



international debate education association

Karl Popper Debate

I. Introduction

The Karl Popper Debate format focuses on relevant and often deeply divisive propositions, emphasizing the development of critical thinking skills, and tolerance for differing viewpoints. To facilitate these goals, debaters work together in teams of three, and must research both sides of each issue. Each team is given the opportunity to offer arguments and direct questions to the opposing team. Judges then offer constructive feedback, commenting on logical flaws, insufficient evidence, or arguments that debaters may have overlooked.

Karl Popper debate should:

- focus on the core elements of controversial issues
- emphasize tolerance for multiple points of view
- emphasize the development of analytical thinking skills
- instill in participants an appreciation for the value of teamwork
- provide students with the opportunity to debate many kinds of resolutions

II. Karl Popper Rules

The following rules, which define the goals and procedures of Karl Popper Debate, are intended to ensure that participants enter into the debate sharing a common set of expectations. Judges may not impose additional rules on debaters.

The judge's decision in a debate round is final. Violations of these rules may merit (at the judge's discretion) a reduction in points, or a loss in a given round. In the case of serious rule violations, a judge should consult with the Tournament Director before imposing sanctions on the debaters. The Tournament Director, or a committee designated by the Tournament Director, may impose penalties including reprimands and, in extreme cases, the removal of a debater or judge from the tournament. Penalties may affect future rounds, but cannot reverse judges' decisions. Cases of intellectual dishonesty are the sole exception: in these cases, a Tournament Director may reverse a decision, provided that the reversal takes place prior to the scheduled start of the next round.

Tournament Directors (with the approval of the IDEA Accreditation Committee) are permitted to make minor changes to these rules. To gain the committee's approval, the changes must be submitted at least one month prior to the beginning of the tournament. The Accreditation Committee will then approve or reject the changes, and inform the Tournament Director of its decision.

A. Resolution and Preparation

1. In Karl Popper Debate, many kinds of resolutions are appropriate. Resolutions should target the core elements of a controversial issue, and be carefully worded to provide fair ground for debate.
2. The duty of researching falls primarily to the debaters, not to their teachers and coaches.
3. In order to allow for adequate research and preparation time, students will be notified of the resolution in advance; ideally, the topic should be disclosed one month prior to a tournament.

B. Interpretation of the Resolution

1. The affirmative team has the responsibility to define and interpret the resolution.

The affirmative should interpret the topic as it would reasonably be interpreted in the public sphere. The affirmative need not necessarily provide a literal interpretation of the resolution; rather, the objective of the affirmative team is to make an adequate case for its interpretation of the resolution. To this end, the team must introduce one or more arguments in support of the resolution as they have interpreted it, and sustain that case throughout the debate.

2. The negative team argues against the affirmative position.

The negative team may counter the affirmative team's interpretation of the resolution if they believe it is not reasonable.

The negative team may challenge any aspect of the affirmative team's case, and may offer a case of its own. For example, it may challenge the interpretation of the resolution, the factual and analytical foundations of the case, or the underlying assumptions of the affirmative's claims.

C. Rules During Karl Popper Debate

1. No research is permitted.

Topic research must be completed prior to the beginning of a debate. Once the debate begins, the participants may not conduct research via the Internet, nor through electronic or other means.

2. No outside assistance is permitted.

No outside person(s) may conduct research during the debate and provide information directly or indirectly to the debaters. Debaters, however, are allowed to consult whatever research materials they have brought with them to the debate.

3. Debaters should be able to provide sources for direct citations.

When debaters refer to any public information, they should be prepared to provide, upon request, complete source documentation to the opposing team and to the judge. A team's documentation of cited material must be complete enough for the opposing team and the judge to locate the information on their own. Ordinarily, such documentation would include the name of an author (if

any), the name and date of a publication (and a page number, if available), or the URL of a Web site.

4. Debaters should practice intellectual honesty.

Students should cite arguments and statistics truthfully, and never fabricate sources or data.

5. Debate should be approached as a team activity.

Each debate team is composed of three individuals who will speak in the roles they announce at the start of the debate. Debaters may change their role in the debate from round to round.

III. The Karl Popper Debate Format

- A. The affirmative and the negative teams will have equal time to present their arguments.

1. The debate is composed of ten parts. Six of these consist of speeches – that is, uninterrupted presentations by a designated speaker. The remaining four consist of cross examination – that is, a series of questions and answers involving one speaker from each side.
2. The following is a breakdown of the Karl Popper debate format

Order	Time	Speaker
Affirmative Constructive	6 minutes	1 A
1 st Negative Cross-Examination	3 minutes	1 A answers/3 N asks
Negative Constructive	6 minutes	1 N
1 st Affirmative Cross-Examination	3 minutes	1 N answers/3 A asks
Affirmative Rebuttal	5 minutes	2 A
2 nd Negative Cross-Examination	3 minutes	2 A answers/1 N asks
Negative Rebuttal	5 minutes	2 N
2 nd Affirmative Cross-Examination	3 minutes	2 N answers/1 A asks
Affirmative Rebuttal	5 minutes	3 A
Negative Rebuttal	5 minutes	3 N

3. Each debate also includes sixteen minutes of preparation time (eight minutes for each team). This time is not scheduled in any particular place in the speaking order, but is instead taken at the discretion of each team, in whatever amounts the team desires, prior to a cross examination or an upcoming speech.

