or three during every speech they hear and take at least one or two in every speech they give.

Plan. Practise. Perform. Post!

