

World Schools Debate: A Student Guide

Welcome to the World Schools Debate format! This guide will help middle school students understand the structure, roles, and techniques used in competitive debate. Whether you're just starting out or looking to improve your skills, this comprehensive resource covers everything from speaker roles to points of information, with practical tips to help you succeed.



Ed Williams- Harvard Debate Council

What is World Schools Debate?

World Schools Debate is a competitive format where teams of three to five members debate motions (topics) from either the proposition or opposition side. During each debate, three team members will speak while following specific roles and time limits.

In a standard debate, each main speaker has 8 minutes to present their arguments, followed by 4-minute reply speeches. Only the speakers participating in that round may communicate with each other during the debate.

After a motion is announced, teams are assigned to either support (proposition) or oppose (opposition) the motion. Preparation time is given before the debate begins, allowing teams to develop their strategy and arguments.

Debate Structure and Speaking Order



1st Proposition Speaker

8 minutes: Defines debate, presents first two arguments



1st Opposition Speaker

8 minutes: Challenges proposition's case, presents first two arguments



2nd Proposition Speaker

8 minutes: Refutes opposition, rebuilds case, adds new argument



2nd Opposition Speaker

8 minutes: Refutes proposition, rebuilds case, adds new argument



3rd Proposition Speaker

8 minutes: Summarizes clashes, no new arguments



3rd Opposition Speaker

8 minutes: Summarizes clashes, no new arguments



Reply Speeches

4 minutes each: 1st or 2nd speakers summarize debate

1st Proposition Speaker Role

The 1st Proposition Speaker sets the foundation for the entire debate. Your primary responsibilities include defining the scope of the debate, explaining why the debate matters, and presenting the first two arguments for your side.



Introduction

Begin with a compelling introduction that highlights the importance of the debate topic.



Define the Debate

Clearly state the problem the motion addresses, define key terms, and present your team's approach or model.



Case Split

Outline which arguments each speaker on your team will present.



Arguments

Present your first two arguments with clear reasoning, examples, and analysis.

Remember to speak clearly and confidently, maintaining good eye contact with the judges. Your speech establishes the framework that the entire debate will follow.

1st Opposition Speaker Role

As the 1st Opposition Speaker, your job is to challenge the proposition's case while establishing your team's position. You'll need to respond directly to what the 1st Proposition Speaker has said and present your own arguments.



Introduction

Begin by highlighting the core of your opposition case.



Case Split

Outline which arguments each speaker on your team will present.



Challenge the Proposition

Question their model, definitions, or context if necessary. Clarify what both sides agree and disagree on.



Refutation

Directly address and counter the arguments presented by the proposition.



Arguments

Present your first two arguments with supporting evidence and analysis.

2nd Proposition Speaker Role

The 2nd Proposition Speaker has the challenging task of responding to the opposition's attacks while strengthening the proposition case. You must be a good listener and quick thinker to effectively address what has happened in the debate so far.

Rebuild Your Case

Repair any damage done to your team's arguments by the opposition. Fill in analytical gaps and strengthen examples from your 1st speaker.

Refute Opposition

Directly challenge and dismantle the arguments presented by the 1st Opposition Speaker. Show why their reasoning is flawed or their examples don't apply.

New Argument

Introduce one new argument that supports your team's position. Make sure it's distinct from what your 1st speaker presented.

A successful 2nd Proposition Speaker creates significant work for the opposition by effectively defending their team's case while simultaneously attacking the opposition's arguments. Balance is key in this role.

2nd Opposition Speaker Role

As the 2nd Opposition Speaker, your responsibilities mirror those of the 2nd Proposition Speaker but from the opposing perspective. You must engage with everything that has happened in the debate so far while advancing your team's position.

Your speech should begin with a clear introduction that highlights the core issues of the debate from your perspective. Then focus on three main tasks:

- Refute the arguments presented by both proposition speakers, paying special attention to the new argument from the 2nd Proposition Speaker
- Rebuild and extend your team's arguments that were attacked by the 2nd Proposition Speaker
- Introduce one new argument that strengthens your opposition case

The most effective 2nd Opposition speeches find a balance between defense, offense, and new material. Your ability to listen carefully and respond strategically is crucial to your success in this role.

3rd Proposition Speaker Role

The 3rd Proposition Speaker has the important job of consolidating your team's case and showing why you're winning the debate. At this point, all constructive arguments have been presented, and judges are weighing both sides.



New Refutation

Add new lines of attack against the opposition's arguments, especially those from the 2nd Opposition Speaker.



Rebuild Your Case

Strengthen your team's arguments with new examples, analysis, or explanations.



