



# WESTERN AUSTRALIAN DEBATING LEAGUE INCORPORATED

## DEBATING HANDBOOK



*The Western Australian Debating League aspires to ensure all students have meaningful access to debating that encourages critical thinking, fosters engagement with global issues, and equips students with lifelong skills and the confidence to pursue their potential. WADL aims to do this by ensuring all Western Australian school students have access to challenging debating competitions, high quality resources, and purpose-built development opportunities.*

## About this resource

WADL cares deeply about accessibility and making sure every student has access to resources, feedback, and advice on how to debate.

This handbook covers:

1. Introduction to debating
  - a. Timings and room set-up
  - b. Speaker role and responsibilities
2. Interpreting motions
  - a. Normative vs empirical topics
  - b. Models and burden
3. Case construction
  - a. Prep time
  - b. Case splits
4. Impromptu debating
5. Speech-writing
  - a. How to make a point
  - b. Characterisation and grounding
6. Structure
  - a. Signposting
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7. Principles
8. Mechanisms
9. Stakeholders and actors
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11. Whipping and summarising
12. Points of information (POIs)
13. Manner
14. Debating language
15. Marking of debates

## Other resources

We have a Youtube channel with a variety of example debates and helpful videos. WADL also offers a series of debating seminars, internal school competitions, and workshops which can help upskill debaters. A coaching list is also available each year.

## Need help?

If you have any questions please email:

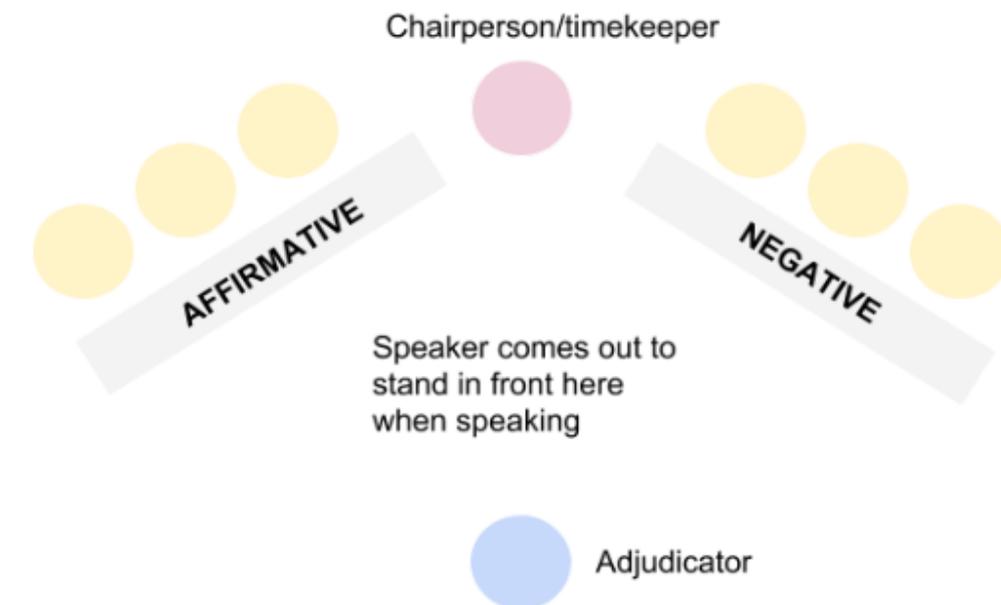
Our Chief Operating Officer at [coo@wادل.org](mailto:coo@wادل.org).

## Basics of debating

### What is a debate?

A debate comprises two teams that each take opposite sides of an argument. In a debate you will receive a topic that is written as a statement. One team will agree with the statement- this team is called the affirmative. The other team will argue against the statement and is called the negative team.

### What does a debate look like?



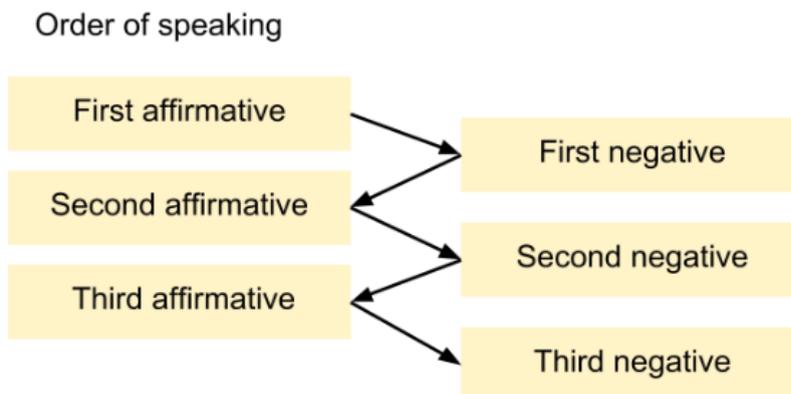
-  Chairperson/timekeeper reads out a sheet which introduces each speaker and keeps time (ringing a bell at certain intervals)
-  Adjudicator judges the debate
-  Speakers - the affirmative team should sit on the right of the chairperson/left of the room. At the bench, third speakers often sit in the middle so rebuttal can be passed around.

