

An excerpt from the Basic Instructional Guide

1. Debate issues, not people

High school debate is an educational method. Its purpose is to teach principles and practices of argumentation in an atmosphere of good sportsmanship. The good debater is calm; he matches issues with issues, he does not confuse issues and emotions. There is no place in educational debate for shouting, name calling, insinuations or any personal attack. Since educational debates should uphold principles of sportsmanship, teams that debate people rather than issues place themselves in jeopardy.

2. Clarity

Clarity is crucial to debating. The speakers need to speak at a rate of speed and to choose words that make the issues of the debate clear. The speeches must be efficient and pithy, for time is limited. Neither the judges nor the audience should be put through a struggle to determine the basic issues. The affirmative debaters should state the issues thus:

1. Contention # 1 is ...
2. Contention # 2 is ...
3. Contention # 3 is ...

3. Clash

A debate has not taken place unless there has been a clash of issues. That is, once the affirmative has set down and clarified the issues (and differences of definition have been resolved) the negative will be expected to reply to those issues directly. It will not be sufficient for the negative to circumvent the affirmative case by an attack on a case that was not made.

4. Analysis of the Proposition

The terms of the debate must be defined satisfactorily, and the main issues identified and developed. The judge will note any attempt at a narrow definition, or any attempt to define a term one way and debate it another. A good analysis recognizes the real issues in the debate, and not tricky attempts to fool the other team. It requires an understanding of the issues and the way they fit together. Facts and information are used to generate proof— and show sound analysis when the conclusion asserted follows from the evidence presented.

5. Soundness of Argument

Is the reasoning used logically sound? If the debater draws illogical conclusions, or is otherwise guilty of faulty reasoning and it is not detected and attacked by the opposition, both sides are guilty of poor argument, and both may receive low marks.

6. Organization of Material

Good organization is simple, clear and easy to follow. It should provide a structure so that the entire debate may be understood, without unnecessarily intruding. It should be found in the constructive and rebuttal remarks, in the affirmative and the negative. The negative team's case may be largely rebuttal, and therefore may not be completely outlined at the time of the first negative speech. Nonetheless, within particular negative arguments, the same organizational strengths should be present. The negative case should not be a disconnected, haphazard attack on the affirmative.

7. Refutation and Rebuttal

Refutation and rebuttal is an attack on the issues presented by the other team and a re—building of arguments that were under attack by your opponents. Can the debaters adapt their case to the arguments presented by their opponents? The judge will want to pay particular attention to the arguments the teams choose to attack or defend. Are these minor points or key issues? Does the debater identify the point to be attacked and then follow up with an explanation of the error?

8. Effectiveness in delivery

Too frequently debaters, in an effort to say everything, forget that they are participating in a public speaking exercise. They forget that bodily action, facial expression, vocal quality, personal appearance, and correct pronunciation will all be considered by the critic. The judge should commend good delivery and deplore its absence. Debates should not be won on delivery alone, but it is an important element in persuading an audience.

9. Cross examination

When cross examination is part of the debate, it will bear a major influence on the result. Questioners should seek to ask a “line” of questions — organized questions following one on the other. The questioner should:

- ask clear and specific questions
- avoid demanding a particular answer
- ask ethical questions
- not argue with the response
- make use of the answers in the question period and later speeches.

The witness being questioned should:

- answer simply and directly when he is able
- avoid arguing with the examiner
- not answer questions with further questions
- answer specific questions specifically
- request permission to give an extended answer when one is required
- not answer at unnecessary length

10. Recording the debate

The debate will be judged as it progresses. During the debate, the ranking of debaters and their relative skills may shift back and forth. The success on a particular issue will be re—evaluated until the last debater has concluded. Judges will therefore use a flow sheet to record the issues as they develop in the debate.

Debaters should be aware that a judge will form his decision on both proof of issues and debating skills. Emphasis should be placed on logical reasoning, evidence .of research and clarity. Any display of unsportsmanlike behaviour or an attempt to debate personalities rather than issues will place the offending team in jeopardy.

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