

Preparing for a Debate

A debate is much more than a few people arguing about something. It is an opportunity for intelligent people who have informed themselves on an issue to exchange ideas and formulate arguments regarding an important policy or decision. When preparing for a debate, keep the following tips in mind:

- There is no substitute for good research. Seek out high-quality information from a variety of reputable sources, including those that do not align with your particular position on the issue. It is important that you understand as many viewpoints as possible and know enough of the details in order to formulate effective arguments.
- Use your research to create arguments – do not simply list pieces of information and expect them to make your argument for you. An argument uses **evidence** in order to advance a **claim** (the conclusion you want your audience to agree with), with some type of **reasoning** connecting the two and showing how that evidence warrants that conclusion.
- Acknowledge counter-arguments. It may seem like a bad idea to acknowledge the viewpoints of those who disagree, but in reality, doing so enables you to explain why you believe your position is stronger or preferable. It shows the audience you have done your research and understand the issue, and that you still have come to your particular conclusion.
- Focus on the arguments and issues at hand, not on attacking the other person. Name-calling or other personal attacks (called *ad hominem* attacks) reduce your credibility and make it seem as though you don't have any substantive arguments to make. You can point out the weaknesses in the other person's arguments without getting personal.
- Listen carefully at all times. Understand that you have much to learn from your opponent(s), and that your ability to make good arguments depends on how well you have understood their arguments. The end result of a debate should be that both sides (and the audience)