**Speech times:**

Novice (Years 7-8)	4 minutes, warning bell at 3
Junior (Years 9-10)	5 minutes, warning bell at 4
Senior (Years 11-12)	7 minutes, warning bells at 1 and 6

**Timing**

There will be a single bell 1 minute before your speech ends to let you know where you are. This is NOT your ending bell- you don't have to panic or stop abruptly! Make sure you take advantage of your time and try to speak to the double bell. When the double bell rings, wrap up your speech and end on a strong note.

**Who speaks when?****Speakers**

In debating, we have three speakers on each team. Each has a distinct and important role. Every speaker is capable of impacting the debate- there is no "irrelevant" position or a "least important" position!

**First speakers** establish the grounds on which the debate is going to be fought, outline their team's case, and present the most important points.

**Second speakers** move the debate forward by developing analysis of existing arguments, rebutting arguments, and introducing new lines of argument.

**Third speakers** show why your team has won throughout the debate and can overcome every point the opposition may have to offer.

## Role responsibilities

<p><b>1ST AFFIRMATIVE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define the topic</li> <li>• Set up the debate (where does it take place, what's the context/problem?)</li> <li>• Explain your team's model'</li> <li>• Outline whole team's arguments</li> <li>• Present 3 points</li> </ul>	<p><b>1ST NEGATIVE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenge the affirmative definition or present a counter-model if necessary</li> <li>• Set up the negative case (where does it take place, what's the context/problem?)</li> <li>• Outline whole team's arguments</li> <li>• Present 3 points</li> <li>• Rebuttal</li> </ul>
<p><b>2ND AFFIRMATIVE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebuttal</li> <li>• Present 1-2 points</li> </ul>	<p><b>2ND NEGATIVE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebuttal</li> <li>• Present 1-2 points</li> </ul>
<p><b>3RD AFFIRMATIVE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebuttal</li> <li>• Focus on main 3 issues that have come up in the debate</li> <li>• Remind us of your team's material</li> <li>• Don't add new material</li> </ul>	<p><b>3RD NEGATIVE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebuttal</li> <li>• Focus on main 3 issues that have come up in the debate</li> <li>• Remind us of your team's material</li> <li>• Don't new material</li> </ul>

## Interpreting motions

	<b>Normative</b>	<b>Empirical</b>
<b>Are:</b>	Debates that propose a change or action	Debates that make a value judgement and decide if something is good or bad
<b>Examples:</b>	<i>This house would ban alcohol This house would introduce quotas for women in Parliament</i>	<i>This house regrets Valentine's Day This house believes that the war on drugs did more harm than good</i>
<b>Require:</b>	A model to explain how change occurs and set-up the debate	A set-up of a "world with" and a "world without"

## Models

A model is required in normative debates to give an explanation of how your solution will look in the real world. It sets out the boundaries of the debate so that teams are on the same page when arguing about the implications of a policy. Establish specifics!

e.g. *That we should tax sugary food*

Affirmative: "Our model is that the Australian government places a tax rate of 30% on foods with high sugar content like cakes and sweets then spends that tax money on healthy eating public campaigns."

### Countermodels

The affirmative usually proposes a model which is different to what is happening in the status quo. The negative can present a "countermodel" or simply argue for the status quo. You do not absolutely need to have a countermodel! Often, the negative team just argues for the status quo. If introducing a countermodel, it must be mutually exclusive to the affirmative model (this means you can't have both things.)

### Worlds

A discussion of worlds is good in every debate, but especially in empirical debates as we weigh up whether things are good or bad.

e.g. *This house believes that we should regret Valentine's Day*

Affirmative: "In a world with Valentine's Day, single people feel bad about themselves and couples care more about money than love. In a world without Valentine's Day, your worth doesn't depend on being in a relationship and couples have to always put effort in every day."

### Burden

Burden refers to the responsibility of each team in the debate. Teams should try and fulfil their burden by being confident in their case and unafraid to disagree with the opposition. If a team is too soft, it makes it hard to have a debate.

e.g. *This house would ban fast food*

An affirmative team who says they would not ban fast food but instead phase it out slowly is not fulfilling their burden in the debate. It also undermines their ability to argue persuasively, because if they argue that fast food is unhealthy, it doesn't make sense to allow people to consume it.

What does the topic require teams to prove?

Normative	Empirical
Aff must prove their model will work. Neg must prove the aff model doesn't work or doesn't solve the problem.	Aff must prove a world with x provides more harm than good, neg must prove the world is actually better with x.

## **Case construction**

Case construction is the process of putting together your points and arguments for the debate. It involves brainstorming ideas, crafting them into arguments, prioritising these points, and then allocating them to different speakers.

Consider:

- Do you know what all the words in the topic mean?
- Have you double checked you're preparing the right side of the debate?
- If you're affirmative, do you need a definition or model?
- Where is the debate taking place? What is the problem?
- Is there recent context or good examples that you can talk about?
- Who matters in this debate? Who is harmed? Who will benefit?
- What are the consequences?

### **Prep time**

5 mins - Silent prep as individuals

5 mins - Share ideas with each other

5 mins - Choose and order points

10 mins - Step out arguments

20 mins - Write speeches

5 mins - Ask "what do we do to win?"

