

Debating Techniques Ks2

Debating is the act of arguing with rules. Just as the Question Time and Jeremy Kyle have different formats, so too are there many different formats for competitive debating. However, learning to debate in any format teaches you the skills that you need to debate in any other capacity and so the important factor is just making sure that everyone in a debate is using the same rules.

The Vocalise format rewards good teamwork in developing arguments of excellent depth and quality as well as argumentation from different perspectives and dimensions. The Vocalise format places an equal amount of burden on both teams to address the motion through substantive arguments and the opponent's arguments through rebuttals. It is also a highly interactive style, with the use of "Points of Information" to allow the debaters to engage each other even during speeches.

Each debate comprises of eight speeches delivered by two teams of three members. The two teams represent the Proposition and Opposition sides respectively. The first six speeches are five minutes in duration, with each team then finishing up by giving a three-minute concluding Reply (Summary) Speech.

The Rules

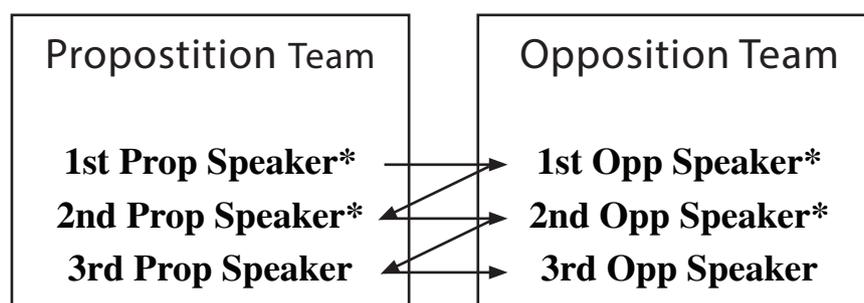
1. Each debate has 2 teams (a Proposition team and an Opposition team), each containing 3 speakers. The aim of each team is to work together to provide a good case for or against the 'motion' set for the debate. The motion for the debate proposes a change in policy or set of beliefs in the form 'This House Would...' or 'This House Believes...'

2. Each speaker in the debate gives a 5 min speech, in a zig-zag order: 1Prop, 1Opp, 2Prop, 2Opp, 3Prop, 3Opp. After the main debate has finished, there will be a floor debate where members of the audience (if there is an audience) can ask questions to either side in the debate. These questions should be responded to not by the speakers but in the 3 minute summary speeches which take place after the floor debate, given by one of the first two speakers on either side. The Opposition summary goes first, followed by the Proposition summary.

Chairman

Timekeeper

Judges



Audience

** Either of the first two speakers on each side can give the summary speech after the audience floor debate*

3. Points of information (POIs), short interruptions, may be made after the first minute and before the last minute of a speaker's speeches to speakers on the other side of the debate. The POI is made by standing up and saying 'Point of information/On that point' and then the speaker speaking may decide whether or not to accept the POI. POIs should be as short as possible and last no longer than 15 seconds. You should accept 1 or 2 POIs per speech and try and offer at least 4 in each speech from the other side.

4. Debates are usually short-preparation, with the motion being announced 30 minutes or an hour before the debate is due to start. The teams then have to prepare for the debate on their own, without talking to anyone who is not on the team and without using any electronic materials. However, initially, longer preparation debates can be used, giving the speakers time to research the debate and prepare fully as a team.

5. A debate can be supervised by a chairman who introduces the motion and the speakers before they speak, keeps order if necessary, and chooses the members of the audience who ask questions during the debate. The timekeeper signals to the speakers how much time they have left by banging a gavel or clapping: a single bang after 1 minute, a single bang after 4 minutes and a double bang after 5 minutes which indicates that the speaker should finish speaking. The judges decide which team has won the debate on the basis on which team presented the more convincing arguments, taking into account Content, Style and Strategy.

