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How to speak

I've left this to last, even though some people think it is the most important. It isn't. Quality of arguments is what will win a debate. That said, how you speak is important. In Mace, it is part of the mark scheme; in BP it isn't, but a judge can't help favouring a speech that is delivered in a way that is engaging and easy to listen to.

Here are some basic principles for how you should deliver your speeches:

1. **Speak loudly enough.** Speeches that can't be heard are not likely to be persuasive.
2. **Speak clearly.** Mumbled, unclear speeches are also not very persuasive. However, provided you are clear, you needn't be afraid of speaking fast. Normally, when advising people about giving readings or speeches in public, I advise speaking slowly, to allow the audience to take in what you are saying. Debating is different, however; you have a lot of content to get in, and you need to make the most of every second of your limited time.
3. **But don't shout.** No one likes being shouted at. Aim to speak to the furthest away person in the room. If you have difficulty with projecting your voice, ask for help from a drama teacher.
4. **Make eye contact.** It makes the people who are listening feel like you are talking to them. If you never look up from your notes, they will feel like you don't care about them. Choose a different person to make eye contact with for each section of your speech. Don't forget the judges. However, don't make continuous eye contact with only one person throughout your speech. They might think you are either threatening them or trying to pick them up.
5. **Vary your tone and your pace.** Talking in the same way throughout your speech is boring.
6. **Use emotion.** Sound like you care about what you are arguing for, or against.
7. **Use timing.** A slowing down of pace, or a dramatic pause, just before a major point will give it more impact.
8. **Study the great speeches of history.** Analyse how they use language to persuade. I particularly recommend Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address; Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech; Barack Obama's speech on the night he was first elected President in 2008; and Mark Antony's 'Friends, Romans, countrymen' speech in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. You can find either the originals or performances of all these speeches online.

How you speak is important

What have we learnt in this chapter?

1. How to define the motion ☐
2. How to use the mechanism ☐
3. How to signpost your speech ☐
4. How to construct speech paragraphs ☐
5. How to use points of information ☐
6. How to do rebuttal ☐
7. How to use the point of clash ☐
8. How to do stakeholder benefit analysis ☐
9. How to prepare ☐
10. How to deal with squirrels and badgers ☐
11. How to speak effectively ☐

Do this before you read the next chapter



Watch some debates online (or live), each time focusing on how the debaters use just one particular skill, e.g. rebuttal, signposting, points of information etc. Make notes on how they use this skill well, and what they could have done better.



If you are in a debating club, watch a debate online together, dividing up the skills you are going to comment on between you. Then have a discussion, chaired by your teacher, in which you compare notes.



Alternatively, have some members of the club conduct a debate and others observe them, each taking responsibility for commenting on a particular skill. Take turns doing this, so everyone gets to debate at some point. Even better, film the debate and then watch it and analyse it together.