- B. Each speech and each questioning period has a specific purpose.

1. Affirmative Constructive (1A)

In this speech, the affirmative team is expected to offer its complete argument in favor of the resolution. Although later affirmative speakers may repeat points and expand on them later in the debate, the first affirmative speaker must present the entirety of his or her team's case, including whatever criteria or definitions the team views as instrumental.

2. First Negative Cross-Examination

The two debaters are expected to face the audience (as opposed to each other). The negative debater is expected to ask questions rather than make speeches. The affirmative debater is expected to answer these questions; he or she should

not make speeches or ask questions in return. The affirmative debater may make concessions during this cross-examination, but it is incumbent upon the negative team to capitalize on these concessions in the speech that immediately follows.

Team members should not assist their teammates by offering suggestions or by answering questions on their behalf. During the cross-examination period, only the examiner may ask questions and only the speaker may answer them. No spoken communication between either the examiner, or the speaker and his or her teammates, is allowed.

3. Negative Constructive (1N)

Like the affirmative team in its constructive, the negative team is expected to offer a complete argument against the affirmative's position. The affirmative's definition, if not challenged at this point, should stand. Similarly, if the negative does not offer competing criteria, it is assumed that the criteria articulated by the affirmative team will govern the round. Finally, the negative team must challenge the affirmative's arguments; otherwise, it will be assumed that these arguments are acceptable.

4. First Affirmative Cross-Examination

The rules of procedure for the "First Negative Cross-Examination" also apply here.

5. First Affirmative Rebuttal (2A)

The affirmative speaker has two tasks in this speech. First, he or she must outline their refutations of the negative arguments. Second, he or she must respond to the refutations made by the negative team (that is, the negative's objections to the affirmative case). If the affirmative speaker does not refute a given point in the negative case, then the point stands; if the affirmative speaker does not respond to a particular negative objection, then the objection is conceded. New evidence for existing arguments may be presented.

6. Second Negative Cross-Examination

The rules of procedure outlined above, under "First Negative Cross-Examination" also apply here.

7. First Negative Rebuttal (2N)

As with the affirmative rebuttal described above, the negative speaker has a dual task: first, he or she must respond to the refutations made by the affirmative, and second, he or she should continue to attack the affirmative case. At this point in the debate, the negative speaker may start to draw the judge's attention to points that have been dropped. That is, he or she will indicate items to which affirmative has not responded. Such a dropped point is treated as a concession made by the affirmative team. New evidence for existing arguments may be presented.

8. Second Affirmative Cross-Examination

The rules of procedure outlined above, under "First Negative Cross-Examination," also apply here.

9. Second Affirmative Rebuttal (3A)

The task of the affirmative speaker in this speech is reactive. He or she should renew refutations that have not been addressed adequately. Usually, this means pointing out flaws in the negative rebuttal. At this point, most good debaters will deliberately let some points drop and will focus the judge's attention on the key issues in the round. The speaker may or may not instruct the judge; that is, the speaker may or may not articulate a standard of judgment for the round. New evidence for existing arguments may be presented.

10. Second Negative Rebuttal (3N)

In essence, the second negative rebuttal is similar to the second affirmative rebuttal. Judges should be especially wary of speakers introducing new arguments at this point since the affirmative team has no chance to respond, so a new argument is especially unfair. The judge should ignore any new arguments that are introduced.

IV. The Role of the Judge

For guidelines in judging any speech or debate event, please refer to [Judge Accreditation Process and Standards](#).

- A. Prior to accepting a Karl Popper judging assignment, a judge must agree to:
 - 1. conduct the debate on the basis of these standards
 - 2. enforce all rules that fall within the judge's province
 - 3. not add, enforce, or base a decision on any rules not included in these standards
- B. In Karl Popper Debate, the judge should consult with tournament administrators in order to be aware of tournament rules regarding oral critiques and the disclosure of decisions.
- C. Under no circumstances can the judge change his or her decision or points based on any discussions with the teams involved.
- D. Judges decision should be based on the content of the debate.

The content of the debate includes the substantive arguments presented in a debate along with the supporting evidence used to support them.

As long as the speakers communicate their ideas clearly, it does not matter if they used sheets of paper instead of note cards, or if they read parts of the speeches. Naturally, the style of speaking affects the ability to persuade. However, though it is more persuasive if speakers do not read their speeches, they should not be marked down heavily unless it impinges on the speakers' ability to convey their arguments clearly and persuasively to the audience.

Structure is generally more important than communication style, as it determines whether the speakers presented clear arguments. A good question for judges to ask themselves is: At the end of the debate, was the audience left with a clear impression of the team's arguments?

- D. Judges should make their decision on which team won or lost the debate based on the performance of the team as a whole.

Some tournament directors may permit judges to award wins to teams that receive lower total speaker points.

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