5 mins - Think of POIs (if necessary)

### **Case split**

A case split is just outlining which points each speaker should present. The most important points should always go to first speakers, who generally have 3 points while second speakers have 1 or 2.

Case splits are usually drafted like this:

1ST SPEAKER:

Set-up

1.1. Principle

1.2. Point

1.3. Point

2ND SPEAKER:

2.1. Point

2.2. Point

**Set-up**

The first speaker on each team should spend some time doing set-up. This includes any definitions, models or counter-models, as well as a discussion of what your team believes is the problem. In set-up, debaters often choose to ask “what are we talking about?” and explain to the adjudicator how something works, who is affected, or what the world looks like.

**Counterfactuals and the comparative**

Sometimes in debating, advanced speakers may like to use the words “counterfactual” or “comparative.” This just means the alternative! It is always good to discuss the alternative world in debates. For example, in a debate about banning alcohol, the negative may wish to argue the comparative is that people buy drinks on the black market instead of in a safely licensed venue.

**Impromptu debating****What is impromptu?**

Impromptu debating is where teams have an hour to prepare without access to technology instead of two weeks leading up to the debate. WADL staff check in regularly with teams to ensure that they understand the topic and provide assistance if necessary. This is a fun and exciting format which challenges students while teaching them crucial skills. Impromptu is about trying your best and believing in yourself!

Impromptu also introduces points of information (POIs).

**How many rounds are impromptu?**

WADL runs the SDC as having 2 prepared rounds for Junior and Senior divisions before going into the impromptu rounds. All of the SDC is prepared for novices.

**Is impromptu only in SDC?**

WA debating features a lot of impromptu opportunities! Our British Parliamentary competition is impromptu and sees students from Year 7-12 engage with enthusiasm. State team trials and squad training is also impromptu, as is the National Schools Debating Championship.

**How long is prep?**

Prep time for impromptu is 60 minutes.

**Who is allowed in the prep room?**

Four members of the team are allowed in the prep room.

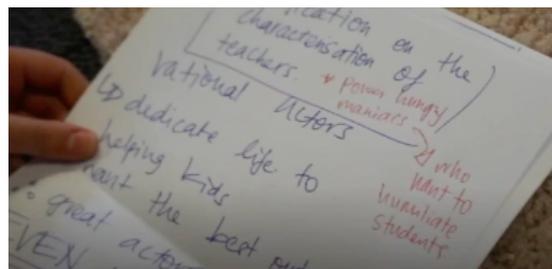
**How many students may sit at the bench?**

Only three students are allowed to sit up at the bench during the debate.

## Note-taking for impromptu

Because you only have an hour to prepare, it's recommended you don't try to write out pages of long paragraphs of text. That would be difficult!

Impromptu debating is also about training yourself to speak on your feet. This is something you already do anyway each time you rebut!



Instead, try to make your notes easy to read with lots of white space.

A good plan is to use:

- Big headings
- Dot-points
- Questions
- Lists
- Boxes and tables
- Arrows
- Colour and highlighters

## When do I use palm cards vs paper?

This is the age-old debate! It is totally up to the individual debater and what you prefer.

Palm cards are great for written-out speeches because they allow for smooth intervals of eye contact with the audience. If you start reading out a page with long paragraphs you may easily lose your place! This is why we recommend palm cards to novices.

Paper is often best for impromptu speeches as it gives freedom for arrows, dot points, etc. and trains the speaker to talk on their feet more and in a natural way.

## Speech writing

### Introductions and conclusions

In debating, it's important to make the audience sit up and listen. You can do this by writing a great introduction and conclusion! You don't need to bother introducing yourself or your speaking position because the chairperson will already do that.

Instead, try something like a rhetorical question or painting a picture for the audience. First speakers usually open by describing the problem in descriptive detail to make the audience care about the issue. Second speakers may try responsive introductions which criticise the characterisation laid out by the opposition or introduce the audience to a new point of consideration they will discuss in their speech. Third speakers may redirect the adjudicator to the most important thing to consider in the debate, or describe two worlds then ask the audience which one they would rather live in. (Hint: it should be in yours rather than the opposition's!)

## Writing a point

It's always important to explain things in debating. Make sure to step out your points as much as you can so the adjudicator understands your great arguments!

Ask questions in your speech such as:

- What is currently happening?
- What does this look like?
- Why is this the case?
- Why should we care?

For each point/paragraph, WADL highly recommends the PREP structure:

**P** - Say what your **point** is

**R** - Give **reasons** why it's true and important

**E** - Provide **evidence**

**P** - Say what you've **proved**

### For example:

"My second point is that banning alcohol will create a black market. This is true because people will still be tempted to drink due to habit, addiction, or because their friends are. Making alcohol illegal doesn't stop people from wanting it. Now, because people cannot access drinks in a licensed bar, they will make it themselves or seek out dodgy sellers. This will create a black market to meet demand. For example, when the USA banned alcohol in the 1920s, people went to underground speakeasies and made moonshine in their bathtubs. This is important because the government now cannot make sure the drinks are safe. Therefore, I've proved banning alcohol will not help people who are addicted and just creates more unsafe ways of accessing it."