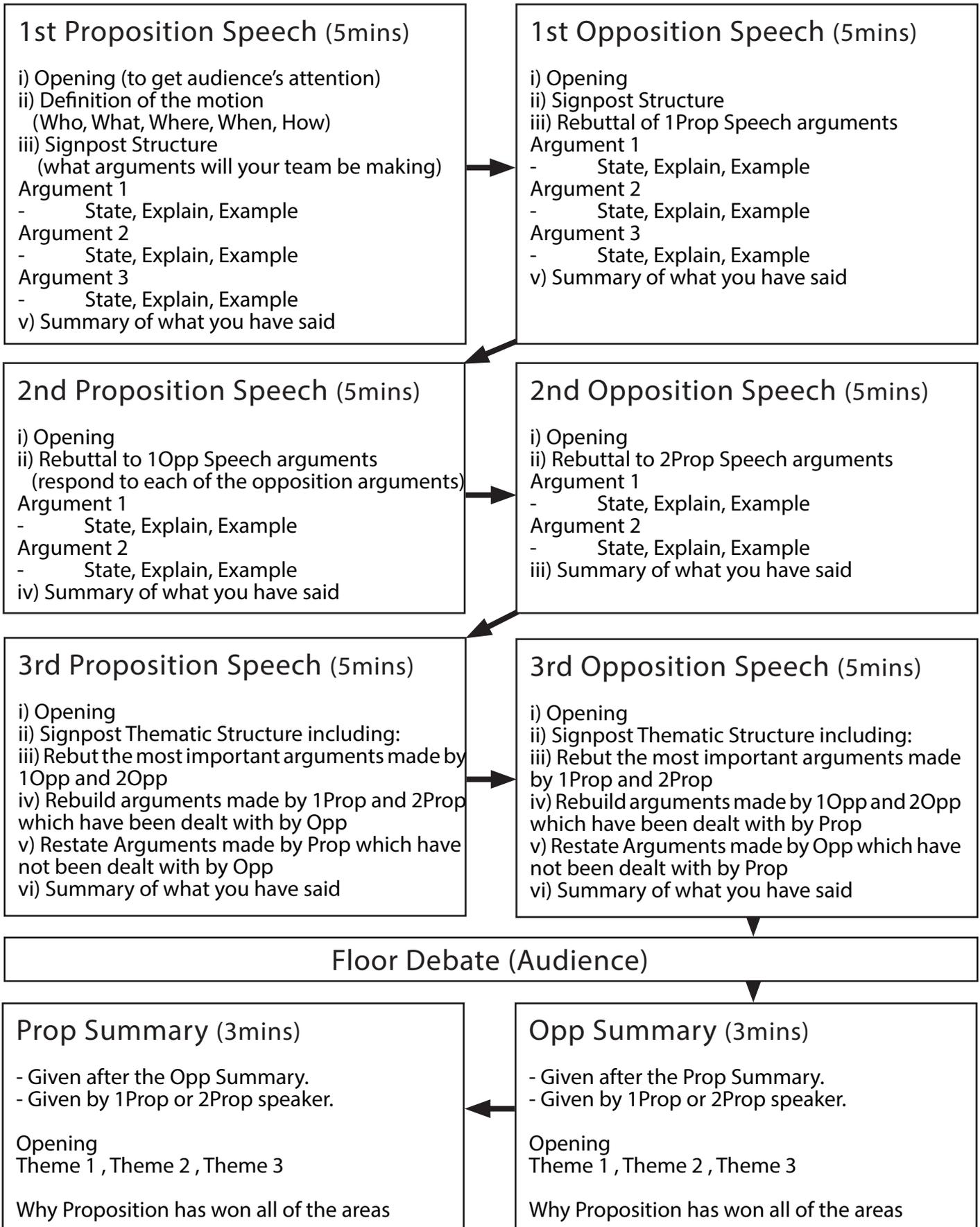
6. Speakers should have controlled conduct during the debate. The use of audio or visual aids is not allowed and speakers should attack the arguments in the debate, not the other speakers on a personal level (ad hominem attacks).

7. At the beginning of the debate, the first speaker from the proposition should define the terms of the debate in his speech (the Who, What, Where, When of the debate and the meaning of any unusual words in the motion) and that definition should be reasonable. The opposition must then argue the debate as defined, using only arguments and examples that are relevant to the debate.

8. All the speakers on the proposition and the opposition should present arguments and examples of their own, and respond to the arguments made by the other team. The aim of each team is to work together in order win the debate by presenting the most convincing arguments on their side and by responding effectively to the arguments presented by the other side. For this reason, teams should attempt to split up their arguments between the speakers, with each speaker making different arguments and responding to the arguments made by the previous speaker on the other side of the debate.

