

Harangue /hə'raNG/

Noun: A lengthy and aggressive speech

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

## Understanding Debate Topics: Policy or Empirical?

### Topic Resources:

Did you know the DAV publishes topic guides for prepared topics? Guides are available on the DAV website at least one week prior to each prepared topic.

The guides provide a basic overview of the topic, and include some links as a starting point for your research.

The guides can be found in the 'Resources' section of [dav.com.au](http://dav.com.au)

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*Topics in the Schools Competition can be divided in to two types of debates. Chris Bisset walks through the two types of debate you will encounter and how you should tackle them.*

Debates are won by the team that, when compared to other team, gives a reasonable person with average levels of general knowledge better reasons to support their side of the topic. Application of this principle has some subtle differences depending on which of two types of debates is occurring:

#### Policy Debates

In a policy or 'should' debate, the teams must prove that the policy would do more/less good than harm compared with the alternative. You can normally recognise these debates because there is a 'should' in the topic (although that rule is not definitive – see below). An example would be 'That we should lower the voting age'.

The affirmative supports the policy given to them by the topic. Sometimes a policy might be to remove a current government program, so in fact they are opposing a policy per se. A negative team is always supporting an alternative, whether it be defending the status quo or proposing an alternative solution to that in the topic.

Teams on either side of the debate sometimes use a 'model' to detail how they would enact their policy. This is not required for either team as the implications of implementing the policy

are very obvious. For example, we could still debate whether or not lowering the voting age was a good idea, even without knowing to which age we were lowering it, but it would help to know, because the arguments change.

In the absence of a model, teams should be taken to implement their policy in a reasonable way, although the other team is allowed to point out harms associated with implementing the policy, so long as they are giving reasons why those harms would result from implementing the policy. Negative teams should be taken to be defending the status quo in the place the debate is set if they offer no indication to the contrary.

Teams cannot avoid affirming or negating the policy in the topic by virtue of their models. For example, in a debate about removing morbidly obese children from their parents' care, the affirmative may include in their model extensive nutritional education for parents and the negative may propose a counter-model doing exactly the same.

Here the policies are not mutually exclusive, so neither team can claim an advantage associated with the extra element of their model. Equally, the negative cannot get credit for an alternative that involves doing the policy in the motion. Teams on either side can only get credit for advantages of their policy that are mutually exclusive with the other team's policy.

Not all policy debates are from the perspective of the state but from other stakeholders such as 'the feminist movement' or

'indigenous groups'. In such cases, the key question is whether the policy is in the *enlightened* best interests of *that* actor that is to say that they should act in their best interests according to logical reasons, even if they may not in real life. Often topics are set in the form 'That we should...' In these scenarios the actor should usually be assumed to be the relevant government of a liberal democracy (Australia, Britain, USA).

#### Empirical Debates

In an empirical or 'is' debate, the winning team must have shown their side of the topic to be more true than false. There are no models in these debates. The teams are not proposing to do anything, they are passing on judgements on things that are; teams must defend or attack the subject of the debate as it exists.

Sometimes the topic will give a yardstick for assessing a subject matter; 'That X has done more harm than good.' At other times, teams will need to propose a reasonable standard for assessing more abstract yardsticks like 'regret' or 'failure'. Where teams disagree about the criteria for assessing the subject matter or the standard, threshold or yardstick for that assessment, you should accept the standard set by the affirmative team, so long as it is reasonable. A topic with a 'should' in it is empirical if the thing that should be done is taking an attitude (eg. regret, celebration) towards an existing phenomenon.

## How to Prepare a Case

*A good debate will be based upon a well prepared case that is understood by all in the team. Catherine Dunlop suggests that to prepare a good case you need to:*

### Four good reasons to use one palm card per point:

- 1) You can rearrange your speech really easily, just by changing the order of the cards. Sometimes you need to do this because of what was important in the other team's speeches.
- 2) You can easily swap points with your other speakers, or give away points to later speakers if you don't get to them in your speech.
- 3) If the other side agrees with you on something, you can very easily dump the point from your speech.
- 4) It makes it easy to put in cards that say "SLOW DOWN", "LOOK AT THE AUDIENCE", "SMILE AT THE ADJUDICATOR". These are very useful to help keep you manner going, but you can't use them if they come up in the middle of a speech!

### 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 might be taken to the topic. You should end up with a list of possible arguments.

### 3) DEFINE

The team should decide on the general approach to the topic. What will you be arguing about? In what context – Australia, overseas, generally or in 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 ensure that your teammates can defend the definition if it is 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 list of good arguments, possibly in order from strongest argument to weakest.