## Statistics

In debating, statistics aren't considered an argument by themselves. They're great to back up your points, but don't rely on them to make a point for you! (And remember, in impromptu debating we don't have access to the Internet.)

## Personal anecdotes

In debating, personal examples are kind of a no-no. This is for a few reasons:

1. It doesn't prove anything just because it happened to somebody you know. Besides, the adjudicator doesn't know if it really happened!
2. It's a bit awkward to listen to. The audience will feel uncomfortable hearing about personal details. You don't have to reveal anything about yourself!

## Characterising and grounding

Painting a picture is really important when giving a speech. It helps adjudicators immensely when debaters describe how things actually look like, how people make decisions, what it feels like to be in a certain situation, or what the debate looks like in the real world with real people.

Bad ways to give examples	Good ways to ground
<p>"My grandma fell over..."            "I hurt my foot last week..."            "My friend Phoebe said..."            "I once failed a math test..."            "For Christmas I got..."</p>	<p>"For example..."            "What this looks like is..."            "Imagine you're a single mum..."            "Last year, the Australian parliament discussed the policy..."            "Teachers are people who care about helping others..."            "If you were failing maths..."            "Being yelled at feels scary..."</p>

Consider:

- Do you have examples?
- Are you painting a picture?
- If the adjudicator didn't know anything about what things like social media, the international justice system, or what highschool is like, are they able to understand after hearing your speech?

## Structure

### What is method?

It is really important to help the adjudicator and audience follow your speech. "Method" is a factor in the way speeches are marked and simply refers to structure. Using structure such as signposting can ensure that your speech is clear and easy to understand!

### Signposting

This is when you say where you are in your speech- just like a signpost when you're driving on a road! This should be the bread and butter for your writing. Tell the room when you're about to do rebuttal, when you're moving onto your points, what your point is, and when you're at your next point. This makes your speech easy to follow.

e.g. "Now for my first point, why principally we should trust parents..."

e.g. "Before I begin, I'm going to rebut the opposition."

e.g. "My second point is that smoking causes health issues."

## **Substructure**

This is further dividing up your points to step out your argument, ensuring you have structure within each point. It looks very persuasive and strengthens your case!

e.g. "There are two reasons why we should trust parents. First..."

## **Principles**

A principle is a moral reason for doing something regardless of outcomes. It is almost always presented as the first point of the first speaker's speech.

If I said murder is bad, I could argue that this is because you are likely to go to prison. However, I could first principally say that murder is bad regardless of whether I get caught or not because taking away somebody's life is a terrible act.

A good tip for thinking about principles is to think of them as rights and responsibilities.

You might have thought along the lines of this before:

e.g. Everybody should be allowed freedom of speech

e.g. Parents have a right to make decisions for their children

e.g. Nations have the right to conduct their own affairs

e.g. The government has responsibility to protect citizens from harm

These are all great principles!

If you're stuck for a principle, consider:

- Is there a certain right we can stand by? Is a right being under attack?
- Does somebody have a responsibility here?

Common principles:

- Freedom of speech
- Right to information
- Bodily autonomy
- Role of government
- Parental responsibility
- Consent
- Freedom of religion
- Sovereignty
- Right to life
- Right to privacy
- Representative democracy

In debating, debates ideally would have a natural principle clash between teams.

For example:

	<b>Common aff principle</b>	<b>Common neg principle</b>
<i>That we should legalise all drugs</i>	Bodily autonomy (right to do what you want with your body)	Responsibility of the government to protect its people from harm
<i>That the West should not intervene in overseas conflicts</i>	Sovereignty (a country's right to rule itself)	International responsibility to protect
<i>That we should ban anti-vaccination campaigners from speaking in the media</i>	Responsibility of the government to protect its people from harm	Freedom of speech

Your principle doesn't have to sound the most philosophical or impressive, it's just great to have a go!

### **Practical points**

In contrast to principle points, practical points focus on outcomes. These are the majority of the points teams will present in a debate. Practical material considers harms and benefits, real world applications and implications, mechanisms, effects, and so on.

### **Mechanisms**

Mechanisms explain how change occurs. In a debate we discuss:

Problem → Mechanism → Outcome

This should be a set of steps in which you set out how something will happen. In debating, you never want to jump suddenly from A to C. You can think of describing your mechanisms like writing a recipe! In a recipe, you go from step to step performing actions which leads to a final result.

If you are going to say big things will happen like a lot of people will die or the economy will suffer, make sure you explain to the adjudicator how this will actually happen.

e.g. *This house would ban cigarettes*

"Our mechanism is that we get less people smoking because we make it illegal. This means you cannot easily buy cigarettes, shops cannot sell them, and most people don't go searching for them because they are afraid of getting caught by the police."

## Mechanism debates

In a mechanism debate, teams may agree on the problem or ideal outcome but disagree on what to do about it or how to get there.

For example:

<i>This house believes that we should not use scientific data which has been collected unethically throughout history</i>	Both teams agree that the problem of the collection of data through torture is bad, but disagree on what we should do with it now that we have it.
<i>This house believes that we should have quotas for women in Parliament</i>	Both teams agree that the outcome of women having a voice in politics is good, but disagree on how we should encourage that.

