



**Toronto Debate Academy** ▶ [www.torontodebateacademy.com](http://www.torontodebateacademy.com) ▶ Version 1.2

This image shows a full page of primary-ruled paper. It contains ten identical sets of horizontal lines spaced evenly down the page. Each set includes a solid blue top line, a dashed blue middle line, and a solid blue bottom line, providing a guide for letter height and placement in handwriting practice.

# TDA Note Taking Guide

## Introduction

This guide provides an overview of the essential note taking elements that a beginner debater needs to know. To learn more about debate and advanced debate techniques, we recommend visiting the Resources page at [www.torontodebateacademy.com](http://www.torontodebateacademy.com).

## About the TDA

The Toronto Debate Academy provides debate education programming for Jr. High and High School Students. We run weekly classes, open and private tournaments, and workshops.

The Toronto Debate Academy only employs highly experienced debate instructors to ensure that our programming is second to none. Our services are highly customizable and can meet the needs of students at all levels of experience.

Please contact us at [info@torontodebateacademy.com](mailto:info@torontodebateacademy.com) if you would like to discuss our programming options and how we can work with you to help you or your students *Debate Better*.

## Note Taking Overview

Note taking is a critical but often overlooked part of being a great debater. While advanced debaters often moderate their note taking style over time (and in some cases start taking fewer and fewer notes), beginner debaters should not emulate this approach. Instead, new debaters should master a formal style of note taking.

A strong formalized note taking style provides the following benefits to new debaters:

- It ensures each point is refuted
- It ensures that rebuilding deals with the appropriate refutation material
- It helps debaters master role fulfillment
- It provides debaters with notes that can be used post-debate to review the round and consider how different arguments/strategies could have been implemented.

**TIP:** One of the best ways to master note taking is practice. New debaters should practice note taking at every opportunity including taking notes for every speech in every round they participate in and while watching rounds online.

## The Flowing Method of Note Taking

The following explanation uses BP as the default style but this method is suitable to all conventional styles of debate.

The “Flowing” method of note taking involves using two sheets of paper, both horizontally aligned. Each sheet is divided into four columns (whip speeches can be blocks). Each column corresponds to one of the eight speeches in a round of BP.

As the speaker goes through their speech, the key highlights of what they are saying should be recorded in the column for their speech.

The following conventions should always be applied:

- Constructive arguments should have the point number listed first and the point should be underlined.
- Refutation/Rebuilding should be separated from constructive material

either by a line or some other note like “REF”.

- Where possible, constructive arguments should be connected to refutation and rebuilding with arrows.
- The model should be recorded at the top of the PM column along with OG’s goal. Similarly, the stance of OO should be recorded at the top of the LO column.

Following this method ensures that debaters can always quickly identify who said what argument in each round, what the refutation was to that argument, and how it was rebuilt.

TIP: using different colours for Gov and Opp will help differentiate the speeches. Blue and black are the most common for these speeches.

### Backhalf Flowing

Since arrows cannot connect the first page of notes to the second, refutation should be included with identifiers for which point is being responded to (e.g. PM1 – [ref]). All other conventions should still be followed.