### 5) SPLIT

You should work out how you will split the arguments. The first and second speakers may want to divide up main arguments according to which they prefer and then try to group other arguments using a standard team-split and then allocate one half to the first speaker and one half to the second. You should check to make sure that the split is not a hung case. Some of the good clichéd splits include:

- Social and political aspects vs Economic aspects
- Individual vs Society
- Legal aspects vs Practical aspects
- Australia vs Rest of the world
- Internal effects vs External effects
- The effects of doing something vs The effects of not doing it

### 6) RESTATE THE DEFINITION

The whole team should then work out the exact wording of the definition. Every speaker must understand and agree with the definition.

### 7) DECIDE ON A TEAM LINE

This last stage is one of the most important. A team line is a statement that encapsulates the team's approach to the topic and what the team wants to prove. It does not need to be long and it does not need to be repeated by every speaker. It **does** need to be stated by the first speaker. It should be used by each team member to check that all their arguments go to proving the team line. It is useful to work out the team line at this stage to ensure that your arguments are consistent. If you can't work out a team line now, go back and review your case. As with the definition, every speaker must understand and agree with the team line.

### 8) WRITE YOUR SPEECHES

It is only after all these things have been done that you can write your speeches and flesh out your arguments before the debate.

*The jargon terms used in debating can be a little overwhelming when you're first starting out! Wondering what a team split is? Need to know how to define "definition"? Take a look at the glossary of debating terms on the back page of this edition for a breakdown of some common concepts.*

## Chairing a Debate

At some point during this year's Schools Competition, you may be asked to chair a debate. The chair ensures the debate runs smoothly. When you chair, remember to:

1. State the topic: this might seem obvious, but the audience may not have heard it before.
2. Introduce the teams.
3. Announce the speaking times: although everyone should know their speaking times, announcing them at the start of the debate means that all speakers are aware of them,

and protects you from accusations of bias.

4. Call on each speaker: introduce each speaker only when the adjudicator indicates to you that they're ready.

5. Timing: please keep time carefully. To signal the time, you should knock on the desk, clap your hands, or ring a bell. Speaking times for each grade are:

A or B	6 mins	8 mins
C	5 mins	6 mins
D	4 mins	5 mins

6. At the end of each speech: announce the length of the speech, and then wait for the adjudicator to signal that they're ready for the next speaker.

7. At the end of the last speech: inform the audience that the adjudicator is deliberating, and will deliver their adjudication in a few minutes.

Thanks for chairing — it really makes the debate run smoothly.

### Debating Hints:

⇒ Write down the opposition team's team line and team split immediately, and make sure you understand their case before you begin your rebuttal. Often teams listen to the first half of an opposing speaker's first sentence, and start writing down rebuttal based on that, without listening to remainder of the speaker's argument. The key to rebuttal is listening and understanding.

## Economics: How to make an argument of it

Economics can be both a tricky and dry subject to argue about, but it is inevitable that during your time in the DAV, you will be required to make an economic argument in one way or another. Here, we will outline the best way to make an economic argument within a debate, so you can let your knowledge shine!

So, how do we do it? When discussing economics, specificity is paramount. This is for two main reasons.

Firstly, when trying to discuss the economy and the effect that a proposal might have on companies, individuals and Australia as a whole, there is a tendency to state facts without proper explanation. A primary example of this is the statement that "introducing this legislation will hurt Australian jobs." While this may well be true, it is important to explain exactly which sector will be affected, why they will be affected and why the people in these jobs would struggle to find work else-

where.

Secondly, from the perspective of the average reasonable person, economics can be a bit confusing. It is therefore imperative to make sure that you explain your arguments to the extent that they are clear to whoever is listening, economist or not.

Let's consider the debate: "That Australia should not introduce a price on carbon affirmative team, there should be a clear contention that by implementing a price on carbon pollution". From the perspective of the affirmative team, there should be a clear contention that by implementing a price on carbon it could hurt our economy. However, as we have just discussed, it is important to be specific. So, in that case, a far more effective argument would be to look at the tangible effects on say, small business.

The argument can now read:

"One reason why we are opposed to the carbon tax is because of the way it disproportionately effects small businesses. This is because large companies are able to absorb the additional cost of a carbon tax, whereas small businesses have smaller profit margins and thus an increase in tax would be more damaging to their industry. To compensate, they would have to lay off what valuable staff they do have..."

In this example, we have followed a clear pattern: we stated our contention in relation to a particular issue, we presented a particular sector to which the argument applied, argued the case and its effects. By following this simple model, you can take your economics argumentation to a new level, which will benefit both your team's success and your enjoyment of debating.

**Sam Scott**

⇒ Resist the temptation to write out your speeches in full. Try using point form instead and gradually decrease the amount of notes you rely on. You will speak more naturally, your audience will relate better to your arguments and you are more likely to think on your feet and respond to the dynamics of the debate.

⇒ Read the newspaper, watch the news, listen to news radio and keep up with current affairs. You can often pick up topical examples to illustrate your points and secret topic rounds often focus on current affairs.