Proposition

Opposition



Opening Speakers

First Proposition

- Provides the Proposition definition
- Outlines case division/menu for Proposition
- Delivers 3 or 2 arguments in support of the motion

The First Proposition Speaker must provide a fair and comprehensive definition for the debate. Without fulfilling this role the rest of the arguments that follow tend to be delivered in a vacuum and a poor debates will often ensue.

The First Proposition Speaker should also be aware that the room is generally “cold” prior to the start of the debate. This means that the judges and the audiences have not fully devoted their attention to the debate and may still be distracted. Therefore, the speaker should try to inject enough energy into the audience and the room in order to bring the debate to life.

First Proposition Speakers usually take advantage of the ability to open the debate by delivering the strongest arguments for the Proposition’s side. These speakers also use the opportunity provided by not needing to rebut to put forward strongly developed substantive arguments with lots of powerful examples. Unlike the other speakers in the debate, the First Proposition Speaker will not have the opportunity to directly respond to their opponents’ arguments. Therefore, First Proposition Speakers should make use of giving and taking POIs to show off their ability to engage and rebut their opponents.

First Opposition

- Rebutts First Proposition’s substantive arguments
- Outlines case division/menu for Opposition
- Delivers 3 or 2 substantive arguments opposing the motion

The First Opposition role can be challenging as this speaker has the least amount of time to prepare to respond to the Proposition’s definitions and the First Proposition’s substantive arguments.

First Opposition Speakers also have the responsibility of delivering the Opposition’s strongest arguments against the motion. These speakers will also be responsible for providing the first attack on the proposition’s strongest arguments within the debate.

Second and Third Speakers

Second Proposition

- Rebut First Opposition's substantive arguments
- Rebuild First Proposition's substantive arguments
- Delivers 2 substantive arguments in support of the motion

Second Opposition

- Rebut Second Proposition's substantive arguments
- Rebuild First Opposition's substantive arguments
- Delivers 2 substantive arguments opposing the motion

The Second Speaker's position is vital as it provides an ideal opportunity to evaluate the broad strategy taken by their team and provide a critique of their opponent's best points.

The Second Speakers are also ideally placed to add a new dimension to the debate by developing their team's arguments further. This allows the team to broaden the scope of the debate and demonstrate that its approach to the motion does not rely on a single line of argumentation or logic. For instance, if the debate has focused mainly on social issues, the Second Speakers can switch to more economic, moral or political perspectives.

Third Proposition

- Rebut the Opposition's substantive arguments
- Rebuild Proposition's substantive arguments
- Provides quick summary of Proposition's case

Third Opposition

- Rebut the Proposition's substantive arguments
- Rebuild Opposition's substantive arguments
- Provides quick summary of Opposition's case

The Third Speakers should focus on rebutting their opponent's substantive arguments. Although some of these substantive points may already have been rebutted before, the Third Speaker can move the debate forward by developing the rebuttals further. This means that the Third Speaker can rebut these arguments from a different perspective (e.g., impact on individual vs impact on wider society) or a different dimension (e.g., long term vs short term). Third Speakers should also address the key examples in their opponents' cases while adding more examples in their own rebuttals.

Third Speakers should avoid simply listing the arguments in chronological order. Instead it is generally recommended that they should organise the points into two or three key categories (e.g, Political, Economic and Social or Impact on Women, Children and Minorities) and deliver them based on their order of importance.

Summary Speakers

- Summarise the key points raised by both teams
- Focus on the key areas of clash between the two teams
- Analyse and evaluate why the debate was won by their team

Although this is commonly known as the “Summary” Speech, debaters should not simply list out the arguments and repeat the main rebuttals that featured in the debate. The Summary Speakers can add value to the debate and attempt to convince the audience and judges in the following two ways:

1. Summary Speakers can demonstrate their understanding of the key issues in the debate by summarising and grouping the arguments into broad Areas of Clash. Summary Speakers usually group the points around 2 or 3 Areas of Clash.

For instance, in a debate on Privatising Prisons in the UK, the Opposition Summary Speaker may state that the two main clashes are the impacts on the Prisoners and the Justice System respectively. In contrast, the Proposition Summary Speaker may argue that the two areas of clash were in the Economic Impact and the Social Consequences of the policy.

