

What has this got to do with debating?

You want your listeners to have a low stress experience as they listen to your speech. Make your speech like Switzerland. Fill it with signposts, telling the listeners where you are going.

- Say what you're going to say.
- Say it.
- Say you've said it.
- Then say it again.
- Don't be afraid of repetition.
- Above all, don't be afraid of repetition.
- Repetition is not something you should be afraid of.

To expand:

- Start by stating what your three points are (and don't have more than three).
- Then introduce your first point.
- Amplify and expand on your first point.
- Remind everyone what your first point was.
- Repeat this for each of your three points.
- Finally, remind everyone what your three points were.

Say what you're going to say. Say it. Say you've said it. Then say it again. Don't be afraid of repetition.

See what I just did? You won't forget my point about signposting. If you use signposting well, your listeners won't forget your points either.

And remember: amongst your listeners are the judges, who decide who wins the debate. Signpost well, and they will remember your argument. You need to remember something before you can understand it. You need to understand something before you can be persuaded by it. Debates are won by the side who are more persuasive. So effective signposting can point you the way to victory.

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4

Speech paragraphs

Paragraphs are, along with sentences, the building blocks of writing. They give it structure and shape. Although debate speeches are a spoken, not a written, form of expression, they too need paragraphs to give them structure and shape.

The most common structure for a speech paragraph is **PEEL**. This may be familiar to you already, as it is similar to the paragraph structures often taught to students in English and History lessons.

PEEL stands for:

Point: What you're trying to say, in one sentence.

Explanation: Amplifying what you want to say

Evidence / Example: Something concrete to back up what you want to say

Link: Connecting what you've said back to the motion.

So, for example, given the motion 'This house would make all schools co-educational':

Point: 'Co-educational schools help children to learn how to get on with the opposite sex.'

Explanation: 'If children spend all their time at school with their own gender, they will never understand the opposite sex. This will seriously disadvantage them in later life, when they will have to live and work with people of the opposite sex.'

Evidence / Example: 'A woman who has been educated entirely in girls' schools will find it very hard to assert herself if she ends up working in a male-dominated profession. Had she had years of having to do this in class, she would be much better prepared.'

Link: 'School should be preparing children for life, and single-sex schools obviously do not do this. This is why they should not be allowed to exist.'

PEEL is a very helpful format for constructing your speech. As you become a more experienced and confident speaker you may be able to dispense with it and be more flexible in your style (this is also true of paragraph structures in writing). But when you are starting out, it is worth hanging on to.

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