

Newspapers and magazines

The Guardian, *The Independent* (online only), *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* are the 'serious' newspapers. They will give you facts about what is happening in the world, though each with their own bias in the way they are presented. *The Guardian* and *The Independent* lean to the left, and *The Times* and the *Telegraph* to the right. In many ways the most useful part of these papers is the opinion and editorial section (known as op-ed for short) which will feature columns expressing opinions about issues in the news. The best of these are superb examples of how to build an argument persuasively - very useful for debaters. *The Financial Times* is the best researched and most accurate daily newspaper, but (as its name implies) focuses heavily on financial and business news.

Weekly magazines give a longer and more considered view, their writers having had more time to reflect on events. *The Economist* is phenomenally well researched, and covers not just Britain but the whole world. It doesn't have any gossip or celebrity stories, or any sport (unless it's about the economic impact of sport) but there is no better guide to the world; read it every week and you will be very well informed. *The New Statesman* and the *Spectator* offer a lot of thoughtful analysis, the *Statesman* from the left and the *Spectator* from the right. *The Week* offers a very useful selection from the major news stories and opinion pieces, providing a helpful summary of the issues. *Prospect* and *Standpoint* are both published monthly, so can take an even longer view, in more detailed, thoughtful essays, often deeply researched.

Podcasts

Podcasts are nearly all free and you can listen to them anywhere, any time. Like social media, they are unregulated, so you do need to be selective. Here are some recommendations.

The Briefing Room (BBC)

The Briefing Room steps back from opinion to give listeners the facts about current issues. The presenter, David Aaronovitch, interviews experts with a real endeavour to understand rather than to persuade. Debaters do have to persuade, of course, but they have to understand first.

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Analysis (BBC)

Analysis is similar to *The Briefing Room*, but tends to look at less immediate, longer term issues. Like *The Briefing Room*, it consults experts and presents the facts, leaving you much better informed.

The Moral Maze (BBC)

The Moral Maze has a regular panel who cross examine experts on an issue that has been dominating the news that week, and then express their own views. I have some reservations about the format; the panel can be a bit too sure of their own views on topics which they didn't know much about a week ago, and it can get bit shouty. That said, the cut and thrust of the discussion is an excellent model for debaters.

Beyond the Red Line (BBC)

Beyond the Red Line is a sort of counter-balance to *The Moral Maze*. It takes two people who have diametrically opposed views on an issue, and gets them to listen to each other and consider why their opponent might think the way she or he does in the hope of finding some common ground. In some ways it's a kind of 'anti-debate', but the empathy and understanding of opposite points of view it cultivates are essential qualities for debaters.

The Long Read (Guardian)

This is an audio version of a regular feature in the *Guardian*. It offers in depth, thoroughly researched analysis of key issues.

Political Thinking (BBC)

Nick Robinson interviews prominent politicians. The longer format allows him to go into more detail than is possible on news programmes. Politicians tend to relax somewhat and come across as more human, not least because Robinson likes to talk to them about their backgrounds and what motivated them to go into politics.

Talking Politics

This is hosted by two Cambridge University professors, David Runciman and Helen Thompson. As you'd expect, it tends to be pretty high powered and academic. However, it's well worth making the effort to engage with what they say; they are exceptionally well informed, highly intelligent and very perceptive. They also offer a wider historical perspective, and keep a helpful distance from the hurly burly of everyday politics.

A good
debater
should be
an avid
reader