

## PUBLIC DEBATE

**Debate** is a formal method of presenting arguments in *support* and *against* a given issue (expressed in a form of a debate topic) in which *debaters* present reasons and evidence to persuade an audience or a group of judges. Debate is governed by some explicit rules and debaters must adhere to these rules throughout the debate.

*Informal* debate occurs in many places however - for example in families, schools, work places, but the quality and depth of a debate improves with knowledge and skill of its participants as debaters- which requires both training and preparation.

Debate is part of democratic systems where *deliberative bodies* such as parliaments and legislative assemblies engage in debates. Also formal debates between candidates for elected office, such as the leaders debates and the presidential election campaign are common in democracies. The outcome of such debates is often decided by vote – either in a house of parliament or through citizens’ vote.

In many countries, including many European countries, competitive debate is often encouraged in secondary schools and universities. This is a contest between two teams during which one team supports, while the other team opposes a given position on a debated topic. Competitive debate begins with a *resolution*, a simple statement that is subjected to critical analysis by both teams. The team supporting the resolution speaks first and is referred to as an *affirmative team* (since it affirms a given resolution). The other team must then oppose the arguments offered by the affirming team and offer arguments against adopting the resolution (it is referred to as a *negative team*). Apart from presenting their arguments in favour of or against the resolution, each team is expected to respond directly to the arguments offered by their opponents. It is the job of a *judge* (or judges), a neutral third party, to listen carefully to the arguments presented by both sides and decide which set of arguments is most persuasive. In most competitive debates speakers have an opportunity to both defend and attack the same resolution and they present the best arguments on both sides rather than express their personal views on a given topic.

This toolkit is designed to help young people in preparing for and participating in *public debates*. Public debates are open events which involve not only debaters and judges but also members of the public. While public debates can be competitive the main goal of a public debate is to engage members of a public in discussion on an important issue. The purpose of debating in such a context is not so much competition between debaters but raising awareness, education and *advocacy*.

This toolkit will present you with basic information on preparation for and organization of public debates. Debating is both educational and fun- we wish you a lot of success in organization of public debates- for your enjoyment as well as the enjoyment of your local community!

### **Choosing a debate format**

One of the first things you will need to decide on when preparing for a public debate is what *format* it is going to have. The format of debate usually includes the following aspects: number of

speakers; length and sequence of speeches; opportunities to question and opportunities to receive and respond to audience feedback.

There are many debate formats used in competitive debate and when preparing for a public debate you may use any of them. One of the debate formats that is often used for public debates is *Public Forum Debate Format*.

Public Forum Debate is conducted by two teams of two speakers each. After the first two *opening* speeches, the first speakers of the affirmative and the negative team engage each other in a *cross-fire*. Cross fire is a question and answer session (with the first question being asked by the speaker from the team opening the debate). Just like in *cross-examination*, debaters ask revealing questions in an attempt to expose a weakness in the opponents' arguments and often use the *cross-fire* period to develop and attack each other's arguments. Following the first cross-fire, the second speakers of each team take the floor in *rebuttal* speeches, when they respond to arguments presented by the opposite team and further develop their own team's arguments.

Rebuttal speeches are followed by the second round of cross-fire, this time happening between the second speakers.

After the second cross-fire the first speakers present concluding *summary* speeches. These are followed by the *Grand Cross Fire* which is similar to the first crossfire except that all four debaters can ask and answer questions of each other. The speaker that gave the first summary speech begins Grand Crossfire by asking the first question.

After Grand Crossfire, each team's second speaker has a chance to give a one-minute speech called the *Final Focus*, the first team giving this speech first (this speech is also referred to commonly as *The Last Shot*) in which the speakers are given one last chance to explain exactly why their respective teams have won the round. No new arguments are allowed in the Final Focus. This speech is often the determining factor for a judge's and audience's decision in a closely contested round, as it allows the judge to hear which arguments/evidence each team views as the most important to their debate case, and summarizes the entire debate.

In addition, both teams are given total of two minutes each of preparation time which they can use before any of their speeches.

