**How to set up a debating programme or club**

The following guide should give you an overview of how to set up or maintain a debating programme at your school, along with some ideas on how to practice with your students.

**How to set up the programme**

The debating programme at your school can be student or teacher led, or a combination of both. It can often be helpful to have senior students involved in the coaching of junior students and in some cases more experienced senior students have taken over the coaching and administration of all of the debating teams at a school.

In our experience it’s useful to have a meeting during an interval or lunch time early on in the year. You should get a gauge on how many students may be interested and what other commitments they have for the year. The good thing about debating is that it doesn’t take up too much time from busy students. Proactively shoulder tapping students that are particularly charismatic or who show an ability to use logic or reason in their writing/class discussions is also a good idea to make sure that your programme is as strong as it can be.

Once you have an idea of how many students are interested the next step is to work out what competitions you would like to enter. The New Zealand Schools Debating Council runs a regional competition in term one that is held over a weekend. There are 10 regions where we run these tournaments so every school in New Zealand has a tournament they can enter:

* Northland (the venue usually being a Kerikeri school)
* Auckland
* Bay of Plenty (the venue usually being a Tauranga school)
* Waikato
* Hawke’s Bay (which includes Gisborne and is held in Napier/Hastings)
* Central North Island (which includes Taranaki and Manawatū as is usually held in Whanganui)
* Wellington (which includes the Wairarapa)
* Kahurangi-Marlborough (which includes everything from the Tasman region right down to the West-Coast and is held in Nelson)
* Canterbury
* Otago-Southland (held in Dunedin)

Each region has its own regional convenors who are responsible for running the regional tournaments, but can also provide assistance if you have any questions about debating. The email addresses for the convenors are as follows:

* northland@debating.org.nz
* auckland@debating.org.nz
* bayofplenty@debating.org.nz
* waikato@debating.org.nz
* hawkesbay@debating.org.nz
* cni@debating.org.nz
* wellington@debating.org.nz
* kahurangi@debating.org.nz
* canterbury@debating.org.nz
* otago@debating.org.nz

If you are new to debating and have not had contact with your regional convenor yet, you should email them to make sure they have your contact details. Regional convenors should be in touch early in the New Year to advise on when your regional competition is being held.

The regional competition at the start of the year is a one off event that schools participate in. At the tournament 3 students from every region (6 from Auckland and Wellington) are selected to represent the regions team at the New Zealand Schools Debating National Championship in May. Students that are selected are given intensive coaching by some of New Zealand’s most successful debaters. At Nationals in May students selected have a chance to take home the National title and we also select 5 students to represent New Zealand at the World Schools Debating Championship. In a normal non-Covid year this means that students get the opportunity to travel around the world to debate.

Along with the regional tournament that the New Zealand Schools Debating Council facilitates some regions also have their own schools debating that is run on a more regular basis. It’s worth asking teachers from other schools in your region what regular debating they participate in. The following organisations facilitate regular interschool debating in their areas.

* Auckland Schools Debating: info@asd.org.nz
* Waikato Schools Debating: schools@waikatodebating.co.nz
* Wellington Speaking Union: wellingtonspeakingunion@gmail.com
* Canterbury Schools Debating: Senior@csdc.org.nz
* Dunedin Schools Debating: otagosouthlandschoolsdebating@gmail.com

Note: the above organisations are not affiliated with NZSDC, however, we often work closely with them and you will likely find that the people involved in running your regions interschool debating are also involved in running your regions NZSDC tournaments.

If your region does not have a dedicated organisation which facilitates schools debating then the local english teachers organisation may run a competition during term times. If you haven’t been able to find details of any regular competition then please get in touch with your regional convenor who can direct you on to who is best.

Competitions such as Super 8 or O’Shea Shield also provide opportunities for students to debate. In the past NZSDC has helped organise judges for both of these tournaments so the regional tournaments that we run is a great way to practice for them.

**What to do during debating practices**

Just like a sport the best way to get better at debating is to practice debating. The schools that have had the most success in recent years are the ones that have had semi-regular training for their debating teams. A debating training can take on many forms. A few ideas for what you could do during a lunchtime is

* Debating drills (see below)
* Coaching session on the basics of debating eg. Prep, structure, content
* Researching world events or other topical issues
* Watching a past debate on youtube

**Debating drills**

There are a number of common debating drills that can help hone particular aspects of a debater. You can always come up with your own drills and below are a few that NZSDC has found helpful over the years. Below are a few you can try during your trainings.

