

Debate Textbook – Chapter 1.1

Goals

Define debate.

List the people who were influential in the debate process.

Understand the significance of presidential debates.

Terms

- debate
- informal debate
- formal debate

Do You Agree?



Resolved When in conflict, the spirit of the law ought to take precedence over the letter of the law.

Affirmative position

Yes, circumstances and situations arise that put people in a position to make decisions that they otherwise would not make. This could be something as simple as driving over the speed limit to the topic of vigilantism.

Negative position

No, the letter of the law must be followed at all times. You cannot rely on personal interpretation to decide when a law will be obeyed.

Debate in Your Life

Debate takes place every day in all kinds of places. Debates can be heard in homes, offices, schools, and the halls of government. They also can be heard in shopping malls, churches, and hospitals. You engage in debate when you disagree with one or more people and try to persuade them to agree to your position.

Debate is an important aspect of your life. It gives you the opportunity to make the best decisions possible based on the information you have.

Debate is defined as oral confrontation between two individuals, teams, or groups to argue reasons for and against a set position. These arguments follow a set form or procedure. Because debate is contentious by nature, you should expect to challenge your opponent's statements and to have your statements, opinions, and ideas challenged as well. *Persuasion*, which appeals to emotional responses, is a key element of the debate process. You will study several types of debate throughout this course: Lincoln-Douglas, cross-examination, and public forum. These are the most common forms of debate found at tournaments. Even though the goal is the same, each debate has its own format and set of rules. Debate can be divided into two categories: informal and formal debate. Informal debate is a common occurrence with very little preparation or rules. It can take place anywhere. Examples of an informal debate are a group of friends deciding which movie to see or a child trying to persuade a parent to extend a curfew. In each case, there is an exchange of ideas for and against an issue between two or more people.

Formal debates are quite different. They usually are scheduled and take place in a specified setting. People taking part in formal debates prepare extensively before the debates take place. The topic or resolution is established. There is a set of rules for the types of speeches given and the length of these speeches. Finally, the participants are dressed appropriately. A debate between political candidates is a type of formal debate. Other examples of formal debates include debates in Congress when making and passing laws and debates that occur during town hall meetings.

Debating is different from arguing. The one crucial difference is the aspect of listening. When you argue, you seldom are interested in the other person's point of view. You only want to express yourself. Debating requires you to listen to what the other person has to say. You then must respond to what has been said, not simply argue your position.

Early Influences on Debate

Debate has been going on for a very long time. The ancient Greeks are credited with inventing not only debate, but also the art of public speaking. For them, public speaking was an important part of *rhetoric*, the art of persuading an audience. The Greek orators Isocrates, Socrates, and Demosthenes, and later the Roman orator Cicero all made important contributions to debate.

Isocrates (436–338 B.C.) was one of the first people to affect education and debate. Isocrates was a lawyer and a teacher. He believed that rhetoric should be taught along with ethics and politics because rhetoric helped people to express their ideas. He believed that knowledge is tentative. There is no limit to what you can learn about a subject, and you can't know it all. Because you can't know everything all of

the time, it is important to have good, informed opinions regarding the issues. Sharing these ideas helps to increase knowledge

Socrates (469–399 B.C.) is credited with setting the standard for Western philosophy. His teachings revolved around the nature of virtue. He believed that people do not deliberately do bad things, but instead they do what they think is the best thing to do at the time. Socrates taught that knowledge and virtue directly affect each other.

Demosthenes (384–322 B.C.) is considered to be Greece's greatest orator. He had a superb command of language and knew how to use it. He wrote orations, letters, poems, political speeches, and speeches in courts of law. As a boy Demosthenes had a speech impediment and a weak voice. He was able to overcome these shortcomings and became a superb orator. Demosthenes paid close attention to all elements of delivery. He felt that gestures and voice were very important. Through close attention to delivery details, he was able to be more influential in sharing his ideas.

Cicero (106–43 B.C.) influenced both philosophy and politics. Born in the waning years of the Roman Republic, Cicero was a lawyer, politician, orator, and philosopher. The ideas Cicero put forth while he was a lawyer are still used. He believed it was important to look at an issue from all sides and to present and consider all information. He was open to new ideas and ready to confront new issues. This approach is used in debate today. In order to be able to write the best case, debaters must explore all sides of a proposition. They also must try to anticipate any arguments or premises that could be introduced in the course of a debate.