The negative can agree that there is a problem and that pursuing a certain goal is good, but suggest the proposed model could make things worse, not be the best solution, create new problems, etc.

This is important to remember in social justice debates. WADL will never require you to defend racism, sexism, or bigotry, or anything that will make you uncomfortable.

## Stakeholders

Debating is always about people. "Stakeholders" are what we call people who we might consider in the debate. Discussing who is affected helps you think of material and allows the adjudicator to be persuaded by your material, especially if you do a good job of explaining the types of people who may be helped or harmed, and why we should care about them.

### Examples of stakeholders:

- \* Students
- \* Politicians
- \* Disabled people
- \* Women
- \* Indigenous Australians
- \* Less wealthy people
- \* Parents
- \* Children
- \* The elderly

You can even break stakeholders down even more. For example, with students you might consider: high-achievers, struggling students, students with private tutors, students with learning disabilities, those from low income families, students who are good at maths, students who hate exams, students who love sport...

## **Actors**

Actors are people who make decisions. In debating, we often argue about who is good at making decisions and who is incapable or cannot be trusted. Actors can be people, groups, or institutions.

This may include:

- Individuals
- Governments
- Schools
- Students
- Experts
- Etc...

In debating, we like to consider why we give people certain rights or responsibilities.

For example:

Why government is a good actor	Why government is a bad actor	Why parents are a good actor	Why parents are a bad actor
Has duty to protect citizens, popularly elected, we trust them, will be voted out if they do something wrong	Does not know about each person's life in great detail, cares about being in power	Older, wise, experienced, understand consequences kids may not see	Might not understand their child, habit to feel protective and want to take charge

## **Rebuttal**

Rebuttal is what distinguishes debating from public speaking. WADL rewards it highly and always encourages teams to do as much rebuttal as they can.

### **Taking the opposition at their best**

In debating, it's important to represent the opposing team fairly. Don't make up arguments or try to misrepresent their argument- this may look like you're a bit scared to actually take them on! Adjudicators always watch to make sure you're playing fairly.

### **Good rebuttal requires listening**

To rebut a point, you need an idea of what the speaker actually said! Always listen to your opposition so you hear their points and understand what they're saying. A secret tip we have is to listen when the first speaker gets up and tells the room what their team will say- write it down so you can make sure your team responds to every point!

## What is rebuttal?

Your response to the opposition's argument! We distinguish this from what we call "substantive", which is your own points you bring to the debate.

## Why do we rebut?

To be persuasive you want to make sure that the opposition's case is being attacked. Don't let their points go unchallenged! Rebuttal often decides who wins. It's really important as a team to be listening to what the opposition is saying and coming out with arguments that defeat their material. This is often called "engagement" or "responsiveness", and good debates have a lot of this- you want both teams to be properly debating each other, not ignoring the opposition completely.

## How to rebut

1. Say what point you're responding to
2. Give reasons why it's not true
3. Explain why it's not important

## How do I take notes for rebuttal?

The main thing to do is write down what the opposition has said and your response. It's a good idea to make it very clear which is which by using a different colour or a clear heading so you don't get confused when reading it out.

For example:

What opposition said here	What opposition said here	Your response here
Your response here		
_____		_____
_____		_____
_____		_____

## Can I prepare rebuttal?

You can definitely think of what the opposition might say and what you might say in response. This is valuable to do both when preparing, and in the impromptu room. However, you should avoid reading out long pre-written rebuttal. Often you'll use a response but the opposition that night didn't actually say it- so you give them a point and look like you're not paying attention. It's also important to train yourself to come up with responses at the bench!

## When should I rebut?

After your introduction and before your substantive. It's important to do this early because the audience has just heard your opposition make some good points!

## Who should rebut?

Every speaker but first affirmative.

## How much rebuttal should I do?

<p><b>1ST AFFIRMATIVE</b> No rebuttal because nobody from the other team has spoken.</p>	<p><b>1ST NEGATIVE</b> Rebut at least one point as the other team's just spoken and you need to knock down their points! Remember that their first speaker's points will be the most important in the debate.</p>
<p><b>2ND AFFIRMATIVE</b> Mainly substantive, but a decent amount of rebuttal because you've heard the negative team's most important points.</p>	<p><b>2ND NEGATIVE</b> Some substantive, lots of rebuttal because you've heard every point the affirmative team has to offer.</p>
<p><b>3RD AFFIRMATIVE</b> All rebuttal, no substantive.</p>	<p><b>3RD NEGATIVE</b> All rebuttal, no substantive.</p>

## How do I rebut?

The way to think about rebuttal is to remember that you want to prove the opposition's points are not true, not important, and aren't as great as yours. It's good to make sure your rebuttal responses aren't a one word answer, so aiming for a few sentences for each point will help you extend your response. Adjudicators always want debaters to give more rebuttal, so don't be shy about spending extra time on it!

Give multiple responses if you can! Another secret tip is to use your own material to combat the opposition- just bring up one of your points and it will probably rebut!

