

Team work and speaker roles

In this chapter, we're going to learn about how to work as a team, and about the different roles different speakers have.

Debating is a team activity. To be a good debater, you need to be a good team worker. The teams are small - two, or at most three - and this makes team working skills even more important; you depend on each other.

Debating also involves taking on roles, and in this respect is a little like acting. As in acting, you need to enter into the personality of someone who is not you. This can be both liberating and exciting. You take on a role when you speak for a motion you passionately disagree with, or against a motion you passionately agree with. You also take on a role when you speak, as different speakers have different roles to play depending on where they speak in the debate.

Let's start with team work.

It's often said that 'There is no I in team' (conveniently forgetting that there is a 'me'). Team work is about putting the interests of the team above your own. Your objective as a team member is not to make people listen with awe, admiration or even laughter to your speech; it is to win the debate. So here are some basic principles for team work as a debater, which will help you to win debates together:

- Analyse honestly your own strengths and weaknesses as a debater, and discuss them with your partner(s). Think about how your strengths can balance her / his / their weaknesses and vice versa.
- When preparing together, make sure you all have more or less equal air time. Don't be too dominating in discussion; but don't be too quiet either.
- Divide up the points for your speeches between you clearly and stick to that division. Make sure not to repeat your partner's points or, worse, contradict them.
- When your partner is speaking, look interested: nod approvingly, make a serious face at the serious points, shake your head when she condemns something, laugh when she makes a joke. This will be encouraging for her, and may also subliminally influence the judge.
- Have a stack of index cards on the table in front of you during a debate. If, while your partner is speaking, she needs a key fact, or you can see a useful point she could make, write her a note on a card and pass it to her. (Speaking to your partner while she is speaking is not allowed, but passing notes is.)
- Always congratulate your partner after a speech, however it has gone. Use back slaps / high fives / hugs as appropriate. Analysis of what went wrong can wait till later.

Your objective as a team member is to win the debate