NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS'
Debating Council

How to Debate
Guide

Contents

INTRODUCTION

This guide will help speakers new to debating learn the basic skills. Debating is easy once you know what to do!

There's no need for speakers to memorise this guide. It is a tool to help students extend their debating, and they are welcome to take it into the preparation room for assistance.

As well as this guide, there are other ways you can improve. Watching videos of past debates a very effective way to learn – the resources section for the NZSDC website has a list of videos to watch, and searching YouTube for "WSDC" will produce plenty more great examples.

If you have any questions about the content of this guide or any other matter, please email New Zealand Schools' Debating Council at council@debating.org.nz

GENERAL OVERVIEW

In debating, there are two teams of three speakers – the affirmative team and the negative team, which debate a topic, called a motion or a moot. We will use 'motion' throughout this guide.

The affirmative team takes the position suggested by the motion and provides arguments in support.

The negative team takes the position contrary to the affirmative team and provides arguments that explain why they are not correct, and against the motion more generally.

Teams will confront different types of motions, some requiring the affirmative team to propose a change to the status quo (what's currently happening). These usually start, "this House[1] would", "this House believes that X should …" etc.

Others require the speakers to support a particular opinion or judgement. For example, "this House supports," or "this House regrets" etc.

Both types require teams to prove that their side of the motion is better than the other, and judges are looking to see whether they should support the motion (affirmative) or reject it (negating).

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[1]'House' is a hang-up from Parliamentary debating. It basically means 'we, the debaters'.

SET UP FOR A DEBATE

Affirmative team

The basics

In every debate, the affirmative team must set up the terms of the debate, and be clear about what exactly they are supporting. This should be done at the first speaker, who should make clear what the debate is about.

Setting up the debate does not require a dictionary definition of the words in the motion, and this should be avoided. Instead, the affirmative team should aim to describe what they are arguing for so that it is clear to both the negative team and the adjudicator.

Common things to include during the set up are: some context or background about the motion (what is currently happening, why this issue is important), a problem that the affirmative wish to solve or something bad they think needs to change, and (if required) a change that the affirmative think will solve the problem(s) or issues.

If the motion requires the affirmative team to propose a change to the current situation, they need to explain what exactly it is they would change and how. This is often called a 'model'.

Other times teams may just need to be clear about what they support, and what they don't support (for example, if the motion is about a moral judgment).

When explaining a change, the team should outline what they think the world will look like once their change is made – this helps clarify what they hope to achieve.

Example

Motion: This House would ban smoking

The affirming team needs to support a change (i.e. a world where smoking is banned), and so need to define exactly what change they support.

A good affirmative team will be clear and specific from the outset about what they support and what the terms of the debate are, so the negative team know exactly what they are opposing.

Good set up:

"We support a total prohibition on the sale and consumption of tobacco cigarettes in New Zealand. We would implement a ban in a similar way to laws currently outlawing marijuana – this would mean that buying, selling, and consuming cigarettes would become a crime."

This set up by first affirmative is clear, specific, and reasonable.

It does not involve a dictionary definition of what "cigarettes" are, rather it gives general details as to what is being proposed.

It is also not too complicated or vague.

Bad set up:

"This House, meaning the New Zealand government, will ban, which we define as stopping, smoking, which we define as paper combined as tobacco to form what we would call cigarettes."

Defining each word here is not helpful for understanding what the affirmative team supports.

It is unclear what the extent and the scope of the ban is.

Tips and tricks

When the affirmative team is deciding what they support, they should follow the wording of the motion. For instance, for the motion "this House would ban smoking," it clearly refers to a debate about prohibiting tobacco cigarettes. An affirmative team supporting banning marijuana or other drugs would not be setting the debate up in the 'spirit of the motion.'

The affirmative team should use the "ordinary reasonable person test" – would an ordinary person think the definition was reasonable based on the wording of the motion?

If an affirmative team does not define the debate fairly, they may be penalised by the adjudicator as it is unfair to the negative team.

Affirmative teams should not try to make the debate easier for themselves by unreasonably limiting what the debate is about. For instance, in the debate "this House would legalise marijuana," an affirmative team should not propose only legalising medical marijuana for the terminally ill. The motion is clearly intended to be wider than that narrow example.

An affirmative team should, however, add detail about what they propose, so long as it doesn't contravene the spirit of the motion. For instance, in "this House would legalise marijuana," it would be reasonable for the affirmative team to limit any sale of marijuana to individuals over the age of eighteen, and to force retailers to follow health and safety guidelines in the production of marijuana. In this case, the affirmative team is setting up the debate so they do not have to defend an unreasonable position (allowing children to be able to smoke marijuana), which would be outside the spirit of the motion.

Negative team

The negative team should attempt to debate the motion according to the affirmative team's definition, even if the terms of the debate are unfair. This is because every debate would fail if the affirmative and negative team were arguing over a different interpretation of the motion. It is impossible to win the argument if you are arguing past one another!

