2016 WADL Student Debating Handbook
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INTRODUCTION

The Western Australian Debating League aspires to ensure all students have meaningful access to debating that encourages critical thinking, fosters engagement with global issues and equips students with lifelong skills and the confidence to pursue their potential. WADL aims to do this by ensuring all WA school students have access to challenging debating competition, high quality resources and purpose-built development opportunities. WADL is the leading debating organisation in Western Australia, and the state’s sole affiliate of the Australian Debating Federation.

The WA Schools Debating Competition has been running for over 40 years, and it is the largest and most prestigious debating competition in the state. The Competition attracts more than 1,500 students from over 50 government and private schools in the Perth metropolitan area. There are five preliminary rounds, which is followed by a Finals series – culminating in a Grand Final in late Term Three.

Debating is not just an extra-curricular activity you do after school – it is a way to develop your critical thinking, teamwork and public speaking skills in a fun and relaxed environment. Through debating you will be able to improve your academic results, meet some great new people and develop lifelong skills that will last well beyond high school. Past WADL debaters have gone on to achieve great things and many have become leaders in the fields of politics, law, academia, finance and science.

This booklet is designed to guide you through debating, and help explain some of the key elements and aspects of debating. It will include a number of activities and worksheets, as well as explanations of important concepts such as rebuttal, case construction, method and manner. Further resources are available at the end of the booklet, as well as information on other opportunities that WADL offers.
INTRODUCTION TO DEBATING

What is a debate?
A debate comprises of two teams that each take opposite sides of an argument. In a debate you will receive a topic that is written as a statement. One team will agree with the statement, this team is called the Affirmative, the other team will argue against the statement and is called the Negative team.

What makes up a speech?

1. **Definitions** - A definition is set by the 1st speaker of the affirmative team in order to define the scope of the topic. The first speaker of the negative team is able to challenge the definition given by the affirmative team but only if they have defined the topic so that it is impossible for them to argue their case.
2. **Points** - These are your arguments that make up the core of a debate. The logic and the strength of your arguments are what win you a debate.
3. **Rebuttal** - This is your response to the opposition’s arguments. Rebuttal is mostly thought of on the spot during the debate and is the main component of the second and third speaker’s speech.
4. **Introductions and conclusions** - Usually a speech to be convincing will have a short introduction and a short conclusion. These should be short, smart and snappy to grab hold of the attention of the audience.

What are the roles of each speaker?
Each team has 3 speakers. Speakers will speak interchangeably; a member of the affirmative team will speak first, then a member of the negative team and so on. Each speaker has a different role in the team.

**1st Speaker**
The first speaker is the first person to advocate for their team’s case; which why their role is to present the major points of their team’s case. The first speaker will introduce a definition and model, if necessary, and then they will go on to introduce their team’s points. The 1st speaker of the negative team then they will have some rebuttal in their speech in response to the case that has been presented by the affirmative team.

**2nd Speaker**
The second speaker primarily needs to respond to the speakers before them. After they have done their rebuttal they will introduce a new argument that support their teams case. Generally, these arguments won’t be as important as anything that the first speaker said.

**3rd Speaker**
The third speaker’s role is to rebut all the points that have been brought up in the debate and summarise their team’s case. They aren’t allowed to bring up any new arguments, but they are allowed to have new responses to material the opposition has brought.
Topics

There are two types of debates, normative and empirical debates.

- **Normative debates** are also known as ‘should debates’. They propose a change and are phrased as ‘That the government should’ or ‘That we should’.
- **Empirical debates** are less common but require you to make a value judgment on a specific motion. They are often phrased as ‘That X has done more harm than good’ or ‘That we regret X’.

Models and Tests

- **Normative Debates use ‘models’** - Sometimes, the way a topic is phrased may require the affirmative team to suggest a model for the debate. A model is basically an explanation of what a proposal will look like in the real world. Topics that contain the phrase “That we should” or “That the Government should” often requires some sort of a model. For example, in the topic “That the government should encourage more men to become primary school teachers”, the affirmative team might suggest a model which involves; pay raises for male primary school teachers or lower ATAR requirements for males to study primary school teaching. A model helps set the boundary of the debate so that both teams can argue about the real world implications of a specific policy. Models can also be very simple - for example on the topic “That the Government should tax fast food” the affirmative could propose a model in which; the Government places a tax rate of 30% on fast foods and uses that tax money to spend on healthy eating public campaigns. If proposing a model, the affirmative team should introduce it at the 1st affirmative speaker.

