European Commission

YOUrope FOR Youth

#EUnarrative

TIPS & TRICKS FOR DEBATERS

Simple solutions to prepare and deliver a winning argument in a debate.

Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

BEFORE: FIND THOSE FACTS!

> **Research your argument**, look for facts, quotes and figures that back up your point of view.

> For any piece of evidence you find to support your case, try to find another one to **counter** it. This information will come in handy later on in your preparations.

> **Group facts into topic areas** to start to create some order to your research.

BEFORE: DECIDE WHAT MATTERS

> Set priorities and decide which are your **three ‘killer points’**.

> **Structure content** into a beginning middle and end, **with arguments** that flow on from one another.

> Prepare a **knockout finale**.

> **At the start** you can write up your speech in full to practice it, but for the debate itself **you should prepare cue cards**.

- These are small pieces of card/paper (**e.g. easy to handle A5 or A6 size**) with bullet points of your speech. They are easy to shuffle through if you get lost or flustered. Don’t forget to number the pages so you can always find your place!

> You can consider **using an appropriate, carefully chosen prop**, which could add some special effects and leave an impact on the audience.

BEFORE: SWITCH SIDES

> **Consider** the other side of the argument, using the evidence you gathered earlier.

> **Imagine** other points the opposition may raise and find facts to challenge them from your perspective.

> What will the other side use for their **three 'killer points'** – how can you challenge them?

> **See** if and how this research can reinforce your own arguments and give you new ones.

> **Update** your speech accordingly.

BEFORE: KEEP IT TIGHT

- If you run over your allotted time **the moderator will cut you off**, so you must practice your speech for length and timing.
- **Read your speech out loud** – but **don't just rush** through it at breakneck speed to cram in all your points within the given time. That won't work on the day – the audience won't be able to understand you and you risk overrunning anyway.
- **Keep trimming and perfecting your speech** until you cover all the essential points in the allotted time.
- **Don't forget to leave room for pauses**, which can be used for dramatic effect and to help points sink in.
- However slow you are going, **you can always slow down some more!**

BEFORE: DO IT YOUR WAY

> **Consider the style and tone of your delivery:**

- Watch other speakers online and decide what approach suits you best.
- Speak with passion and energy – If you sound bored, the audience will be bored.

> **Posture and body language is important too:**

- Stand up straight but don't be rigid or tense.
- You can use gestures, also as a way to emphasise points, but don't overdo it.
- If you are using any props, put them out of the way after use so you don't fiddle with them and distract the audience.
- Practice moving your head from side-to-side – **almost like a lighthouse** – to project and connect with the audience all around the room.

> **Once you are confident with the content**, try rehearsing in front of parents or friends to get used to speaking in front of an audience. **Beforehand**, say that you would like feedback on your performance and the content.

ON THE DAY: STAY RELAXED

- **Wear clothes you are comfortable in** – but don't dress too informally.
  You want the audience to listen to what you are saying, not focus on what you are wearing.
- **Avoid clothes that are too tight** or that make you sweat – you want to be cool as well as sound cool and look cool.
- **Don't chew gum.**
- **Remember to take your script of bullet points with you.**

ON THE DAY: FEEL THE VIBE

- It is important to **check out the room beforehand**.
- What are **the acoustics** like?
- **How loud** will you have to speak?
- Is there **a lectern** for speakers? **Try standing there** to get a feel of the room.
- **How easy** is it to make eye contact with everyone in the audience?
- Where will **you be sitting**? What about your opponents? Where will the moderator be seated?
- Check with the moderator **what timekeeping system** they will be using.

DURING: KEEP CALM

- When it **is your turn to speak**, stand up, **take a couple of slow deep breaths**, smile at the audience and do a quick mental runthrough of your three killer points and then start to speak.
- **If you lose your thread** when speaking, first of all stay calm. **Take a pause and a breath**, smile at the audience and calmly find your place again in the cuecards.
- **Remember**, you have practiced this and know the arguments, **you just need to clear your mind** of the stress and everything will come back to you, after all you are well prepared.
- There is no need to **get flustered or heated**, it is only a debate!

DURING: KEEP THEM WITH YOU

> **Create and build a connection** with the audience through good eye contact. Remember to use the **'lighthouse head'** moves you practiced earlier, moving your head from side-to-side to look at everyone around the room.

> **It is hard to monitor** how you are doing when you are actually in the middle of presenting, but try to check your delivery:

- Are you going too fast?
- How is your posture?
- Are you sounding passionate?
- Are the audience following you or are they distracted?

DURING: KEEP CALM

> **Slow it down!**

- Even experienced debaters can find themselves speaking too fast.
- Every so often take a moment to **breathe, smile, collect your thoughts, check your notes** and then start again at a slower pace.
- **If it feels painfully slow to you**, it is probably just about the right pace for the audience.

> When challenging the other side, **don’t resort to personal attacks** – challenge the argument not the person. It is nothing personal.

> **Have fun and enjoy yourself!**

AFTER: TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

- **Continue the debate** by discussing what you have heard with family and friends.
- **Keep up** your research.
- **Get involved** in other debates – or even organise your own!
- **Get active** – look out for and get involved in events and initiatives, either in your area or online.