

READINGS # 5

CHAPTER NINE:

Introduction to Debate

While many of the skills ~~radio~~ debaters will need they already have, including basic reasoning skills and basic communication abilities, they will need to know the basic process of and components that make up a debate. Much of this information will help radio debaters understand what is happening during a debate, but a great deal of this information is also devoted to acquainting radio debaters with the skills they will need to present high quality debates to a listening audience and, secondarily, studio audiences who watch a debate being broadcast.

WHY DEBATE?

Debating can take time and effort. Millions of people have, through the years, found that it is more than worth it.

Debating is fun. You may debate with a partner and against others. You will make friends and meet lots of interesting new people. You will engage in thrilling contests and perhaps travel to other locations to stage debates.

Debating is a sport of the mind and voice. You compete using your brain and your voice. You have a chance to win and learn. Unlike some sports, where you need to be fast, tall, big or something else physical, debate is for everyone. You don't have to be book-smart or test-smart to be a good debater. If you feel you can learn and if you think you are clever, debate is for you.

You control debating. You get to speak, you get to pick the arguments, and you get to use your strategy. Instead of being told what to do, in debate you can create your own agenda and follow ideas and issues that interest you.

Debating creates the skills you need for success. Studies show that employers and others are looking for people with oral communication skills, and debate is based on developing oral communication skills. Studies also show that those with good oral communication skills are identified as "leaders" by others and get promoted faster on the job. Debating will help you succeed wherever your life may lead you long after this series of radio debates has concluded.

Debate can give you the power to change things. Some things need changing, and your voice can be a powerful instrument for change -- in your community, in your nation, in the world.

WHAT IS DEBATE?

Debate is about change. We are constantly engaged in a struggle to make our lives, our community, our country, our world, our future a better one.

A debate (Snider and Schnurer, 2000) should be defined as *an equitably structured communication event about some topic of interest with opposing advocates alternating before an opportunity is given for decision.*

Notice the components of this definition:

- A debate is equitably structured – all sides have the same opportunities to give speeches and express themselves.
- A debate is a communication event – those involved give speeches to express their ideas.
- A debate is about a topic – each debate has a subject that is the focus of the debate, such as “The death penalty should not be used as a criminal punishment.”
- A debate has opposing advocates – two (and at times perhaps three) different individuals or teams, and each is assigned to agree with a point of view or disagree with a point of view.
- A debate has alternating speeches – one side speaks and then the other side speaks in a sort of formal conversation.
- A debate has an opportunity for decision – at the end listeners or an audience is invited to agree with one side or the other, and often minds are changed by a debate.

Debate is that process which determines how change should come about. Debate attempts to justify changing the way we think and live. In the real world, debate occurs everyday on the floor of the legislatures of the world. Debate (although often less formal than the debates we will be having) occurs at the United Nations, the faculty meetings at a school, and at your dinner table. The procedures for these debates may differ, but the process is the same - discussion that resolves an issue that will determine whether change is good or bad. The United Nations debated whether or not the Iraq invasion of

Kuwait was good or bad; school faculty meetings debate school policies; you may recently have debated with your family about some domestic matter.

The debates we will attempt will "formalize" this debate process.

1. You will at times work with a partner. You and your partner form a "debate team". Sometimes you will have to be for the issue (the affirmative) and sometimes you will have to be against the issue (negative). In any instance, you will have plenty of time to get ready for the debate.
2. You will deliver speeches in a format that is unique to debate. The speeches are called constructives and rebuttals. Constructive speeches involve developing your ideas and presenting your case for the side of the topic you are on. Constructive speeches build what will become the main issues in the debate. Rebuttal speeches dispute these points, attacking opposing points and defending your points, while often indicating to the listeners why they should agree with your side of the topic. There are affirmative constructives and negative constructives. There are affirmative rebuttals and negative rebuttals.
3. The ways we learn how to debate may at first seem difficult. But once you take on the challenge, you will begin to understand its relationship to debating. The most difficult part of debate is the first few times, after that it gets easier and easier once you have learned more about it.
4. You will debate so that the radio listening audience will learn about the issue you are debating as well as the process of debate. This is your dual role – to discuss important issues and to show the listening audience what debating is and can be.
5. There are some basic customs associated with the debating process that you will learn. These include being respectful of your opponents, not attacking them personally, not ignoring their arguments, not falsifying facts and information and respecting the rights of intelligent people to disagree about issues.

