

CHAPTER 2

How debates work

In this chapter we're going to learn the nuts and bolts of how debates work.

There's more to football than kicking a ball.

There's more to hockey than hitting a ball with a stick.

There's more to playing the clarinet than blowing in one end and moving your fingers up and down.

There's more to debating than just talking.

We need to learn how debates work. This chapter is going to help do just that.

It will explain the rules of the two main formats of debate in the UK: Mace and British Parliamentary.

What is a debate?

A debate is a structured competition between two opposite points of view.

Who wins the competition?

The side which makes the more persuasive case.

Who decides who made the more persuasive case?

All debates have **judges**. Judges decide who has won the debate. Normally, they use a mark scheme (like teachers do when they mark an exam). Judges also give feedback at the end of the debate telling you what you did well and how you can improve. We will look more at what judges do in Chapter 8, 'How to Win a Debate'.

How do I know what the debate is about?

The topic of the debate is expressed in the motion.

What is the motion?

The motion is a sentence beginning either 'This house would ...' (for example, '*This house would make all schools co-educational*') or 'This house believes ...', (for example, '*This house believes money does not make you happy.*')

Motions that begin 'This house would ...' are about taking action in the world, and are called **policy motions**. Motions that begin 'This house believes ...' are about what we think or believe, and are called **ideas motions**.

Whose house are they talking about?

The word 'house' comes from the British parliament. In the British parliament, motions are put forward to be debated by the House of Commons, and at the end of the debate there is a vote to find out what the 'house' (i.e. the House of Commons) either believes or is going to do. As the House of Commons is the law making body in Britain, what the 'house' decides will go on to become the law in Britain. (It is useful to know about how the House of Commons works, because how Britain is, or should be, governed is often a topic for debates. We will learn more about this in Chapter 10, What Debaters Need to Know About the World.)

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