## CHAPTER TWO: Debate Format

As students first beginning the activity of debate, something that I cannot stress more is that debate is a very organized and structured activity. Every debate that you have will follow the same speech times and format. Learning the structure of a debate can help you avoid feeling confused as you enter some of your first rounds at tournaments and practices!

As explained in the first chapter about a debate resolution, the format of a debate will center on an affirmative team defending that the resolution is a good idea through policy proposals, and the negative arguing the affirmative’s policy proposal is a bad idea. Pretty simple in the abstract, but obviously debate gets a lot more technical and nuanced than just that. Figure 1 is a general guide to how a collegiate policy debate is set up. I will go on to explain each part below the figure:

Figure 1. Debate Format

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| First Affirmative Constructive  **1AC** | First Negative Constructive  **1NC** | Second Affirmative Constructive  **2AC** | Second Negative Constructive  **2NC** | First Negative Rebuttal  **1NR** | First Affirmative Rebuttal  **1AR** | Second Negative Rebuttal  **2NR** | Second Affirmative Rebuttal  **2AR** |
|  | **Cross Ex**  3 Minutes | **Cross Ex**  3 Minutes | CONSTRUCTIVE SPEECHES  9 minutes each  **Cross Ex**  3 Minutes | **Cross Ex**  3 Minutes |  | REBUTTAL SPEECHES  6 Minutes each |  |

**Constructive Speeches: Debate’s “Building Blocks”**

The first thing you may notice looking at the picture above is that some of the speeches are color coded in green, and the others in blue. That is because in debate, we have two different types of speeches: constructives and rebuttals. The green coded speeches, constructives, are the first four speeches in debate. These speeches have the purpose that their name suggests – these speeches are where debaters *construct* their arguments. These four speeches will serve as the building blocks for the rest of the debate. Largely, constructive speeches are the only time new arguments can be made.

However, that does not necessarily mean that each constructive speech does the same thing (probably why this book has a chapter for each of these speeches!). It simply means that they all have the same speech time (9 minutes) and are serve a similar purpose in creating the pool of evidence and arguments that you have for the rest of the debate.

**Rebuttal Speeches**

Unlike constructive speeches, where debaters are creating their argumentative options for the rest of the debate, rebuttal speeches serve the role of refutation. As the debate evolves, and the “pool” of arguments have been introduced, rebuttal speeches aim to tailor a side’s strategy down and focus the debate.

In these speeches, a debater often works toward looking at the big picture. How do all the pieces of a debate connect? How best can a debater articulate why the judge should vote for their side, everything considered. While the constructive speeches aim to elucidate and respond to all of the minor details, rebuttals aim to expound on a debater’s offense in the debate while making sure to play enough “defense” on however their opponent hopes to win the debate. Often, rebuttals are compared to a narration of an argument, as they attempt to “spin the best story” for a debater’s side.

**Who Gives What Speech?**

Policy debate is a partner activity – meaning that the affirmative and negative team in a debate are both comprised of two debaters who split the speeches for their side. Each partner is expected to give both a constructive and a rebuttal speech for whichever side they are debating in that debate. The “norm” for how these are split up is that one partner will give the first constructive and first rebuttal, and the other partner will give the second constructive and second rebuttal. However, there is no hard and fast rule for following that order. Some teams choose a different set up for which constructive and rebuttal a debater in a partnership gives for strategic reasons.

Often, if you are responsible for the first constructive/rebuttal for one side of the debate, when you and your partner are on the other side, you will flip and give the second constructive and second rebuttal. Largely, this is because the debater giving second constructive and rebuttal has the job of controlling what occurs strategically in the debate. So, flipping who has control allows the partnership to split affirmative and negative preparation evenly. The 2A of a partnership would do most of the affirmative work, while the 2N does most of the negative work. Since debate does require a large effort outside of tournaments, most partnerships find that this eases the preparation burdens, and ensures that one partner becomes a relative expert in the affirmative areas of the topic, and the other does so for the negative. However, this does not mean that both partners should not have a handle on both sides of the debate. Remember, you are still giving speeches for both sides!

