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social**



# DEBATING GUIDE FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

TEACHING RESOURCE: PRIMARY & HIGH SCHOOL

**DEBATING**



*This resource has been produced by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia as part of a pilot for a broader suite of evidence based, peer-reviewed classroom resources for Australian students and teachers in the social sciences. Feedback and further inquiries are welcome via email: [info@socialsciences.org.au](mailto:info@socialsciences.org.au)*

## Acknowledgments

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This resource has been produced in consultation with Fellows of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, who are experts in related fields.

This school resource is produced at no cost to users and is fully funded by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. This booklet provides information for teachers to use debating as a teaching method in the classroom. This resource has been created by teachers and experienced expert debaters.

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

## Contact information

Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia Inc  
ABN: 59 957 839 703

3/95 Northbourne Ave Turner ACT 2612  
GPO Box 1956, Canberra, ACT 2601

(02) 6249 1788  
[info@socialsciences.org.au](mailto:info@socialsciences.org.au)  
[socialsciences.org.au](http://socialsciences.org.au)

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# DEBATING GUIDE FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

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## Introduction

This booklet provides teachers with a framework for debating in the classroom or as an extracurricular activity. Social science content is available from [seriouslysocial.org.au](https://seriouslysocial.org.au), presented in kits that provide a topic, key points for debate and weblinks for research and planning purposes. The information provided in debate brochures is peer reviewed and fact checked by experts in related fields.

Debating offers a teaching methodology that develops a range of valuable knowledge, skills and attributes including:

- Public speaking
- Critical thinking
- Communication skills
- Research skills
- Persuasion
- Confidence
- Empathy and understanding
- Time management
- Teamwork
- Civic engagement

Debating is an activity that provides individuals with transferable life skills, as they become more informed and engaged citizens.

## D.E.B.A.T.E. Preparation

The DEBATE acronym is a framework for student learning through debate. It provides a structure to teach students about the topic being debated, and a format for classroom management to prepare for the debating process. Here's a breakdown of each step:



### DISCUSSION

This step reminds students of prior learning relevant to the topic.

### ENGAGEMENT

Students engage in peer conversations, fostering curiosity and interest in the topic.

### BRAINSTORM

Encourages students to generate questions, promoting critical thinking and inquiry.

### ARRANGE

Students are grouped to prepare for the debate.

### TEACHER INSTRUCTION

Teachers provide instruction on how to prepare and plan for debate.

### EXPLORE & EVALUATE

Students conduct research and plan their arguments.

## Discussion

In a class discussion, students talk about the debate topic and share any relevant prior learning or life experiences. This helps them to enhance their existing knowledge and gain a deeper understanding. The following questions may assist to guide the discussion:

- How do you think [topic] connects to other things you've learned about?
- Can you explain [key concept within topic] in your own words?

## Engagement

To help students engage further with the debate topic, provide time for a class conversation that builds on prior learning discussions. A variety of suggestions are offered below to generate conversations, that allow for teacher adaptation to suit the topic, student age group and class learning needs. Any notes that are created during conversations are useful to be on display when students begin planning their debate speech.

### Think-Pair-Share

Students work in pairs to discuss the debate topic before participating in a class discussion led by the teacher.

To help keep groupings small, prior to moving to a whole class conversation, two pairs could join to make four, to expand their conversation about the debate topic.

### Fishbowl

Divide the class evenly, with an inside and outside circle of students all facing inwards. The inside circle discusses the debate topic, with the outside circle taking notes of any questions or new learning they hear during the discussion. After approximately 10 minutes of conversation, the teacher then invites the outside circle to share their observations.

### White Board Relay

Students line up in groups facing a white board. They take turns moving to the board, scribing any words or short statements that they associate with the debate topic. Once everybody has had at least one opportunity to contribute, a class conversation drawn from the board is facilitated by the teacher. Any words that are found to be unfamiliar to members of the class provide an opportunity to discuss the meaning in relation to the debate topic.

### Inner-Outer Circle

Form two circles—an inside and an outside circle. The inside circle faces the outside circle. Each person from the inside circle is paired with somebody from the outside circle. Pairs share thoughts, ideas and knowledge about the debate topic until instructed to stop, with the outside circle rotating to the next person to change partners. The teacher's role is to time keep and listen, determining how long to continue the rotations before moving into a whole class conversation about the debate topic.