4 min.	Team A Constructive
4 min.	Team B Constructive
3 min.	<i>Cross-fire</i> between the first two speakers
4 min.	Team A Second Speaker rebuttal
4 min.	Team B Second Speaker rebuttal
3 min.	Cross-fire between the second speakers
2 min	Team A First Speaker Summary
2 min	Team B First Speaker Summary
3 min.	Grand cross-fire (all speakers)

1 min.	Team A final focus ( <i>last shot</i> )
1 min.	Team B final focus (last shot)

When organizing a public debate it is important to involve the audience in the debate and designate a special time when the members of the public can express their views on the debated topic and/or ask debaters questions. This session should be conducted by a *moderator*. It is usually best if the audience is given opportunity to speak towards the end of the debate, once most of the arguments by both sides have been presented.

In Public Forum Debate, a good time to allow audience participation is after the last summary speech or after the grand cross-fire, so that both teams have an opportunity to respond to the issues raised by the audience in the final focus.

You may also want to adjust the time of the speeches, preparation time (e.g. you could eliminate preparation time altogether – since it is often the least interesting part of debate from the point of view of the audience) or design your own debate format to suit your needs – e.g. the number of speakers that want to participate, lengths of time, etc.

When designing your own debate format you should make sure that:

- It involves orderly development of arguments – constructive speeches followed by responses and further development of arguments and summary speeches at the end of the debate;
- Both team have equal and alternating speaking time;
- The format involves variety – mixture of speeches, questions and audience participation.

If you would like to use any other established debate formats please see brief descriptions and speaking time of other most common.

### **Selecting and wording a debate topic**

Choosing a good debate topic is one of the most important and yet also one of the most difficult tasks for debate organizers. A good debate topic will make for good debates- likewise – a bad debate topic will result in poor debates and potentially a lot of disappointment on the part of debaters, judges and the audience. When selecting a topic area and eventually wording it in a form of a debate resolution, you should take into account the following criteria for good debate topics:

1. A good debate topic should be interesting – a topic that will motive the audience to come to the debate.
2. A good debate topic should be controversial – which means that it should provide enough disagreement or pose a problem with many potential solutions
3. Good debate topic should be balanced - it should provide enough arguments and evidence for both sides in debate- the affirmative and negative.
4. A good debate topic should avoid being too abstract and focus on issues that both debaters and the audience understand and can relate to.
5. At the same time a good debate topic should avoid being too narrow and technical- some issues related to science may make for good debates between scientists or experts specializing in a given narrow field but would be too complicated for most *layman* debaters and audiences.

When looking for a good topic area for a public debate, you may want to ask yourself a few questions:

1. Have there been any recent events that are dominating public discussion right now (in the media, etc.)?
2. These days when acquaintances meet, what do they talk about?
3. What are my country's political leaders currently arguing over?
4. Are there any new or proposed laws that have been the subject of controversy or criticism?
5. What topics are being covered on the opinion pages of local newspaper (s)?
6. That last time you got into a discussion about political or social issues, what was that discussion about?
7. Are there any subjects that you already know a great deal about?
8. Are there any subjects that you and your audience have an interest in learning more about?

Once you have selected the topic area you should *word* the topic- express it in the language that will lead to good quality debates. When wording the topic it is important to insure that:

1. It is expressed in a declarative (affirmative) sentence
2. It is expressed in a clear manner (it avoids ambiguous words and phrases)
3. It is worded neutrally (it avoids biased terms)

Sometimes a debate resolution would begin with a word "Resolved" (e.g. "Resolved that protection of environment is more important than economic development"). Here are a few examples of debate topics on different issues:

- European Union should admit Turkey
- European Union should impose sanctions Burma
- European Union should have a defence force
- Citizens of European Union should elect its President
- European Union should take more active steps in promoting human rights globally

### **Preparation for debate**

Preparation for debate is an important process, since it will determine the quality of the event and consequently the level of the enjoyment of the debate by the debaters and the audience. Usually the process of preparing for debate involves the following steps:

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| Step 1 | Coming up with ideas on the topic                    |
| Step 2 | Researching the topic and collecting evidence        |
| Step 3 | Formulating arguments                                |
| Step 4 | Developing debate cases                              |
| Step 5 | Dividing tasks and responsibilities between speakers |