For example:

**Banning drugs will make it hard for people to get hold of them**

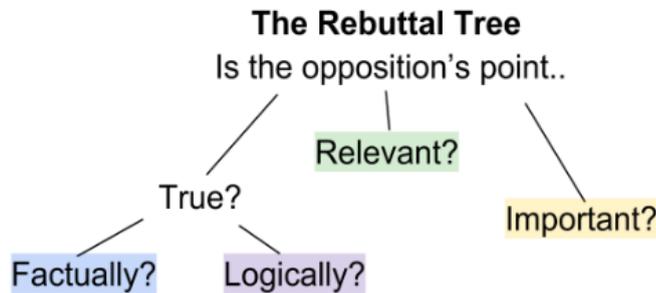
Either way, people will want these substances. But if you make them illegal, people will have to seek them out in shady ways. As we told you at first speaker, this means a black market will develop that isn't regulated by the government, meaning people will be buying from dodgy places with no safety inspections. So banning drugs creates far worse harm!

**People should be able to choose to smoke even if they know it's bad**

2 responses:

1. The government has an obligation to protect people from harm because smoking affects everybody as it clogs the healthcare system
2. Additionally, often the addictive nature of smoking makes it hard for people to quit even if they want to, so the government should act

You may also find it helpful to follow the Rebuttal Tree:



<b>Factually true</b>	Did the opposition just say something completely false? Often in debating, you want to suggest that the opposition has said something wrong about the world, implied things about people which aren't correct, or are wrong about the outcomes.
<b>Logically true</b>	Do their statements lead to a conclusion that doesn't make sense or is a massive leap? For example, arguing that banning alcohol will lead to the government banning freedom of speech might be a very big stretch and not make sense.
<b>Relevant</b>	Is what they've said even relevant to the debate? For example, if a debate is about banning fast food, it probably doesn't make sense to start talking about the diet of a whale.
<b>Important</b>	Is the opposition's point more important than your material? Maybe they will provide a benefit, but it's totally outnumbered by the harm it will bring! For example, in a debate about shark culling, you could agree that it's true that surfers may be safer if we culled sharks, but this would have very bad effects on the ecosystem and environment which is more important than the safety of a few surfers.

### **"Even if" technique**

This is a good trick when doing rebuttal. Using the "even if" argument is valuable because it knocks down their point by firstly proving it's not true, then saying we shouldn't care even if it were true. Just saying the words "even if" shows the adjudicator that your case can hold up in every scenario!

e.g. "The opposition said \_\_\_\_\_, which is not true because \_\_\_\_\_. However **EVEN IF** it was true, it is important because..."

In debating, there are some types of rebutting that are better than others. Always prioritise disproving (aka disagreeing totally with the opposition) because this makes for the best debate! Only ever agree with your opponent if you HAVE to.

	<b>What it looks like</b>	<b>When to do it</b>
Disproving	Destroying the opposition's point	As much as possible!
Mitigating	Saying outcome won't be as bad as the opposition says it will	When it feels strategic
Conceding	Agreeing with the opposition	When you want to make a strategic trade-off or focus on other points

### **Being comparative**

To win debates, you always compare yourself to the opposition and say why you're better. It's great to frame different worlds and explain why yours is better.

e.g. "In the opposition's world..."

e.g. "In the opposition's best case..."

### **Making trade-offs**

In debating, you cannot always claim your world is perfect and that nothing bad ever happens. Sometimes you have to give something up for something else. By making trade-offs, you tell the adjudicator that what you have to offer is much better than the opposition.

e.g. "Under our model of banning alcohol, people cannot drink at weddings. However, this is actually for the better as now adults can enjoy the experience more and remember things clearly. This is a great trade-off!"

### **Clash**

This refers to the wider conflicts between the two teams. Debates without teams disagreeing or "clashing" often feel confusing or messy. This is why it's so important to be strong on your own points and disagree with the opposing team.

Clash is the bigger picture of broad rebuttal. It is an understanding of which points matter and how they interact with each other. What do teams agree on? What should the adjudicator believe is important? A debate with clash should change and develop down the bench. Speakers should always aim to whip and defend their case even after it has been rebutted.

Thinking about clash can help you with understanding thematic rebuttal.

## Thematic rebuttal

This is a structure for giving rebuttal which is commonly used by third speakers. It allows you to break your speech into three "points" and order your thoughts.

Each theme acts as a heading for you to group all your rebuttal responses under. At the end of each theme, you can say "we win this clash" or "we've proved..."

To do thematic rebuttal:

1. Pick out 3 main themes or categories of the debate
2. Group all of your rebuttal responses under the headings

This can be phrased as a question or a statement, it is up to the speaker. Sometimes themes are also called "points of contention."

e.g. "Does the government have the responsibility to protect?"

e.g. "Effects on the economy."

e.g. "Will this protect the environment?"

Think of the debate as a whole and how you might sort your rebuttal.

(Ideally, you would have 1 principle theme and 2 practical themes.)

e.g. *That we should ban sugar* (Affirmative)

Example 1st theme: Does the government have a responsibility to protect people?

Example 2nd theme: Will this help people to lead better lifestyles?

Example 3rd theme: Will this improve the healthcare system?

## Is there an easy way to do this?

Physically placing your palm cards with rebuttal in piles on your desk and moving them around can help you sort your material into categories! Writing the points of your side and the points of the opposition can also help you start to see broader themes.