**Speaking Duties**

As mentioned above, while constructives and rebuttals have their overarching purposes of building arguments and refutation, each individual speech serves a specific purpose. While these speeches will be explained in further depth in their own chapters, Figure 3. Gives a first glance into what each speech attempts to do in a debate:

Figure 3. Speaking Duties.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| First Affirmative Constructive  **1AC** | First Negative Constructive  **1NC** | Second Affirmative Constructive  **2AC** | Second Negative Constructive  **2NC &**  First Negative Rebuttal **1NC**  **“THE BLOCK”** | First Affirmative Rebuttal  **1AR** | Second Negative Rebuttal  **2NR** | Second Affirmative Rebuttal  **2AR** |
| Presents a pre-written affirmative case (their advocacy) and provides advantages for voting for it. Usually, this case will present a policy proposal that fits under the resolution, and then outlines problems this proposal would solve. | Provides arguments to prove the advocacy is a “bad” idea, such as disadvantages, counterplans, kritiks or topicality. This speech is also largely pre-written. The 1NC is responsible for also answering the specific components of the affirmative case, called on-case arguments. | “Extends” their case, and answers any attacks made on the case. Also answers offensive reasons the negative provided for why the case is a bad idea, like disadvantages, kritiks, counterplans, or topicality. | As you can see, the affirmative team has the benefit of being able to speak both first and last in a debate. To overcome this advantage, the negative team speaks for two speeches in a row, which we call the negative block. We consider these speeches to be part of one larger speech, given by 2 different people. So, the partners will take the arguments introduced in the 1NC and split who extends which arguments. | Extends their case strategically. Sometimes choosing to only go extend one or two of their advantages to save more time. Also is required to refute any of the arguments extended into the negative block. | Chooses a strategy that they extended into the block and extends it here. The judge will only evaluate the arguments that are brought into this speech, so choose wisely! But, don’t go for everything. You don’t have enough time! | The 2AR has the opportunity to close the doors of the debate. They have the final say in what the judge hears about the round. They should use this speech to compare the parts of the affirmative case extended in the 1AR to whatever strategy the negative extended in the 2NR, and tie up loose ends/extend their best answers to the negative’s arguments |

**Cross Examination**

One of the most important aspects in debate is cross examination (aka cross ex, or cx) time. One of intercollegiate debate’s governing organizations is even named the Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA), which should show just how important this part of debate is. Cross-ex is the time after each constructive speech where the opposing side has the opportunity to ask questions regarding the speech that just occurred. While most judges are fine with open cross examination (where both partners of the opposing side ask questions and both partners on the recently given speeches’ side answer questions), it is usually expected that the partner who is speaking next on a team uses cross ex time to prepare their coming speech. So, cross ex questions should largely be asked by the partner who is not speaking next. In figure 2, I have outlined who would answer/ask each cross ex if Hallie (1A) and Siobhan (2A) were affirmative and Portia (1N) and Darius (2N) were negative:

Figure 2: Who answers/asks cross-ex questions.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1AC | CX of the 1AC | 1NC | CX of the 1NC | 2AC | CX of the 2AC | 2NC | CX of the 2NC |
| Given by Hallie | Questions by Darius | Given by Portia | Questions by Hallie | Given by Siobhan | Questions by Portia | Given by Darius | Questions by Siobhan |
|  | Answers by Hallie |  | Answers by Portia |  | Answers by Siobhan |  | Answers by Darius |

As you can see, when Portia is about to give the 1NC speech, Darius would ask the questions in the cross ex of the 1AC so that she can use those three minutes to make any last minute tweaks to the 1NC. Similarly, Hallie would ask Portia questions after the 1NC so that Siobhan could use that time to prepare her 2AC. Overall, each debater has the opportunity to “shine” in cross-ex, since everyone is the cross-examiner and cross-examinee at one point in the debate.

Jackie coaching advice for cross-ex time:

1. Don’t waste it! This is the one time where the judge sees YOU and how smart you are outside of a speech. Make sure you are using each of those three minutes to best articulate your case.
2. Don’t interrupt your partner! Nothing makes a judge cringe more than a debater who doesn’t trust their partner. Seriously, unless your partner is going to lose you the round with what they are saying in cross-ex, let them have their cross-ex time. Sharing is caring, you get your time later.
3. Be cordial! You are new to debate. The worst thing you could do as a new debater is to get in the habit of being rude to your opponents. Nicer debaters are often much more respected and liked by judges. It’s a lot more fun from a judging perspective to vote for a team when they are likable!
4. Be prepared! Nothing will gain you more speaker points in a debate than sounding like you know what you are talking about. Know your case! Know your opponents side as well. Be prepared to “wax eloquently” and you will gain a lot of credibility in the eyes of your judge.

**Preparation Time**

Something that I did not list on figure 1 is the preparation time (“prep time”) that each side has for the debate. In college debate, each side is allotted 10 minutes of time to prepare. You can use this in between any speech, before cross-ex, etc. It sounds like a lot of time now, but trust me – in debate you will wish you had twice as much prep time. Use it wisely!