### ***Generating ideas***

This is the stage in preparation during which you and your friends will approach the topic and try to generate and organize ideas, *arguments* and examples related to the topic. Very often you will want to come up with arguments both *for* and *against* a given debate resolution-even if you know which side of the debate you will be on. Identifying possible arguments of your opposition will allow you and your team to prepare responses to the arguments of the other team and come up with a good defense strategy. The main objective at this stage is also to find out what you already know about the topic and what areas need to be researched further. Usually, at this stage, you should be more concerned with the *quantity* of ideas rather than their *quality* and the best approach is to list different points and arguments as they come to mind (brainstorming) and at a later stage try to group the arguments into *pros* and *cons* as well as different categories (e.g. economic, political, ethical, etc.). The debate team should nominate one person to be the *facilitator* and note down ideas that team members come up with.

### ***Research and collecting evidence***

One of the outcomes of the first stage of the preparation for debate is identifying the areas that you will need to find out more information about by consulting outside sources.

Few people (including debaters) are experts on everything on which they speak. It is for that reason that in preparation for debates you will need to find external support for your own ideas by researching the ideas and knowledge of others. The effective use of external support is *the golden mean* of supplementing one's own reasoning with the careful use of authoritative material. Citing outside sources that are neutral and authoritative will allow you to build credibility in the eyes of your audience and make your arguments more persuasive.

The process of researching and collecting evidence will involve the following steps:

1. Identifying the areas where more information needs to be found - often these areas involve specific information like statistics, specific facts, data, views and opinions of experts.
2. Identifying sources of information: brainstorming ideas on where the missing and important information can be found. It is here that you will need to decide if it may be better to look for the information on internet or visit a local library.
3. Reading and identifying the information that supports your position in a debate or potentially *refutes* the arguments of the other side – one of the skills required for this stage is *skimming* of the text locating the most useful paragraphs, sections and quotes.
4. Evaluating the information – you will need to analyse the information in the text, applying *critical thinking* skills and deciding whether the information is relevant for your *case*, if it is up-to date and credible, etc.
5. Recording of the evidence - the last stage in the process involves correct recording of the evidence to be later presented during the debate. It is best done on a small paper (e.g. *index card*), identifying the sources and the author as well as making sure that the quote presents accurate information. It may be a good idea to label each piece of evidence so that it can be easily filed and found prior to or during the debate.

### ***Developing arguments***

The next step in preparation for debate will involve making persuasive points in support of your position. You will need to connect the evidence with *reason* to support various aspects of the resolution. You will need to develop *arguments*. Argument can be defined as a *claim* that is *warranted by data*.

Claim is what a debater wants his/her audience to ultimately accept. This might mean a piece of information, proposal or a solution that you would like your audience to accept or believe in. For example, *By admitting Turkey to the European Union we will advance building a more diverse Europe* might be a claim advanced by the side that is supporting Turkey's accession to the EU in a debate on the resolution: "Turkey should join the EU"

Data is additional information given to the audience in order to support the claim. Data is usually introduced by the word "because . . ." and it explains to the audience why your claim is correct. For example the evidence that: *Turkey will be the only country in the EU with majority Muslim population* might be used as data to support the previous claim.

Warrant is a logical relationship that connects the data to the claim and makes your argument stronger and more persuasive. In the previous example, a good way to relate the need to *advance ethnic and religious diversity in EU* (Claim) with the examples of *Turkey having the majority Muslim population* is to argue that *accepting a predominantly Muslim country into the Union is a good way to enhance ethnic diversity in the EU*. Warrant serves as a logical bridge between the data and the claim. It is important to emphasise at this point that warrants themselves are claims which can be argued about and often need prove to be accepted by the audience.

In a debate, the claim is usually presented as the first part of the argument followed by the word "because" or "since" introducing data. In many arguments, the warrant is not explicitly expressed by it is understood by the debaters and the audience and can be emphasised in response to a question or counter-argument.

There are a number of different types of arguments, depending on how a speaker wants to support his or her conclusions during the debates. Often speakers will base their reasoning on examples (e.g. something is true because we have an example to support it), somebody's authority (e.g. something is true because an expert or a panel of experts believes it to be true,) an analogy (something is true because it is similar to something else which is believed to be true), etc.