For example:

<p>Our case</p> <p>1st speaker: •</p> <p style="padding-left: 100px;">•</p> <p style="padding-left: 100px;">•</p> <p>2nd speaker: •</p> <p style="padding-left: 100px;">•</p>	<p>Their case</p> <p>1st speaker: •</p> <p style="padding-left: 100px;">•</p> <p style="padding-left: 100px;">•</p> <p>2nd speaker: •</p> <p style="padding-left: 100px;">•</p>
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### **What is integrated rebuttal?**

Normally, most speakers will do their rebuttal then go on to presenting their points. However, some speakers choose to weave their rebuttal in as they go through their points. When this occurs, it is done by first speakers who may find all their material naturally clashes with the opposition's material instead of having to repeat responses. To do this, say "rebuttal will be integrated" at the start of your speech and say "this is in direct response" when addressing rebuttal in your points.

### **Summarising and whipping**

Whipping refers to the practice of reminding the adjudicator of what previous speakers on your team have said. This is usually done by third speakers. Younger speakers may finish their third speaker speech with a "summary" where they recap the points given by their teammates. Older and more advanced speakers tend to weave this summary throughout this speech.

It is very important to make sure the material and responses brought out by your team remains in the mind of the adjudicator and present in the debate! Often speakers also find bringing up a point from one of their previous speakers helps them prove the enemy wrong- and reminds the adjudicator of how great their case is at the same time!

### **Points of information (POIs)**

#### **What is a point of information?**

A point of information (POI) is generally a question you ask the opposition during their speech. It should ideally trap them and interrupt their case.

#### **Purpose of POIs:**

- To point out inaccuracies or contradictions in the opposition's case
- Clarify their position or force them to take a stance
- To force them to respond to one of your arguments they've been ignoring
- To "pre-empt" your points and give them more airtime
- To stay active in the debate
- To remind the adjudicator of all your good points

POIs are an excellent weapon and offer play a key role in the outcome of the debate. It is important to consistently appear engaged and actively attempting to make sure your material is given prominence in the debate.

Answering POIs confidently and clearly is an excellent skill to learn!

## When do I offer a POI?

POIs should be offered between the 1st and final minute. If you offer it outside that time, it is considered “out of order.” The chairperson will ring a bell so you know when this time is! You should offer at least 2 POIs for each speaker.

## How long should a POI be?

Each POI must be brief. Officially, we suggest no longer than 15 seconds. This is not timed by the adjudicator but you should keep it quick, and to the point.

## Offering POIs

### DO:

- ✓ Stand up
- ✓ Say “point of information”
- ✓ Speak confidently and clearly
- ✓ Make sure your team is offering POIs regularly

### DON'T:

- × Say “point of interest”
- × Shout at the speaker
- × “Badger” the opposition (ask a million POIs one after another)
- × Ask the speaker a POI right after they have finished answering one

## Accepting POIs

### DO:

- ✓ Accept 1-2
- ✓ Say “no thank you”
- ✓ Say “yes please”
- ✓ Say “I’ll take you in a minute”
- ✓ Finish your sentence first
- ✓ Ask them to repeat it if necessary

### DON'T:

- × Accept more than 2
- × Stop abruptly or get flustered
- × Leave the asker standing without making it clear if you’re taking it
- × Keep asking for clarification or engaging in cross-bench talk

## Phrasing of POIs

Try not to phrase your POI in a way which can easily be answered with “yes” or “no”. Make the speaker dedicate time to addressing your material.

e.g.

- “Why don’t we care about the rights of teachers?”
- “If we believe the drug war has been used disproportionately to search, arrest, and lock up black Americans and use their labour, how can we defend it?”
- “When somebody is called out for racist behaviour it does 2 things: forces them to self-reflect and listen to marginalised groups, and sets a deterrent for others who will now think twice before trying blackface. How is this a bad thing?”
- “You said bodily autonomy justifies legalising all drugs. Somebody cannot give proper consent when under addiction because they cannot make choices out of their own free will. Please respond.”

### **How do you come up with POIs?**

Write them in prep! Come up with them on the bench and pass them along to your teammates! Practice makes perfect with writing POIs- always have a go!

### **When do I take a POI?**

Whenever you feel ready! Often a good time is after you've finished a bit of rebuttal or a point. Try to finish your sentence before turning to accept.

### **What do I do if I don't know how to respond?**

- Repeat what they asked you to buy yourself time and help yourself understand what they're saying ("so the opposition has asked...")
- Try answer as best as you can
- Use it as way to bring up an argument you're confident about

## **Manner**

In debating, everyone has a different style - there is no correct way to speak as long as you're clear and can be understood by the adjudicator.

To feel confident in your manner, practice:

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Eye contact - look around the room, at your adjudicator, or focus on a friendly face in the audience</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Gestures - hold your palm cards in one hand so you can move at least one!</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Pace and pausing - don't talk too fast! Make sure to pause to let your words sink in</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Posture - stand tall! Try standing with your feet shoulder width apart</li> </ul>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Tone and pitch - get passionate at some points and more calm in others</li> </ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Conviction - sound like you believe what you're saying!</li> </ul>                              |

If you get flustered just pause, breathe, and carry on when you're ready! The adjudicator always wants to see you do well and won't be angry at all if you need to pause.

