



---

## Top Tip & Talking Point #6: Those little things that matter!

Let's be clear from the outset: no-one cares how students dress or do their hair or what accent they have. A student's gender, ethnicity or any disabilities are not relevant to the quality of their speaking. Not at all! None of these should be of relevance to anyone else and this competition is no exception. This is explicitly explained in the training which all judges receive and is laid out in our Equity Policy. Yet little things - which students can easily influence - can matter when it comes to selecting the very best team to go to the finals by ensuring that it is what you say and how you say it is all that matters!

- **Engaging with the audience** is absolutely crucial in ensuring that the presentation is a successful one. It can be a long event if there are as many as 8 teams. Those students, teachers, parents and ESU members watching have probably had a long day at school or work already, while the judges have to concentrate really hard for a sustained period of time. All those speaking should ensure that they have really good eye contact with all members of the audience, so cannot be reliant on a script or over-detailed notes. It is important to smile and show that students are pleased to be there. If appropriate, humour can really help to engage with those listening to speech after speech.
- **The Interaction between students** really matters. The way in which Chairperson and Speaker from one team interact with the Questioner from another school (and vice versa) should be courteous and pleasant. A warm smile and an openness to one another will go a long way to creating a positive, formal discussion between the Speaker and the Questioner. This will ensure that the audience learns even more about the topic.
- **Demeanour** is key. The attitude which a student has will impact on the audience. All students need to be friendly and positive with each other and with those watching. Even if the topic being addressed is a very serious or sensitive one, there is no reason for the Speaker to be hard on the audience! In particular, the approach of the Chairperson in running the whole event needs to be business-like, but it should still be cheery!
- **Dress and hairstyle** can be whatever students want it to be. The ESU does not mind whether school uniform or casual clothes are worn. It is worth ensuring that students are comfortable so as to avoid unconscious habits, such as brushing hair away from their face or rearranging clothing every few minutes, which can be very distracting!
- **Knowing when to sit or stand** is really important. This, of course, only applies to those students who are able to stand easily without discomfort. The Chairperson needs to stand for their introduction, having ensured that the Speaker and Questioner are comfortably seated. Having introduced the Speaker, the Chair then sits. If they need to give time warnings, they should do it discreetly from a seated position without interrupting the flow of the meeting. If the timing is flagrantly exceeded, they may have to stand. They then stand to introduce the Questioner and then sit. They should stand to control the questions from the audience since it is easier to control the length of the questions and the answers from that position. Having made sure that the Speaker sits at the end of the questions, the Chair then goes straight on into the summary and thanks standing up.
- The Speaker stands for their speech. During questions, they can either stand or sit for the questions but must stand to give the answer. The Speaker then sits for the closing remarks by the Chair. The Questioner stands to ask questions and continues to stand for the answer as this makes it easier to interrupt the Speaker with a follow-up or stop the Speaker trying to dominate the question time to have fewer questions to answer. At the end of the four minutes of questions the Questioner sits. Both should ensure that as well as addressing each other, they also look at the audience and speak clearly so their dialogue is audible to the whole room. This will avoid a private conversation between the two of them with the Questioner's back to the audience.



ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION  
discovering voices

---

It would be great to know what others think of this advice and what other points could appropriately be included. If you have any questions, then please do get in touch with me.

Best wishes.

Matthew Christmas  
Lead Organiser: ESU-Churchill Public Speaking Competition  
[matthew.christmas@esu.org](mailto:matthew.christmas@esu.org) / 0207 529 1587 (direct dial)