### Guiding questions

Adapt the following open-ended questions to stimulate engaging conversations about the debate topic:

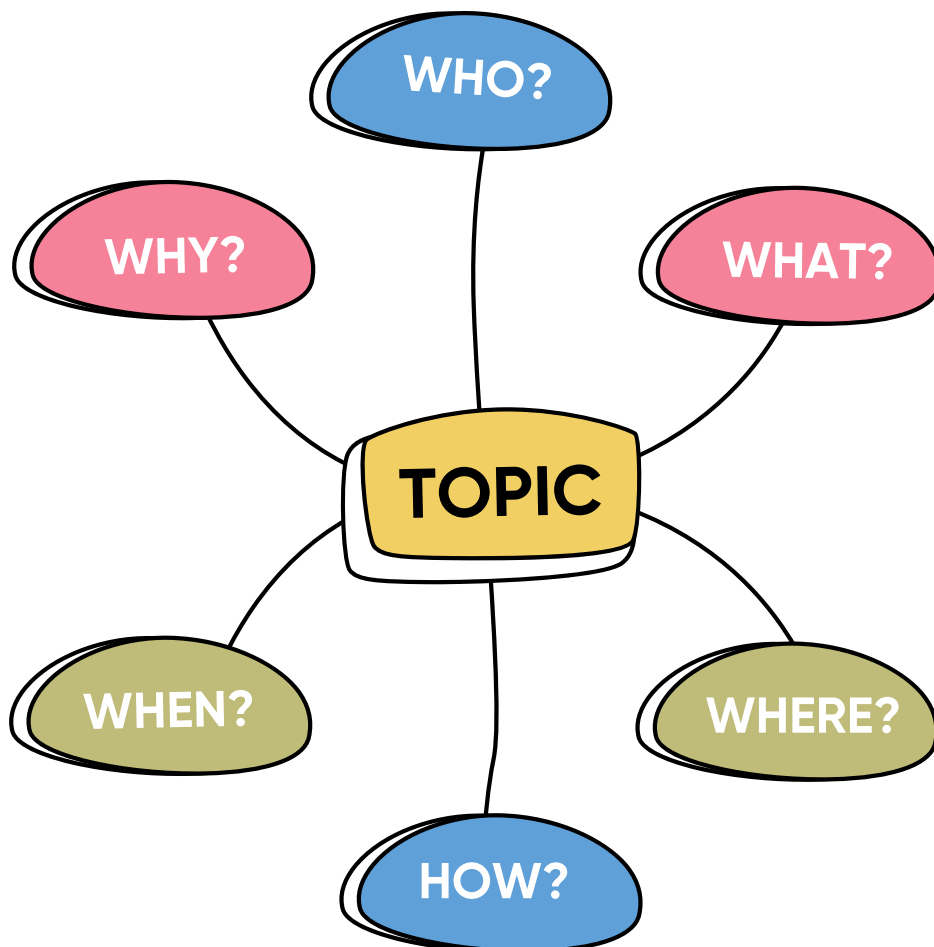
- *What do you already know or think you know about this topic?*
- *Why do you think this topic is important or relevant?*
- *How do you think this topic might impact your world or others?*
- *What challenges or controversies are associated with this topic?*
- *Have you seen this topic discussed elsewhere, such as in the news or on social media, and if so, what opinions were presented?*

## Brainstorm

The teacher facilitates a brainstorm session with students, where they are encouraged to generate questions about the topic, promoting critical thinking and inquiry. This can be done in pairs, small groups or as a whole class. A mind map would be useful, with who, what, where, when, why, how provided as starting points for the brainstorming session to generate questions about the topic.

It is helpful to write down the questions that students come up with during their brainstorming session. These notes can then be used during the planning session to guide further student research. It may be useful to write the questions on a board or large paper and display them for the whole class as they learn more about the topic.

The questions raised by students build on the initial discussion and engagement conversations about the debate topic.