Debate has been an important element of governments throughout history. Many people have contributed to debate and oratory. Every political season produces another politician with exceptional speaking skills. It is safe to say that the list of influential orators and debaters will only continue to grow.

Debate Today

Because of presidential political campaigns, debates are more popular than ever. From the Kennedy-Nixon presidential debates to the Obama-McCain debates, candidates as well as the issues are dissected by the press and public alike.

There were four debates between Kennedy and Nixon during the 1960 presidential campaign. The first debate centered on domestic issues, while the second and third debate focused on China. The United States' relationship with Cuba was the topic of the final debate. Polling showed that more than half of all voters were influenced by the debates. Six percent said that their vote was a direct result of the debates.

This first nationally televised debate was watched by 77 million Americans. The format used in 1960 is still in use today. Presidential debates continue to be a source of information for the public.

During the 2008 presidential election, both parties hosted a series of debates between the candidates running for their party's nomination. Three presidential debates and one vice-presidential debate followed during the general election. Once again, millions tuned in to hear what the candidates had to say.

Turning Point: The Great Debates of 1960



During the 1960 presidential campaign, the Democratic candidate, Senator John F. Kennedy from Massachusetts, agreed to four debates with the Republican candidate, Vice President Richard M. Nixon. The first debate took place on September 26 in Chicago, Illinois. Howard K. Smith, a CBS news anchor, was the moderator. The format for the debates was an eight-minute opening statement, and then alternating questions from four panelists. The candidate had two and a half minutes to respond. This was followed by a rebuttal speech given by the other candidate. Not only was this the first debate between candidates of the two major parties, but it also was the first time presidential debates were televised.

The importance of the effect television had on these debates is significant. This was the first time the public could compare the candidates firsthand. Things did not go well for Richard Nixon.

In August, Nixon spent two weeks in the hospital because of a severely injured knee. As a result of this injury, Nixon had lost weight and was still twenty pounds underweight by the time the debates were held.

Despite being very pale, he refused to wear any makeup. Nixon chose a gray suit for the debate which provided very little contrast with the background set.

Kennedy, on the other hand, had been in California campaigning during the early part of September. Even though he was already tan, he chose to wear makeup. In sharp contrast to Nixon, Kennedy wore a dark suit, making him stand out from the background. Kennedy also was coached on how to sit and what to do when he wasn't speaking. Kennedy appeared firm and confident.

The first debate centered around domestic issues. Kennedy was thought to be inexperienced, but he overcame this supposed weakness by focusing on his work in Congress. His style was strong and aggressive.

There is much discussion as to who actually won the debate. Studies show that voters who watched the debates on television thought Kennedy was the winner, while those voters who listened to the debates believes it was a draw. Everyone agrees that the debates changed the face of politics.

There were three more debates between Kennedy and Nixon, but the first was by far the most memorable. Their effect was far reaching. Italy, Finland, Sweden, Japan, and Germany followed by establishing debates for national office as well. The Great Debates of 1960 were the beginning of what has become a much-anticipated event in the presidential electoral process.

Think Critically

How have the presidential debates changed since 1960? What impact do the debates have today on presidential elections?

Think Critically

1. How is debate different from arguing? Why is debate preferable?
2. Compare and contrast formal and informal debate.
3. How do debates affect presidential elections?

1.2 Debate Skills and Grooming for Debate

Goals

Define the types of skills used in debate.

Understand the importance of grooming and appearance to success in debate.

Terms

- hearing
- listening
- articulation
- pronunciation
- vocalized pause
- poise

Do You Agree?



Resolved Protection of the environment should take precedence over the development of natural resources.

Affirmative position

Yes, we only have so many natural resources left. It is important that we protect them for future generations. These resources are also important in our efforts to halt global warming.

Negative position

No, we are now in a position where we must develop our own oil resources. We should no longer depend on other nations to meet our oil needs. There are areas that will not upset the balance, and we should use the resources that are at our disposal.

Skills You Gain From Debate

You have to sign up for courses, and you would like to try something different. You read an article in the school paper about the debate team winning a trophy at a statewide competition. It interested you because the topics they debated—the environment, curfews, changing the age when you can get a driver's license—are topics that interest you. You argue about them with your parents and your friends, but you never quite feel like you get your point across.

There is a debate class, and you wonder about taking it. Can it help with other classes? What skills do you need to be a debater? You decide to investigate.

