



Parul Institute of Engineering and Technology

Career Development Cell

Semester-3

Professional Communication Skills (303193203)

Unit 3: Debate - The Three-Minute Debate Planner

1. Content

Understanding Debate and Its Structure

A **debate** is a structured discussion or contest of ideas on a particular topic or resolution. It involves two opposing teams presenting their viewpoints — one in favor of the resolution (affirmative team) and the other against it (opposing team). Debates are governed by a set of pre-agreed rules and are often used in educational, political, and public settings to explore issues critically and constructively.

The primary purpose of a debate is to **develop reasoning, critical thinking, research, and public speaking skills**. It encourages participants to examine a topic from multiple perspectives, helps decision-makers evaluate the strength of different arguments, and enhances participants' confidence in expressing their views in public.

Components of a Formal Debate

A formal debate includes the following main elements:

- **Affirmative Team:** This team supports the resolution and presents arguments in favor of it.
- **Opposing Team:** This team disagrees with the resolution and presents arguments against it.
- **Judges or Evaluators:** These may include the teacher, peers, or an appointed judging team. They assess the quality of the arguments, evidence, delivery, and overall performance.
- **Audience:** Classmates or invited guests not directly participating in the debate observe the discussion and may participate in post-debate reflections or feedback.

Basic Structure of a Debate

A formal debate follows a specific sequence to ensure fairness and clarity. The key stages of a debate are:

1. Introduction of the Resolution

The topic or issue to be debated is clearly stated. This resolution must be specific, debatable, and balanced, allowing both teams to argue effectively.

2. Opening Statements

The debate begins with the **first speaker from the affirmative team**, who presents their main arguments in support of the resolution.

This is followed by the **first speaker from the opposing team**, who presents arguments against the resolution.

Each speaker is typically allotted **5–10 minutes** for their opening statements.

3. Presentation of Arguments

The **second speakers** from each team present additional arguments to support their team's position.

- The **affirmative speaker** continues building on their case, addressing any conflicts raised and providing further supporting evidence.

- The **opposing speaker** does the same, responding to the previous points and strengthening their stance.

This stage also lasts for about **5–10 minutes per speaker**.

4. Rebuttals and Counterarguments

After a short recess for preparation (usually around **5 minutes**), each team presents **rebuttals**.

- The **opposing team** presents the first rebuttal, addressing the key points made by the affirmative team and attempting to refute them without introducing new arguments.

- The **affirmative team** then follows with their first rebuttal.

- Each team is allowed a **second rebuttal**, which also serves as a **closing statement**, summarizing their main arguments and making a final appeal to the judges or audience.

Rebuttals typically last **3–5 minutes** each.

5. Closing Statements

The debate ends with brief closing remarks, reinforcing each team's stance and concluding their line of reasoning.

The **affirmative team has the final opportunity to speak**, as per the standard debate format.

6. Feedback and Assessment

Once the formal debate is concluded, there is a **post-debate discussion**.

- The **audience and judges** provide feedback on the quality and clarity of arguments.
- Participants reflect on their own and others' performance.
- If included in the debate plan, **formal assessment** is carried out using a **Debate Assessment Rubric**, which evaluates areas like clarity, research, rebuttal strength, teamwork, and adherence to rules.

Preparation Steps

Before the actual debate begins, thorough planning and preparation are essential to ensure clarity, coherence, and fairness. The following steps outline the preparation process:

1. Select and Define the Resolution

Choose a clear and specific topic that can be argued from both sides. Ensure that the resolution is debatable, meaning it should not be a fact but an opinion or proposition that can be supported or opposed with evidence and reasoning.

2. Form Two Teams: Affirmative and Opposing

Divide participants into two balanced teams.

- The **affirmative team** supports the resolution.
- The **opposing team** disagrees with it.
Each team usually consists of 2 to 3 members, depending on the format and time available.

3. Establish Debate Rules

Clearly define the debate format, including:

- Time limits for each speaker
- Sequence of speeches
- Rules regarding rebuttals, interruptions, and use of notes
- Criteria for judgment or evaluation

4. Conduct In-Depth Research

Each team must gather reliable facts, statistics, expert opinions, and real-life examples related to the topic. The quality of a debate depends heavily on the depth and relevance of the research conducted.