However, if a negative team is presented with an unfair definition by the affirmative team, they should briefly point this out in their first speech and continue to debate as best they can within the framework set up by the affirmative team's definition. The adjudicator will take into account the reasonableness of the definition when they come to their judgement.

In almost all debates, the negative team will simply reject the motion. If the debate is "this House would ban smoking," a negative team would support allowing smoking to remain legal, without necessarily proposing their own change to the current situation.

A negative team can add detail to what they support in the same manner as the affirmative, including supporting a change to the current situation, in order to make their position clear. For instance, in "this House would ban smoking," a negative team can say that while they support legal smoking, they also support a tax placed on the sale of cigarettes to pay for the harms generated. In some cases, a negative team will be wise to do this – it may give them a strategic advantage and allow them to escape having to support an unreasonable position. This is often called having a 'counter-model'.

However, a negative team must make sure that they do not limit what they are supporting so that it is essence the same as what the affirmative team is supporting. For instance, if the negative team were to say that they supported a limit on the sale of cigarettes to one pack a month per individual, this would place them in a strategically weak position as it would concede to the adjudicator that the affirmative team's reasoning is in part correct, and also limit what the negative team could argue.

SPEAKER ROLES

The following table outlines what each speaker in a debate should aim to do. If you're not familiar with any terms, they are explained below.

First Affirmative	- Context/Introduction - Set up/define stance or model - Outline which arguments each of the first two speakers will make ("Split") - First substantive point - Second substantive point - Third substantive point (optional) - Conclusion The role of first affirmative is to set up the debate; provide the context and parameters for the debate; briefly outline the affirmative team's case (by listing the points the team will make); and advance two or three substantive points.
First Negative	- Context/Introduction - Define stance or counter-proposal/model - Outline which arguments each of the first two speakers will make ('Split') - Rebuttal to first affirmative - First substantive point - Second substantive point - Third substantive point (optional) - Conclusion A first negating speaker should explain what their team stands for (especially if there is a counter-model); respond to the key points raised by first affirmative ('rebuttal'); briefly outline the negative team's case (by listing the points the team will make); and advance two or three substantive points. Rebuttal should be one to two minutes.
Second Affirmative	- Introduction - Identify what new substantive points will be made ('their split') - Rebuttal - Fourth substantive point - Fifth substantive point (optional) - Conclusion A second affirmative speaker should respond to the first negating speaker (both what they said in rebuttal and their substantive arguments); build on the first affirming speaker; and advance one or two additional new arguments. Rebuttal should be between two to three minutes.
Second Negative	- Introduction - I Identify what new substantive points will be made ('their split')

	- Rebuttal - Fourth substantive point - Fifth substantive point (optional) - Conclusion A second negative speech should be split roughly 50/50 between rebuttal of the affirmative team and new substantive argument.
Third Affirmative	- Introduction - Identify the 'areas of clash' in the debate - First 'point of clash' - Second 'point of clash' - Third 'point of clash' (optional) - Conclusion A third affirmative must not have any new substantive argument. Their role is to look at the debate holistically, identify what the most critical issues/areas of disagreement are (the 'areas of clash'), and extend the team's analysis on these issues where possible.
Third Negative	- Introduction - Identify the 'areas of clash' in the debate - First 'area of clash' - Second 'area of clash' - Third 'area of clash' (optional) - Conclusion A third negative must not have any new substantive argument. Their role is to look at the debate holistically, identify what the most critical issues/areas of disagreement are (the 'areas of clash'), and extend the team's analysis on these issues where possible.

STYLE

The point of debating is to persuade the adjudicator that your argument is the better one. The content of that argument will be critical to its persuasiveness. However, the manner in which the argument is delivered also helps persuade an adjudicator.

There is no one "style" in debating, and multiple different methods can be equally persuasive by different speakers. However, there are some techniques that help.

Cue cards / written material: A speaker shouldn't write out their entire speech. Reading out a whole speech won't be very persuasive. **We suggest using refill rather than cue-cards.** This means writing out the outline of a speech on refill placed on a table or lectern in front of them. This way the speaker's hands are free to gesture and they do not get in the habit of reading their speech.

Over several pages of refill, the speaker's speech should be laid out in a structured outline. Try to structure it in such a way that you can add new material throughout the debate – if the opposition raises a point you need to respond to, slot it in where it is most relevant, rather than just at the

end of your speech. Similarly, if you come up with a great new idea that is relevant to one of your existing points during the debate, write it on the relevant piece of paper.

Confidence: Being confident is persuasive. This means getting up to deliver the speech with positive body language. Standing tall. Being in control of the room. Maintaining eye contact with the audience, and only occasionally referring to notes. Speakers who are not confident often give this away. They look to their teammates for help, or even tell the adjudicator that they have run out of material, or have just made a silly point, or do not know what they have written down. This always makes things worse, and should be avoided.