Identify Clashes

Highlight the key points of disagreement between the teams and explain why your side wins these clashes.



Weigh Arguments

Explain why your arguments are more important or impactful than the opposition's.

Remember: while you cannot introduce new arguments, you can add new examples, analysis, and refutation. Your goal is to make the judge's decision clear by showing why your team should win.

3rd Opposition Speaker Role

The 3rd Opposition Speaker serves as the final voice for your team's main arguments. Like the 3rd Proposition Speaker, your job is to hammer home your points and show why your team is winning the debate.

Your speech should focus on:

- Providing new refutation against the proposition's arguments
- Rebuilding your team's arguments that were attacked by the proposition
- Pointing out inconsistencies or contradictions in the proposition's case
- Explaining why your arguments are more important or relevant than the proposition's

A strong 3rd Opposition speech often uses a "clashes" structure to organize the key points of disagreement in the debate. For each clash, explain what both teams said and why your team's position is more convincing. Remember that you cannot introduce new arguments, but you can add new examples and analysis.

Understanding Clashes in Debate

Clashes are the central points of disagreement between the proposition and opposition teams. They represent the key issues that judges will use to determine the winner of the debate.

What Are Clashes?

Clashes occur when the arguments from both sides directly oppose each other on a specific issue. They are the points where teams engage most directly with each other's ideas.

A helpful way to identify clashes is to ask: "What are the points we don't agree on?" You can often frame these as questions, such as "Is this policy effective?" or "Is this approach fair?"

How to Use Clashes

3rd speakers typically organize their speeches around clashes to show why their team is winning the debate. For each clash, you should:

1. Identify the clash clearly
2. Summarize what both teams said about this issue
3. Explain why your team's position is more convincing

Example of Debate Clashes

Let's examine how clashes work in a debate on the motion: "This house would ban private education."

Clash 1: Fairness

Question: Is it fair to ban private education?

Proposition: Private education creates an unfair advantage for children of rich parents.

Opposition: Parents have the right to choose which school they send their kids to.

Clash 2: Quality of Education

Question: Will the level of education improve or worsen?

Proposition: Public education will improve when all resources are focused there.

Opposition: The level of education at public schools will be worse than at former private schools.

Clash 3: Social Impact

Question: Will social interaction between classes improve?

Proposition: There will be more social cohesion when private education is banned.

Opposition: Rich people will likely backlash against this policy, worsening social divisions.

3rd speakers would analyze each clash, explaining why their team's arguments are more convincing on these key points of disagreement.

Reply Speeches

Reply speeches serve as the final opportunity for each team to convince the judges that they've won the debate. These 4-minute speeches are delivered by either the 1st or 2nd speaker from each team (never the 3rd speaker).

The purpose of a reply speech is to provide a biased adjudication of the debate, explaining why your team has won the key issues. No new arguments or evidence may be introduced during reply speeches.

 **Structure Options**
You can organize your reply speech using either a clash-based structure (similar to 3rd speakers) or a more narrative approach that paints a picture of what the world would look like under each team's vision.

 **Key Components**
Identify the big ideas from both sides, explain where they clashed, and articulate why your team won those clashes.

 **Tone and Delivery**
Reply speeches should be delivered with confidence and clarity, often with a slightly more reflective tone than main speeches.

The opposition reply speech is delivered first, followed by the proposition reply speech, which concludes the debate.

Points of Information (POIs)

Points of Information are questions or short statements offered during an opponent's speech. They allow for direct engagement between teams and test a speaker's ability to think on their feet.

When to Offer POIs

POIs can only be offered during the middle portion of a speech. The first and last minute of each speech is "protected time" when no POIs are allowed.

How to Offer a POI

Stand up, extend your hand, and say "Point of Information" or "On that point." Wait for the speaker to either accept or decline your offer.

Accepting POIs

Speakers should accept 1-2 POIs during their speech (depending on speech length). Accepting too few shows unwillingness to engage; accepting too many can disrupt your speech.

Good POIs are concise, relevant, and challenging. They should identify a weakness in the speaker's argument or force them to defend a difficult aspect of their case. Remember that both offering and responding to POIs affect your speaker scores.

Crafting Effective Arguments

Strong arguments form the backbone of successful debates. Each argument should be well-structured and thoroughly explained.



Claim

State your main point clearly and concisely.



Explanation

Explain the reasoning behind your claim and why it's true.



Evidence

Support your explanation with facts, statistics, examples, or expert opinions.



Impact

Explain why this argument matters in the context of the debate.



Link Back

Connect your argument back to the motion and your team's position.

