



## A SHORT GUIDE TO COMPETITIVE DEBATE FORMATS

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There are a lot of different competitive debating formats in the world. This can be confusing as one encounters an alphabet soup of names. I hope that this very short introduction can assist you in locating the format that is relevant to you.

Find the right format, and then go to the webpage at Debate Central to find the information you need – <http://debate.uvm.edu/learndebate.html>

First, select the level at which you hope to compete.

### **University level competition:**

- WUDC/BP World Universities Debating Championship
- NPDA/APDA American Parliamentary Debate, USA only
- Policy Debate CEDA, NDT, USA only
- Asians Format AUDC, NEAO, Asia only
- Australs Australasian format, Australasian only
- CUSID Canada only
- NFA Lincoln Douglas, USA only

### **High school level competition:**

- WSDC World Schools Debating Championship
- Karl Popper Debate IDEA
- Policy Debate, USA only
- Lincoln-Douglas Debate, USA only
- Public Forum Debate, USA only

Second, see which format you prefer, or find out what format your school participates in. A short description of each format is below.

## **UNIVERSITY LEVEL COMPETITION:**

### **WUDC/BP**

- Topics: New topic for each debate.
- Teams: Teams of 2, 4 teams in one debate, 2 proposition, 2 opposition, judges rank teams 1-4.
- Length: 60 minutes
- Preparation: 15 minutes before the debate, no electronic access, only talk to partner.
- Interaction: Points of information from one side to the other.
- Content: No quoted material, usually. Very few procedural or definitional arguments.
- Style: Faster than normal conversation, but accessible to all people.
- Events: Worlds, Euros, Asians, Pan Africans, US, etc.

### **NPDA/APDA**

- Topics: New topic for each debate. Topic more binding for NPDA than APDA.
- Teams: Teams of 2, 2 teams, proposition and opposition.
- Length: 45 minutes
- Preparation: 20-30 minutes open preparation.
- Interaction: Points of information.
- Content: No quoted material.
- Style: Some jargon, some procedural arguments,
- Events: NPDA tournaments, NPTE, APDA tournaments.

### **POLICY DEBATE**

- Topics: One topic for entire academic year.
- Teams: Teams of 2, 2 teams, affirmative and negative.
- Length: 2-2.5 hours.
- Preparation: Intense preparation during the entire year, extensive research. Ten minutes preparation time to be used by each team during the debate.
- Interaction: Cross examination
- Content: Lots of quoted material, lots of jargon, many procedural arguments, but very open to innovation if you can defend it.
- Style: Usually very rapid speaking.
- Events: NDT, CEDA tournaments.

### **ASIAN**

- Topics: Three topics before each debate, teams determine which to debate.
- Teams: Teams of 3, 2 teams, government and opposition.
- Length: About one hour.
- Preparation: 30 minutes.

- Interaction: Points of information.
- Content: No quoted material, usually.
- Style: A little faster than conversational, but understandable by all.
- Events: UADC

### **AUSTRALS**

- Topics: Three topics before each debate, teams determine which to debate.
- Teams: Teams of 3, 2 teams, proposition and opposition.
- Length: About one hour.
- Preparation: 30 minutes.
- Interaction: Points of information.
- Content: No quoted material, usually.
- Style: A little faster than conversational, but understandable by all.
- Events: Australian tournaments, Australasians.

### **CUSID**

- Topics: 30 minutes before the debate, but topic is very loosely interpreted.
- Teams: Teams of 2, 2 teams, government and opposition
- Length: Less than 60 minutes
- Preparation: Most preparation done before the tournament.
- Interaction: Points of information.
- Content: No quoted material, usually.
- Style: A little faster than conversation, but understandable by all.
- Events: CUSID tournaments.

### **NFA LD**

- Topics: One topic for the entire academic year. Mostly topics about policy issues.
- Teams: Teams of 1, two teams, affirmative and negative.
- Length: About 45 minutes.
- Preparation: Intense preparation and research during the year.
- Interaction: Cross examination.
- Content: Quoted material, prepared arguments.
- Style: Appeals to an audience of average intelligent citizens.
- Events: NFA tournaments.

### **High school level competition:**

#### **WSDC World Schools Debating Championship**

- Topics: Mix of prepared and extemporaneous topics.
- Teams: Teams of 3, two teams, affirmative/proposition and negative/opposition
- Length: One hour

- Preparation: Significant pre-tournament preparation for prepared motions, one hour preparation for extemporaneous motions with no outside help except for almanac and dictionary.
- Interaction: Points of information.
- Content: No quoted material, usually.
- Style: Faster than normal conversation, but understandable by all.
- Events: World Schools Debating Championship, Asian Schools Debating Championship, various tournaments.

### **Karl Popper Debate IDEA**

- Topics: Announced, usually one month in advance.
- Teams: Teams of 3, two teams, affirmative and negative.
- Length: 45 minutes
- Preparation: Significant preparation before the debate.
- Interaction: Cross examination.
- Content: Quoted material allowed, but must be able to document sources.
- Style: Accessible to all intelligent citizens.
- Events: IDEA Youth Forum, IDEA affiliated tournaments.

### **Policy Debate, USA only**

- Topics: On topic for the entire academic year, concerns question of government policy.
- Teams: Teams of 2, two teams, affirmative and negative
- Length: 90 minutes.
- Preparation: Significant preparation and research during the year. Eight minutes preparation time for each team to be used during the debate.
- Interaction: Cross examination.
- Content: Substantial quoted material, procedural arguments, considerable jargon.
- Style: Very fast delivery.
- Events: NFL tournaments, Tournament of Champions, NDCA championships.

### **Lincoln-Douglas Debate, USA only**

- Topics: Value topics announced in advance.
- Teams: Teams of 1, two teams, affirmative and negative.
- Length: 35 minutes.
- Preparation: Topics announced in advance. Three minutes preparation time for each side during the debate.
- Interaction: Cross examination.
- Content: Very little quoted material.
- Style: Accessible to all intelligent citizens.
- Events: NFL, ToC, NDCA.

### **Public Forum Debate, USA only**

- Topics: Announced in advance. Topics of current popular interest.
- Teams: Teams of 2, two teams, pro and con, sides determined by coin flip at beginning, loser of flip can decide to speak first or second.
- Length: 35 minutes.
- Preparation: Significant preparation before the debate, two minutes of preparation time for each team to use during the debate.
- Interaction: Crossfire, debaters take turns asking questions.
- Content: Some quoted material but debate should not be driven by it.
- Style: Accessible to all citizens.
- Events: NFL tournaments, ToC, NDCA.

For more information please go to Debate Central at <http://debate.uvm.edu/learndebate.html> and click on resources for the format you are interested in.

Formats are fluid and changing, thus some details given here may be different for different tournaments and organizations.

This is not a comprehensive survey, as many new debate formats are constantly being born. These, however, are the most common debate formats.

HAPPY DEBATING!