Voice: Actively varying your speaking style can be very compelling. A speaker should aim to vary the tone and pace of their speech. Some speakers are naturally fast speakers and need to be wary of this. Using pauses in a speech can help a speaker control the pace of their speech. Emphasis can also be placed on particular words, or an empathetic tone can be used in parts of a speech. Other parts of a speech may need to be more matter of fact. The important point to note is variation. A speech that is monotonous will not be easy to listen to and therefore not be as persuasive.

Maintaining interest: Debating can at times be formulaic, and experienced debaters and judges will often have seen similar arguments made many times by different speakers. It is critical that debaters are able to make their speeches interesting and entertaining – otherwise audience or judge concentration will lapse, and key analytical points may be lost. Memorable speakers are also more likely to be selected into representative teams, awarded prizes, and build a reputation at the tournament – factors that can also influence how their performance is perceived in future debates.

Maintaining interest is about managing energy, responding to the audience, and introducing dynamic elements into a speech.

Using techniques to generate empathy – deliberately trying to establish empathy can help build credibility and trust. The voice can be used to communicate emotional content, and body language (particularly facial expressions) can reinforce the spoken content. Generally, points with more emotional content should be made more slowly, with a deeper pitch and lower voice, and with the tiniest hint of emotional response from the speaker. Your facial expressions should mimic this – sombre – and your body language should not distract from it – try to be subdued.

Being funny – Humour is a powerful tool in debating, but one that is often overlooked. A well-timed joke can severely damage a team's case, point out a ridiculousness hiding just under the surface, break up the tension in a tight round, or bring interest to an otherwise dull debate. People often overestimate how hard it is to be funny. The building blocks of humour are fairly basic – exaggeration, reversal, pantomime, and irony are all fairly reliable sources of humour in a debate. Political or topical jokes are also often successful, as are amusing pop-culture references, quotes or analogies.

Stance / Gestures: A speaker should try to take as natural a stance as possible. Avoid pacing around the front of the room while delivering a speech, or standing so rigidly still that you begin to rock back and forward or sway side to side. Gestures can also be an important part of a speech. Using finger signals as you list numbers, or small hand gestures to emphasise a particular point are effective gestures.

INTRODUCTIONS

The first thing a speaker says **sets the tone** for their speech and establishes their **credibility** in the eyes of the adjudicator. Careful thought needs to go into each introduction.

A speaker should have a **reasonable grasp** of what their introduction is before they go up to speak, so they can introduce their speech in the most effective way.

Good introductions: Introductions should **add to the speaker's team's case** and introduce the direction the speech will take. This could be a powerful new argument, or a key piece of rebuttal against the previous speaker to 'put a stamp on the debate'. It may be funny, or elaborate on a particularly good example to try and win the audience over. It may be strategic – undermining a particularly good opposing speech by pointing out an error or contradiction, or to remind the adjudicator of good points for that speaker's side that were ignored.

Attempting to be emotive in an introduction is often effective. This does not mean being theatrical, but instead displaying some empathy and recognising some of the humanity of the motion – for instance, by using a vivid example.

Bad introductions: A speaker should never begin their speech by saying:

> "Good afternoon and welcome to the adjudicator, members of the opposing team and audience. My name is John and I am the first speaker from Aroha High School and we strongly support the moot that this House would ban smoking".

This introduction is poor as it tells the adjudicator nothing that is not already known, or available on the mark sheet. It wastes time without advancing the case for the affirmative. Speakers never need to introduce their name, repeat the exact wording of the motion, or wish everyone "good afternoon."

First Speaker Introduction

Introductions are particularly important for both first speakers, who are able to state what they believe the **context** is for the debate from the outset. Both first speakers ideally try to paint an evocative picture and create **momentum.**

The first speaker of the affirmative team wants a context that leads the audience and adjudicator to believe that the proposition is necessary or correct, and provides background to the substantive points that they will make in full.

Good introduction for first speaker: A good introduction will **introduce a key idea** or summary of the team line. For example:

> "Every year children across New Zealand suffer from health complications as a direct result of second hand smoking. Children are, without choosing to do so, ingesting harmful chemicals that will have detrimental consequences on their health for the rest of their life. That is not something we are prepared to stand for. We would ban smoking."

This introduction is much more valuable. If the speaker says nothing else, the adjudicator will have a broad overview of what the affirmative team's case is. The introduction makes it very

clear that an important focus of the debate will be on children, and evokes sympathy for the affirmative team as being the protectors against harm for children.

Introductions for later speakers

As the debate progresses, introductions should become **more comparative** between both teams. Speakers should use their introduction to make a direct comparison to the opposition and explain why the speaker's team is supporting a more logical or reasonable position on the topic.

Good introduction for later speakers: Imagine you are the second speaker of the affirmative and the first speaker of the negative team has focussed on the idea of an individual having the right to choose to smoke and the motion infringing on their liberty.