2. Summary Speakers bring the biggest contribution to the round by presenting evaluative analysis of the debate. This means that they assess at the debate as a whole and describe how the debate was won by their respective teams. They will have to highlight the flaws in their opponents’ case while pointing out the strength of their own case and refutations. In many ways, the Summary Speakers will take the role of a biased Journalist (e.g. A partisan FOX News reporter) reporting on the debate and explaining to the audience and judges why their team has won.

Summary Speakers should NOT make any new arguments in their speeches, although new rebuttals and examples are allowed. It is often a good idea for the language used in the Summary Speeches to be retrospective and the speakers should be encouraged to speak in the PAST TENSE.

Style

Verbal

Style refers to the way debaters speak and deliver their speeches. Speakers will need to make their communication effective and impactful in order to persuade the audience and judges. Below are some examples of how a speaker's Non Verbal style can be improved. This will be useful for improving the Style Marks of a speaker in a competitive debate or for prisoners who just want to improve their confidence at public speaking.

Volume

Volume control is critical in making debaters' speeches effective and clear. The following factors should be considered with regards to volume.

- Avoid high volumes: Some speakers appear to believe that the louder team will always win. This is not the case! A debate featuring debaters screaming their arguments will leave the judges' ears ringing and the audience in shock.
- Avoid low volumes: Some speakers are naturally soft-spoken. However, these debaters are often hard to hear and understand when they are speaking in large areas or when they have to compete with ambient background noise. A good basic rule is that the speaker needs to be heard by the member of the audience seated furthest away from them.
- Use variation for emphasis: Varying the volume is a great way to put emphasis on certain words. Lowered volume can make the audience lean forward in anticipation and the raised volume (without shouting) after that moment can help to force home a crucial point.

Tone

Debate speeches, even on a very controversial and engaging motion, can easily become dull and forgettable if a speaker has a monotonous voice. Therefore, all debaters need to learn to vary the pitch of their voice so that they can make the aural quality of the speech more interesting. Pitch variation also allows for emphasis to be made on key elements of the speech.

Speed

With a limited amount of time available for speeches, speakers are often tempted to talk as quickly as possible to get as much information out as possible. This is a flawed approach and very few speakers speak effectively by speaking fast. Debaters should instead try to speak as slowly as possible, speeding up only on occasions to add some variety. Speaking slowly makes the speakers appear calm and confident. Perhaps most importantly, speaking slowly gives the judge and members of the audience time to follow the arguments and rebuttals being delivered and also to process and evaluate them. If the judges cannot follow the speaker because their speech was too fast, then the arguments and rebuttals will not be receiving the full credit they deserve.

Pauses

Debaters should also learn to put natural pauses into their speeches. These pauses need not be long and should only last up to 3 seconds. However, they allow the speakers to add emphasis to a certain idea or point. Using a pause before a concept or idea can make it clear to the audience that this is a critical point. Moreover, pauses are good transition markers. Using pauses at the end of each rebuttal and argument lets the judges know that the speaker is moving to a new point. This signals to the judges and the audience that the previous point is finished, so that they can make an initial evaluation of it.

Avoid unnecessary Filler Words

Debaters should not waste time during their speeches using unnecessary or distracting words. Many Debaters end up using many "filler" words such as "Ladies and Gentlemen" and "like" and "erm" during their speeches. These tend to be highly distracting for the audience. In severe cases, these words tend to form the vast majority of a debater's speech! Speakers should be encouraged to remove these words from their speeches altogether and instead replace them with effective pauses instead.

Be yourself!

Debaters should try to make themselves as stylistically distinct from their teammates and opponents as possible. When all debaters on a team speak at the same pace, with the same intensity and volume, it is very difficult to establish each speaker's individuality. Non-Verbal style variation can be very effective. For example, if most preceding speakers were laid back, the next debaters can speak with greater energy and fervour. If the speakers had been intense, the follow-up speakers could adopt a calm and cool persona to have more contrast.

However, always remember that speakers sound far more convincing to the audience if they express themselves in a genuine manner that demonstrates their personal authenticity. There is no need for debaters to try to speak like Winston Churchill, Barack Obama or one of their Vocalise coaches!

Non-verbal

Even though the majority of the information in debates are conveyed through oral communications, as human beings we still receive a great deal of information through visual triggers. This means that debaters have to make sure that their Non-Verbal style does not distract from their speeches and in fact helps to support their arguments as much as possible.

