



Wolverhampton Speakers Club

The Club Debate

The Purpose and Nature of the Debate

In WSC the Debate is essentially an exercise in persuasion and effective argument by both the principals and the audience; it should be a stimulating and enjoyable experience. A whole range of speaking skills can be practised but also, just as important, active listening.

The Motion

The debate is about the motion, which should be well-defined and clearly expressed. Many speakers will argue about the wording or make their debating points about the actual wording, which will ruin a good debate.

The Audience

The audience will make or break a debate, and must be fully involved. We so often see debates where the principals make their presentations and then few of the audience take part – the debate then falls completely flat. The audience should have a clear idea about what is being said – they might like to take notes.

Debates can get vigorous and we have had occasions where members can feel personally attacked, belittled and insulted (on one occasion a member left the club because of this). This is part of the cut and thrust of a debate and members must be aware of it and neither seek to wound unnecessarily nor feel belittled.

Chairman:

- Encourage the audience to take part and let them know this is their debate, not just the principals.
- Encourage the audience to take notes – paper and writing implements should be available.
- Remind the audience of the dangers of taking comments personally.
- You can suggest that to enliven the debate members might like to argue for points opposite to what they actually believe.

Conducting the Debate

1. The Chairman should arrange the principals on either side of the lectern, usually with those speaking for the motion on the right and the opposers on the left. As the principals speak from the lectern the Chairman should decide beforehand where s/he will sit during these speeches.
2. The Chairman introduces the motion and may then take a 'straw poll' of members: this allows the effectiveness of the persuasion to be gauged at the end of the debate.

3. The Chairman explains the rules of procedure.
4. Leading speakers are given up to 8 minutes and the timings are indicated by lights as usual. Seconders are given up to 5 minutes and the Chairman should decide what the light timings should be.
5. The principals speak in the order:
 - a. Proposer (up to 8 minutes)
 - b. Opposer (up to 8 minutes)
 - c. Secunder (up to 5 minutes)
 - d. Second Opposer (up to 5 minutes)
6. The Chairman then declares the debate open to the house and controls the speaking, judging when to bring the open session to a close. The Chairman might need to encourage speakers but does not take part in the debate.
7. Speakers from the floor are usually given up to 2 minutes, as in a Topic. The Chairman should decide whether/how lights are to be used. The Chairman should also decide beforehand whether speakers from the floor speak in place or come to the lectern.
8. The Chairman declares the open period closed and calls for the summing-up.
9. The leading speakers sum up in the following order:
 - a. Opposer (up to 3 minutes)
 - b. Proposer (up to 3 minutes)
10. The summing-up is not a prepared speech (except for the opening and closing remarks, which should be memorable) but deal with the arguments raised by the opposing side and questions raised from the floor. This means that the principals must listen actively and will usually take notes during the debate.
11. The Chairman will conduct another vote and announces the result.

Rules of the Debate

1. The correct form of address is “Mr Chairman”, “Madam Chairman” or “Sir”. The Chairman would be wise to decide which is to be used.
 - a. Note that in a debate “Mr/Madam Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen” is NOT used.
2. Speakers from the floor should indicate to the Chairman that they wish to speak but must wait to be called up.
3. All remarks and questions should be addressed through the chair.
4. If a speaker from the floor wishes to ask a question the address is: “Sir, I would like to ask the Proposer/Opposer ... “
5. The principals do not take part in the open period and questions are answered in the summing-up.
6. The Chairman does not permit argument about matters of fact.
7. A speaker from the floor may speak more than once, but no one speaker should monopolise the debate.