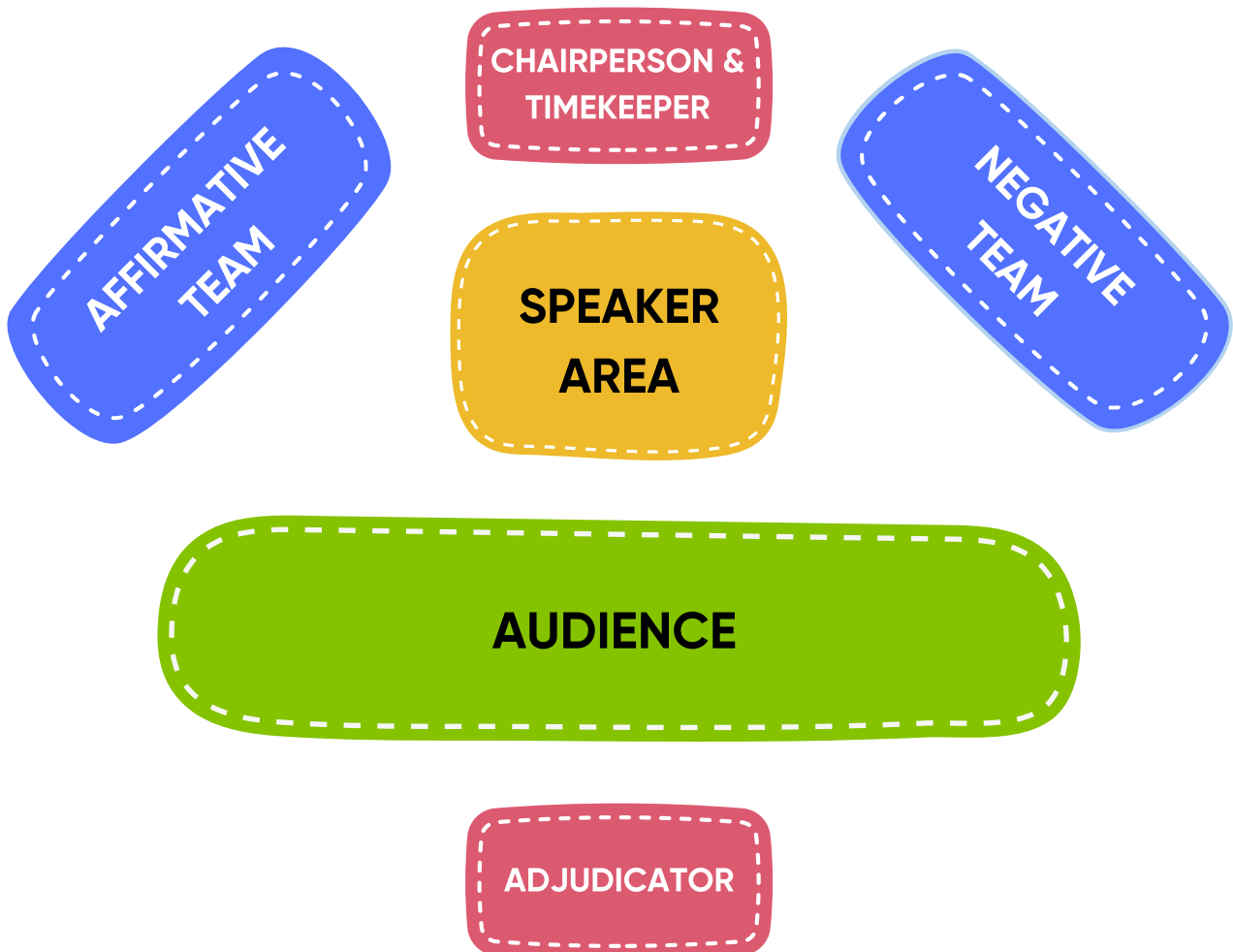


## Arrangement

To introduce debate, students can be positioned on opposite sides of the room and practice having a volunteer from the group lead with an argument, with a member from the opposing group presenting a counter argument.

### Room layout

A debate is set up as shown in the diagram below:





