

Bloomsburg University
Department of Psychology
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Psychological Aspects of Social Issues
Oral Debate Format/Guidelines

Each topic will have two teams, four to six people will be involved in each debate. There will be 2-3 students on each side of each issue. One team will be the affirmative (what we called the “pro” for the policy or issue) and the other will be negative (what we labeled the “con” for the issue).

Each side will give four speeches: Two “constructive” and two “rebuttal” speeches: “Constructive” refers to the first four speeches of the debate. The goal of these speeches is to ‘construct’ each side’s main arguments.

“Rebuttal” refers to the last four speeches. The goal of these is to rebut the other side’s arguments and to compare the arguments. 1AC - means the First Affirmative Constructive, 2NR - means the Second Negative Rebuttal, and so on. Each team participates in 4 cross-examination periods (asking questions twice and answering questions twice). Participants always answer questions immediately after their constructive, and play the role of asking questions when they are not the next ones to speak.

All group members should have approximately equal time in the oral debate. How you choose to divide things up is up to you, but be sure you adhere to the guidelines, that is the person who presents the 1AC speech must respond to the cross examination and the person doing the cross examination must not be the person next to speak from the negative team.

Format for Debate

1. 1AC – 2-3 minutes
2. Cross-examination - 2 minutes (N asks questions, 1AC responds)
3. 1NC – 2-3 minutes
4. Cross-examination - 2 minutes (A asks questions, 1NC responds)
5. 2AC – 2-3 minutes
6. Cross-examination - 2 minutes (N asks questions, 2AC responds)
7. 2NC – 2-3 minutes
8. Cross-examination - 2 minutes (A asks questions, 2NC responds)
9. 5 minutes to confer with team to prepare rebuttal/closing statements No new arguments are allowed beyond this point. New evidence and analyses are fine.
10. 1NR - 2 minutes
11. 1AR - 2 minutes
12. 2NR - 2 minutes
13. 2AR - 2 minutes

General goals/purposes of each speech:

1AC - Presents the case, this usually includes 1.) a plan (the policy that the affirmative supports), and 2.) an advantage (the reason why the policy would be good). A good introduction that attracts the audience’s attention and interest in the topic.

1NC - A good introduction that attracts the audience’s attention and interest in the topic. Responds to the affirmative’s advantage, for example minimizing the advantage and showing that there is not a great need for action.

2AC - Answers the attacks of the 1NC, building up the advantage again.

2NC - Responds to the affirmative’s plan, for example showing that the plan won’t solve, or will lead to harmful disadvantages.

All cross-examination periods – questioner should have a strategy or at the very least a direction to their questioning.

1NR - Continues the attack on the affirmative’s advantage, answering the arguments made by the 2AC. ** Note that there are two negative speeches in a row (2NC, 1NR). This is called the

“negative block” and it is important for the 1NR to avoid simply repeating the arguments made by the 2NC. For this reason, it is common for the 1NR to address the advantage while the 2NC addresses the plan.

1AR - Defends both the affirmative’s plan and advantage by dealing with all of the arguments in the two prior negative speeches.

2NR - The closing speech for the negative, it usually focuses on a few central reasons why the negative has won. Try and convince the audience the affirmative team has failed to carry the burden of proof.

2AR - The closing speech for the affirmative, it answers the arguments of the 2NR and rebuilds whatever is being attacked in the affirmative’s case. Summarize the debate and show the audience how the affirmative position is superior – and that the affirmative team has carried the burden of proof.

Suggestions for doing well in the debate and earning a high grade:

1. You have to be prepared to argue both sides in order to anticipate and be prepared to respond to the other team’s attempts to refute or undermine your arguments. This means that your team must have researched both sides extensively from reputable, scholarly sources.
2. Listen very carefully to your opponents. Rebuttals are only as strong as your ability to undermine their arguments with evidence or carefully constructed counterarguments of your own.
3. Arguments should be made from logical constructions, almost like a mathematical proof. You should avoid emotional argumentation, that is "I'm right because everyone knows that it's right." All of the fallacies we studied earlier in the semester are to be avoided.
4. Arguments should be supported with research evidence and expert opinions, gathered from your research. Also avoid citing sources that seem dubious or that are unsupported unless they are personal anecdotes designed to create the foundation for a point.
5. *You will be cut off at the end of the time limit.* This means that you need to practice timing your responses to ensure that you’ve made your argument within the time allowed. Otherwise the audience will be left hanging. Using your time effectively is important.
6. The first and last impressions are most important. Make sure that you have good openings and closings for your debate. Make sure your closing statements address the arguments of your opponents. For the rebuttal speeches at the end, you will want to have a basic framework prepared, where you have tried to anticipate what the arguments the other side will have made and what effective responses will be. The five minutes to confer as a team will give you a chance to make any necessary changes to the closing statements in response to issues raised by the other team.
7. Be sure to follow all directions carefully, i.e., with respect to the handout and questions that must be prepared and e-mailed. These will typically play no role in your grade per se, but not following the directions will result in a reduction of the overall team grade.

Each team must prepare a handout for the class. The handout must include the following sections:

- A. Outline of your teams’ arguments on the issue being debated.
- B. Outline of the opposing perspective on the issue being debated.
- C. Reference list, for materials used to prepare for the debate.

You will need to bring copies of the handout to class on the day of your debate, there are _____ students in the class.

Each team must also e-mail four multiple choice questions, with four response options based on material that the team will be presenting during the course of the debate. You should clearly indicate which response you consider the correct one. These questions may be included on the handout that you provide to the class, but that is not necessary. These must be e-mailed to Dr. Leitzel (JLEITZEL@PTD.NET) by the day of your debate. A sampling of these questions will be included on the final exam.