Reading Skills

Debate requires reading many different types of material in order to understand the debate topic and its issues. Weekly periodicals, newspapers, professional journals, websites, and law cases are a few examples of the types of materials that are invaluable for research. Reference librarians can acquaint you with the library's services and holdings, guide you to specific sources of information, and provide you with instructions about the library equipment available for use.

It is not enough to just read the articles and the stories. You also need to comprehend and retain the information. To achieve this, develop and use note-taking skills. Identify the key points found in an article. Then find areas

of support or reason that validate the key points. Good note taking will save a lot of time. Make sure that your notes are always legible. You should be able to look at notes later and still understand what you wrote.

Listening Skills

Listening is the key to winning a debate. It is not enough to *hear* your opponent—you must *listen* to your opponent. There is a big difference between hearing and listening. **Hearing** is the act of recognizing sounds around you. **Listening** requires you to give meaning to the sounds you hear. It is a conscious act to comprehend and to be able to respond to others. Studies show that you only remember 25 to 50 percent of what you hear, but with practice and effort listening can be improved. These are the steps to becoming an effective listener:

- **Recognize a situation that requires critical listening.** During a debate round, you must focus wholly on what is being said in the round. Analyze each speech in order to form a thoughtful and effective response.
- **Tune in and pay attention.** Eliminate any distractions by focusing on the speaker. This is not the time to be thinking about your next speech. It is the time to hear and understand what is being said by your opponent. This skill will take effort on your part to develop, but it will play a large part in your becoming a successful debater.
- **Measure the value of what is being said.** Pick out the key points of the speeches. Not everything said in a debate is important, so it is up to you, the debater, to identify the issues that need to be addressed.
- **Defer judgment.** One of the biggest mistakes debaters make is to start formulating their argument while the opponent is still speaking. Because you have researched the topic, it is easy to anticipate what might

be said in a round. However, your response must address the points presented in the round. Wait until the speaker is done to form the counterargument.

- **Check for understanding.** During the debate round, [cross-examination periods](#) provide the opportunity to question opponents regarding the information they have presented. This is the perfect situation to ask for clarification of the main ideas.



One mistake debaters make is to formulate arguments while their opponent is still speaking. Why is this a problem?

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- **Be an active listener.** An active listener is a person who is able to hear what is being said. Next, an active listener understands what is being said. This requires listening, evaluating, and comprehending. Finally, an active listener will be able to judge what has been said and apply it to the current situation. If you listen actively during a debate round, you will remember key points. If you listen actively while talking with friends, you will remember necessary information. Obviously, not every word you hear during the day or the debate round is important. An active listener is able to distinguish information that is important from the rest of what has been said.

Work on your listening skills every day. Improving listening skills will not only help you to be successful in the classroom or at a debate, but it also will help you to have a better understanding with friends, family, and people you interact with everyday.

You be the Judge



Ethics are the guiding principles of right and wrong. In debate there are specific dos and don'ts in

developing your argumentation strategy. This begins with moral and ethical conduct in preparation for and during your debate competitions.

First and foremost, respect the people with whom you debate. Demonstrating respect for your opponents as well as your team will improve your image among the judges. It also will help you build stronger relationships among your team members.

Muhammad Ali was one of the greatest prizefighters of all time. Before stepping into the ring, he would masterfully manipulate his opponent's emotions with harsh talk, fierce stares, and frightening facial expressions. While this may be appropriate or even expected in the prize fighting arena, it is absolutely forbidden in debate competition. You will always have the temptation to psyche your opponent out with a glare, a rolling of the eyes, or cross-talk with team members during an opponent's speech. However, this shows a lack of respect and can be viewed as a distraction tactic to disarm and throw off the person speaking.

Being respectful is not only ethical, it also is a reflection of good manners and proper etiquette. In practicing respect, your nonverbal presentation is as important as your verbal message.

What Would You Do?

You arrive at your first competition. The team has prepared and is ready to debate. When you enter the room, you notice the other team sizing you up. They start snickering, whispering, looking at your team, and then looking back at each other and bursting out into laughter. Their coach smiles, and shoots your coach a competitive glare. How should your team react?

Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking is another skill that will help you become an effective debater. Critical thinking is the ability to review information from many points of view. Being fair-minded is the spirit of critical thinking. This means being objective in your evaluation of each viewpoint and drawing conclusions only after you have studied each point presented. Remember that in debate you must be ready to argue from both the affirmative and negative viewpoint. Be ready to substantiate each of your claims with evidence, cite your sources, and make a strong case. You also must be able to analyze all points of what is being presented. Critical thinking means not taking information at face value, but analyzing and interpreting the information that has been presented.

