

Griffith College Dublin
Schools Debating Competition

DEBATE TIPS

- Keep calm and speak slowly – even where your time is tight, a calm and controlled presentation focusing on your key points is much more persuasive than a panicked presentation that tries to cram too much in. Speak as slowly as you can – it will feel much slower to you than it will sound to the audience and the judges!
- Maintain eye contact with the people around the room, and especially the judges. If you have prepared a speech in full, it is tempting to read it out but this has a very bad effect on those listening. The best approach is to have bullet points only in front of you – they will help to focus your speech and guide you if you get lost.
- Swaying and fidgeting are very distracting to your audience – plant your feet firmly when you stand up to avoid swaying and hold something in your hands if you think you might fidget. Do not place your hands in your pockets!
- When opening your speech, greet your audience. A confident start will help to calm your nerves and create an immediately positive impression, rather than starting with ‘ummmm...’
- Place your strongest arguments first, in case you get side-tracked with rebuttal or points of information.
- Structure is very important – it can be helpful:
 - (i) to set out the key arguments that to plan to make;
 - (ii) expand each argument in turn; and
 - (iii) conclude by reminding the judges of your key points.

This not only ensures that the judges are clear on your points but also keeps you on track if you are nervous. Preparing for this format will also help to focus the mind and ensure you have separate and distinct points to make rather than conflating arguments.

- Don't just research your side of the argument – consider your opponent's side and try to anticipate what they will attack you with. If you are prepared for their arguments, you will not be easily wrong-footed and can be ready with points of information. However, don't rely exclusively on your pre-conceived notion of your opponent's arguments – you need to follow the flow of the debate!
- Remain confident of your arguments – do not retreat or back-track on points of information or rebuttal! You may be on a side of the motion that you disagree with but do not look for a neutral stance – argue your side to the best of your ability. Debate is argument not mediation!

- Read the news – using current issues to support an argument can be very impressive, especially if the other side have not picked up on it.
- Team position is important and it is advisable to put the debaters who are best at improvising towards the end to best deal with rebuttals. For rebuttals, you need to pin-point why the opposition’s point is wrong, find a team argument to support why they are wrong and elaborate. Each team mate should rebut the argument of the opponent who came directly before them, while those speaking towards the end have more scope to challenge the entire opposition argument.
- The first speaker should briefly introduce the team and, if possible, succinctly explain the main points of each speaker. The last speaker should sum up the team’s main arguments.
- You will need to both respond to points of information and make them yourself. Some debaters can be very eager when it comes to offering points of information – you don’t need to respond to all of them but you must respond to at least one, and preferably two or three. Making a strong point of information can impress judges but many don’t appreciate debaters popping up and down like a yo-yo with weak points. Make sure you offer points of information but only when you have a relevant point to make. The more research you do on your motion, the easier this will be!

Three essentials for your speech – you need all three for a good performance!

MATTER – what you say. Your argument needs to be logical and consistent.

MANNER – how you say it. Eye-contact, speaking slowly and not reading from notes are key here. Style is important and not everyone has the same strengths. If you are funny, use your skill (with appropriate jokes...! An inappropriate joke can lose a debate) If not, you can be convincing by being eloquent, concise, or eliciting an emotional response.

METHOD – the way you put everything together. Is your speech structured properly ie arguments in the right order? Do team arguments fit well together and in the correct order?