Eye Contact

Debaters must try to ensure that they make eye contact with the judges and the audience as much as possible. Maintaining eye contact and not looking down at the floor demonstrates that the debaters believe in their own arguments. Engaging eye contact also means that the judges and audiences will be less likely to be distracted by other factors. This does not mean that the debaters should stare at a particular individual in the room. Establishing regular eye contact with the judges and audience and "scanning" the entire room will really help to make a speaker appear confident and in control.

Good eye contact also means that the debaters will not be looking down at their speeches or notes and simply reading them. Looking down automatically lowers the volume of the speaker, as their speech is likely to be directed to the floor rather than outwards to the audience. Reading also makes a speaker look as if they are not comfortable with their own material and can even give the impression that the speaker is merely reading words written by someone else on their team.

Gestures

The use of hand gestures can help to put emphasis on key points in the speech. However, the excessive and repetitive use of a particular form gestures can also become very distracting and annoying for those people watching the speech. Debaters should therefore try as much as possible to control and vary the use of gestures instead of letting their hands go wild! Speakers should be reminded that their hands should never be in their pockets as this creates a rather unprofessional and unpolished appearance.

Movement

Walking around is something that has to be restricted within a debate. A moving speaker often takes the attention of the judges and the audiences away from the speech and towards their movement. Therefore, if there is to be any movement at all, it should be limited and used only when the speaker is in between points and has a natural pause. Otherwise, it is preferable to stand still and deliver the speech from a firm stable stance as described below.

Standing Stance

One nervous gesture common in debaters is the tendency to shift their weight from leg to leg. This often makes their bodies sway back and forth or from side to side. This is very distracting for the audience and can even make some people feel as if they were watching a debate on a ship at sea! Debaters should instead stand with their feet at shoulder's width apart (as if they were about to hit a golf ball) so that their stance will be nice and stable.

Content

THE PROPOSITION TEAM

Problem – Solution – Outcome (P.S.O.)

The very basics of debating are of course that one team must propose a motion and one team must oppose the motion. The job of the proposition team therefore is to convince the audience and/or the judges that what they propose (the motion) is a good idea. 'Problem-Solution-Outcome' or P.S.O. is a technique which can be used specifically by the proposition to look at a debate topic as a whole and consider what they have to prove to win the debate.

When given the debate motion, the proposition team should first consider:

1. what problem that motion sets out to remedy
2. why the problem is important and
3. the ways in which the outcome of the motion would be better than the status quo.

They must then incorporate this in to all their speeches, to make sure that the arguments put forward by each team member are in line with the approach of the team as a whole. P.S.O. will also help the proposition to ensure that they have understood what is at the crux of the debate, which to a certain extent they can set out in their opening speech. It might sound like an obvious approach, but it is often forgotten and when done properly, it enables debaters at all levels to formulate a solid basis for what they propose.

EXAMPLE: This house would make voting compulsory

PROBLEM = Voter turnout in the UK has been steadily declining since the 1950s and citizens are increasingly disengaged from politics. Politicians don't have to appeal to a genuine majority to get elected, they only have to target those who are likely to vote.

SOLUTION = Voting should be made compulsory for all British citizens aged 18 and over

OUTCOME = All citizens would be forced to become more politically involved and aware. Politicians would have to formulate policy which would appeal to and benefit the whole of society, not just those likely to vote. General elections would by definition become more democratic.

As you can see from this example, there is more than one problem at the heart of this debate but the arguments above can easily be summarised into a TEAM LINE or approach that can be applied by all team members.

PROPOSITION:

P r o b l e m

Voter turnout in the UK has been steadily declining since the 1950s and citizens are increasingly disengaged from politics.

S o l u t i o n

Voting should be made compulsory

O u t c o m e

All citizens would be forced to become more politically involved and aware. General elections would, by definition become more democratic.