### ***Developing debate cases***

Once you have researched the topic and developed persuasive arguments you will need to develop *debate cases*. Debate cases are argumentative strategies that debaters will use when arguing for or against a given resolution. They constitute a framework for debaters' arguments and evidence - the specific content of debate.

Since you will not be able to present all the arguments in a limited time-frame debate in support of a given issue or all possible solutions to a given problem, you and your team will need to make strategic decisions on which arguments are best presented and how to effectively link them with each other.

Most of the time debate case will depend on a type of resolution that you will need to defend or attack. Some resolutions will require you to focus on *facts* and argue that something is the case (for example: "Resolved that: C02 emissions cause global warming"), or concentrate on

values and evaluate a value of some custom, law or policy (for example: “Capital punishment is immoral”) or argue in support of some policy in order to address an existing problem (“European Union should increase its involvement in Iraq”). In most debates however, you will need to address a number of issues in one debate case and present facts, argue about values and advance policy change (for example debaters will need to persuade the judges or the audience that CO2 in fact cause global warming and propose a policy to protect our environment more effectively).

It goes without saying that developing an effective debate case is an important part of debate preparation and it usually involves:

- Introducing the topic and defining its most important terms
- Presenting the main issue and assessing it (why something is a important or why something is a problem)
- Presenting a proposal to address a given issue or a problem
- Presenting arguments in support (or against – in the case of the affirmative team) of a resolution: proving a fact, showing positive aspects of a policy etc.
- Explaining to the audience how they should assess the debate and what criteria that should use in determining the winner

### ***Division of tasks***

After developing debate cases you and your team-mate (s) will need to decide on the order of in which you will speak during the debate. You will need to take into consideration the roles and responsibilities of each speaker and the function of their speeches in a debate. Below is a presentation of the main speeches and the roles of speakers in most debate formats:

#### *Constructive speeches*

These speeches are presented by the first *affirmative* and the first *negative* speakers. The main responsibility of these speakers involves: introducing the topic in an attractive and interesting manner, defining the main terms of the resolution, outlining the main arguments of the affirmative and the negative team (*debate case*) and presenting the teams’ strategies. The negative speaker should also respond to the arguments presented by the affirmative speaker.

#### *Rebuttal speeches*

During these speeches, the speakers (the second speakers on the team) *extend* (further develop) arguments presented by the first speakers (by providing additional reasoning and evidence). They also respond to the arguments presented by their opponents - both attacking new arguments as well as *re-building* their teams’ cases.

#### *Summary speeches*

These are usually the last speeches in a debate and their function is to summarize the main points and conclude the debate for each side. The last speakers have the last opportunity to demonstrate to the judges or the audience why their team should win the debate and finish their respective speeches with a powerful conclusion. In some debate formats (e.g. *Public Forum Debate*) the speakers may have the last final chance to bring the main reasons for supporting their side in a *Last Shot* speech which is very similar to a summary speech.

#### *Refutation*

With the exception of the speaker opening the debate (1<sup>st</sup> speaker) all speakers participating in a debate should be ready to not only support the arguments prepared by their teams (through the process of *research, argument and debate case development*) but also critically respond to the

arguments presented by their opponents. In debate jargon the response is called *refutation*. Refutation is one of the most important elements of debate- it is the disagreement between speakers of opposite sides that makes for the clash of ideas and makes a debate possible. Without refutation, your event will become a presentation of two opposing views on a topic but it will not be a real debate.

By refuting arguments of the opposite team debaters reduce their impact on the audience. However it is not enough, to simply say that an argument of your opponents is untrue; rather, a debater has to *prove* that an argument is wrong, irrelevant or not significant in the context of a given debate –using reason and evidence.