> **"**The first speaker of the negative team talked a lot about individual liberty in this debate. However, what she ignored is the liberty of children. The liberty that a child has to live free from ingesting harmful chemicals that they have not chosen to ingest. That liberty is completely overridden by the case of the negative team. It is the most important liberty in this debate and one which our team upholds."

This introduction is effective, as it immediately identifies a fundamental flaw in the argumentation provided by the negative team and turns the negative team's argument into a point in favour for the affirmative.

It also makes an attempt to explain to the adjudicator why your argument is more important than the opposing team's argument. This kind of comparison between arguments is very important. Otherwise, the adjudicator is faced with two equally well-argued points, with no explanation from the teams as to which "trumps" the others.

SPLITS

After the introduction, a speaker gives their 'split', which lists the arguments or points the team or speech will make, and the order they will be discussed.

The first speaker should provide an **outline** of the team case. It is important that it is informative. Saying "I will talk about politics and economics, and my second speaker will talk about health and children" does not inform the adjudicator of much at all.

In the preparation room, teams should separate and label their different distinct areas of argument. Each speaker should be clear as to who will raise each argument for the first time, and in what order.

A good split for a first speaker:

> "We will bring you four points in support of our side tonight. First I am going to talk about the harmful effects of smoking on people's health, and second I am going to address why second hand smoke is particularly harmful to children given they often ingest second hand smoke without choosing to do so. My second speaker is going to focus on the addictive nature of smoking, and why many people are pressured into smoking and are then unable to quit smoking despite wanting to."

This split is effective because it provides a headline for the key arguments that are going to be advanced by the affirmative team. The adjudicator can note these points down and then follow them as the debate unfolds.

Note: the first speaker should not provide a split for the third speaker, as no new material is going to be advanced at third speaker. It is not necessary to say that the third speaker will do rebuttal – the adjudicator knows this already!

A split is not just for the first speaker of each team. Every speaker should provide a split or an overview of what their speech is going to cover. This may appear like:

> "First I will look at the main issues that have occurred so far in the debate, including whether the state is legitimate in removing an individual's freedom to smoke, and also whether a ban in smoking will in fact reduce the harms associated with consumption. Finally, I will advance one more point of substantive about the emotional harms incurred by family members of smokers."

A third speaker's split will often consist of identifying the points of clash in the debate as they see it. What 'points of clash' are will be explained later in this guide.

SUBSTANTIVE MATERIAL

Both the affirmative and negative teams should come up with substantive arguments (between three and five) in support of their respective side. Substantive arguments are the **main positive points** for why a particular side of the motion is 'better' or 'correct.'

All the substantive points a team presents in a debate is called their **'case.'** These should be divided between the first and second speaker, with the most persuasive arguments presented by the first speaker.

Teams that produce their best arguments at second speaker will find that those arguments hold less weight in the debate, as there is less opportunity for later team members to **expand** on these points, and for the opposition to respond.

Teams should not produce new substantive arguments at third speaker.

As well as providing a split in the beginning of the speech, speakers should signpost to the adjudicator when they are moving in between points. Often numbering is an effective measure to indicate that a speaker is moving on to a new point. For instance, telling the adjudicator "my third argument is X".

The **level of development and explanation** of a substantive point **is critical** to the weight an adjudicator will give an argument. A speaker should aim to explain each logical step of the argument they are making – when writing out a point, the critical question a speaker should have in mind is "why?"

A speaker should develop an argument by explaining each logical step with detail and examples. Speakers should try and think of examples and analogies that can be used to help prove that the point they are making is correct.

Principles v Practical Outcomes

There are two main types of reasoning in debating; arguments from abstract theory and principles, and arguments based on practical outcomes. Teams should consider both when coming up with their material.

Practical outcomes are the tangible harms and benefits of a proposal. Teams should keep in mind "what actually happens" on their side of the motion and develop their material accordingly.

Principled arguments are arguments which are generally based on more intangible concepts that are still important.   For example, teams may consider that a particular motion would infringe principles of justice, particular rights, or principles of choice – these are things that most people think are important independently of the outcomes they produce.

Principles

Teams should think about the principled dimension to a debate alongside any practical outcomes.

This principled dimension may include freedoms the state should protect (e.g. freedom of choice, freedom of speech, freedom of information) or situations where the state should restrict freedoms (e.g. irrationality in decision making, lack of information, protection of certain stakeholders).

Moral arguments often impact the **legitimacy of various policy approaches.**

For instance, one argument for why alcohol is legal is "freedom of choice." Despite the potential harms of alcohol to individuals and society, alcohol continues to be legal. This respects the ability of individuals to decide if they want to expose themselves to the possible harms of alcohol.

Thus, practical outcomes are often not the only thing policy makers consider – moral considerations are also important. The same applies to debating.

