



Griffith College Dublin

Schools Debating

Competition 2024

Information Booklet

**The Annual Griffith College Schools Legal Debating Competition
takes place on Friday 22nd March 2024
at the Griffith College campus on the
South Circular Road, Dublin 8.**

Contents

COMPETITION INFORMATION	3
Entry Requirements	3
Competition Guidelines	3
The Final	4
JUDGING GUIDELINES	5
Sample: Individual Speaker Sheet completed by Judges	Error! Bookmark not defined.
DEBATING INFORMATION	7
1. How to Prepare a Speech	7
2. How Debates are Judged	9
3. Delivering a speech	10
4. Engaging in a Debate	11
5. Common Problems and How to Solve Them	12
6. Debating Tips	13



COMPETITION INFORMATION

Entry Requirements

- To partake in the Legal Debating Competition, you will need to submit a general essay on the motion;

“This House believes that Ireland's exam-obsessed model is failing Irish students.”

- Essays should be 1,000 words in length.
- Essays should be submitted no later than **3pm on Friday 9th February 2024 to schoolsdebating@griffith.ie**.
- Essays should be accompanied by a cover letter confirming school details, full names of all team members, contact details (teacher etc.), number of supporters attending.
- The teams shortlisted will be contacted no later than **Friday, March 1st**, and will be invited to attend our Schools Debating Finals Competition on **Friday 22nd of March 2024**.
- PLEASE NOTE Successful teams will at this time be assigned to either the proposition or opposition of the motion.
- Please note that subject to the number of submissions received we may be limited in the number of teams that can participate, and also, shortlisting one team per school only.

Competition Guidelines

- The teams will consist of 4 students where each student will speak for between 3 - 5 minutes to a maximum of 15 minutes per team.
- There will be a knock from the time-keeper at the end of 2 minutes and the end of 4 minutes so students can keep track of timing, followed by a double-knock at 5 minutes.
- Students will be penalised in points for continuing after 5 minutes.
- Points of information are allowed but only between the first knock at 2 minutes and the second knock at 4 minutes so the first two minutes and the last minute of a speech cannot be interrupted.
- The proposition will start the debate with the first speaker (usually the captain) speaking first, followed by the opposition captain, alternating until all 4 team-mates on each side have spoken.
- There is no specific time-allocation for rebuttal so it should be integrated into speeches.
- Judges do not tend to ask questions but are permitted to do so.

The Final

- The teams that reach the final will be informed before lunch.
- The final two teams will have one hour to prepare their debate, the motion being;

“This House believes that the age of majority should increase from 18 years of age to 21 years of age.”

- The opposition and proposition for the final will be decided on the day.
- The rules for the final are similar to those of the initial rounds.

**All submissions and enquiries can be sent to:
schoolsdebating@griffith.ie.**

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PRIZES

There will be 5 prizes awarded on the day.

- ★ Winner – Schools Debating Competition 2024
- ★ Runner up – Schools Debating Competition 2024
- ★ Best Rebuttal - Schools Debating Competition 2024
- ★ Best Speaker - Schools Debating Competition 2024
- ★ Best Essay – Schools Debating Competition 2024

Please note that Best Rebuttal and Best Speaker prizes will be awarded from across all participants.

JUDGING GUIDELINES

Debates are judged comparatively. When the judges deliberate, they discuss your contribution as a team and/or as an individual compared to other teams and speakers in the debate. So, how are your contributions assessed?

1. Development of Ideas

Was an appropriate model for development of ideas used, for example, 'S.E.I.'.

a) S = State

What are you seeking to prove? Can you think of a simple way of expressing the basic idea that you want the people listening to your speech to take away from your argument?

b) E= Explain

This may be the most important part of the development process. In short, you need to explain why your statement is true. What you need to explain depends on the argument you are making. You should aim to have satisfied yourself by the end of this process that you have shown that your claim is true by showing how it could be successful in the "real world", or why it is important.

c) I = Illustrate

Illustrate your claim with examples. This is really important because real world impacts of an idea can strengthen your persuasiveness by giving those listening to you something to relate to.

2. Structure

Does the speech have a structure? The most important points should come first and less important or shorter points should come later.