## Debating roles and responsibilities

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITY
<b>Chairperson</b>	Introduces teams
<b>Timekeeper</b>	Ensures debate speeches stay to the agreed time, signalling (such as a gesture, bell, or clap) when time is up.
<b>Adjudicator</b>	Listens carefully to both teams' arguments and observes their presentation style, delivery and teamwork. They pay attention to how well each team speaks and if they use good reasons to support their ideas. After the debate, the judge gives feedback to help the team consider their debating strengths and areas that they could improve. The adjudicator or an audience vote picks the winner of the debate. The audience would usually vote with a show of hands.
<b>First speaker affirmative</b>	The first person in the affirmative team starts the debate. They explain the topic, what their team thinks, and why. They talk about their main ideas and why these ideas matter. They also give a preview of the ideas and arguments the next speaker will talk about.
<b>First speaker negative</b>	The first speaker negative's job is to show why the first team's ideas are wrong. They rebut the first affirmative speaker's ideas and arguments and then present their own ideas and arguments.
<b>Second speaker affirmative</b>	The second speaker affirmative presents arguments (rebuttal) against the ideas from the first speaker negative. The second speaker affirmative then presents their ideas and arguments.
<b>Second speaker negative</b>	Second speaker negative has the same role as the second speaker affirmative.
<b>Third speaker affirmative</b>	The third speaker affirmative's job is to rebut the second negative speaker and to summarise the affirmative team's ideas. They remind the judges (or the audience) of the main points their team has made and why those points are strong.
<b>Third speaker negative</b>	The third speaker negative's job is the same as the third speaker affirmative.

## Teacher instruction

Once students have been assigned roles and responsibilities, teacher instruction is required to explain the debate sequence, judging and agreed norms for debating. Reference materials required are provided in this debating guide.

DEBATE SEQUENCE	ROLE RESPONSIBLE	DETAILS
1	Adjudicator or teacher	Explain to all participants and audience members that teamwork, respect for opponents, listening, and making strong, logical arguments are key to a good and friendly debate. The judge is to take notes throughout the debate to offer feedback to teams about their strengths and areas for improvement. A scoring assessment is provided in this debate booklet to assist. If the winner of the debate will be determined by the judge, scoring can take this into consideration. If the audience is to judge the winner of the debate, they are to be informed of this at the beginning of the session.
2	Chairperson	Announce the debate topic and introduce all speakers throughout the session.
3	Timekeeper (throughout the debate)	Start timing when each speaker begins. The timing for speakers is recommended as between two to seven minutes each. Use a clap, bell or another signal to warn speakers when they have 30 seconds left. At the end of their time, signal for them to stop.
4	First speaker affirmative	The first affirmative starts the debate.
5	First speaker negative	The first speaker negative responds.
6	Second speaker affirmative	The second speaker affirmative backs up what the first speaker affirmative said and presents arguments against ideas from the first speaker negative.
7	Second speaker negative	Second speaker negative backs up what the first speaker negative said and argues against ideas from the affirmative team.
8	Third speaker affirmative	The third speaker affirmative is the next and final speaker for the affirmative team.
9	Third speaker negative	The third speaker negative is the final speaker in the debate.
10	Adjudicator	Announces the winning team or invites the audience to vote to determine the winner. The judge then provides feedback to the speakers, either as part of a class discussion or individually.

## Judging guide

TOPIC	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA				100 POINTS
<b>Matter</b>	The strength, relevance and proof of the argument and rebuttal.				/40 points
	<p>10: beginning</p> <p>Little to no evidence provided for argument.</p>	<p>20: developing</p> <p>Evidence for arguments is provided with limited to no elaboration on details or reasons.</p>	<p>30: established</p> <p>Clear evidence and links to reasons for arguments.</p>	<p>40: exemplary</p> <p>Clear evidence and links to reasons for arguments. A range of relevant examples are included to reinforce message.</p>	
<b>Manner</b>	How well each speaker presents to engage the audience. Consider eye contact, body language, voice.				/40 points
	<p>5: beginning</p> <p>Limited to no use of body language, eye contact, variance in tone of voice.</p>	<p>10: developing</p> <p>Sporadic use of body language, eye contact and variance in tone and pace of voice.</p>	<p>15: established</p> <p>Consistent use of body language, eye contact and variance in tone and pace to engage the audience.</p>	<p>20: exemplary</p> <p>Body language, eye contact and variance in tone and pace to engage the audience, with any use of prompts accessed in a way that doesn't impact the presentation.</p>	
<b>Method</b>	The structure of and approach to the argument to ensure persuasiveness.				/20 points
	<p>5: beginning</p> <p>Topic and argument are presented in isolation to each other, missing relatable reference for the audience.</p>	<p>10: developing</p> <p>The speech addresses the topic and arguments, with missed opportunity to connect ideas together and relate these to the audience.</p>	<p>15: established</p> <p>The speech builds in a logical manner that presents the topic and arguments in a sequence that is easily understood, with some relatable content for the audience.</p>	<p>20: exemplary</p> <p>The speech builds in a logical manner that presents the topic and arguments in a sequence that is easily understood by the audience, with several relatable references.</p>	