For example: The motion: *"This House would ban smoking":*

> An affirmative team might talk about the harms of second hand smoking and the negative health consequences for smokers. They may also talk about the benefits to the health system of less people smoking. These are all 'practical' arguments as they depend on the affirmative team proving that a particular outcome will occur.

> Alongside this, they may argue that freedom of choice for smokers is not important because they are addicted, and not exercising a rational choice.

> This is a principled argument. It doesn't rely on proving a particular outcome, but instead on establishing a logical chain of moral reasoning.

When preparing, teams should think about what underlying moral principles are relevant to the debate. They then need to explain why that moral point of view/principle is important. It would not be enough for a team to talk about how freedom of choice is violated by a ban on smoking – a team would also need to explain why freedom is choice is important and should be respected by the state. For "*this House would ban smoking*," examples of such reasons include:

> Individuals are in the best position to weigh up their personal subjective benefits and harms of smoking.

> Individuals are most important when considering the personal decision to smoke, as they are the most affected by their choice, and thus the decision should remain with them.

> Governments are unable account for the pleasure of smoking when deciding whether to prohibit the activity, as the pleasure is intangible and not easily recorded in health statistics (in contrast to lung cancer etc.).

The following however is a simple method to develop a principled argument (although it will need to be modified according to the debate):

> **State the premise of the principle**

Explain what the principle means

Give examples of when the principle or moral stance is already seen in society. This is to give the principle credibility in the context of the debate.

Explain why the principle is important. This is the most important step – without explaining why the principle is valuable, it will not hold substantial weight in the debate. This is also the most difficult step in explaining a principle – teams need to think together as to why the moral positon your team wishes to be adopted is important.

Explain why the principle should be enforced in the context of the debate. Without relating the principle back to the debate and explaining why it should be *adopted in the current debate,* it is pointless analysis.

Do not rely on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or any other government code or law when explaining why a principle should be enforced. Merely because a speaker can cite that 'freedom of speech' is in the Declaration of Human Rights does not mean it is such important freedom that it must be respected in a given debate - particularly when there are competing rights at stake. Speakers need to think about **why** that right exists and is protected, and why it is important to the particular debate.

In a debate where both teams have a clear moral positon, speakers must think about why their moral position is superior or better than their opponent's position. For instance, in a debate about banning smoking, an affirmative team in responding to freedom of choice might want to think about whether smokers who are addicted to cigarettes actually have any 'choice' in the first place, or whether the violation of others rights through second hand smoke justify taking away the ability of smokers to choose.

Practical material

When thinking of practical points or outcomes, it is often helpful to think in terms of who the **stakeholders** are in the debate – who is impacted by the motion, or has an interest in the outcome. This can be specific groups of people (such as children, taxpayers, other vulnerable groups etc.), or wider society.

It is also helpful to consider both the short-term and long-term outcomes.

Often stakeholders in a debate can be **broken down into smaller groups** with a motion impacting each smaller group in a different way. For instance, if the motion was banning smoking, addicted smokers (those who smoke very often) and social smokers (those who do not smoke often) will be impacted very differently by a prohibition on smoking.

Speakers should keep three things in mind when constructing a substantive argument:

Label/Premise: What is the point in a nutshell? What is it that you are trying to prove? The premise of the argument should be explained at the start so that the adjudicator can easily follow what the point is that you are trying to prove. This is similar to a topic sentence or a thesis statement in English/History.

Mechanism: Why will the point occur in the way you say it will? Why will a particular outcome happen? A mechanism in debating is an explanation of why a point is true.

Outcome/impact: Each time an argument is presented, why it matters should be explained– who is the point good for? Who will be affected by the point? Why is this impact good or bad?

Example: The Motion *"this House would ban smoking,"* the affirmative team argues that lives will be saved from second hand smoking if it is banned.

Good development:

Premise: Lives will be saved from second hand smoke if it is banned

Mechanism: When smoking is legal, more people smoke, often around other people. Individuals therefore breathe in second hand smoke which contains harmful chemicals and substances.

Parents smoke around innocent children, and it occurs at parties other innocent patrons and party goers inhale smoke. It also occurs in tightly cramped places such as cars where individuals are not able to protect themselves or escape the smoke.

Often the victims of second half smoke don't know what is happening to them, or don't have the choice to avoid it (children etc.).

Moreover, social pressure at parties means that innocent victims don't speak up to stop those around them for fear of being shamed.

Outcome: When smoking is banned and fewer people smoke, individuals who would otherwise be harmed by second hand smoke are protected.

This is good for the health of those individuals and means the government is protecting their interests.

Banning smoking would protect the rights of these individuals.

This is persuasive analysis because the speaker logically analyses why the particular outcome will occur (more lives saved). Detailed reasoning is given to the mechanics of the point (where second hand smoke occurs and why is not possible to escape).