#### *Cross-fire, cross-examination or points of information*

In some debate formats (including Public Debate Forum), there are special periods during the debate, when debaters can ask each other questions in relation to the previous speeches as well as their general position with regard to debated topic. The main purpose of the questions is to show some flaws in the opponents' case and expose weak arguments or evidence. When asking questions speakers should keep them short and to the point and try to “steer” the respondent into admitting something that may seriously weaken the opposite team's case. In this respect, cross-examination in debate is very similar to the cross-examination in a courtroom, when advocates for respective sides (prosecution and defence) try to get *admissions* and *concessions* from witnesses and experts that would strengthen their case or undermine the case of their opponents. Cross fire and cross-examination are often the most lively elements of debate since this is when debaters interact directly with each other – can interrupt each other and respond immediately to what their opponents are saying. Cross- examination provides a wonderful opportunity to speaker to demonstrate their wit, knowledge of the subject area as well as public speaking skills. It is important however that you should remain courteous to your opponents and treat them with the same respect and friendly attitude as you express in other speeches in the debate.

In some debate formats (e.g. parliamentary debate) not all speakers can ask questions (e.g. Karl Popper format) and in some other format, cross-fire or cross-examination are replaced with points of information – brief interjections by speakers during the speeches of their opponents.

When assigning speakers to their positions in a debate, you may want to take into consideration their preferences as well as particular skills that each of the speaking positions requires. Having said that, it is an educational experience for speakers to try their skills in different speaking positions.

#### ***Presenting your arguments***

The last element of preparation involves deciding on how you will present your arguments to the audience so that your presentation is equally effective as the content (reasoning and evidence). The main aspects of the presentation include:

- Style (the words and the language you use)
- Organization of the speech (how you structure your main points in the speech)
- Delivery (the way you speak as well as your body language)

When deciding on the style, you will need to relate it to the content of your speech- use humor and *pathos* when appropriate. Remember to use memorable, vivid language that will have an emotional appeal to your audience and will emphasize the message of your speech.

Organization of your speech is equally important – a good speech has an introduction, main body and a conclusion. You can use a story, anecdote or a memorable quote for the opening of your speech and refer to it back in your conclusion. Make sure to divide the main body of your speech

into the main ideas and link them in an appropriate manner (using phrases like: *it follows that, as a result, in my last point, etc.*)

A large part of communication relates not just to arguments and words but to speaker's voice, body, and movement.

The elements of good delivery parallel the elements of good conversation. The audience should feel that a speaker is speaking with them, not presenting to them, so in most settings, it helps to use the voice and body language in a natural manner. Avoid reading, *chatter-box* style, use pauses to your advantage, establish eye contact with your audience and use gestures that naturally emphasise the content of your message.

### ***Advertising public debate***

Preparation for a public debate involves all the steps and aspects presented in the previous sections of this toolkit but there is one more important consideration that you and your friends will need to pay attention to in preparation for a public debate - promoting your debate in local community and assuring audience attendance. This will require publicizing debate in a local community.

Publicizing a public debate is in a way similar to marketing a product and you will need to assure that your debate is something that audience will be interested in participating. This will require your team of organizers to assure that the topic for debate is interesting and attractive, that the debate is organized at a convenient time for your audience to attend, that it is organized in a convenient venue and that it is promoted in an appropriate manner.

If you want to invite general public to the debate it is usually good to organize it in a late afternoon or evening when most people have finished work or on a weekend or any other holiday. It may be a good idea to link your debate to another event that you know will have a large audience attendance: for example an *open day* at school or university, public festival, sports event, etc.

Choosing a place for debate is important - the location will affect not only the size of the audience, but the character and mood of the event as well. The natural choice for you to host the debate may be at your school (e.g. in a gym or assembly hall). This could also help you to promote your debate program in a community. Besides, many of the members of the audience - the parents- will already know how to get to the venue. You may want to choose a different venue however- depending on how big or prominent you want the debate to be. Good venues include town halls, sports venues, churches, etc. Remember that it is important to reserve the venue long in advance however and also sometimes consider its cost implications (rent). In choosing the place for the debate you should consider its location (the more central- the better) and easy of access (including access by disabled members of the audience).

Once you have determined the topic, time and place for your debate you will need to start promoting the event. There are many ways in which you may want to do it and they will depend on a number of factors - for example how many volunteers you have to engage in promotion as well as how much funding you have to spend on promotion (you may want to consider finding sponsors for your debate - in such case remember to include information about them in your promotional materials). Some of the effective ways of promoting public debates include: posters and *direct mail*, media (newspapers, radio, possibly TV) newsletters of various organizations, bulletin boards, etc. A good method of promotion is free coverage in the media - e.g. local radio station inviting you and your friends to talk about your debate program or a given issue.