3. Development of arguments

Arguments start with statements. Statements must then be developed. Developing your ideas simply means analysing them and explaining why they are true. As outlined above, it is helpful to ask yourself a series of questions about the statement which you are making. For instance, if you claim that the death penalty is wrong because killing is always wrong, then you need to explain why killing is always wrong.

4. Delivery of speech

Judges will also reward the manner in which you deliver your speech. This criterion usually takes into account your speaking style and the manner in which you express the arguments you are relying on. Some speakers are funny and light-hearted, others are passionate and eloquent. Both of these can be convincing, but need to be founded on persuasive concrete arguments. Your aim should be to find the right balance between style and substance.

5. Research and Statistics

Where you have time to prepare your speech, the research you have done will be taken into account. Try to use reputable sources. Similarly, try to use your research to formulate persuasive arguments. Do not treat your research as an argument in itself – rather, it should inform and strengthen points you will be making in the debate.

If used, were statistics appropriate and not used as arguments in themselves but interpreted and explained? Statistics in and of themselves do not constitute arguments.

6. Reading

Try not to rely too heavily on notes you have written. If you can, be familiar with your speech well in advance of the debate. This will allow you to make eye contact with the judges and the audience and makes you appear more confident.

7. Style and Rhetoric

Usually, the delivery of the speech and the content of the speech are considered together. The ideal speaker possesses a combination of proficiency in both of these aspects. It is sometimes best to think of the stylistic delivery of a speech as being a way to make your concrete arguments more persuasive. Therefore, it is definitely something to take into consideration when writing your speech.

The language you use is important. When you have had time to prepare your speech, you should focus on polishing your speech. This might involve clever turns of phrase or interesting literary flourishes. It can be helpful for you to talk to a teacher or somebody who is good with English to help you determine what works and what does not. A polished speech goes down very well with the judges who will appreciate the effort you have put into it.

8. Rebuttal

Rebuttal is offered during the speech. The aim of rebuttal is to deal with arguments which have already been offered by other speakers in the debate and answer them. Rebuttal may be incorporated into your speech or presented at the start of your speech.

When formulating rebuttal, make sure to engage with the bigger ideas of other speakers. Do not spend too much time pointing out small problems with their arguments when there may be more important arguments to tackle.

9. Argument

Were arguments adequately asserted and developed with appropriate analysis?

10. Timing:

Did students stay within the allowed times. Did the most important or newest arguments in a speech come out in the last minutes of the speech and as a result were underdeveloped?

DEBATING INFORMATION

1. How to Prepare a Speech

1. You receive the motion:

- Read the motion. Ascertain what it is about. A simple way to determine whether or not you understand the motion is to ask yourself if you can explain why the debate is happening.
- Read around the motion. If the motion is topical, it has probably received media attention recently. Investigate what has been written and said about the topic.

2. Generate ideas:

- Talk to your teachers, parents and friends. Ask them about the motion.
- Try to think about the following:
 - a) Stakeholders - who does the motion affect? How does it affect them? Does it affect some individuals or groups more than others?
 - b) Policies - is the motion asking you to debate a policy? If it is, consider the impact of this policy on different stakeholders. Ask yourself who is implementing the policy. If it is the government for instance, ask whether the government has the right to enact and implement such a policy. Who and/or what should the government prioritize?
 - c) Concepts - the motion might not be asking you to talk about a policy, but rather, to look at an idea or philosophical concept.

3. Select the ideas you want to develop into points:

- If you are speaking early on in the debate, then focus on the most basic points. This allows you to claim these points as your own.
- If you are later on in the debate, try to think a little more outside of the box. If you use the same arguments as those who came before you, and do not add substantially to them, it is unlikely that you will get much credit for them. Instead, take the more original ideas which you have generated and develop these instead.
- If you are in a team, then you will need to divide the points between you.

4. **Develop your ideas:**

- Once you have selected your best ideas, you should develop them. This can be difficult and requires considerable thought. However, a useful model for development exists, and is encapsulated by the acronym 'S.E.I.'.

d) S = State

What are you seeking to prove? Can you think of a simple way of expressing the basic idea that you want the people listening to your speech to take away from your argument?

e) E= Explain

This may be the most important part of the development process. In short, you need to explain why your statement is true. What you need to explain depends on the argument you are making. You should aim to have satisfied yourself by the end of this process that you have shown that your claim is true by showing how it could be successful in the "real world", or why it is important.