Improving manner is a constant thing for all debaters, and even adult debaters are always looking for new gestures to try or some new phrases!

### **Tips for handling nerves:**

- Remember, everybody gets nervous!
- The more you debate, the more confident you become!
- Practice and prepare - rehearse your speech beforehand. You've got this!
- Get yourself into a routine at the debate (e.g. counting to three before you start speaking, taking a sip of water, smiling at somebody you know in the audience)
- Pause on stage before you start speaking- take a second to breathe and become comfortable on stage. Own the space.
- It's okay to stuff up - learn to recover. If you stumble over words or drop a palm card (which happens to everybody at some point- trust me, the adjudicators did it their lives), stay calm, take a second to compose yourself, then continue smoothly.

Finally, support your teammates! Remember, debating is a team activity. You win as a team, you lose as a team. No one person is to blame for any faults in your case, and throughout this experience remember that you've all got each other's backs.

It can be nice to pat your teammates on the back or tell them they've got this! Always compliment something in their speech, especially if they feel a bit nervous about how it sounded.

## **Debating language**

If you're having a conversation with somebody outside of debating, you are nice and polite. You will nod, smile, and say things like, "I see your point," or "that's true."

In debating, we don't do this. You should always listen to what the opposition says with open but critical ears. Don't be afraid to say they've said something that isn't true or isn't important. In fact, that's how you win debates!

### **Topic phrasing**

In competitive debating across Australia, topics are phrased using the words "this house." This is an old stuffy tradition that comes from debates in parliament. "This house" just refers to the affirmative team.

*THR = This house regrets*

*THS = This house supports*

*THBT = This house believes that*

*THW = This house would*

### “And that’s why I’m proud...”

“Proud to propose” or “proud to oppose” is often said at the end of a speech!

### “Speaker...”

Often debaters will address the adjudicator as “speaker” or if there is more than one, “panel.” This is just a tradition, but also can help you sound confident.

#### Common debate vocabulary:

**ANALYSIS** = Detailed discussion, argumentation, or dissection

**AUTONOMY** = Having independence, freedom from control, the ability to make your own decisions

**DISCOURSE** = Discussion, debates, or conversation in society around a certain topic

**ECHO CHAMBERS** = A system where beliefs are intensified and not challenged

**IMPACT** = Having an effect on something, to “impact” is to emphasise the adjudicator how something might have a significant harm or benefit

**INCENTIVE** = Providing a reason to do something

**MANDATE** = Having a vested authority or duty to do something e.g. the government having a mandate to best represent the people because the population has given them responsibility through an election

**NARRATIVES** = Representations or constructions about people and issues

**NUANCE** = Providing complexity, not being simple

**STATUS QUO** = The current world, or the way things are at the current moment

#### Things to say when rebutting:

- “The only benefit we hear...”
- “I just don’t think this is true...”
- “We overcame this analysis...”
- “Everything they brought us was mitigatory...”
- “This fell down...”
- “The first and most obvious thing to say here...”
- “Which was why when they said...”
- “Here they were uncomparative...”
- “This point is contingent...”
- “Here this is a tension in their case...”
- “I think this was probably their strongest material here, but it still falls down...”
- “At the end of this, we win this clash...”
- “The ONLY response we hear”
- “This response wasn’t enough to overcome...”

**Things to say when whipping:**

- "We've told you down the bench..."
- "My first speaker told you..."
- "We gave you 3 reasons why the environment will be harmed..."
- "We flagged this in a POI"
- "Second speaker gave you some great material which went unresponded to..."
- "I think we responded to this pretty well at second, but I'll give you a further takedown..."
- "We give you 3 responses to this material"
- "Our analysis here went unresponded to"

**"Squirrelling"**

This is when one team defines the motion in a strange or narrow way that could not have been reasonably expected by the other team, damaging the debate and making a good clash difficult.

**"Swinging"**

This is when an adjudicator debates against students. Swinging can be a valuable learning experience and exciting! Often this will be offered when a team forfeits or fails to show up.

## How are debates marked?

Debaters at WADL are assessed on the “3 M’s.”

These are “Matter”, “Manner”, and “Method”:

<b>Manner</b>	How did the speaker deliver their argument?	WADL does not look for memorised rigid speaking. Often, conversational manner is more persuasive. Manner incorporates eye contact, gestures, clarity, tone, expression, humour, conviction, passion, etc.
<b>Matter</b>	What did the speaker say?	Matter considers the arguments made by a speaker and team. What were the points? What did teams prove? Was their reasoning logical and persuasive? Can their arguments stand on their own?
<b>Method</b>	How clear and strategic was the speech?	<p><i>Internal method</i> considers the structure and organisation of a speech. Does the speaker fulfil their role? Method incorporates signposting, timing, rebuttal, and POI responses.</p> <p><i>Team method</i> considers the structure and organisation of the team case. Was the team split clear? Are the most important points coming out early at the first speaker?</p> <p><i>Strategy</i> considers the ability of the team to react to the dynamics of the debate.</p>