PM	LO	DPM REF	DLO REB
<p>M: Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. G: hemark</p> <p>1) <u>Donec porta magna</u> -nunc, eu euismod arcu interdum placerat. -Nullam ut velit mattis, ornare ante vitae, -cursus ex. Etiam vel semper lectus.</p> <p>2) <u>Maecenas porta orci</u> -a neque tempus consectetur. Morbi id -enim a erat vulputate sagittis non iaculis -metus. Donec eget iaculis lorem.</p>	<p>S: Lorem ipsum dolor sit</p> <p>1) <u>Donec porta magna</u> -nunc, eu euismod arcu interdum placerat. -Nullam ut velit mattis, ornare ante vitae, -cursus ex. Etiam vel semper lectus.</p> <p>2) <u>Maecenas porta orci</u> -a neque tempus consectetur. Morbi id -enim a erat vulputate sagittis non iaculis -metus. Donec eget iaculis lorem.</p> <p>REF</p> <p>-uspendisse maximus non lectus id finibus. -Duis eu risus efficitur, molestie nisi eu, -vulputate metus. Maecenas in congue massa</p>	<p>-uspendisse maximus non lectus id finibus. -Duis eu risus efficitur, molestie nisi eu, -vulputate metus. Maecenas in congue massa -Lorem ipsum dolor sit</p> <p>REF</p> <p>-nunc, eu euismod arcu interdum placerat. -Nullam ut velit mattis, ornare ante vitae, -cursus ex. Etiam vel semper lectus.</p> <p>-a neque tempus consectetur. Morbi id -enim a erat vulputate sagittis non iaculis -metus. Donec eget iaculis lorem.</p>	<p>-nunc, eu euismod arcu interdum placerat.</p> <p>-Nullam ut velit mattis, ornare ante vitae, -cursus ex. Etiam vel semper lectus.</p> <p>REF</p> <p>-a neque tempus consectetur. Morbi id -enim a erat vulputate sagittis non iaculis -metus. Donec eget iaculis lorem.</p> <p>-uspendisse maximus non lectus id finibus. -Duis eu risus efficitur, molestie nisi eu, -vulputate metus. Maecenas in congue massa</p>

Figure 1 - the front half of a BP debate. Note how easy it is to identify each constructive argument, the response, and the rebuilding

<p><b>MG</b></p> <p><u>E: Lorem ipsum dolor sit - amet, consectetur - adipiscing elit.</u> -hemark</p> <p><b>REF</b></p> <p>PM1 - Donec porta magna -nunc, eu euismod arcu interdum placerat. -Nullam ut velit mattis, ornare ante vitae, -cursus ex. Etiam vel semper lectus.</p> <p>PM2 - Maecenas porta orci -a neque tempus consectetur. Morbi id -enim a erat vulputate sagittis non iaculis -metus. Donec eget iaculis lorem.</p>	<p><b>MO</b></p> <p>E: Donec porta magna -nunc, eu euismod arcu interdum placerat. -Nullam ut velit mattis, ornare ante vitae, -cursus ex. Etiam vel semper lectus.</p> <p><b>REF</b></p> <p>Maecenas porta orci -a neque tempus consectetur. Morbi id -enim a erat vulputate sagittis non iaculis -metus. Donec eget iaculis lorem.</p> <p>LO1: uspendisse maximus non lectus id finibus.</p> <p>LO2 -Duis eu risus efficitur, molestie nisi eu, -vulputate metus. Maecenas in congue massa</p>	<p><b>GW</b></p> <p><u>1) uspendisse maximus non lectus id finibus?</u> -LO: Duis eu risus efficitur, molestie nisi eu; MO: vulputate metus. Maecenas in congue massa; MO: MG: Lorem ipsum dolor sit</p> <p><u>2) nunc, eu euismod arcu interdum placerat.</u> -DLO: Nullam ut velit mattis, ornare ante vitae; MO: cursus ex. Etiam vel semper lectus; MG: a neque tempus consectetur. Morbi id -enim a erat vulputate sagittis non iaculis -metus. Donec eget iaculis lorem.</p>
		<p><b>OW</b></p> <p><u>1) uspendisse maximus non lectus id finibus?</u> -PM: Duis eu risus efficitur, molestie nisi eu; MG: vulputate metus. Maecenas in congue massa; MO: Lorem ipsum dolor sit</p> <p><u>2) nunc, eu euismod arcu interdum placerat?</u> -DPM: Nullam ut velit mattis, ornare ante vitae; MG: cursus ex. Etiam vel semper lectus; MO: a neque tempus consectetur. Morbi id -enim a erat vulputate sagittis non iaculis -metus. Donec eget iaculis lorem.</p>

Figure 2 - The backhalf of a BP debat

## Additional Tips

The previous material is the framework for flowing but it is not the only thing debaters should practice when it comes to note taking.

## Preparing Your Speech

Outside of the PM speech, everyone in a debate has to be ready to respond to material on the fly. Flowing can help students prepare their speech because it creates a framework in which a student can plan their upcoming responses. In order to do this, students should use the column for their speech as a place to put their notes for refutation and rebuilding. That way, when they get up to speak, they already have those notes to work from. Proper flowing should also make it clear

what points the other side has made and where the debater is missing necessary refutation or rebuilding. For example, if the DPM does not have an arrow connecting each LO argument to refutation, it should be clear on their page that this is missing.