Remember to use varied evidence types and explain why your arguments are more important than your opponents'. The most persuasive arguments are clear, logical, and relevant to the debate.

Effective Refutation Techniques

Refutation—the art of countering your opponents' arguments—is crucial for debate success. Strong refutation doesn't just say "they're wrong" but explains why and how.

1 Identify the Argument

Clearly state which argument you're addressing so judges can follow your refutation.

2 Attack the Reasoning

Challenge the logical connections in your opponents' arguments. Look for assumptions, leaps in logic, or faulty cause-and-effect relationships.

3 Question the Evidence

Challenge the relevance, credibility, or sufficiency of their examples and facts.

4 Provide Counter-Examples

Offer examples that disprove their claims or show that their argument doesn't apply in all situations.

Effective refutation requires careful listening and quick thinking. Always prioritize addressing your opponents' strongest arguments rather than focusing only on their weakest points. Remember to explain why your refutation matters in the context of the debate.

Debate Preparation Strategies

Thorough preparation is essential for debate success, especially for impromptu motions where preparation time is limited.

Before the Tournament

- Stay informed about current events and major issues
- Practice speaking and argument construction regularly
- Research common debate topics and prepare general arguments
- Work on refutation skills through practice debates

During Preparation Time

- Analyze the motion carefully and agree on definitions
- Brainstorm arguments quickly (aim for 3-4 strong arguments)
- Assign speaking roles and divide arguments
- Anticipate opposition arguments and prepare responses
- Outline speeches with clear structure

Effective teams use their preparation time efficiently by having clear roles. For example, one person might focus on developing the team's model, while others generate arguments and anticipate counter-arguments.

Delivery and Speaking Skills

How you deliver your arguments can be just as important as the content itself. Strong delivery helps judges and audience members follow your reasoning and find your arguments persuasive.

Voice and Clarity

Speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard. Vary your tone, pace, and volume for emphasis. Avoid speaking too quickly, especially when explaining complex ideas.

Body Language

Maintain good posture and make eye contact with judges. Use purposeful gestures to emphasize key points. Avoid distracting movements or fidgeting.

Structure and Signposting

Use clear signposting to help judges follow your speech. Phrases like "My first argument is..." or "Moving on to my second point..." create a roadmap for listeners.

Time Management

Practice timing your speeches to use the full time without rushing. Allocate appropriate time to each section of your speech.

Remember that confidence comes with practice. Record yourself speaking and review the recordings to identify areas for improvement. The more comfortable you become with public speaking, the more you can focus on the content of your arguments.

Common Debate Motions and Themes

World Schools Debate covers a wide range of topics from politics and economics to social issues and philosophy. Understanding common themes can help you prepare more effectively.



Politics and Governance

Motions about voting systems, political reforms, or government policies.



International Relations

Topics on international organizations, treaties, or conflicts between nations.



Justice and Rights

Debates about legal systems, human rights, or ethical dilemmas.



Environment and Technology

Issues related to climate change, technological regulation, or scientific advancement.

For each theme, develop a basic understanding of key concepts, major stakeholders, and common arguments on both sides. This background knowledge will help you adapt quickly to specific motions during tournaments.



Judging Criteria and Feedback

Understanding how debates are judged can help you focus your preparation and improve your performance. Judges evaluate several aspects of your debate.

Content

The quality and relevance of your arguments, evidence, and analysis.



Style

Your delivery, including clarity, persuasiveness, and engagement.

Teamwork

Consistency between speakers and how well you function as a unit.



Strategy

How well you structure your case, allocate time, and respond to the other team.

After debates, judges often provide feedback to help teams improve. Listen carefully to this feedback and take notes. Identify patterns in the feedback you receive across multiple debates to recognize your strengths and areas for improvement.

Remember that different judges may have different preferences, but all are looking for clear, logical arguments presented persuasively and responsively to the other team.

Tips for Debate Success

As you develop your debate skills, keep these final tips in mind to improve your performance and enjoyment of World Schools Debate.



Practice Regularly

The more you debate, the more comfortable and skilled you'll become. Hold practice debates with teammates and seek out opportunities to compete.



Be Adaptable

Be prepared to adjust your arguments based on what happens in the debate. Flexibility is crucial for responding effectively.



Listen Actively

Strong debaters are also strong listeners. Take detailed notes during opponents' speeches and identify key points to address.



Learn from Every Debate

Win or lose, each debate offers valuable lessons. Reflect on what worked well and what could be improved for next time.

Remember that debate is not just about winning—it's about developing critical thinking, public speaking, and teamwork skills that will benefit you throughout your academic and professional life. Enjoy the process of learning and growing as a debater!