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South Australian Debating Association Inc

Welcome to Debating!

The below document is an introductory resource to debating, accompanying the Debating Fundamentals Education Evening. It outlines: how a debate works, what the key concepts in debating are, how to plan a team case, the roles of each speaker and a mock preparation of the affirmative case on the topic “*That schools sport should be compulsory*”.

◆ What is a debate?

A debate is a formal argument on a defined topic. Debate topics are given in the form of a statement, for example, *That the internet teaches us more than teachers*. The topic is then argued by two opposing teams of 3 speakers each. One team argues that the statement is true, that team is called the affirmative. The other argues that the statement is false, that team is the negative. One speaker from the affirmative team speaks first, they are followed by a speaker from the negative and so on. A fully trained adjudicator then determines who won and gives the speakers some tips on what went well and what can be improved.

◆ The basics to organising a debate

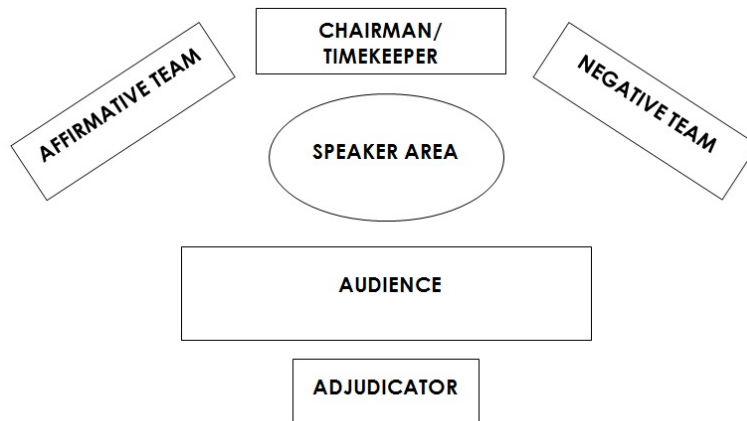
When preparing for a debate, the first step is to find out what the topic is and what side (affirmative or negative) your team is on. This information can be found in the program; team names are displayed in the order affirmative v negative.

You then need to prepare for the debate with your teammates and coach. The amount of time that should then be devoted to preparing for a debate is up to you! At least a few lunchtimes or after school meetings with your team is recommended. Once you are prepared for the debate, information about the location and time of your debate can be found in the program.

When you arrive at a debate the Zone Steward will help you find which room your particular debate is in. In the room debaters sit in the following arrangement:

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◆ Key concepts in debating: the outcome and scoring of a debate

Each speaker is scored in the following way:

Category	Total possible marks
Matter	40 Marks
Manner	40 marks
Method	20 marks
Total	100 marks

Whilst the total mark a speaker can receive is 100, in theory, each speaker will receive a mark between 70 and 80, where the average speaker is awarded a 75. The total team score is each speaker's score added together to give a score out of 300.

◆ Key concepts in debating: Matter

Matter, the first element you are marked on, pertains to **what you say**. Good matter is defined by content that is persuasive. Content is persuasive when it is (1) relevant and logical, (2) employs arguments and examples, and (3) includes both rebuttal (material specifically attacking what the other side has said) and substantive matter (material supporting your team's side). Bad matter is content lacking these attributes.

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As good matter requires both arguments and examples, understanding the difference between the two is critical. Arguments are the theories which suggest, in a broader sense, that your side of the topic is true. Examples, on the other hand, are the specific historical/current events or statistics which help support your arguments. Good matter requires arguments **and** examples because neither is sufficient on their own. Arguments offer no proof that they are true in real life; they are simply assertions which cannot be verified. Equally, examples on their own only prove the thing happened that one time, they do not provide proof of the general case. Therefore, given that both are necessary, the key is to use arguments as the foundation of your speech and examples to back up each argument.

Rebuttal is another key component of good matter and is the material which counters the arguments raised by the other side. There are a few ways to go about countering opposition arguments. You can point out that an example they are using is factually wrong or is being used in the wrong way. You can point out that the argument they are making is irrelevant or illogical, meaning that even if their premises or examples are true, they do not actually suggest the conclusion or argument being advanced. You can say that their arguments do not prove everything they are required by the topic to prove. If they have no examples to back up their argument, you can point out that their argument is merely an assertion, and then it is a good idea to reference back to your own arguments and prove how they are not. Finally, if they merely have a list of examples, you can point out that nothing about a list of examples suggests a general argument.

