

How to win a debate

In this chapter we'll be learning about how judges decide who has won a debate.

Debating is a competitive activity. You should be in it to win it.

But how do you win?

In football, netball and hockey you win by scoring more goals than the opposition. Anyone watching the game (provided they can count) knows who has won as soon as the final whistle is blown.

That isn't the case in debating.

The people who decide who has won the debate are the **judges**. In a major competition, you are likely to have at least two per debate, though in smaller competitions you may have only one. One important thing to understand is that the judges' decision is a **qualitative** one. That means that marking a debate is not like marking a Maths or Science exam, where you accumulate marks by getting right answers. It's more like marking an English or History exam, where you're awarded marks for demonstrating certain skills across a whole essay.

What are those skills? What are judges looking for?

In one sense, there is only one skill needed to win a debate. The judging criteria can be summed up in one sentence:

Which team has made the more persuasive case?

Everything you do as a debater should be focused towards that one aim; persuading listeners to agree with your side of the case. And remember, the listeners who will decide if you have won the debate are the judges.

But how do the judges decide who has made the more persuasive case?

They will be breaking down the debate into the key skills of debating, all of which help to make your case more persuasive, and seeing how well you display your mastery of each of them. They will be asking questions of your speeches and points of information, to see if you are using these key skills.

The people who decide who has won the debate are the judges