## Whip Speeches

Whip speeches are the most complicated speech to give in BP and so additional notes are often necessary. In order to prepare to give a whip speech, the speaker should flow the round as described in this guide while also keeping an additional sheet of notes to track the debate.

The additional sheet of notes should be vertical. In most rounds, the PM and LO

introduce the most important areas of clash. By the end of the PM and LO speeches the whip speaker should have an idea for at least two of the questions that will make up the whip speech. These questions should be written on the additional sheet of paper with generous spacing between them. Using numbers and underlining the questions will make them easier to read.

Next, as important material is added to the round, the whip speaker should add notes to the whip speech sheet noting who said it.

Example Question Notes:

1) Honer bez pictsa?

PM: res ipsum

LO: ywertza quarucle jetsz

GW: rashet swool treautseau

Good whip speeches set out the opposing side's main contentions and then refute aggressively so refutation should be included either below contentions or to the right connected by arrows.

All rounds are unique but it is generally good practice to ensure that at least one of the questions is directly related to the teammate's extension. The sooner the extension is determined, the sooner the whip speaker can start incorporating it into their notes.

As well, GWs need to refute the MO extension so be sure to follow closely to the extension and incorporate it into the questions. Using red ink, a star, or some other notation will remind the speaker that this is the new extension material so they can specifically flag this refutation to the judge. OW can use the same technique to flag any particularly strong new refutation coming out of the GW speech.

## Shorthand

It is impossible to write down everything being said in a round of debate. In order to capture what matters students need to learn to simultaneously listen, write what they are hearing, and write what they plan to say in response. This is difficult to do and something that only lots of practice can help. That said, learning some shorthand can help make the process much easier.

Students should experiment with their own shorthand to find out what works for them, but here are some examples of shorthand that might be helpful:

- Use math symbols. We are all familiar with math symbols so this is an easy place to begin. Useful symbols include '+', '-', '=', '≠', '<', '>' and "∴".

TIP: "∴" is particularly useful for noting the conclusion to arguments.

- There are a lot of recurring words in debate that can be shortened and easily read once the student is familiar with using them. Here is a non-exhaustive list of examples:
  - e/i = even if
  - e/o = everyone
  - w/ = with
  - w/o = without
  - b/c = because
  - a/o = anyone
  - a/y = anything
  - e/y = everything
  - b/e = believe
  - s/q = status quo
- Some words work well just being shortened. For example:
  - exp. = experience
  - esp. = especially
  - disc. = discrimination
- Sometimes special shorthand is useful for particular rounds. If the round has recurring words, then the debater can use

shorthand for those words for that round.

Here are some examples:

- C = child
- P = parent
- Po = police
- R = rights
- AR = animal rights
- M = minorities
- EL = endangered language

### Colours

In addition to separating Gov and Opp by using colours, the debater can further clarify their notes by reserving a third colour for their own material. Usually red is the best colour for this since it will stand out against other colours.

There are numerous ways that a student can use their own colour to enhance the clarity of their notes and thus the clarity and effectiveness of their speech:

- Circle key issues in other speeches that need responses.
- Number and/or star places in the flow to ensure those issues can be found quickly.
- Identify areas of the speech that require emphasis.
- Make notations indicating the maximum amount of time that can be spent discussing a point or refutation.

### Judging

More experienced debaters may find themselves judging rounds of debate in order to help train new debaters. Whether you are judging as a trainer or just observing a round, the flowing method can be effective at tracking everything that is going on.

In addition to the above advice, when judging a debate it is useful to use a separate colour to note the suggestions you want to

make following the round. This can be done directly next to the argument/refutation etc. or by making notes at the bottom of the column. A judge can also use the margins or corners of the page to record notes that are relevant to all the debaters in the round like a lack of POIs or examples by all teams.

### Conclusion

Good note taking is a difficult skill to master but it is also something that debaters at any level can learn to do effectively with practice. The faster good note taking skills are developed the easier it is for debaters to master the more challenging aspects of debate.