⇒ Discuss your debating topic with another person and ask them to take the opposite side of the debate. See how you go with rebutting

*Harangue* is the DAV's publication for student debaters. We are always interested in hearing from you, so if you have any feedback or you would like to submit an article, email the editor at: **publications@dav.com.au**

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Participating in the Victorian State Debating Team (VST) is a chance for you to represent Victoria at the National Championships - and even Australia in the World Championships! Students who are selected for the team get to participate at the National Schools Debating Championships held this year here in Victoria.

Trials will be held on Sunday 2 March at St Kevin's College in Toorak. On the day, debaters will be allocated into teams and asked to participate in two secret topic debates in front of selectors. The best debaters on the day will be invited to participate in a second day of debating on Sunday 9 March at Wesley College.

We invite any interested students to participate in trials. More information about trials and how to register are available on our website, under 'Schools': <http://dav.com.au>

## Speaker Roles

It is vital you know and fulfill your role in the debate. **Ming Kang Chen** presents a breakdown of each speaker's role to help prepare for your debate.

	Affirmative	Negative
1	Introduction/ Context Definition/Model* Team Split Arguments (aim for 3) Conclusion	Introduction Counter-model* Rebuttal (~20–30% of speech) Team Split Arguments (aim for 3) Conclusion
2	Introduction Rebuttal (~25–50% of speech) Personal Split Arguments (2 or 3) Conclusion	Introduction Rebuttal (~25–50% of speech) Personal Split Arguments (2 to 3) Conclusion
3	Introduction Rebuttal (~90% of speech) Summary/Conclusion	Introduction Rebuttal (~90% of speech) Summary/Conclusion

\*optional

### Glossary

**Arguments** – The range of ideas and reasons why your team is arguing in favour or against the topic. The 1st speakers must get the most important arguments.

**Conclusion** – A very short (1–2 sentences) ending to reinforce what your speech or team believes in.

**Context** – Used by the 1A to explain the *context* of the topic, explaining very briefly some recent events or trends which have led to this debate, and thus why the team believes so strongly in being in favour of the topic.

**Counter-model** – A *model* presented by the negative team to provide an alternative solution to the problem being presented by the affirmative team. E.g. *That we should ban all junk food*: “Our counter-model is that we continue with the status quo, which means that we would continue to have healthy food education in schools, nutrition information availability, and advertisements on television to encourage people to be aware of their choices.” If you don't agree with the problem being presented by the affirmative, then there is no need to introduce a counter-model.

**Definition** – (see: *Model*) Clarifies what the debate is going to be about. Do not use a dictionary, your common sense will be enough. Aim to define it as naturally as possible in as few sentences as possible, e.g. *That we should ban smoking*: “This topic is about the Australian government stopping people from making or using tobacco products.” It may also be combined or substituted by the *model*.

**Introduction** – (see: *Context*) This can be as simple as introducing yourself but can be used in more persuasive ways. You can re-emphasise the main difference between your team and the opposition, or point out an overall flaw in the other team's case, or just reemphasise what your team believes in.

**Model** – (see: *Definition*) Clarifies how your team foresees the topic being implemented. It only needs to be presented if not doing so would make the debate unclear to the opposition and adjudicator. Only the most essential parts need to be introduced, e.g. *That we should have compulsory military service*: “We propose in our model that all citizens who are **18 and have finished school** be required to perform **2 years** of military training.” If you only provided a definition for the topic, then no-one would know *how old* or *how long* the compulsory military service would go for, which could harm your side's case.

**Personal Split** – An outline of what you will present in your speech, e.g. “In my speech I will be talking about (1) passive smoking and (2) the effects of smoking on the environment.”

**Rebuttal** – Providing reasons why the opposition has provided illogical or incorrect arguments, or if they have exaggerated or overstated the effects of a certain issue. Always rebut all the arguments presented before you, and you are advised to rebut rebuttal, as well anything else that has been said by the other team. You may want to consider grouping similar arguments and rebuttals into themes to make it easier to follow, e.g. economic and social themes.

**Summary** – (see: *Team Split*) Restating an outline of what your team's has presented in arguments. This is identical as the team split. You can alternatively summarise and recap your teams arguments during rebuttal, as they will often be very similar, e.g. “They said that smoking is good for your health but we already explained to you at 1st speaker that smoking causes a wide variety of health problems. This is because...” etc. This technique is often more effective as it shows that your team was right from the beginning.

**Team Split** – A very concise outline of what you will present in your speech and your 2nd speaker's speech, e.g. “In my speech I will be talking about (1) the negative healthy effects of smoking and (2) the addictiveness of smoking. Our second speaking will be talking about (3) passive smoking and (4) the effects of smoking on the environment.”