

How to write a debate speech?

Preparing ...

Understand how debates work.

- You will be given a debate topic – this is called a “**resolution.**”
- Your team must **take a stance**, either affirmative or negative, to the resolution.
- The speakers then present arguments against the earlier affirmative or negative speech that was just read.
- Speakers must listen carefully and be able to **counter arguments.**
- There are two segments involving **cross-examination (CX)**, in which the debaters are allowed to ask questions and openly debate the topic. This occurs after the first affirmative speech, and the first negative speech.

Research the topic very thoroughly with credible information.

- Because you may be asked to work on either side, in addition to preparing **one speech**, you must spend time thoroughly understanding all aspects of the resolution in order to write a **second speech.**
- *Brainstorm the topic, and research it before you sit down to write.* Write out a list of key components for both sides of the issue. If you are on a debate team, do this together. Each member could discuss the key component list, in order to figure out which issues you want to cover in each speech.
- *Spend some time at the library or on the Internet using credible sources* to research the key reasons that seem strongest. Use **books, scholarly journals, credible newspapers**, and the like. Be very cautious about unverified information bandied about on the Internet.
- You will also want to prepare for dealing with the strongest arguments your opponent(s) might make. *Ignoring the other side's best arguments can weaken your rhetorical appeal.*

Write an outline of your speech.

- If you create a **basic outline** of the speech, your writing organization will probably be better when you actually sit down to write the **speech in full.** It's a good idea to memorize the ultimate speech or just rely on the outline as notes when giving it.

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Debate outline

ATTENTION-GETTER

YOUR STATED STANCE / RESTATEMENT OF THE RESOLUTION

DEFINITIONS

VALUE

CRITERION

CONTENTIONS

You can break each of those six parts into subcategories. It's often a good idea to write the contentions last, focusing on the value and criterion to hold it up first.

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Writing ...

Write an introduction that is catchy and interesting.

- You want to introduce your topic very clearly and concisely right at the beginning of the debate speech. However, *you should open with a colourful flourish that foreshadows the topic.*
- You should address the jury or audience with **formal salutations**. Debates are very formal in tone.
- *Making a good first impression with the judges is very important.* This leads judges to assume the debater is persuasive. One technique to write a strong introduction is to **contextualize the topic**, especially in relation to real world events.
- Introductions can also focus on prominent **examples, quotations**, or on a **personal anecdote** that can help establish a **rappor**t with the audience and judges. *Be careful using humour*; it involves risks and can lead to awkward silences if not done right. Find a **relevant specific** that illustrates the underlying point.

Outline where you stand very clearly.

- The audience and judges should not have to puzzle over where you stand on the topic. *Are you affirmative or negative to the resolution?* Say - clearly and concisely and firmly. Up high.
- *Don't muddle your position.* It needs to be extremely clear whether you affirm or negate the resolution, so *don't hem and haw and contradict yourself.* The audience also should not have to wait until the end to find out. Make your stance very clear, and do it early on. For example, you could say, “my partner and I firmly negate (or affirm) the resolution which states ...

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Make key points to back up your stance.

- You want to highlight your key points very strongly early on in the speech. You could provide **rapid-fire examples**, basically piling up the evidence to support your stance.
- A good rule of thumb is to back up your position with **3-4 strong points of supporting argumentation**. You definitely need to have more than 1 or 2 key points to back up the stance you have taken.
- The body of the speech – the key points and their development – should be, by far, the longest part of the debate speech.

Develop your key points.

- Back every single one of your key points up with examples, statistics and other **pieces of evidence**. *Flesh them out.*
- Focus on the **causes** of the problem, the **effects** of the problem, **expert opinion, examples, statistics**, and present a **solution**. Try to use **visual images**, not just generic terms – show, don't tell, and illustrate a point with details.
- Appeal to the **motives and emotions** of the listener with a light touch. Appeal to their sense of **fair play**, desire to save, to be helpful, to care about community, etc. *Ground examples in how people are affected.*
- Try using **rhetorical questions**, which make your opponents consider the validity of their point; **irony**, which undermines their point and makes you seem more mature and intelligent; **simile**, which gives them something to relate to; **humour**, which gets the audience on your side when done well; and **repetition**, which reinforces your point.

Understand the art of persuasion.

- Ancient philosophers studied **the art of persuasion**, and understanding their techniques will help your debate speech.
- Aristotle believed that speakers were more persuasive if they combined elements of **logos** (persuasion by reasoning) with **pathos** (having an element of emotional appeal) and **ethos** (an appeal based on the character of the speaker) - for example, that they seem intelligent or of good will.
- There are two ways to use logic – **inductive** (which makes the case with measurable evidence like statistics or a specific anecdote or example) and **deductive** (which makes the case by outlining a general principle that is related to the specific topic to infer a conclusion from it)
- *You should use pathos sparingly.* **Emotional appeal** on its own can be dangerous. Logos - the appeal to reason - should be at the core. However, **logical appeal** without any pathos at all can render a speech dry and dull. Consider what you are trying to make your audience feel. *Explaining how a topic affects real people is one way to use pathos well.*

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Concluding...

Write a strong conclusion.