When you are delivering your rebuttal, it is key to point out you are doing so – always say that you are rebutting and also what you are rebutting, e.g. “The 1st speaker said [insert their argument here] and it is wrong because of [insert argument].” To make sure you do not get stuck without any rebuttal to say, always share your ideas with each other at the table and think about possible rebuttal points before the debate. Make sure you only raise your pre-prepared rebuttal if the other team actually makes the argument you are prepared to rebut!

◆ Key concepts in debating: Manner

The manner category refers to **how you present** your material. The ultimate goal is always to be persuasive. There are many factors affecting your ability to deliver persuasively, such as your tone, volume, general passion and sincerity, your eye contact, your body movements, your general engagement with the audience and your general confidence.

Many debaters struggle with their manner initially, but luckily it is easy to improve over time. Importantly, practicing your speech will make you feel more prepared and

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confident, which, in turn will improve your ability to deliver it confidently. Practicing with someone who can tell you if you are speaking too fast or too softly can also help. Using palm cards will help free up your hand gestures and stance, writing on them in note form will help promote eye contact. Finally, using variations in tone and volume to add emphasis to your speech is a very easy way to improve your manner.

◆ Key concepts in debating: Method

Method relates to how you organize your own speech and your team's case as a whole. Method is important because strategic organisation of your own speech means that material is easier for the audience and adjudicator to understand. Understandable content is naturally more persuasive.

Being organized in your own speech requires: (1) performing the 'role' of your speaker, (2) structuring and signposting the content in your speech and (3) adhering to time constraints. Moreover, by presenting rebuttal first and then your own substantive matter you will automatically have a more organized speech.

Your team's organisation is dependent on preparing well. Firstly, your team should ensure your team split is 'grouped' rather than a mere list of what the first and second speaker will say. Being non-repetitive between speakers is also an important component of team organisation. Finally, responsiveness in rebuttal to the most important issues in the debate improves your team's method scores.

◆ Key concepts in debating: Speaker Roles

The Speaker Roles are a set of rules about what things each speaker should cover in their speech and in which order.

The first speaker on the affirmative team must present the team definition, give the team split, and then present their substantive arguments. The first speaker on the negative team must first rebut the opposition, and if they disagree with the definition presented by the affirmative team, they should present an alternative definition. If they agree with it, they can go on to the team split and substantive arguments.

The second speaker must rebut the opposition (thematically if possible) and present substantive arguments.

The third speaker must rebut the opposition (thematically if possible) and if they wish, they can summarise the substantive arguments made by the 1st and 2nd speakers.

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◆ Key concepts in debating: How to prepare a team case

The first step in preparing your team case is defining the topic. The definition should not be a dictionary definition and only one definition is required. The definition must be fair to both sides of the debate and take what a 'reasonable average person' would understand the topic to mean. Specifically, the definition must target only the important parts of the topic.

After defining the topic, your team should brainstorm arguments. During your brainstorm, you should research, and ask your teachers, coaches and parents to ensure you have enough to say. If you think of examples first, you should try and turn them around into more general statements that will form your arguments.

When you have a list of arguments you need to work out which speaker is going to make which argument, and this division is called the team split. Arguments should be grouped together so that similar ones are made by the same speaker. This should mean they are easily able to be labelled under broad headings, e.g. political, economic, social, individual, environmental, moral etc.

After brainstorming and dividing arguments, it is time to write your speech. Once you have written your speech, be sure to get your coach to proofread. Then it is time to practice your speech **to time!**

◆ Example preparing a team case

Below is an example of the steps in preparing a team case on the topic "That School Sport should be compulsory".

1. Definition
 - a. School sport – does that mean PE lessons or participation in the school's team or both?
 - b. What else needs a definition? Perhaps compulsory
2. Brainstorming arguments
 - a. Sport makes you healthier
 - b. Sport provides a good opportunity to make friends with classmates
 - c. It's a fun break from academic subjects
 - d. Gets you to experience more different things
 - e. Ensures kids who don't otherwise exercise get some exercise
 - f. Teaches you how to be good at sport and good sportsmanship
 - g. Gives you confidence in interacting with other people
3. Team split

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- a. Combining arguments that are the same, putting the ones that are related to similar things together:
 - i. GROUP 1:
 1. Sport makes you healthier
 2. Sport provides a break in the day from academic subjects like Maths, English, etc.
 3. Sport allows people to experience different things and build their skills.
 - ii. GROUP 2:
 1. Sport teaches sport skills
 2. Sport provides an opportunity for people to become friends
 3. Sport creates social interaction skills
- b. Assigning labels to each group
 - i. GROUP 1: Benefits to the individual
 - ii. GROUP 2: Benefits to society/the community
- c. Working out who will say each group
 - i. The first speaker will say group 1 and the second speaker will say group 2.