- **Empirical Debates use ‘tests’** – In other instances, the way a topic is phrased may require the affirmative team to suggest a test for the debate. A test is basically a way of measuring a statement in order to make it provable. For example, if you were faced with the motion “That the United Nations has done more harm than good”. With just that topic, it is impossible to prove that the United Nations has done more harm than good to everything in the world! The affirmative team can propose a test to narrow the scope of the debate – its test can be along the lines of “Our test for this debate is to prove that the UN has done more harm than goods to the environment, poor countries and disadvantaged people.” A test is effectively a burden that a team can set for itself in an empirical debate. It is important to keep the burden reasonable otherwise your opposition will challenge it!

Just because a test is normative or empirical doesn’t mean that you must propose a model or test but it is a good guiding principle. It is safe to propose a model or test if you are unsure and uncertain.

Senior Debates

Debating as a Senior (Year 11 & 12) varies from Novice and Junior debating in two ways:

1. **Impromptu Debates** - In senior division debaters don’t receive the topic until they arrive at the debate on the night. They get 1 hour to prepare their case with no access to internet or notes.
2. **Points of Information (POIs)** - POIs are questions that the opposition can ask a speaker during their speech. POIs are used to put a speaker on the spot or make them respond to an argument that they have been avoiding.
CASE CONSTRUCTION

Putting together the points and arguments in your speeches

Case construction refers to the process of putting together your points and arguments for the debate. It involves brainstorming ideas, crafting those ideas into arguments, prioritising those points and then allocating them to different speakers.

There are a few simple steps that can be followed in order to form your case. When you first receive a topic complete each of these steps thinking about the answers to the questions. We will consider these steps in relation to the topic ‘That we should ban smoking’.

Step 1: What is the problem?

Why was the topic set and what is the problem that we are trying to address? How does the topic attempt to solve that problem?
— This debate has been set as smoking is a major problem in our society as it causes health problems and puts pressure on the health system. The motion attempts to solve this issue by banning people from smoking - reducing the amount of health problems caused.

Step 2: Who matters in this debate?

Who are the people that would be affected by this topic (groups, individuals, institutions)?
— The groups that you would want to consider include: smokers, non smokers, hospitals and the health system, tobacco companies, children etc.

Step 3: Are there any principles we stand behind?

Principles are moral stances that we as society take. Consider whether this is something that we principally agree with, whether it is a case in which we would stand behind that principle, or whether a different or more important principle applies in this case.
— A principle that you may want to consider is the right to bodily autonomy. Generally we let people make choices about their own body. We allow people to have tattoos, piercings, bad foods, alcohol. There are exceptions to this rule as we do not allow people to do things such as take drugs as it may harm others. Considering why you think smoking may be part of the rule or part of the exception.

Step 4: What are the practical effects?

What are the harms and benefits of this policy? Remember to consider the effects on each of the groups that you identified in step two.
— Benefits: less smokers, less health problems, less people in hospitals
— Harms: black-market may develop, smokers may face symptoms of withdrawal, loss of industry in terms of jobs and economic contribution

Step 5: How does this all fit together?

Now bring all of the above information together and decide on which are your most important points! Allocate the first two most points two your first speaker, and your second two most points to your second speaker.
Case Construction Worksheet

Topic: ________________________________________________________________

What is the problem?

Who does the problem affect?

What principles do we stand behind?

What are the positives and negatives of this policy?

Case!
REBUTTAL

Proving your opposition wrong

What is rebuttal?

Rebuttal refers to responses that a team provides to other team’s arguments. It’s when you say something contrary to what the other side says.

Why do we rebut?