Bad argumentation

Premise: lives will be saved from second hand smoke if it is banned

Mechanism: Smoking kills lots of people and is very harmful

It costs the government lots of money when second hand smoking occurs

We need to protect these people so we should ban smoking.

Outcome: We will save lives when we ban smoking because second hand smoking will reduce.

This is not persuasive analysis because it is unclear where or why second hand smoke occurs. It is assertive in nature, with no detail about how the harms occur, nor a step-by-step explanation of why the model will solve the problem.

Despite both points relying on the premise, the former argumentation is more persuasive as it is developed, includes more detail and examples, and is more logically developed than the latter.

Examples

Speakers should use examples where possible in support of the lines of argumentation that they run. Good examples (and explanation of those examples) can amplify a point and make it significantly more convincing in a debate.

Choose appropriate examples: Teams should think very carefully about what examples are used. For example, in a debate about race relations in New Zealand, historical examples from World War II or apartheid may not be the most relevant. Similarly, in a debate about compulsory blood donation, using the example of seatbelts for restricting freedom of choice may not be the most convincing analysis. Better examples will be to think of other medical processes which involve an element of compulsion or free choice.

Explain examples properly: Examples should be used after the argumentation has been developed. Identify what the example is. Examples should be used to **expand on** the above reasoning, not as a substitute. It is much easier for an opposing team to rebut an argument that relies on a single example, as they only have to dispute the example and not the reasoning.

REBUTTAL

In addition to offering substantive arguments, both teams need to engage with the arguments offered by the opposing team – making rebuttal arguments.

It is best that rebuttal is done immediately after a speaker has given their introduction and split, to ensure that the opposing team's arguments do not stay unrefuted in the adjudicator's mind.

Teams should always consider what the point of rebuttal is. Only taking "pot shots" or "snipes" at the opposing team is seldom going to be effective. Similarly, comprehensive line by line rebuttal is unlikely to be effective. Rebuttal should focus on the key points the opposing team has raised. A good question to ask is "what has the previous speaker said which may lead the adjudicator to award the debate to them?" Those arguments should be the focus of rebuttal.

In this way, rebuttal can be grouped into two or three key points. If the speaker being responded too had good structure and identified two points in their split, it is often appropriate simply to mirror that structure in rebuttal, and respond to the two points that they labelled.

Rebuttal should also be developed in the same way as substantive material. A one line response will generally be insufficient. In rebuttal a speaker should identify the point that is being rebutted (without spending too much time repeating the opposition speech – or making the point better than the opposing team did!) Then the speaker should identify what their rebuttal is, and provide their reasoning.

There are several ways to engage in rebuttal:

Denial: There may be occasions where a team is simply able to deny the truth of what the opposing team is saying. However, it is not enough just to say that the opposing team is not telling the truth. A reasonable foundation must be laid as to why the opposing team has not told the truth, with the truthful position actually being advanced. Teams should also think about the importance of denying a fact. In a debate about sporting role models, if an affirmative team said that Dan Carter was a good role model as the All Blacks captain, simply pointing out that Richie McCaw is the All Blacks' captain is not going to advance a case very far.

Pointing out the lack of logic: an opposing team might have simply asserted a position to be true, without analysing the logic underlying that position. A team may point out that an argument is lacking in reasoning and should be afforded little weight, and then insert an alternative chain of reasoning. For example, if a team asserts that zoos are detrimental to animal welfare, the opposing team might respond as follows: "the opposing team has alleged that zoos are harmful to animal welfare. They have not provided any reasoning why this is actually the case. Zoos are, in fact, beneficial to animal welfare. Many animals that are injured in the wild or are unlikely to survive in the wild are provided protections within a zoo where they are guaranteed shelter, safety from predators and the best veterinary care available. These protections to the animal's welfare are not provided in the wild, but are available in a zoo".

Other consequences: an opposing team might put forward an argument that leads to consequences/harms which that team has not identified. An affirmative team may argue that raising the driving age to 18 will result in fewer injuries to teenagers on the road. In rebuttal, the opposing team may refute this, and say that individuals below the age of 18 will still drive out of necessity, but now will be more dangerous on the road because they do not go through the testing process.

Examples: rebutting examples can be difficult. For every example in a debate, there is a counter-example. Therefore, it is important that if teams are going to use a competing example in rebuttal, they must explain why their example is more relevant to the debate, and why the opposing team's example is less relevant. The reasoning underlying the example will often be more convincing than the mere fact of the example itself.

Minimising the importance of a point: As a last resort, if a team cannot think of any ways to rebut the truth or logic of an argument, they may seek to minimise its importance in a debate. For example, a team may say "the opposing team have argued X. However, this is of minor importance in this debate". If a team elects to take this option, they must explain the reasoning why the opposing team's argument is of minor importance.

There may be instances where substantive material directly engages with the opposing team's case. The best way to handle this is to provide a very short rebuttal at the beginning of the speech and alert the adjudicator to the fact that the point will also be dealt with in more detail later during substantive material. It is important to have some rebuttal upfront, so that the adjudicator knows that there is a response coming.