5. Prepare Logical, Evidence-Based Arguments

Build strong arguments that are logical, structured, and well-supported by evidence. Avoid emotional appeals or vague opinions. Arguments should be clearly connected to the resolution.

6. Anticipate Opposition and Prepare Rebuttals

Try to predict the arguments the opposing team might use and prepare effective

counterarguments in advance. This helps strengthen your own case and shows critical thinking ability.

7. Plan the Order of Speakers and Practice

Assign roles and plan the sequence of who will speak when. Practice delivering arguments confidently and within the allotted time. This builds fluency, reduces nervousness, and improves coordination among team members.

8. Prepare Assessment Criteria (if required)

If the debate is part of an evaluation, prepare or review the assessment rubric. This may include criteria such as clarity, strength of argument, rebuttal effectiveness, teamwork, presentation skills, and adherence to rules.

Debate Conduct Sequence

Once the preparation is complete, the debate follows a structured sequence of speaking turns, ensuring that each side has an equal opportunity to present and defend their stance. The typical order is as follows:

1. Affirmative Speaker 1: Argument in Support (5–10 minutes)

- Introduces the resolution
- Defines key terms
- Presents the team's main arguments
- Provides supporting evidence

2. Opposing Speaker 1: Argument Against (5–10 minutes)

- Presents a counter-definition (if needed)
- States the team's position opposing the resolution
- Offers main arguments with supporting facts

3. Affirmative Speaker 2: Additional Points and Rebuttals (5–10 minutes)

- Adds further arguments in support of the resolution
- Begins to address or refute points made by the opposing team

4. Opposing Speaker 2: Further Counterpoints and Rebuttals (5–10 minutes)

- Reinforces the opposing arguments
- Counters the points made by both affirmative speakers

5. Recess (5 minutes)

- A short break for teams to prepare their final rebuttals and closing statements
- No communication with external sources during this time

6. Opposing Team Rebuttal (3–5 minutes)

- Presents a concise and focused response to the key points made by the affirmative team
- Reinforces the weaknesses in the affirmative arguments without introducing new points

7. **Affirmative Team Rebuttal (3–5 minutes)**

- Responds to the opposing team's rebuttal
- Strengthens the affirmative position by clarifying misunderstandings or restating strong points

8. **Final Closing Statements by Each Team (3–5 minutes each)**

- Summary of each team's position
- Restates the strongest arguments
- Makes a final appeal to the judges or audience
- The **affirmative team speaks last**, ending the formal debate

Debate Etiquette and Rules

- **Respect speaking time:** Each speaker must adhere strictly to the time limits.
- **No interruptions:** While a speaker is presenting, members of the opposing team must listen silently and respectfully.
- **Polite language:** Participants must maintain a respectful tone and avoid personal attacks or inappropriate language.
- **Stay on topic:** All arguments and rebuttals must relate directly to the resolution being debated.
- **Follow the format:** Deviating from the agreed structure disrupts the flow and fairness of the debate.

3. Rebuttals and Closing Statements

In a formal debate, **rebuttals and closing statements** are crucial components that showcase a team's critical thinking, listening skills, and ability to respond under pressure. These final stages help solidify the team's stance and persuade the judges or audience of their position. Understanding the purpose and execution of these segments is essential for effective debating.

Rebuttals

The **rebuttal** is the stage in the debate where each team directly addresses and challenges the arguments presented by the opposing team. It is not the time to introduce new points but rather to critically analyze and weaken the strength of the other team's case.

Key Characteristics of an Effective Rebuttal:

1. **Respond Directly to the Opponent's Arguments**

Rebuttals should target specific points raised by the opposing team. Each argument should be identified and systematically challenged with logic, evidence, or clarification.

2. **Avoid Introducing New Arguments**

No new evidence or arguments should be introduced at this stage. The focus should remain on dismantling the opposition's existing arguments rather than adding fresh content.

3. **Show Active Listening and Strategic Countering**

An effective rebuttal reflects attentive listening. Responding appropriately shows that the team has understood the opposition's arguments and is capable of thinking critically and strategically.

4. **Maintain Clarity and a Respectful Tone**

While rebuttals can be strong and assertive, the language and tone must remain respectful and professional. Personal attacks or aggressive speech weaken the credibility of the speaker.