Writing Skills

Writing also is an important element of communication. Debate will help you to refine your writing skills. You will have many opportunities to write about a variety of topics. Three main types of papers are written for debate. The positions stated in the papers are fact, value, and policy.

- **Papers of fact** When researching topics, you will need to be able to prove various positions. You may have to prove that something did or did not happen. An example of this would be the statement, “Television has affected the way we view our presidential candidates.” With research, facts can be found to support this. You could analyze the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates to confirm this statement.
- **Papers of value** The purpose of a paper of value is to show that one thing is better than another. When working with values, it is impossible to prove that one value is right and another value is wrong. However, it can be demonstrated or shown that one value is better than another.



Why is it important to have good writing skills?

- Take the statement, “All students should take four years of physical education.” Not everybody will agree with this. Some people may think that this requirement can be met through areas like marching band. Others might feel the time would be better used in an academic class. Reasons must clearly articulate why the reader should agree with the statement.
- **Papers of policy** A paper of policy suggests a change of the current situation or that action should be taken. An example of a statement of policy is “All high schools will require students to wear uniforms.” This is a call to action. The paper will have to clearly state the advantages or disadvantages of requiring uniforms. It should also state why the action should be taken. An example of a reason why the schools should require uniforms could be safety. Some urban school districts require students to wear uniforms because it identifies anybody not dressed in the same manner as a visitor to that school.

While these are three distinct types of papers, a good paper will combine all three styles to present a strong position. You should incorporate these three styles into your own personal writing methods.

In writing these papers you effectively are writing speeches. Therefore, the language you use will be very important as well. Remember to use a variety of sentence structures, from simple to compound sentences. It also helps to vary the cadence, or sound, of the speech. This also is an opportunity to improve and expand your vocabulary.

After writing your speech, always practice reading it aloud. Practice in front of a mirror. Pay attention to your facial expressions, your posture, the tone of your voice, and the rate and pitch of your speech. Not only will this help to point out any areas of weakness, but you also will be able to detect grammar and punctuation errors. It also will indicate whether or not the speech flows smoothly. You always want to move effortlessly from one point to the next. If possible, videotape yourself debating your propositions. Analyze your strengths and weaknesses. Be sure to time your speeches. There is no better way to learn than to review your performance.

Speaking Skills

Speaking in front of a group of people or even just a couple of people requires certain skills. It is especially important for debaters to have good speaking skills. Good speaking skills will help you to formulate and articulate your arguments and responses. Articulation, pronunciation, volume, rate, grammar, vocabulary, correct word usage, and gestures are all key elements to effective speaking. Developing each of these skills will help you with your presentations and give you confidence as a speaker as well.

Speaking skills can be thought of as building blocks. Each one is important on its own, but together they create a strong foundation. Take a closer look at each of the key elements, or individual skills, that make up effective speaking skills.

FYI



Three out of every four individuals have a fear of speaking in public. In a survey of the top ten things people feared most, the fear of public speaking was number one, ranking ahead of the fear of flying, fear of terrorism, and even the fear of death.

- **Articulation** Poor articulation is the result of being a lazy speaker. This is very easy to correct, but it does take a conscious effort on the part of the speaker. Proper *articulation* is saying each syllable in a word correctly. Take the words *going to*. Listen to other students in the hallway and you will hear some of them saying *gunna*. The problem isn't that they don't know how to pronounce it correctly. Those speakers simply are not taking the time to say each syllable. Poor articulation is not a problem in casual conversation. However, when you are trying to make an impression on a judge in a debate, it is important to have proper articulation.
- **Pronunciation** It is not enough to simply say each syllable correctly. You must know how to pronounce it correctly. *Pronunciation* refers to saying the word correctly. It has a direct affect on a speaker's credibility. It is difficult to persuade somebody that you know what you are talking about when you are mispronouncing names and words. Take a look at the following name: *Mackinac City*. Unless you are familiar with this particular city, it would be easy to mispronounce it. The correct pronunciation is *ma-ka-naw*. If a word is unfamiliar, look up the pronunciation in a dictionary or ask somebody who is familiar with the word. Never guess.
- **Vocalized pauses** The sounds you sometimes utter while speaking, such as *um*, *er*, and *uh*, are called *vocalized pauses*. The trick is to become aware of how frequently you do this while making a speech. Points often are deducted off your speech in class, or worse, in a formal debate where the number of points deducted can mean the difference between winning and losing.