# Rules for Debating



“  
MAINTAIN CALM AND  
RESPECTFUL BODY LANGUAGE  
AND TONE OF VOICE  
WHEN SPEAKING

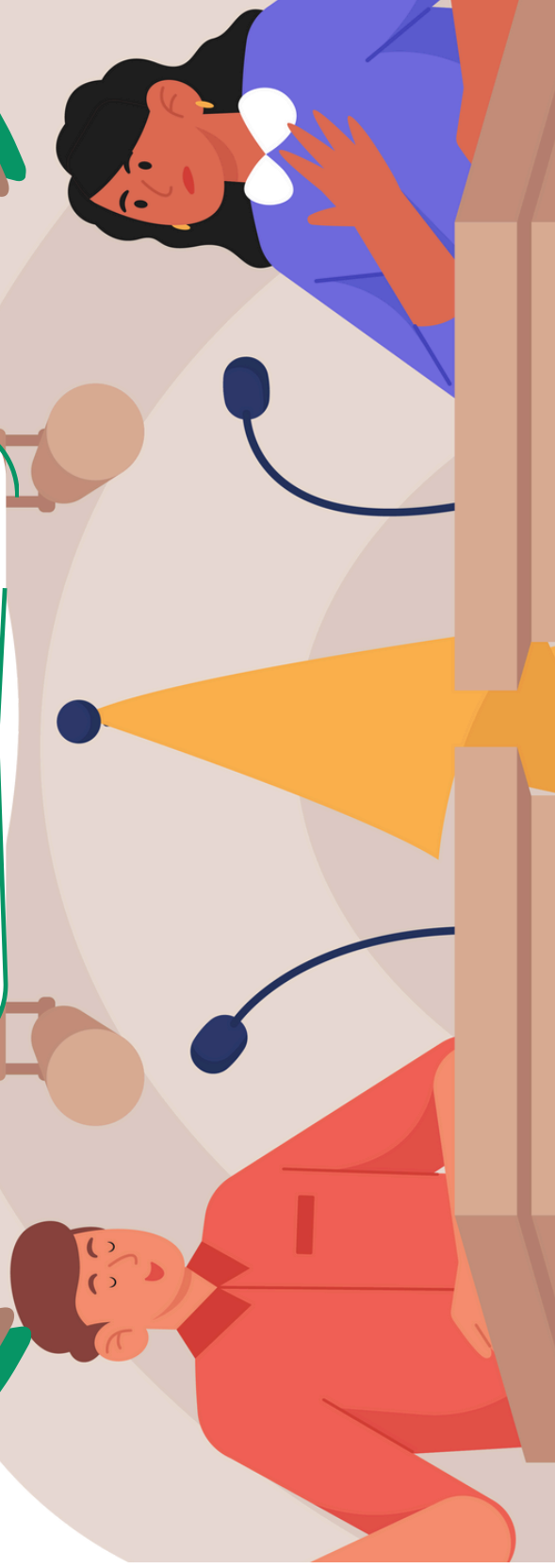
“  
ALL PEOPLE IN  
ATTENDANCE ARE TO  
MAINTAIN FOCUS ON  
THE ALLOTTED SPEAKER



JUDGING IS TO BE  
BASED ON AGREED  
ASSESSMENT  
CRITERIA

“  
DEBATE TOPICS, ARGUMENTS  
AND IDEAS, WHILE  
MAINTAINING RESPECT FOR  
ALL PEOPLE INVOLVED

SPEAKERS ARE TO  
KEEP TO ALLOTTED  
TIMES



## Explore and evaluate

Students will need time to explore and evaluate information for the debate. Seriously Social ([seriouslysocial.org.au](https://seriouslysocial.org.au)) provides debating kits that include topics, key points to consider and reference links to assist in this process.

During the initial discussion, engagement and brainstorming session, student conversations will help teachers assess students' understanding of the debate topic. This information will guide teachers in determining if further direct teaching about the debate topic is necessary.

Displaying documentation in the classroom from discussions, engagement conversations and brainstorming can serve as useful references for students as they plan for the debate.

Templates are available to help students gather information. These templates will guide students as they explore and evaluate information related to the debate topic.