In promoting your public debate you will need to plan in advance, seek assistance of your teachers and parents, show a lot of ingenuity and enterprising spirit and most importantly be professional and pay a lot of attention to detail.

## **During the debate**

After a period of preparation, the big day will come and you and your team (including the opposing debate team) will meet your audience at a chosen venue.

Public debate, like any other organized public event, involving hosting people (if even for a short duration of the debate) will require some degree of formality, courtesy and hospitality. As organizers you will need to assure that there are volunteers manning the front entrance, cloakroom, handing out leaflets, offering refreshments, making sure that there are enough seats for everybody and taking care of less able guests. Organizing a public debate will require a lot of effort from your both prior to the event (*preparation*) as well as during the event. It is best if the debaters themselves are not directly involved in any activities other than the debate on the very day of the public debate- their main focus should remain the debate!

One of the most important persons during a public debate, apart from debaters, is a *moderator* or an MC (*Master of Ceremony*). The moderator is the guardian of the debate format who must see to it that rules are followed—and ensure fairness. The more specific responsibilities of the Moderator include: welcoming the audience, introducing the debate topic and the speakers, explaining the rules of debate, insuring the smooth conduct of a debate, facilitating the process of audience participation as well as providing a closure to the event.

This is why, when choosing a moderator for your debate you must insure that it is somebody who knows and understands the purpose and format of the debate and also exerts a level of authority and respect among the debaters as well as the audience and is, at the same time, a well-liked and appreciated figure. You may want to ask somebody in who is well known in your local community to perform this function.

It also goes without saying that even the most experienced moderator should spend some time preparing himself/herself for the task.

## **Evaluating the debate**

Although in a public debate, competition is less important than in its competitive equivalent (e.g. at a debate tournament), however, since debate is an inherently competitive event (it is a contest of reason), you may want to introduce an element of judging and deciding who the winners are – both for the benefit of the debaters (who will want to know who has done a better job persuading the audience) as well as for the benefit of the audience (for whom coming up with the verdict may be yet another way of participating in a debate).

In a public debate, the job of judging can also be done by the panel of judges as well as the audience themselves (or by both judges and the audience).

### *Panel of judges*

The panel of judges can be composed of audience members or you can ask individuals who have some expertise in debate and or the debated topic. These can be student debaters, debate coaches as well as experts in a given area (e.g. a lawyer, politician, journalist, etc.). You may also have a mixed panel of judges. It is important however that before the debate, the judges are briefed on their responsibilities as judges, debate rules, etc.

The judges may decide to declare a winner of the debate or simply provide evaluative comments at the end. When declaring a winner, they can do so independently of each other (with each judge making his/her own decision – with the verdict being a sum of votes for and against a given team – it is important to make sure then that the number of judges is uneven) or as a joint decision (usually preceded by a discussion).

### *Audience*

You may also decide to ask the audience to evaluate the debate and decide who the winner is. In such case it may be useful to provide a brief explanation before the debate what the evaluation criteria should be (this can be done by a moderator) or providing a short evaluation sheet with some simple guidance). It may be important to emphasise to the audience that debate can be judged with respect to the skills of the debaters rather than the audience's preference with regard to the side (based on their prior beliefs). The moderator can thus explain that members of the judges should base their decision on which team did a better job of persuading (arguments, evidence, presentation).

However, a public debate may also serve as a tool of finding out how the audience feels about a given issue and this is how the audience may be asked to vote. It may be also interesting for you in such case to determine the audience's view on the topic before and after the debate (to see to what extent the debate changed the views of the audience).

Regardless of which method of *judging* debate you choose you will need to prepare yourself for that final element of a public debate which may include: judges' briefing, preparation of short explanation of judging criteria, ballots for the audience, etc. (when the number of the audience is relatively small, e.g. under a 100, you may want to use a vote by hand, but with larger audiences a simple ballot is recommended).