- At the end, *you should reiterate your overall stance on the topic to reinforce your position.* It's a good idea to conclude with your **intention** to do something and with a strong **appeal for action** as well.
- One strong way to conclude a debate speech is to **bookend the conclusion with the opening**, by referring back to the introduction and tying the conclusion into the same theme.
- **Quotations** can be a good way to end a speech. You can also end with a **brief summation** of the key arguments of the speech to ensure they remain fresh in judges' minds.

Work on your delivery from beginning to end.

- *An advanced speaker carefully hones his or her delivery.* The speaker understands the power of carefully timed rhetorical pauses and pays careful attention to the desired tone (firm, moderate, etc.)
- *You don't want to read a debate speech verbatim.* Although you want to memorize the speech, and may use notes or your outline when giving it, it needs to sound natural and not too rehearsed. The key to giving a good debate speech is research. You will need to think on your feet to counter opposing arguments.
- Use a **clear, loud voice**, and be careful to watch **pacing**. You don't want to speak too loud or too slowly. Remember that confidence goes a long way toward persuasion.

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Are cell phones dangerous? – a model debate speech

<p>I believe that cell phones are dangerous. They pose a threat to safety on the road, to family life, to social behaviour, and they cause attention deficit disorders.</p>	<p>YOUR STATED STANCE</p>
<p>In society today, cell phones are common among everyone—every gender, every age.</p> <p>Each year, more and more kids get cell phones from their parents, and the average age at which kids receive cell phones gets lower and lower.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> As teens start driving, cell phones become an even bigger threat to safety. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Some teens simply cannot resist the temptation of texting while driving, despite the various movements dedicated to preventing that activity. <p>HOWEVER, teens aren't the only ones at risk. People of all ages check email, make phone calls, and text while driving.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> There is a growing amount of deaths each year caused by cell phone use while driving. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Yes, fines are given, but that doesn't seem to keep people from putting not only themselves in harm's way, but others as well. <p style="text-align: center;">→ SO WHEN IS ENOUGH ENOUGH?</p> IN ADDITION, cell phone use poses a threat to family. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Children and adults are constantly on their phones, which causes home life to suffer. ✓ Dinnertime is no longer a sacred time for families to sit and catch up on important things in their lives. ✓ Now phones are a part of the story: one kid is playing a game, another is texting a friend, and parents are checking email. <p style="text-align: center;">→ HOW CAN PARENTS HAVE IMPORTANT DISCUSSIONS WITH THEIR CHILDREN IF EVERYONE IS ABSORBED IN THEIR CELL PHONES?</p> 	<p>CONTEXT</p> <p>KEY POINT 1 cause</p> <p>effect + explanation</p> <p>KEY POINT 2 cause</p> <p>effect + explanation</p> <p>Rhetorical questions/pathos</p> <p>KEY POINT 3 effect</p> <p>cause + evidence</p> <p>Rhetorical question/ pathos</p>

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4. **Social behaviour** ALSO **suffers because of cell phone use.**

- ✓ We don't communicate the way we used to.
- ✓ Breakups occur via text, and bullying happens the same way.
- ✓ People don't have to talk to each other anymore because they can distract themselves with the latest game.
- ✓ Our society has turned into a society of people with their noses buried in digital devices.
- ✓ Interpersonal interactions are limited by apps that let you order a non-fat chai latte without saying a word to a barista.

→ WHEN WILL IT BECOME COMPLETELY NORMAL FOR PEOPLE TO HAVE NO COMMUNICATION WITH ANYONE BUT THEIR CELL PHONES? HOW MUCH LONGER UNTIL WE DEPEND SOLELY ON OUR PHONES FOR COMPANIONSHIP?

5. **LASTLY, attention deficit disorders are at an all-time high, and I believe that devices like cell phones are to blame.**

- ✓ Children as early as two or three years old begin playing on their parent's cell phones.
- ✓ They become accustomed to touching something and getting an instant, colourful result.
- ✓ It's instant gratification at its worst.
- ✓ This behaviour becomes a huge issue later in life when they're in grade school and high school and they can't focus on reading a history book because it's not giving anything colourful and fun back to them.

KEY POINT 4
effect

cause +
evidence

Rhetorical
questions/pathos

KEY POINT 5
effect

cause +
evidence

IN CONCLUSION, I believe that cell phones are dangerous—not just physically, but mentally, emotionally, and socially as well.

→ Limits should be put on cell phone use, and more importantly, they should be banned from cars.

CONTENTION

CALL FOR
ACTION/
SOLUTION

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety: the state of being safe from harm or danger • Safety on the road: refers to the methods and measures used to prevent road users from being killed or seriously injured • Family life: life with one's family; the part of one's life concerned with one's family • Social behaviour: interactions among individuals, normally within the same species, that are usually beneficial to one or more of the individuals • Attention deficit disorder: a mental disorder of the neurodevelopmental type. It is characterized by difficulty paying attention, excessive activity and acting without regards to consequences, which are otherwise not appropriate for a person's age. 	<p>DEFINITIONS</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limits should be put on cell phone use, and more importantly, they should be banned from cars. 	<p>VALUE What is your point?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cell phones are dangerous—not just physically, but mentally, emotionally, and socially as well. 	<p>CRITERION Why does it matter?</p>