WHAT IS DEBATE ALL ABOUT?

Many people do not have a clear idea of what to do in the first few debates. When unsure about procedures, one should not hesitate to ask others for help.

Eventually one becomes more comfortable debating and the nervousness will subside.

Because the debates will be recorded for later broadcast, speeches can be done over and over again until they are acceptable to you and the organizers. There is no need to be nervous because the radio audience will not hear your mistakes.

Explanation of the Topic

The purpose of the topic is to limit the debate. Arguments and issues that are not relevant to whether one would accept this topic as a statement are not relevant to the debate. When you are in school you study a specific subject, and similarly when you are in a debate you discuss a specific topic. The affirmative argues in favor of this topic and the negative argues against it.

Speech Order and Responsibilities

The constructive speeches are used to build the arguments that the affirmative and negative teams hope to win. The rebuttals are used to solidify the position taken by each team and to convey to the judge why he/she should vote for one team over the other.

The first affirmative speaker has the responsibility to present a case that falls under the current topic and is the basis for the debate that is to follow. The case should involve several important reasons why the listeners should agree with the topic being debated.

The second speaker is from the negative team. This speaker will argue against the case presented by the affirmative and will also introduce other issues that the negative team thinks are important. Notice the dual role of this speaker, to refute what has been said but also to introduce other issues into the debate that would justify not agreeing with the topic.

Depending on the format there will be additional speeches by each side, one after the other, until the end of the debate. Often a debate format has rebuttal speeches to end the debate. In these speeches the debaters summarize what has happened in the debate and try to persuade the audience that their arguments have been better and more important.

Cross examination is a period of time between the speeches that allows each speaker to ask the other questions in order to clarify arguments. These questions and answers should be quick and direct.

Questions may also come from the audience or from expert commentators watching the debate. Answer them quickly and directly in a way that enhances your ideas while at the same time being responsive to the question asked.

Let us look at one of the formats you may be involved in and explain what the responsibilities of each person in the debate would be. There are many possible formats; this is a common one that is used to demonstrate what happens in a debate.

Sixty minute two-on-two debate with audience and/commentary

EVENT	MINUTES	RESPONSIBILITIES
Introduction	1	A moderator introduces the program and the debaters
Background	1	A moderator gives the topic [Death penalty should be abolished] and some very brief background information
First affirmative speech	7	Speaker makes a basic case for abolishing the death penalty [1. Death penalty fails to deter crimes, 2. Death penalty is applied unfairly, 3. Death penalty justifies other forms of state violence]
Cross examination	2	An opposing debater asks short questions of the person who has just spoken, who answers the questions
First negative speech	8	Speaker refutes the three arguments of the

		affirmative and introduces two new arguments to support the death penalty [1. Those who are executed will never kill again, 2. Death penalty gives victims and survivors a sense of justice done]
Cross examination	2	An opposing debater asks short questions of the person who has just spoken, who answers the questions
Second affirmative speech	8	Speaker defends the original three arguments and answers the two new ones presented by the negative
Cross examination	2	An opposing debater asks short questions of the person who has just spoken, who answers the questions
Second negative speech	8	Speaker deals with the defense of the three original affirmative arguments and defends the two arguments introduced by the negative
Cross examination	2	An opposing debater asks short questions of the person who has just spoken, who answers the questions
Audience questions-statements, commentator	10	Audience members or others present ask questions of specific debaters or make short statements about what

		has been said in the debate
Negative rebuttal	4	Negative speaker summarizes the debate and gives reasons why listeners should agree with them
Affirmative rebuttal	5	Affirmative speaker summarizes the debate and gives reasons why listeners should agree with them

Judges

There are times when an audience watching the debate will be asked to vote for the team they think did the better job of debating. Even the listening audience at home may be asked to vote. Many debates, however, will have no formal judges and each person listening will make their own personal decision.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

John Meany and Kate Shuster, On that point: an introduction to parliamentary debating. New York: International Debate Education Association, 2003. Chapter One.

Alfred Snider and Maxwell Schnurer, Many sides: debate across the curriculum. New York: International Debate Education Association, 2000. Chapter One.

Alfred Snider, "Why debate?" Video lecture at Debate Central website [<http://debate.uvm.edu/watchnovicepolicyvideo.html>].