Rebuttal is often the deciding factor in the debate. The case you construct is the base, and then from there you have to also prove why the other team is wrong. At the end of the debate, the adjudicator will have to weigh up both sides of the case, and decide which one was more convincing. If your team can prove why the other team is wrong, then it is a lot easier for the adjudicator to believe your side and award you the debate.

When should rebuttal be done?

At the start of your speech, because straight away the audience recognises that you were listening to your opposition and don’t believe them at all and want to convince them why you are right. The audience has just listened to several minutes of why your team is wrong, you have to make sure you respond as early as possible.

How should you think about responses?

The best way to respond to an argument is by following the following the rebuttal tree to make sure that you are giving the best responses possible.

1. Is it True?
   a. No: If what they have said is untrue you should explain that it is untrue because it is factually wrong or because it is not logical. For example
      — It is factually wrong to say that drinking red bull will make you a better sports player because red bull gives you wings.
      — It is logically untrue to say that if you do lots of homework you will be a better sports player. This is logically untrue because the two activities require different skill sets.
   b. Yes: If what they have said is true you need to explain why it is not relevant or why it is not important.
      — In a debate about nuclear power, if the oppositions talk about how Donald Trump might be the next President of the USA and why this means Australia should not use nuclear power you can safely argue that that point is probably irrelevant.
      — In a debate about shark culling you say that whilst you agree that surfers may be safer if we culled sharks you think that this would have bad effects on the ecosystem and that this is more important that the safety of surfers.
The Rebuttal Tree Worksheet

Is their statement true?

YES  NO

Is it relevant?  Is it important?  Is it factually correct?  Is it logically correct?

Your Response

“The opposition claimed that by making tertiary education free for everyone that the workforce would be smarter and people would be more competitive in getting jobs. Our response to that this argument is untrue because it does not logically follow. If everyone now had access to free tertiary university education then university degrees would be meaningless as everyone would have the same qualifications and be on the same playing field.”
METHOD

Structuring your arguments and speeches

What is Method?

Method is an often forgotten and undervalued aspect of debating that differentiates it from other forms of public speaking and communication. However, Method is integral to ensuring effective persuasion, clear communication and conveying a convincing message to the audience and adjudicators. It is also one of the easiest skills to learn, and can often make the difference between losing and winning a debate.

There are two types of Method:

1. **External Method** - Because debating is a team effort, and communicating about a team’s case is incredibly important, let's start with External Method. As highlighted above, External Method refers to the structure and consistency of the entire team’s case in a debate. There are three main things to keep in mind when considering External Method.

2. **Internal Method** - Once we have sorted out the issues above, we can focus on the Internal Method of each speaker. This concerns the logical flow and consistency of each individual speech, and therefore it is up to the individual speaker to ensure that they have ticked off the main elements of good Internal Method. Some teachers like to compare Internal Method to writing an Essay – it is important to have an introduction, include clear topic sentences and have logical flow in an argument. Debating speeches are very similar in that you need to clearly signpost your arguments within your speech. A classic phrase used to describe Internal Method; “tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them”. This perfectly summarises the process of introducing the arguments, explaining the arguments, and then summarising the arguments.

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<th>EXTERNAL METHOD</th>
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<td>Points to Remember</td>
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<tr>
<td>INTERNAL METHOD</td>
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<td>Points to Remember</td>
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**Structuring Palm Cards**

The following diagram should give you an idea of some ways to structure your palm cards, especially your rebuttal palm cards. This way, you have a clear idea of what point the opposition made, and what your rebuttal to that point is. This can automatically improve your structure by helping with effective signposting and clear logical flow within your speech.

Other key things to remember when using palm cards:
1. Number your palm cards
2. Not overly relying on your palm cards (keep up your eye contact)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEY SAID</th>
<th>REBUTTAL</th>
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<tr>
<td>“People should be able to choose to smoke, even though they know that it is harmful to them”</td>
<td>Two responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The government has an obligation to protect people from harm, because the burden of smoking falls on everyone else through clogging up the healthcare system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Furthermore, a lot of the times, the addictive nature of smoking makes it hard for people to quit, even if they want to, so the Government must act</td>
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MANNER
Being a persuasive speaker

What is manner?