THE OPPOSITION TEAM

Attack - Attack - Attack

The job of the opposition team is to attack and undermine the arguments of the proposition. They do not necessarily have to show that they have a better idea than the proposition – they simply have to show that the proposition itself is weak and we are better off with the status quo or with another approach to the problem. The P.S.O. formulation is still relevant to the opposition team because it is precisely the links that the proposition have made between the motion and a particular problem, and the motion and a particular solution that the opposition must **attack**. They can do this in a number of ways:

OPPOSITION

1. **Prove there is not a problem.** E.g. Compared to many countries the UK has a relatively high turnout and this is not something which we need to be concerned about at the moment.
2. **Prove that the proposed solution will not in fact solve the problem.** E.g. People will resent being forced to vote and will become even more disenfranchised from politics and politicians.
3. **There is a better way of solving the problem** E.g. many studies have shown that simply giving people the day off or holding elections on the weekend significantly increases voter turnout.
4. **The outcome which will result is no better than the problem.** E.g. Making people vote will not automatically make them more politically aware and they may very well vote arbitrarily or just spoil their ballots.

Structuring Speeches

You may have noticed by now that a lot of things in debating come in threes – P.S.O., S.E.E and rebuttal are all done in three stages, and there are several other aspects of debating that follow the rule of three.

As far as structure is concerned:

1. Every debate speech should comprise of three sections
2. Each argument in a speech will be said three times.
3. There should always be no more than three main arguments per debate speech

This may sound a little strange but if you follow this rule when structuring your speeches, they will be a lot better for it!

The Rule of Three

Like an essay or a story, a debate speech should always have a beginning, a middle and an end.

Beginning

Always start your speech with an introduction or a 'menu'. This is where you tell the audience what arguments you are going to make and like a menu, it lets the audience know what to expect or what to look forward to. If you are the first speaker for your team, you should also tell the audience what your team mate will be discussing. A very basic example of this would be:

"Ladies and gentleman of the floor, madam chair, I am going to tell you today why you should oppose the motion to ban boxing. I am going to talk to you about three major issues that arise from this motion: why boxing is not in fact a very dangerous sport, why banning boxing would not work anyway and create more danger for those currently involved in the sport and..... My partner is going to tell you about the personal benefits of boxing, as well as the benefits to the wider community."

Once you have given your menu, the rest of this first section to the speech will be comprised of rebuttal and rebuilding:

"Before I go on to my main arguments, I would like to address some of the issues raised by the first speaker from the proposition"

Middle

The middle section of the speech will obviously be where you make your main arguments in full, following the S.E.E. structure for each one. You should not give more than three arguments – otherwise it will be too many for the audience to remember and it will mean you have to rush through your speech or skip over important elements like rebuttal. There will rarely be a plethora of arguments for any debate topic but there will often be more than you can mention – the skill is to identify those which are the strongest and prioritise those.

End

The third section is your conclusion, where you summarise your main arguments and remind the audience/judges what you have said and why you should win. This is your last chance to make an impression on your audience and should never be forgotten, even if you are running out of time.

Rebuttal and Rebuilding

In order to win a debate it is not enough to make brilliant arguments in favour of your team's position. Every speaker in a debate (apart from the first speaker from the proposition team) must include rebuttal of the previous person's points in their speech. This means that throughout the debate, each speaker should keep a note of the key arguments made by the person before them and think about how they will discredit them. Debate, without rebuttals, would merely be a series of speeches with no relation to each other. Like ships passing in the night, there will be no clash, no conflict and ultimately, no debate. Rebuttal, like argumentation, is one of the foundations of debate.

What is rebuttal then? It is a speaker saying that an opponent's argument is not valid and showing why it is not valid. If argument is about building logic links in a case, then rebuttal is about the breaking of these links.

The following approach is a simple and effective way of incorporating rebuttal in a speech:

STEP 1: What **THEY** (the other team) say

STEP 2: What **WE** say

STEP 3: Why we are **RIGHT**

Rebuttal Example

STEP 1: The opposition team have told you that boxing should be banned because it is one of the most dangerous sports in the world.

STEP 2: The fact is that far fewer people die boxing in the UK every year than they do playing other sports like horse riding, motorcycle racing or skiing.

STEP 3: This is important because it shows that the Proposition are wrong to characterise boxing as a sport that is SO dangerous that the State has a responsibility to step in and protect boxers.

This is a crucial part of debating and should not be forgotten or ignored! Another important element of every speech is rebuilding. This almost takes rebuttal one-step further and can be structured in a similar way:

STEP 1: **WE** told you X

STEP 2: The opposition said it was wrong because of Y

STEP 3: **BUT** they failed to think about Z, which proves we are right.