Why is it important to impress a judge with good speaking skills?

- **Grammar** Always use good grammar when speaking in front of an audience. Using good grammar will help you create a positive first impression with your competitors, and, more importantly, with your judges. Once you have created a first impression, it will be difficult to change. Debates are considered formal speaking events, and, therefore, good grammar is required. While you should use good grammar in everyday speech as well, it is extremely important in debate competitions.
- **Volume** How loudly or softly you speak is the volume. You want the judge and your opponent to be able to hear everything you say. There are some factors relating to volume to consider when speaking. First of all, how big is the room? You would adjust your volume if you were speaking in an auditorium compared

to a classroom. You do not want to blast people out of the room with your voice, nor should they have to strain to hear you. People's body language will give you feedback about your volume.

- **Rate** How quickly or slowly you speak is the rate. The acceptable rate for delivery varies between the different types of debate. You should speak at a rate that makes it easy for the judge and opponent to understand what you are saying. Speaking too fast is a common problem. Taping practice rounds can help identify many of these problems as well as help to alleviate them.
- **Gestures** Movements of the hands, arms, and body that help to express and emphasize an idea or a point are gestures. Gestures can be effective during a debate because they can help you to illustrate the key points that you want the judge to remember or notice. Gestures should be used sparingly. You must be careful to not let a gesture become a habit. It will no longer be effective as a tool for emphasis. Instead, it will become a distraction. Practicing speeches aloud in front of a mirror can be an effective tool to monitor your nonverbal communication.
- **Vocabulary and correct word usage** Debate provides an excellent opportunity to expand your vocabulary. You will be required to read many different types of literature in the preparation of your cases. Record words you don't know. Look up the definition and the pronunciation of each word. Make sure you understand the meaning of the word and how it is used in the text. Then use the new word in your speeches. Become familiar with the word. By doing this for words you don't know, you will be able to enrich and increase your vocabulary skills.
- **Eye contact** It is important to have a connection with your audience. In the case of Lincoln-Douglas debate, the judge is your audience. Speak to him or her. You are trying to persuade the judge that your arguments are the best in the round. By making eye contact with the judge, you will be able to tell when he or she agrees with a point you have made. You also will be able to tell which points you will have to explain again. Eye contact is another speech skill you can work on when practicing in front of the mirror. The more you can look up during a speech, the better relationship you will develop with the judge.
 - **Poise** The way you handle yourself during the round is called *poise*. Being prepared will help with poise because it will make you feel confident. Do everything you can to be aware of and eliminate anything that might make you nervous or uncertain. Try to focus on your own sense of purpose.
Be confident by being prepared

Grooming and Appearance

The final area to discuss is grooming and appearance. Because debate is a formal event, it is important to dress for the occasion. You probably are familiar with the phrase "Dress for Success." This is critical in debate. Before you say your first word, you have made an impression on the judge. The style in which you dress, the way you walk into the room, and how you set up for the debate all tell the judge what kind of attitude you have about the event. It lets the judge know that you are serious about the debate.

What you wear and how you look should never distract from your performance. Shirts, pants, dresses, or jackets that are loud or flashy can be distracting. Clothing doesn't have to be expensive, but it should be clean and neat. Hair that is unbrushed or uncombed gives the impression that you didn't really prepare to appear in public. Your appearance should give the impression that, like every other aspect of your performance, you have put time and effort into your preparation. Your appearance should always show respect—for the judge, for your opponent, and, above all, for yourself and what you have to say.

Once the judge arrives in the room, the opponents can enter and set up for the debate. Take out your materials quietly and get them set up on the table. Take out your case, flow pad, pens, pencils, and stop watch. Once you are ready, quietly wait for the judge to start the round. The debate will begin when the judge identifies the competitors and their positions. Be patient. This is where your poise will be put to the test. Even though the actual round has not started, the judge has already begun to evaluate you.

By paying attention and practicing each of these skills, you will become the best speaker you can be. Being able to get your message across with ease is not only a debate skill, but a life skill as well. Pay attention to the small details and practice, practice, practice.



Why should your appearance always show respect for the judge and your opponent?