



Guidance for Speakers

This document is a summary of a more detailed booklet available from our website.

www.debsoc.com/Guidance.html

Debating Format

- Main speakers: 15 minutes each (Proposer then Opposer)
- Floor speakers: 3 minutes each
- Main speaker summaries: 5 minutes each (Reverse order – Opposer then Proposer)

Preparing a Speech

Decide up front how you will approach the topic and what aspects you hope to cover. Although you may think of some novel interpretations, it will generally make for a more interesting evening if you stick to the way you think most people in the audience will understand the topic.

Don't try to deconstruct all the words in the topic and define them. Of course you may still need to clarify anything that is not obvious and is necessary to explain your interpretation of the topic

Use sources like the Internet to do your research but make sure you verify your facts – there is as much rubbish as truth out there! Look for helpful quotations or examples that back up your arguments rather than relying solely on surveys and statistics.

Make sure the evidence you will present in support of your case is credible – where possible refer to sources or anecdotes that the audience will be more familiar with.

Structure

Structure your speech with a clear beginning, middle and end.

At the start, try to grab the audience's attention and set out your case clearly. You might consider opening with a quotation, a short anecdote or a rhetorical question.

The main part of your speech is where you need to carefully develop your argument. Don't throw in a series of random points, instead take time to plan the different points you want to cover and sequence them so there is a clear logic leading from your initial remarks to your conclusion. Make sure each part of your argument is clear and supported by credible evidence before moving on to the next area you want to address. In a typical 15 minute speech you are unlikely to have time to do justice to more than half a dozen main themes.



Make sure to leave time for your conclusion at the end. Fifteen minutes is easily long enough for people to forget some of your early points! Use the last minute of your available time to properly summarise the case you have built. Don't repeat precise details and statistics but refer to them to remind people how well your case was justified. End on a final punch line delivered with as much confidence as you can muster.

Always remember that giving a speech is more like having a conversation than writing an essay. It's just a big conversation with a larger audience than normal. So when you are finalising your speech, make sure that it sounds natural as though you are talking – which means many of the normal grammatical conventions for written work do not apply.

Delivering Your Speech

An excellent and well researched speech can be ruined by a poor delivery. Make sure you sound and act confidently and you will seem more authoritative on your subject, which will go a long way to convincing people to support you.

Vary the tone and pace of your voice as you speak. A monotonous delivery will make the audience switch off after just a few minutes. Tone and pace can both be used as forms of emphasis to draw attention to the most important parts of your speech. You can also vary them when reading quotations or telling an anecdote. Remember that emphasis does not just mean speaking louder!

Use gestures naturally to reinforce your message – it's often another form of emphasis. But don't overdo it – too many gestures can become distracting.

Make good use of humour – even the most serious speech will benefit from a few more light hearted moments to get the audience on your side. Judge your humour carefully so as not to offend anyone though.

Most speakers will use notes, but the way you use them is critical. Never read verbatim from your notes: no matter how good an actor you are, your speech will lack the spontaneity and passion for the topic that the audience will want to see. Also, by constantly looking down at the lectern, you will not project your voice well enough around the room and some people may not be able to hear you.

Ideally your notes should just have a series of headings and bullet points reminding you of the key topics and facts you need to cover. Prepare your cards well so that you keep everything in the right order and do not get lost or confused. It's often a good idea to start each main section of your speech on a separate sheet.

Summing Up

Don't attempt to respond individually to every point made during the floor debate. Refer to the most critical ones directly, and group related comments together where appropriate.

Use the rest of your time to remind the audience of the key points from your speech and perhaps reiterate some of the more crucial evidence that supports your case.

Don't be tempted to introduce too much new material and certainly not a new line of argument unless it is critical to rebut something said by your opponent. Otherwise you risk confusing the audience.

As with your main speech, prepare a good punchy ending to set out your case and urge the audience to support you.