

ESU TEACHING RESOURCE



Skill Set Resource Sheets

Listening and Response

Debate provides a range of opportunities for students to engage with the ideas of others. This skill set represents the extent and efficacy of this engagement.

A persuasive speaker:

- Demonstrates attentive listening by engaging with the ideas of others
- Responds to others with precise analysis or questioning, supporting or challenging their ideas
- Uses good judgement to select and respond to the most important arguments in the debate

Rebuttal: First Steps

Rebuttal is a denial or counter-argument to someone else's argument. Students should be encouraged to begin their speeches with some rebuttal. This is their chance to confront their opponent, and weaken their argument.

For example: *'I have three arguments today. They are A, B and C. But first, I'm going to give some rebuttal. The previous speaker said X, but I disagree because...'*

Developing Rebuttal

When trying to think of effective rebuttal students can use the 'Not true, not important' method. This method encourages students to attack the logical substance of an argument, rather than taking pot-shots at examples, or simply making opposing assertions.

For example: This house would ban single-sex schools

'Proposition said that some people don't want to go to single sex schools because of their religion. This isn't true: proposition didn't explain any religious laws saying you must have mixed-sex education. Also, this isn't important because even if single-sex schools exist, those people can still choose to have mixed-sex education!'

Summary Speeches: First Steps

Students often think summary speeches are going to be easy, because according to the rules they can't offer any brand new material. However, giving a good summary speech is one of the hardest things to learn to do.

Summary speeches are often described as 'biased news reports': a summary speaker has to give the facts about what happened in the debate (and can't leave out good arguments made by other teams), but they should present this information in a way that shows that their team is winning.

To do this, summary speeches should:

- Group the arguments by theme. These can be phrased as questions, e.g. 'Is gambling





addictive?’ ‘Is it the government’s job to prevent people from harming themselves?’ ‘Does banning gambling really reduce choice?’

- Provide additional rebuttal in areas where it is needed, and respond to questions from the floor. As far as possible, this should be integrated into the theme.
For example: ‘*Is gambling addictive? We argued no. The proposition team said gambling was addictive because... My partner argued it wasn’t addictive because... Our argument was stronger because...*’

Points Of Information

What are they?

Most debating formats also allow students to make ‘points of information’, which can be offered during main speeches (but not during the summary speeches. They can be offered only by speakers from the other team (so not from team-mates, and not from the audience).

Points of information are short (under 10 seconds) statements or questions that should challenge the current speaker’s arguments.

How can they be offered?

Someone who wants to give a POI should stand up, and say ‘Point of information’, the speaker’s name or role, or occasionally ‘Madam’ or ‘Sir’. The current speaker can then either accept or decline that point of information. If declined, the person offering the point of information must sit down immediately without further comment. If accepted, the person offering the point of information can then give their point of information.

How should they be used?

Each speaker should take 1-3 points of information during their speech. Not taking any points of information is unfair on other teams. Taking too many points of information will damage the speaker’s planned speech.

Responding to Points Of Information

Many students find that points of information offer a thrilling opportunity to think on their feet and respond quickly and directly to critique. However, sometimes this can be quite nerve-wracking, or even intimidating. Fortunately, there are many methods we can use when responding to points of information which minimise any sense of panic, and maximise the efficacy of our response.

What to do

- Respond to the POI as directly as possible: students should listen carefully to identify the objection being made, and counter it either using a new argument or by referring their opponent back to arguments that have already been made
- Don’t let the POI derail the speech: students should try to return to their planned speech structure as quickly as possible
- If a student isn’t sure how to respond to a POI, they shouldn’t stop speaking completely. Instead, a common tactic is to say something like ‘I’ll deal with that point in a moment’





and continue with the speech as planned. This way, the speech can continue, and if a good response comes to mind, you can give it later on (and if not, at least the POI didn't ruin your speech)

Listening and Response Activity

I couldn't disagree more

Learning Objectives:

- Prompts students to think about points critically, and come up with effective responses
- Helps students come up with objections that they personally disagree with, but would be reasonably convincing to a general audience

Average time:

- 2-3 minutes per topic

Use with:

- All age groups; debating

Task:

Give participants a statement and ask them to give reasons why they disagree with you. Make the statements absolute, but difficult to disagree with (e.g. 'I believe that we should never hurt animals'; or 'I believe that lying is always wrong'; for older students, 'I believe that war is never justified').

Tip: Alternatively, go round in a circle with each participant saying why they disagree with the statement given by the previous participant, and then giving a new statement of their own.

Person 1:

'I couldn't disagree more because sometimes we need to hurt animals, e.g. when testing medicines. However, I do think that lying is always wrong.'

Person 2:

'I couldn't disagree more because lying is the right thing to do when alternative would put someone in danger or hurt their feelings. However, I do think that war is never justified.'