Example:

"The opposing team argued that technology reduces interpersonal communication. However, studies show that digital communication has, in fact, created more opportunities for meaningful global connections, particularly in remote learning and international collaboration."

Closing Statements

The **closing statement** is the final opportunity for each team to leave a lasting impression. It should be persuasive, concise, and emotionally resonant, summarizing the team's position while reinforcing their strongest arguments.

Key Elements of a Strong Closing Statement:

1. **Summarize the Team's Main Points**

Reiterate the key arguments made by your team in a concise and coherent manner. Highlight how your points consistently supported your position throughout the debate.

2. **Reinforce Key Arguments**

Emphasize the most compelling evidence and examples used by your team. Reassert how your arguments effectively countered the opposition.

3. **Deliver a Convincing, Impactful Final Statement**

End with a memorable statement or call to action that reinforces your stance. This closing remark should be clear, confident, and persuasive enough to sway the audience or judges.

Example:

"In conclusion, we have demonstrated that embracing renewable energy is not only a

necessity but a responsibility. By acting now, we ensure a healthier, more sustainable future for generations to come. The evidence is clear, and the time is now.”

By mastering **rebuttals** and **closing statements**, debaters learn how to respond critically and communicate persuasively—skills that are not only vital in academic settings but also in real-life discussions and decision-making.

Post-debate Discussions and Assessments

The debate experience does not end with the final statement. **Post-debate discussions and assessments** are essential to consolidate learning, reflect on performance, and enhance critical communication skills. This stage offers valuable opportunities for feedback, improvement, and appreciation of the debate process.

Audience Interaction and Reflection

1. Audience Questions and Feedback

After the debate concludes, the floor is often opened to the **audience**. Non-participating students, teachers, or guests may pose questions to both teams, seeking clarification or expressing their views. This encourages engagement, reinforces active listening, and allows teams to defend their points further in an informal setting.

2. Team Reflection

Each team is encouraged to reflect on their **own performance**. This can include discussing what went well, areas for improvement, how well their arguments were structured, and how effectively they handled rebuttals. Reflective discussion enhances self-awareness and helps develop future debate strategies.

Feedback and Evaluation

3. Constructive Feedback from Judges or Teachers

Judges, teachers, or peer evaluators provide **constructive feedback** on various aspects of the debate. Comments may focus on strengths like clarity, confidence, logical flow, and teamwork, as well as suggestions for improvement. The goal is to guide participants in developing stronger communication and analytical skills.

4. Assessment Criteria

Evaluation is often based on a **detailed assessment rubric**. This ensures fairness and consistency in judging and helps participants understand how their performance was measured. Common assessment categories include:

- **Clarity of Expression** – Clear and confident delivery of points.
- **Preparation and Research** – Depth of research and use of evidence.
- **Strength of Rebuttal** – Effectiveness in addressing and refuting opposing arguments.

- **Logical Coherence** – Organization, consistency, and structure of arguments.
- **Teamwork and Coordination** – Smooth transitions and support among team members.

Purpose of Post-debate Discussions

The aim of post-debate discussions and assessments is not only to determine which team won, but to **promote learning, enhance confidence, and foster a respectful exchange of ideas**. Participants gain insight into different perspectives and learn how to improve their communication, critical thinking, and collaborative skills.

Dos and Don'ts of Debating

Dos:

- Wear school uniform or neat casual clothes for the debate.
- Arrive at least ten minutes before the debate begins.
- Confirm the location of your debate at the Information Desk upon arrival.
- Ensure your full name is written on the Official Score Sheet and Chairman's Sheet.
- Stand in front of the Chairman and Timekeeper when speaking.
- Wait for the Chairman to introduce you before you begin your speech.
- Be ready to speak as soon as your name is called.
- Applaud each speaker respectfully.
- Number your cue cards for easy reference.
- Stay quiet during other speeches and while the adjudicator is writing.
- Listen to the adjudicator's feedback carefully.
- Prepare a short "thank you" speech at the end.
- Shake hands with the opposition after the debate.
- Be humble in victory and gracious in defeat.
- Most importantly, have fun and enjoy the learning experience.

