

CHAPTER 3

Basic Skills

In this chapter we'll learn the basic skills you need to master to be a successful debater.

Now you know how debating works, it's time to learn the basic skills that every debater needs.

If you want to get good at football, you need to know how to pass, how to tackle, how to take free kicks etc.; if you want to win at tennis, you need to work on your serve, your forehand, your backhand etc. Debating is no different. It can be broken down into certain skills which you can practise and improve.

Here are those skills...

1

Defining the motion

Whoever speaks first in a debate (first proposition) gets to **define the motion**. Your opponents have no choice but to accept your definition, even if they don't like it / don't agree with it. So being given first proposition is a bit like winning the toss in cricket or tennis, or getting white in chess. You get to set the terms; you decide what it is you will be debating about.

How can you make the most of this advantage?

Fencers and boxers stand sideways on, to minimise the area in which their opponents can attack them. In the same way, the best motion definitions will be tight, focused, and precise, to minimise the areas in which your opponents can attack you. A tight and focused definition also allows you to develop your proposition much more fully and thoroughly.

However, before you can define the motion, you first need to analyse it.

You need to understand what kind of motion it is.

Is it a **policy motion**, i.e. one concerned with changing what happens in the world?

Policy motions, remember, begin: 'This house would ...'

They call for either:

- something to be done that isn't being done
- or**
- something that is being done to be done differently

Two examples of policy motions are:

- This house would give every citizen a universal basic income.
- This house would impose a 20 mph speed limit in all built up areas.

The best motion definitions will be tight, focused, and precise