Defending your own case: In rebuttal, it will also be necessary to defend your own case. It is likely that the opposing team will provide rebuttal to your own team's substantive case. This

should also be responded to so you can convince the adjudicator why the rebuttal offered by the opposing team is insufficient to knock down your team's substantive arguments. Eg "my first speaker made point X. In response, the opposing team has said Y. However [explain why opposing team's rebuttal is not sufficient to knock out your argument]"

CONCLUSIONS

Every speech should finish with a conclusion. It should provide the adjudicator with the key takeaway points from the speech that has just been delivered.

A conclusion should not simply be a repetition of points made during the speech, or a hurried restatement of the motion saying that it should clearly stand/fall.

Some **good starter lines** for a conclusion are:

"What this debate is about / comes down to…"

"The most important part of this debate is …"

An alternative approach to a conclusion is to compare what the two teams have said. For example, a conclusion at second affirmative could be "Both teams agree that liberty is important in this debate. We are the team that actually provides this. I have explained in my speech exactly why the liberty of children is more important in this debate, and how their liberty is jeopardised by the status quo. We protect children in this debate. The motion stands".

Speakers should have a vague idea of what their conclusion is before they stand up and speak otherwise they will be prone to rush through it or not make it as rhetorically effective as it could be. A good guideline is to jot down the main idea of what it will be before standing up to speak.

THE OTHER SPEECHES

Third speakers

A third speaker has a unique role in the debate. While they have considerable influence on the outcome of the debate, they do not bring new substantive material.

Instead, the third speaker has a crucial role in tying up the debate for their side. They should introduce new examples, new responses, and extend existing lines of analysis. They should think about what needs to be done to win the debate, and analyse all major points in the debate to ensure each has been won by their side.

A simple to structure a third speech is to ask what the key issues, arguments, or points of clash are in the debate. While there is no set number, three key issues is a good rule of thumb. The third speaker should identify these issues/points of clash as part of their split. It is not necessary for a third speaker to go over all the points raised during the debate – only the ones that will be important to the adjudicator.

Often the issues raised by each team will overlap, or at the very least relate to the same stakeholder. Generally, it is better to prioritise the points advanced by your own team as these are the points which you are hoping to convince the adjudicator of, in order to win the debate. Deal with the issues in the order that you would like the adjudicator to prioritise them.

A good structure for a third speaker to adopt is summarised below.

Identify the first (main) issue/point of clash: Explain how your team has argued that issue and why it is the most important issue in the debate. In explaining your team's material, make an attempt to distinguish the explanation from your previous speakers. It is possible to do this through new examples, different rhetoric and new pieces of analysis. Discuss the point, rather than the speakers. That means that instead of saying "my first speaker said x", "my second speaker said y", you should discuss and reframe the argument as though you are summarising it, and then add new layers of analysis.

Identify any points of rebuttal offered by the opposing team, and how your team has responded: This is a good opportunity to extend on your own team's analysis, by adding further lines to existing arguments or presenting new arguments. If there has been no (or limited) rebuttal offered by the opposing team, remind the adjudicator.

Deal with opposition substantive points: If the opposing team's material is distinct from your own and has created its own separate issue in the debate, it may be necessary to structure a point of clash around their material. Identify the argument that has been made. Do not spend too much time doing this, as it is not wise to give more air time than necessary to an issue which the opposing team seeks to place importance on. All a speaker needs to do is inform the adjudicator which issue they are responding to.

Explain what the rebuttal has been to this point throughout the debate. Take the opportunity to add new points of rebuttal, particularly if the opposing team has made attempts to respond to earlier rebuttal. Explain why the argument for the opposing team no longer stands in the debate, or why it is of limited importance so that the adjudicator should award the argument to your team or not place much weight on it in arriving at their decision.

At the end of a third speaker's speech, they should aim to have proven that their team has won the important issues that the result of the debate will hinge on.

Leader's replies

Leader's replies are the final opportunity a team has to convince the adjudicator that they have won the debate. Only the first or second speaker may deliver the leader's reply.

The leader's reply summarises the debate from your team's perspective. One way to think about the reply is to deliver the speech you wish the adjudicator to give.

The leader's reply cannot introduce any new material. It must refer only to material which has already been introduced into the debate by previous speakers. However, this does not mean that a reply simply repeats what has already been said in the debate. The reply should evaluate how the arguments have played out during the debate, and why the adjudicator should believe that your team's arguments have been the superior arguments in the debate. The reply should be an effective reminder to the adjudicator of what points were made by each team in the debate, and what points were most compelling.

The reply structure will often be similar to the structure of a third speaker (see above). The most effective replies deal only with the main issues in the debate, and will group those issues together thematically. The reply should comment on those issues and the arguments that were made in the debate. The reply should also analyse which arguments should receive the most weight in the adjudicator's deliberation, and why.

