# **DEBATING RULES**

**Below is the classic structure of formal debates from the early literature on debating.  Please also visit the links listed below for other guidelines.  For the class debate, we will follow the classic guidelines.**

## **The Affirmative Burden of Proof**

The affirmative team always has the burden of proof.  You can uphold your view by proving that:  a) there is a need for a change in the**status quo**relative to the proposition; b) that your side has a plan for change and a proposal for implementation; and c) that there are precise advantages and benefits to such a plan and proposal.

The affirmative side will begin and end the debate.

## **The Opponent Presumption**

The opponents are responsible for opposing the proposition.  You hold the presumption in the debate.

The presumption is the opposite of the burden of proof.  Your responsibility is to defeat the proposition.  It is generally agreed that the best manner in which to proceed is to present a logical negative case which refutes the affirmative and supports the status quo.

## **The Burden of Rebuttal**

Both teams have a burden of rebuttal which shifts from side to side as the debate progresses.

There are two elements involved in the burden of rebuttal:

a)  Each team is obligated to refute their opponent's arguments.

b)  Each team is obligated to rebuild and defend their own case.

## **The Preponderance of Evidence**

In order to establish the validity of their arguments, each team should seek to amass a great amount of evidence supporting its position.

Debates hinge upon the question of which team has presented the greatest weight of evidence since it is impossible to establish absolute proofs in dealing with propositions of policy.

## **Decision About Who Wins**

If the burden of proof is upheld throughout the debate, the affirmative must win; if the presumption is upheld, the negative must be awarded the decision.

The panel of judges will weigh the evidence presented by both sides in determining who wins the debate.

**DEBATE GUIDELINES**

## **Opening Argument**

***Each Side Will Have 5-10 Minutes to Present Their Opening Argument.***

***Each Side Will Have 3 Minutes for Questions.***

### **Affirmative Side**

The affirmative side should present as much of their argument and evidence as possible in an attempt to build a***prima facie*** argument for the adoption of the proposal. (***Prima facie*** can be defined as a logical analysis containing sufficient evidence to stand on its own validity until attacked.)

This speech must contain the overview of the entire affirmative argument relative to the need for a change, carefully documented and supported.

It should be noted that this is the only speech in the debate which can be completely prepared in advance.  You should make the most of this advantage by selecting every word and piece of evidence for its maximum effect.  This speech establishes the basis of the argument.  Debates are very often won or lost in this first speech.


### **Opponent Side**

Your purpose is to establish the lines of clash in the debate.  The negative is not under obligation to clash with every argument presented by the affirmative, but may select what it considers the most important issues in determining whether the proposition should be rejected.  The establishment of your direct lines of opposition in the debate is critical at this point.

The negative must carefully document and support its objections to the affirmative case as presented to this point in the debate.  It is most desirable for the negative to present a***prima facie***argument for the rejection of the proposition based upon a defense of the status quo. This argument must be phrased to directly clash with the affirmative and is frequently combined with the attack on the affirmative case.

***Good debate is based upon the direct clash of opponent's arguments which results from careful advanced preparation of arguments and on-the-spot adaptation of those arguments to the opponent's case as presented.***

## **Rebuttals**

***Each Side Will Have 5 Minutes for Rebuttal.***

### **Opponent's Rebuttal**

The team picks up where the second negative constructive left off and continues the attack on the affirmative case.  You should also proceed to rebuild the negative case.

You are not to introduce any new lines of argument into the debate at this point; you can only provide extended discussions of the lines of argument already produced.

This speech should conclude with a summary of the affirmative weaknesses in the debate which must be answered by the next affirmative speaker.

### **Affirmative's Rebuttal**

This speech is often the crucial affirmative presentation in the debate since it must rebuild the affirmative case in light of the attack by the opposition team.  The affirmative must regain their power by bringing the audience back to the affirmative point of view, but should not go on the defensive.

Begin with a restatement of the affirmative issues, then move on to rebuilding the affirmative case by simultaneously answering the opponent's attack, concluding with a summary of the crucial issues remaining to be answered by the opponents in the debate.

**Note:  By this time the debate should be reduced to a few critical issues of significant disagreement rather than a review of all of the areas of conflict presented in the debate.**

## **Closing**

### **Closing Opponent's Speech**

The debate follows with the closing opponent's speech.  Of course, the purpose again is to attack the reconstructed affirmative case.  Because no new argument can be introduced in the closing, it is imperative that this speech solidifies the opponent’s stance.

 The best strategy for this speech is to begin with an attack on the plan and its advantages, then (time permitting) to proceed to an attack on the rebuilt need argument, leaving the rebuilding of the negative case and additional refutation to the first negative rebuttal speech if necessary.  It is a good practice to announce the division of labor to be used in the negative time block at the onset of the speech.

### **Closing Affirmative Speech**

The debate continues with the closing affirmative speech. The purpose is to attack the opponents case and no new argument can be introduced in the closing. It is imperative that this speech solidifies the affirmative’s stance.

A particular problem that teams are frequently confronted with is in finding time to answer all of the negative objections introduced by the opposition, in addition to presenting the remainder of the affirmative case.  It might be a good idea to have someone on your team take precise notes relative to the points being made by the opposition and preparing mental responses to them.

When it is impossible to answer each and every negative objection separately, the speaker should synthesize the negative arguments into a few manageable points, taking care not to distort the opposition's arguments.

Adapted and modified from: Introduction to Debate. John Pacilio, Jr. and William H. Stites. Colorado: Pruett Press, 1967.

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