



Establishing the rules and format of the debate

Every debate should have a pre established format and set of rules where speaking time is fairly divided between the pro and contra team. There should always be a set of jury members who will not only make sure the rules and time-limits are respected, but will also judge the arguments and form of the debate participants to ultimately decide the winner. Optionally, there can also be a timekeeper who specifically oversees time-limits and warns the contestants when they are approaching the end of their speaking time. Finally there can also be a moderator who mediates when a team wants to react to a statement (especially in the case of a free form debate round) and intervenes when participants are acting out of line.

Basic debate structure

There are many types of debate formats. Below we give a detailed overview of a commonly used, easy to understand format. In this case the debate will take about half an hour and consist of 2 teams of 2 participants

Preparation	5 minutes
Opening speeches	2 minutes pro; 2 minutes contra
Discussion	10 minutes
Closing speeches	2 minutes pro; 2 minutes contra



Preparation

After each team is appointed either the pro or contra side they get an amount of time to structure their arguments and choose their speaking order. With known question the participants get 5 minutes to prepare the structure of the debate, with an unknown question this can be 15 minutes or more.

Opening speeches

Both teams get 2 minutes to present their opening arguments. Starting with the pro side which also has the responsibility of defining the statement. After this, the contra side will present their opening arguments. This is not yet the time for teams to react to the other teams arguments, but simply to present their own.

Discussion

After this there will be a 10 minute discussion. This is where a moderator would be most useful, as this is a more free-form type of round. This is the time to clarify ones arguments, and question or refute those given by the opponent.

Closing speeches

Both teams get 2 minutes to present their closing arguments. No new arguments should be given during this time, this is merely to summarize the debate and articulate the most important arguments from both sides in a clear and concise way. Here the contra team starts with their closing arguments, they can talk about the focus of the debate and the main (dis)agreements and why they think the arguments given point to a conclusion in their favour. Lastly the pro team should close off the debate by giving a final overview and arguing why the statement still stands in their favour.





There is an endless variety of debate formats and each format can be changed by adding a round, adding time, changing the speaking order, adding a jury question round, adding or removing free form discussion periods etc.

Here are some examples of well-know debate formats that can be used to draw inspiration from for your own format or can be strictly followed if a more challenging style is preferred.

British Parliamentary Debate

In this format there are 4 teams with 2 speakers each where 2 teams take the pro side (called the government) and the other 2 take the contra side (called the opposition). Each side has 1 opening team and 1 closing team. Even Though 2 teams are on the same side of the argument they are not necessarily there to help each other, and will be judged as a single team competing against 3 other teams.

The speeches in a British Parliamentary style debate are quite long, as they are typically 5-7 minutes. Just like in a regular debate, the speaking time alternates between the pro and contra side per speaker, and the debate is opened by the pro side's opening speaker. The closing speakers (in this case called the whip) are, just like in the first format we discussed, not expected to formulate new arguments but rather to summarize the debate. In the case of the British Parliamentary Debate, the final speaker is from the contra side, not the pro side.

An interesting addition here is the POI (points of information) where speakers can ask to react to an opposing team during their speech. If accepted by the moderator, the person who offered it has 15 seconds to offer a rebuttal or ask a question. The first and last minute of a speech is so called protected time where no POI may be offered.

American Parliamentary Debate

In this format there are 2 teams of 2 participants: The Government team (prime minister and member of government) and the Opposition team (leader of the opposition and the member of the opposition)

The debate itself consists of 6 speeches that each have a very specific timing:

- **Prime Minister's Constructive:** 7 minutes, 30 seconds
- **Leader of the Opposition's Constructive:** 8 minutes, 30 seconds
- **Member of Government:** 8 minutes, 30 seconds
- **Member of the Opposition:** 8 minutes, 30 seconds
- **Leader of the Opposition's Rebuttal:** 4 minutes, 30 seconds
- **Prime Minister's Rebuttal:** 5 minutes, 30 seconds

POI (see British Parliamentary Debate) are only permitted during the first four speeches, Though prohibited in the first and final minutes of each speech. The speaking participant can choose themselves to hear the POI or dismiss it.

A single judge, who has extensive knowledge of debate themselves, listens to the round and provides quantitative and qualitative assessments of each round as a whole and of the individual speakers before the next round.