

Harangue

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Three Tips to instantly improve your debating

You may not believe it, but debating can sometimes get quite heated, and things sometimes get said that can be a bit offensive. That can bring down the tone of a debate, so bear the following points in mind:

Try to avoid directly addressing your opposition.

Especially in rebuttal, starting a rebuttal point with “you said...” makes you seem less professional, but also makes it personal. Instead, try something like “the opposition told us that...”.

Remember, to win, you need to convince the adjudicator, not your opposition.

Making personal comments about the appearance/school/mannerisms of your opposition is not cool.

It makes you look like you have nothing better to say than to make a personal jab at your opposition for something that is entirely irrelevant to the debate.

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Just because you find something funny, doesn't mean it won't offend someone.

You may find the following joke hilarious: “Why did the woman get hit by a bus... who cares, what was she doing out of the kitchen?”, but that doesn't mean that someone else won't find it deeply offensive. If you think that a joke may be a little bit controversial, err on the side of caution, and leave it out.

Remember, being offensive may not lose you the debate, but it will very probably drag your scores down.

Swannie Awards

Every year, at the close of the Schools Competition, the DAV hosts the Swannie Awards night. These awards are presented to the speaker in each region and grade who has the highest average speaker score after completing at least three debates during the year.

This year more than 10,000 students from over 1,400 teams, representing 269 schools in 4 grades across 19 regions participated in the Schools Competition. Of these many students, only 99 will be awarded a Swannie award. Congratulations to all these students for their great achievement!

The Swannies will be held on Friday 18 October at MLC in Kew. For more information check the website: dav.com.au

How to Prepare a Case

1. **Brainstorm:** every member of the team writes down all the ideas, arguments, and information that they know about the topic.
2. **Discuss:** you should discuss the issues and throw around ideas using the notes from the brainstorming. Debaters should be able to criticise other ideas freely and should ask for clarification. This is the time for all members of the team to get an understanding of the topic and the general approach that the team will take. You should end up with a list of possible arguments.
3. **Define:** the team should decide on their approach to the topic. What will you be arguing about? In what context - Australia, overseas, generally, or a specific case? The exact definition does not need to be worked out, but everyone should agree on what the debate will be about. You should make sure that everyone on the team can defend the definition if attacked.
4. **Refine:** the team should work out which arguments they want to use. You should work out examples to prove them, ensure that none of the arguments contradict each other, and discuss the anticipated rebuttal. There should be a good list of arguments, maybe in order from strongest to weakest.
5. **Split:** you should work out how you will divide the arguments between speakers. The first and second speakers may want to divide up the main arguments according to which they prefer, and then try to group the other arguments around them in themes.
6. **Restate the definition:** the whole team should then work out the exact wording of the definition. Each speaker must understand and agree with the definition.
7. **Write your speeches:** with all of the above done, you are now in an excellent position to write your speech and flesh out your arguments before the debate.

Catherine Dunlop

Understanding your score

After each of your debates, you'll receive a copy of the adjudicator's scores for each speaker and team.

Every individual score is divided into three areas:

Matter: Your matter score is a mark based on what you said. Arguments, which are relevant, logical, and clearly explained will lead to a high matter score.

Method: Method reflects these factors: did you speak to the time limit? Did you fulfill your speaker role? Did you engage with the opposition's arguments?

Manner: The manner score is an assessment of how you spoke, rather than what you said. Speaking naturally and with confidence leads to high manner scores.

Although the scoresheet gives a useful summary of strengths and weaknesses, debates are marked within a very tight range of scores. The most useful feedback you can get is to listen carefully to your adjudicator, and ask them if you have any questions.

Harangue /he'raŋg/

Noun: A lengthy and aggressive speech

Verb: To lecture someone at length in an aggressive and critical manner

Rebuttal is an important part of debating as it gives a team the perfect opportunity to prove the superiority of your team's arguments. George Talliopoulos provides some tips.

Debating is about convincing the audience that the opposition's arguments are wrong and your arguments are right.

Your team is not the only team in the room trying to convince the audience, so make sure you get the edge you need by demonstrating through rebuttal that the opposition's arguments are wrong. Here are some rebuttal tips:

1. Understand why we use rebuttal in our speeches

Rebuttal can be used to:

- Show the opposition has misinterpreted information
- Prove that the opposition provided irrelevant arguments (make sure you think this through before saying anything!)
- Demonstrate that the opposition's arguments are illogical
- Suggest that accepting the opposition's arguments will lead to undesirable consequences

2. Recognise the extent to which rebuttal should be used

A general guideline, but not a strict rule, is that around 25-30% of the speeches of the first and second speakers of a negative team should be focused on rebuttal.

If you find it hard to come up with rebuttal points on the spot, think of objections to potential

arguments from the opposition before you debate to help get your mind going.

Most of a third speaker's speech should be focused on rebuttal, not summary. A good third speaker provides solid rebuttal not simply a nice summary.

3. Attack the roots of a tree not the branches

Many students spend their rebuttal time trying to refute comments made by the opposition that are irrelevant to the core issues of the debate. Ask yourself if proving that a particular comment made by an opponent is wrong will help disprove the main arguments of the opposition - if the answer is "no" think again about making that rebuttal point.

4. Identify the important issues in the debate and organise your rebuttal accordingly

Think of the main issues in the debate (eg. social, political, economic) and set aside different palm cards for each issue. When an issue comes up and you have a problem with your opponent's claims write your rebuttal point on the relevant card. Grouping your points into themes is often a more effective method of rebuttal than opting to rebut point-by-point.

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Many thanks to the contributors:

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More Resources

The DAV publishes topic guides and general debating resources to help you develop a case and improve your debating.

The guides can be found in the 'Resources' section of dav.com.au