Sometimes, speakers embark on this part of the process by posing a series of questions and answering them. If you can think of new answers which you have not already generated, then you may have found a new angle of analysis.

f) I = Illustrate

Illustrate your claim with examples. This is really important because real world impacts of an idea can strengthen your persuasiveness by giving those listening to you something to relate to.

5. **Fitting it all together:**

- Once you have all of the work done, all you need to do is put it all together. Think of a structure for your speech. Your most important points should come first and less important or shorter points should come later.
- Make sure to time your speech and know how long each individual section takes. This will allow you to make decisions about cutting material if necessary. Also remember to leave time for rebuttal.

6. **Think about what the other side will say:**

- Before the debate, think about what the other side will say. This will help you prepare for rebuttal - you can formulate answers to opponent's questions and arguments in advance of the debate, rather than having to do so on the spot.

2. How Debates are Judged

Debates are judged comparatively. When the judges deliberate, they discuss your contribution as a team and/or as an individual compared to other teams and speakers in the debate. So, how are your contributions assessed?

1. Development of arguments:

- Arguments start with statements. Statements must then be developed. Developing your ideas simply means analysing them and explaining why they are true. As outlined above, it is helpful to ask yourself a series of questions about the statement which you are making. For instance, if you claim that the death penalty is wrong because killing is always wrong, then you need to explain why killing is always wrong.

2. Delivery of speech:

- Judges will also reward the manner in which you deliver your speech. This criterion usually takes into account your speaking style and the manner in which you express the arguments you are relying on. Some speakers are funny and light-hearted, others are passionate and eloquent. Both of these can be convincing, but need to be founded on persuasive concrete arguments. Your aim should be to find the right balance between style and substance.

3

3. Research:

- Where you have time to prepare your speech, the research you have done will be taken into account. Try to use reputable sources. Similarly, try to use your research to formulate persuasive arguments. Do not treat your research as an argument in itself – rather, it should inform and strengthen points you will be making in the debate.

3. Delivering a speech

1. Reading:

- Try not to rely too heavily on notes you have written. If you can, be familiar with your speech well in advance of the debate. This will allow you to make eye contact with the judges and the audience and makes you appear more confident.

2. Rhetoric:

- The language you use is important. When you have had time to prepare your speech, you should focus on polishing your speech. This might involve clever turns of phrase or interesting literary flourishes. It can be helpful for you to talk to a teacher or somebody who is good with English to help you determine what works and what does not. A polished speech goes down very well with the judges who will appreciate the effort you have put into it.

3. How is style assessed?

- Usually, the delivery of the speech and the content of the speech are considered together. The ideal speaker possesses a combination of proficiency in both of these aspects. It is sometimes best to think of the stylistic delivery of a speech as being a way to make your concrete arguments more persuasive. Therefore, it is definitely something to take into consideration when writing your speech.

4. Engaging in a Debate

1. Why is debating different from public speaking?

- In public speaking, you are tasked with presenting a particular piece to an audience, usually in isolation and without reference to the opinions of anyone else who may be presenting alongside you.
- In debating, you are always defending something. The key difference between debating and public speaking is that you are trying to prove why you are right and other people are wrong. Therefore, it is important not only to acknowledge the contributions from other people in a debate, but also to show why you have been more persuasive.

2. Rebuttal

- Rebuttal is offered during your own speech. The aim of rebuttal is to deal with arguments which have already been offered by other speakers in the debate and answer them. Rebuttal may be incorporated into your speech or presented at the start of your speech.
- When formulating rebuttal, make sure to engage with the bigger ideas of other speakers. Do not spend too much time pointing out small problems with their arguments when there may be more important arguments to tackle.

5. Common Problems and How to Solve Them

1. Lack of Analysis:

- Often arguments are asserted. In basic terms, this means that arguments are underdeveloped and do not receive as much credit as they should.
- Solution: Develop your arguments as much as possible and support with examples when applicable. The acronym S.E.I. (as explained earlier) serves as a useful way of thinking about the development of your arguments.