This is a good opportunity to show how arguments in the debate interrelate, and show that yours are most important. You might point to an argument made by the opposition and explain how it was irrelevant due to a point your team brought.

The most important point to keep in mind for leader's replies is that it is not merely a full-on repetition of your team's points. Speakers need to evaluate those points in the context of what happened later in the debate and explain why those points still stand.

POINTS OF INFORMATION

Points of information are an important part of debating. They allow speakers the opportunity to offer a point to the speaker on the floor.

Points of information are not permitted in the **first minute** or the **last minute** of a speaker's speech – this is protected time. The adjudicator/timekeeper will indicate when these time periods have concluded to indicate when points of information may be offered.

In order to offer a point of information, a speaker should stand up and say "point of information", "on that point" or something to the same effect. It is important that speakers do stand up when intending to offer a point of information so that the speaker who has the floor knows that there is a point of information on offer.

The speaker who has the floor gets to control whether or not a point of information is accepted. To accept the point, the speaker on the floor simply needs to turn to the offeror

and say "accepted". If the point of information is declined, the speaker can say "declined", "no thank you", or simply wave the offeror down to indicate that the point has been declined. If the opposing team is offering lots of points of information, it is often best to simply wave them down so that you do not disrupt the flow of your speech frequently. Don't worry, this is a normal part of debating etiquette and will not make you look rude!

It is only once the point of information has been accepted that the person offering the point of information may speak.

A point of information should take the form of a question requiring a response. It should generally be no longer than 10-15 seconds. The question should be clear and direct.

Once the question is understood, the speaker on the floor should attempt to answer it as briefly (but completely) as possible. At this point, the speaker who offered the point of information should sit down – there is no opportunity for follow up questions, and a conversation should not be entered into.

Once a point of information has been accepted, the speaker on the floor should attempt to answer it as best as they can. Try to avoid saying "I will get to that later in my speech". Similarly, saying that a later speaker will deal with that point of information indicates an inability to respond to the question.

In general, speakers should accept 1-2 points of information during their speech. Any more will result in time being wasted that should be devoted to substantive argument/rebuttal. Any less indicates an unwillingness to engage with the opposing team.

Good questions will be like cross-examination in a courtroom – they will lead the speaker to an answer which is helpful to the person offering the point of information and enable you to use the answer in a later speech.

For example an affirmative team in a debate about banning smoking might ask: "Do you think it is fair for a person to be forced to inhale harmful chemicals without their consent?" This is a good point of information, because the answer is clearly no. It requires the speaker on the floor to have command of their argument to sidestep the immediate question and focus on another argument which they perceive to be more important in the debate.

Keep questions clear and concise. Avoid trying to incorporate multiple questions – if your question is long and confusing, the speaker may get away with only answering one part of it.

Sometimes speakers will get stuck. The best way to handle that situation is to try and make light of the question that has been asked by giving a "politician's answer". While a speaker may not be able to answer the question directly, a speaker could choose to answer a different question. For example, a speaker might say in response "that is not the real issue in this debate. The real issue is …" Obviously, this kind of response is not ideal and will not gain a speaker as much credit as a direct and convincing answer. But it will go some way to ensuring that a speaker is not flustered by unexpected points of information.

PREPARATION TIPS

There is usually **half an hour for preparation (although some Regionals will have an hour for preparation)**. If used wisely, this is a lot of time.

Brainstorm individually for a few minutes to start generating ideas. It is a good idea to start discussing as a team shortly after, to ensure that no one is going down the wrong track.

Try and come up with as many ideas for arguments as possible. Note these down.

If stuck for ideas for arguments, brainstorm examples for the debate. Those examples may help identify new arguments.

After five or ten minutes, the team should start trying to link arguments together into broad themes or groups of similar arguments. Also try and identify double-up, to avoid repeating essentially the same argument twice.

Teams also need to prioritise which arguments are most important. You will likely choose not to use some of the arguments that you have brainstormed once you have discussed them.

Once you have done that, develop the reasoning behind each argument. It is not merely the job of the first speaker to work out how each argument will be explained in the debate – the team together should work out the structure and chain of reasoning that the first speaker will use.

As debating is a team sport, the success of second and third speakers in the debate hinges on how well the case is presented at first speaker. All speakers should participate in the preparation, and understand all of the arguments so they can defend it later in the debate.

Think about the arguments the other team will run. Is there a way to pre-emptively address any of those arguments? Sometimes your arguments can be constructed in a way that deals with easy responses and shuts down gaps in logic that the other team could exploit. Be careful, though, not to make the first speech too defensive – you want to focus on positive material that supports your side of the motion.

Do not spend your whole preparation time writing out speeches. It is better to spend the bulk of prep time working as a team.

It is often useful during this time for speakers to also start thinking about pre-prepared points of information, and rebuttal for points you anticipate the opposition will raise.