1. ***Discussing the news***

An important part of debating is a base level understanding of world affairs and the most pertinent issues affecting the world both currently and long term.

Ask your students to tell you what's been happening in the headlines this week.

We recommend spending at least a little bit of time every meeting talking about the news. News should be short but regular to get students in the habit of following current events and explaining them, without becoming too much extra homework to be bothered with.

Here are some discussion questions to help students identity how to apply their current events knowledge in debates:

* Can someone explain this story in 30 seconds?
* Who is affected?
* How? Is it a big impact?
* Why is this happening? What actions and choices lead to this?
* Who made those choices? Why did they make them?
* What are the controversies related to this headline?
* What do people disagree on?
* Why do they disagree?
* Does this specific controversy illustrate a bigger disagreement in society? Can you think of other examples of this same disagreement?

In large groups, feel free to split students into smaller groups to encourage participation from all students.

1. ***“No, because…”***

This drill aims to improve on-your-feet rebuttal. It helps debaters focus on listening to and remembering previous responses, thinking quickly, and understanding effective responses.

All the players sit in a circle. One player or the teacher will start with a common debating statement, such as “private companies are more efficient than publicly run services”.

The first player has to make a simple, one or two sentence argument in support of the statement given.

Going around the circle, the next player has to rebut the argument of the previous player. The third player rebuts that rebuttal and so on. Players don’t have to try to prove the original statement, just disprove the statement of the player directly before them.

A player is ‘out’ if they can’t think of a response or if they reuse a response from earlier in the game.

Alternatively, this drill can be done in teams; the last team with a response wins. This is a good way to play if you have students with a wide range of confidence levels. You can partner less experienced students up with more experienced ones. This way, everyone can be encouraged to participate and speak, but if a student is struggling or new to debating, they aren’t put completely on the spot.

1. ***“Yes, because…”***

This drill aims to work on developing points, reasoning, and thinking outside the box.

It helps debaters focus on listening and remembering previous reasons, thinking quickly, and developing material to its logical conclusion.

Similarly to “No, because…”, All the players sit in a circle, and one player or the teacher will start with a common debating statement, such as “private companies are more efficient than publicly run services”.

The first player has to make a simple, one or two sentence argument in support of the statement given.

Going around the circle the next player has to develop that point further: “yes, because…” or if they think there are no more because statements in that chain: “Also…”.

Players are ‘out’ if they can’t think of any more reasons that haven’t been said before. The last player with a reason wins. As in “No, because…”, this drill can also be played in teams.

Feel free to give players hints. For example is there a reason it would be good for this group of people?

**Coaching sessions**

To access NZSDC’s guide to debating please [click here](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1vSFPcGM_Koq9-S7rldsw3fk22wHWSJGOM_5OdyD07tI/edit?usp=sharing). Breaking this guide into chunks and discussing it with students is often a great way of improving your programme’s debating and cutting out common mistakes that debaters often make.

**Researching world events or other topical issues**

Debaters can’t take any outside information into a debate (unless it is prepared) so need to be up to date with current events. Spending some time reading up on what is happening in the world of politics or international relations can be quite helpful. Certain students may be better on some topics than others so focus on where the gap in knowledge is, whether that’s politics, social justice, sport, economics etc. Podcasts or youtube explainer videos can also be helpful at explaining a particular event or issue.

**Watching a past debate on youtube**

One of the best ways to get better at debating is to watch debating. This is particularly helpful for students who have not seen or participated in many debates. A good first debate to watch [is this one](https://youtu.be/-tTGOpU0CT8?t=278). If you are after more, NZSDC has a [youtube channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvSrBKcEBAxcE2RL7d6bQ0A/featured) which has most of the debates from 2020’s National competition. Note that speaking times are 8 minutes and your region might be 6 minutes. The Online Schools Worlds Competition also has a number of excellent debates on their [youtube channel](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFk0qboRAjYkcVqGaR35hDZA0XxikLTnk).

**Conclusion**

If you have any questions or need clarification about any of the information in this guide please get in touch with your regional convenor or contact NZSDC at council@debating.org.nz

We hope you enjoy starting a debating programme and look forward to seeing you at competitions in the future!