Templates provided:

- **Team planner** - page 13
- **Speaker 1 planner** - page 14
- **Speaker 2 planner** - page 15
- **Speaker 3 planner** - page 16

## Team planner

**Speaker order:** 1. ....  
 2. ....  
 3. ....

**Debate topic:** .....

Speaker	Main ideas and arguments	Details
1		
2		
3		

Opposing team possible ideas	Our response

**Useful key words and phrases:**

## Speaker 1 planner

This template provides you with a guide to plan your debate speech. However, the sequence and order of the debate can be adapted in a way that best suits you, the topic and your ideas.

	SCRIPT
Opening introduction, e.g. 'Good afternoon everyone'	
Explain the debate topic and your team's interpretation of this.	
Explain your team's position—affirmative or negative.	
<p>Present your main argument for or against the topic and the reasons why. List any additional arguments that you will present.</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence</li> <li>• Examples</li> <li>• Stories that help back up your argument</li> <li>• Sentence starters or expressions</li> </ul>	
Conclude your speech by summarising the main points that you have made.	

## Speaker 2 planner

This template provides you with a guide to plan your debate speech. However, the sequence and order of the debate can be adapted in a way that best suits you, the topic and your ideas. The second speaker also needs to decide when to reinforce the first speaker's argument, introduce new ideas for the argument and challenge the ideas of the first speaker from the opposing team.

	SCRIPT
Opening introduction, e.g. 'Good afternoon everyone'	
Consider sentence starters or expressions that you can use for the rebuttal of the opposition first and second speakers' arguments.	
Reinforce the topic, your team's position and what the first speaker in your team has said, adding any more details or examples to strengthen the argument.	
<p>Present your main argument for or against the topic and the reasons why. List any additional arguments that you will present.</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence</li> <li>• Examples</li> <li>• Stories that help back up your argument</li> <li>• Sentence starters or expressions</li> </ul>	
Conclude your speech by summarising the main points that you have made.	



## Speaker 3 planner

This template provides you with a guide to plan your debate speech. However, the sequence and order of the debate can be adapted in a way that best suits you, the topic and your ideas. The third speaker needs to decide when to reinforce the first and second speakers' arguments, introduce new ideas for the argument and challenge the ideas of the first and second speaker from the opposing team.

	SCRIPT
Opening introduction, e.g. 'Good afternoon everyone'	
Consider sentence starters or expressions that you can use for the rebuttal of the opposition first and second speakers' arguments.	
Reinforce the topic, your team's position and what the first and second speaker in your team has said, adding any more details or examples to strengthen the argument.	
Present your main argument for or against the topic and the reasons why. List any additional arguments that you will present.  Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence</li> <li>• Examples</li> <li>• Stories that help back up your argument</li> <li>• Sentence starters or expressions</li> </ul>	
Conclude your speech with a summary of the main points that your team have made and the arguments against your opposition team's arguments.	

## Debating preparation skills

Prior to debating, consider and practise the following skills:

<b>Voice</b>	Speak in a calm and audible volume that is easy for the audience to hear.
<b>Body language</b>	Practise public speaking, thinking about your eye contact and body language. Recording yourself practising your speech through an online meeting app or having a friend or family members as a practice audience member can help.
<b>Analogies &amp; humour</b>	Are there opportunities for stories, personal experience or humour to help explain your ideas and argument while engaging the audience?
<b>Palm cards</b>	How well do you know your speech? Do you need palm cards? Can you manage with abbreviated notes so that you don't rely on reading the whole speech?
<b>Rebuttal preparation</b>	If you are the first negative or second or third speaker, tune in to your opposition team's speech, considering their ideas and how you will argue against these.



## Contacts for Australian debating organisations

ORGANISATION	WEB LINK
Australian Debating Federation	<a href="http://debating.org.au">debating.org.au</a>
ACT Debating Union	<a href="http://actdebatingunion.com">actdebatingunion.com</a>
Debaters Association of Victoria Inc	<a href="http://dav.com.au">dav.com.au</a>
New South Wales Debaters Union	<a href="http://nswdu.com">nswdu.com</a>
Queensland Debating Union Inc.	<a href="http://qdu.org.au">qdu.org.au</a>
South Australian Debating Association Inc.	<a href="http://sada.org.au">sada.org.au</a>
Western Australia Debating League Inc.	<a href="http://wادل.org">wادل.org</a>



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3/95 Northbourne Ave Turner ACT 2612  
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