Manner is the way you speak to an audience, your personal style. It is unique for every speaker and there is no one correct way to speak as it will depend a lot on your personality. Your manner is how you sell your matter and make your arguments appear as strong and persuasive as possible. There are some technical terms we use when explaining manner that are relevant to everyone.

Why does manner matter?

In debating, what you say will often be more important than how you say it. But the way that you speak, your manner, does play a huge role in making your arguments convincing – the two go hand in hand. You can have an absolutely killer point, but if you speak so quietly the adjudicator can’t hear you, the point won’t get the attention it deserves.

This section is to help you have the best manner possible so you can present your arguments in the most convincing way possible. Manner is essential to establish a personal connection with your audience – if your audience can’t connect with you, how can they really connect with your arguments?

Elements of good manner

— Eye contact - It is important to look at your audience when you are speaking to them. When we really want something from our parents or friends, we will look at them in the eye to really engage with them and get what we want. Just because you are speaking to more than one person, it doesn’t mean that eye contact stops being important. Try and look at your audience members and adjudicators, not above their heads

— Posture – standing straight with your feet shoulder width apart will ensure you command the space that you are in. It also makes you appear more confident and assertive when you can stand straight and own the space you are in. Often, when we get nervous, we try and make ourselves as small as possible – bringing our shoulders in and looking down. This makes it harder to breathe properly and our voice is then not as powerful. Be really conscious of what your body is doing when you are speaking and if you feel yourself getting nervous – make an effort to stand tall.

— Gesture – remember that a lot of our communication with other people is nonverbal. People will understand what we mean through not only what we say, but how we say it with our body language and gestures. Hand gestures can be incredibly effective to illustrate a point when you use them appropriately. They will make you look engaged in what you are saying and in turn, will engage the audience.

— Tone & pitch – the tone of our voice plays a huge role in how we are perceived as speakers. Learning how to control your pitch will make you a powerful speaker – it will allow you to lower your pitch when you are making a serious point and raise it
when you want to be humorous or increase the energy of your presentation. Think about pitch the way you would think about a music score and work to reach your full pitch range.

— *Pause* – pauses in public speaking act as auditory punctuation. They give listeners a chance to digest what you have said and will make you appear in control of what you are saying. Remember you don't have to fill every second of your time speaking, it is important to pause and let the audience do some thinking.

— *Pace* – the rate at which you speak will affect how the audience understands your material. Naturally, speakers will have different paces, but generally, it is important to speak at a rate that people can understand and process what you have said. When we are nervous or excited, we are more likely to speak fast. So take a breath and make sure to slow down.
FURTHER OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES

The Schools Debating Competition is just one element of WADL’s comprehensive and far-reaching debating program. For more information about our other activities please visit our website: http://www.wadl.org.

2016 BP Debating Competition

The BP Debating Competition is WADL’s newest and fastest growing program which was established in 2014. This competition is based on the British Parliamentary style of debating, where four teams of two compete against each other in a debate. The BP Debating Competition is a fun, challenging and unique opportunity for students, and has been very popular since its establishment. Rounds are held in early September with a Finals Series held in late September and early October.

WA State Debating Team

WADL is responsible for selecting the WA delegation to the National Schools Debating Championships, which is the most prestigious secondary school debating competition in Australia. The WA State Debating Team consist of four of the most exceptional and talented secondary school debaters in Western Australia. WA has a rich history of competing in the National Schools Debating Championships, having won the Grand Final a number of times. Trials for the WA State Debating Team are held in late February each year.

Further Resources

If you are after more resources on debating, then we would suggest visiting the WADL website for written and video resources on debating. WADL is also able to provide seminars to students at your school to suit a range of skill levels.

— Information about Seminars: http://www.wadl.org/development/seminars
— Information about online videos: http://www.wadl.org/development/videos

WADL is an affiliate of the Australian Debating Federation, and there a number of sibling organisations operating in the other states & territories across the country. You might find it useful to look for some resources published by other affiliates which can be found at: http://debating.org.au. Another useful guide is the Australia-Asia Debating Guide (2nd edition) edited by Ray D’Cruz.