

CHAPTER 1

Successful Debating

Debating is a tool we can use to question the assumptions that people, including ourselves, make about our world and how it works.

This chapter will elaborate on this statement. After a brief explanation of the basics of debate, the chapter will suggest some ways in which a debater's success can be measured, not necessarily in terms of wins and losses but in terms of her own progress as a debater and growth as an engaged and thoughtful person. In other words; if the debater never wins a single debate, let alone a competition, can she be said to have succeeded as a debater? The answer is a resounding "yes."

What Is Debate?

Debate is a way of testing ideas by disagreeing with other people. An idea is phrased as a motion (sometimes called a "topic" or "resolution")—a standardized statement on which the two sides will disagree. Each person involved in a debate is either for or against the motion so that an equal number of debaters are on either side. Those in favor of the motion are referred to as the "Affirmative" and those against it are called the "Negative" (some debate formats use other terminologies). The side of a debate on which an individual speaker finds himself does not necessarily reflect his personal opinion on the motion.

In any formal debate, each side has the same amount of time to prove their case (their position on the motion) and the same opportunities to demonstrate the weaknesses in the arguments of the other side. Participants take turns delivering a speech for their side. First, a member of the Affirmative team will speak in support of the motion; then a member of the Negative team will argue against it. The third speaker (Affirmative) will then argue in support and address issues raised by the previous speaker, and so on until everyone has spoken.