Don'ts:

- Do not address the adjudicator directly during the debate.
- Avoid using loose sheets of paper for your notes—use cue cards instead.
- Don't use distracting gestures or mannerisms.
- Never interrupt other speakers while they are talking.

- Avoid personal attacks or disrespectful comments towards the opposing team.
- Do not shout or raise your voice unnecessarily.
- Refrain from using inappropriate or offensive language.
- Avoid using false or unverified information.
- Do not turn your back to the audience or face the chairman while speaking.
- Avoid frequent filler words like "um" or "er."
- Never interrupt the adjudicator while they are giving feedback.

Debate Topics List

Here are some suggested debate topics suitable for academic and general settings:

1. **Social Media does more harm than good.**
2. **Online learning is more effective than traditional classroom learning.**
3. **Artificial Intelligence is a threat to human jobs.**
4. **Uniforms should be mandatory in educational institutions.**
5. **Space exploration is a waste of public money.**
6. **Mobile phones should be banned in schools.**
7. **Climate change is the biggest threat to humanity.**
8. **Exams are not a true test of knowledge.**
9. **Technology has improved human relationships.**
10. **Animal testing should be banned.**

2. Learning Objectives

- Understand the nature and structure of a formal debate.
- Identify the roles and responsibilities of debate teams.
- Practice preparing arguments and rebuttals.
- Demonstrate effective speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills.
- Participate in structured debates using the Three-Minute Debate Planner format.

3. Introduction

Debate is a structured discussion that helps develop reasoning, communication, and public

speaking skills. It involves arguing for or against a resolution while adhering to formal rules. Debate promotes critical thinking and respectful exchange of ideas.

4. Key Concepts/Definitions

- **Debate:** A structured contest involving argumentation on a given resolution.
- **Resolution:** The statement or proposition being debated.
- **Affirmative Team:** Supports the resolution.
- **Opposing Team:** Opposes the resolution.
- **Rebuttal:** Response to counter the arguments presented by the opposing team.

5. Detailed Explanation

- **Debate Preparation:** Identify the resolution, organize teams, establish rules, research, and prepare arguments.
- **Structure:** Opening arguments by both teams, followed by second-round arguments and rebuttals. Final rebuttals conclude the debate.
- **Example:** Debate on "AI is Dangerous" with opening statements, cross-arguments, and closing rebuttals.

6. Diagrams/Tables (if applicable)

Table: Debate Structure and Time Allocation

Segment	Team	Time (Minutes)
Opening Argument	Affirmative	5-10
Opening Argument	Opposing	5-10
Second Speaker	Affirmative	5-10
Second Speaker	Opposing	5-10
Rebuttal 1	Opposing	3-5
Rebuttal 1	Affirmative	3-5
Rebuttal 2/Closing	Opposing	3-5
Rebuttal 2/Closing	Affirmative	3-5

7. Real-life Applications/Case Examples

- School debates on environmental topics
- Model United Nations simulations
- Corporate decision-making discussions
- Legislative assemblies and boardroom arguments

8. Tips, Tricks, or Mnemonics

Mnemonic: PREP for Debating

Letter	Meaning	Description
P	Point	State your main point clearly.
R	Reason	Give a logical reason to support it.
E	Example	Provide evidence or an example.
P	Point (Restated)	Restate your point persuasively.

9. Classroom Activity/Interaction:

- *Simulation:* Conduct a class debate on "Technology makes us smarter or dumber?"
- *Think and Share:* Groups brainstorm arguments for/against a topic.
- *Quick Quiz:* Identify which statements are valid rebuttals or not.

10. Summary/Key Takeaways

- Debate is an organized form of argument that develops analytical and presentation skills.
- Teams must support or oppose a resolution within a structured format.
- Preparation, clarity, evidence, and respectful rebuttal are essential.
- Use the Three-Minute Debate Planner to structure ideas concisely.

11. References/Resources

- **Snider, A. C., & Schnurer, M. (2002).** *Many Sides: Debate Across the Curriculum*. IDEA Press.

- **Freeley, A. J., & Steinberg, D. L. (2013).** *Argumentation and Debate*. Cengage Learning..
- **Cragan, J. F., & Shields, D. C. (1995).** *Understanding Communication Theory: The Debate Over Debate*. HarperCollins.