2. Picking the wrong points:

- Sometimes the first argument you think of is probably not the strongest argument you can make. Arguments which may be valid but difficult to defend or lack potential for development are usually arguments which should be reconsidered when deciding which points to use.
- Solution: Try to come up with multiple ideas before you choose the final ones you wish to rely on.

3. Relying too heavily on statistics:

- It has been noted in recent years by judges of schools competitions that statistics are used as arguments.
- Solution: Continue to conduct research which uncovers useful statistics, but do try and interpret and explain the statistics you find. Statistics in and of themselves do not constitute arguments.

4. Timing:

- Often: The most important or newest arguments in a speech come out in the last minutes of the speech and as a result are underdeveloped.
- Solution: When preparing your speech, place your new and important material first. This will require you to sit down and make decisions about the priority of your points, and deliberately place your best material early in your speech.

6. Debating Tips

- Keep calm and speak slowly – even where your time is tight, a calm and controlled presentation focusing on your key points is much more persuasive than a panicked presentation that tries to cram too much in. Speak as slowly as you can – it will feel much slower to you than it will sound to the audience and the judges!
- Maintain eye contact with the people around the room, and especially the judges. If you have prepared a speech in full, it is tempting to read it out but this has a very bad effect on those listening. The best approach is to have bullet points only in front of you – they will help to focus your speech and guide you if you get lost.
- Swaying and fidgeting are very distracting to your audience – plant your feet firmly when you stand up to avoid swaying and hold something in your hands if you think you might fidget. Do not place your hands in your pockets!
- When opening your speech, greet your audience. A confident start will help to calm your nerves and create an immediately positive impression, rather than starting with ‘ummmm...’
- Place your strongest arguments first, in case you get side-tracked with rebuttal or points of information.
- Structure is very important – it can be helpful:
 - (i) to set out the key arguments that you plan to make;
 - (ii) expand each argument in turn; and
 - (iii) conclude by reminding the judges of your key points.This not only ensures that the judges are clear on your points but also keeps you on track if you are nervous. Preparing for this format will also help to focus the mind and ensure you have separate and distinct points to make rather than conflating arguments.
- Don't just research your side of the argument – consider your opponent's side and try to anticipate what they will attack you with. If you are prepared for their arguments, you will not be easily wrong-footed and can be ready with points of information. However, don't rely exclusively on your pre-conceived notion of your opponent's arguments – you need to follow the flow of the debate!

- Remain confident of your arguments – do not retreat or back-track on points of information or rebuttal! You may be on a side of the motion that you disagree with but do not look for a neutral stance – argue your side to the best of your ability. Debate is argument not mediation!
- Read the news – using current issues to support an argument can be very impressive, especially if the other side have not picked up on it.
- Team position is important and it is advisable to put the debaters who are best at improvising towards the end to best deal with rebuttals. For rebuttals, you need to pinpoint why the opposition's point is wrong, find a team argument to support why they are wrong and elaborate. Each team mate should rebut the argument of the opponent who came directly before them, while those speaking towards the end have more scope to challenge the entire opposition argument.
- The first speaker should briefly introduce the team and, if possible, succinctly explain the main points of each speaker. The last speaker should sum up the team's main arguments.
- You will need to both respond to points of information and make them yourself. Some debaters can be very eager when it comes to offering points of information – you don't need to respond to all of them but you must respond to at least one, and preferably two or three. Making a strong point of information can impress judges but many don't appreciate debaters popping up and down like a yo-yo with weak points. Make sure you offer points of information but only when you have a relevant point to make. The more research you do on your motion, the easier this will be!

Three essentials for your speech – you need all three for a good performance!

MATTER – what you say. Your argument needs to be logical and consistent.

MANNER – how you say it. Eye-contact, speaking slowly and not reading from notes are key here. Style is important and not everyone has the same strengths. If you are funny, use your skill (with appropriate jokes...! An inappropriate joke can lose a debate) If not, you can be convincing by being eloquent, concise, or eliciting an emotional response.

METHOD – the way you put everything together. Is your speech structured properly ie arguments in the right order? Do team arguments fit well together and in the correct order?

