

believe that things are as they immediately appear to be. The critical thinker is as wary of received wisdom as she is sceptical of evident truth. When in doubt, question. Without question, doubt. (Critical thinking is discussed further in Chapter 6.)

- *Excellent listening skills.* In everyday conversation, we often hear what we expect to hear—assuming that the person who is speaking is telling the truth and that he has thought through what he’s saying. Frequently, even when he has said something that is clearly wrong, we let it slide, assuming that it is a mistake and that no harm is meant or will result. However, a debater listens more actively and is alert to slips in logic or unfounded assertions. The active listener also keeps an ear out for what is not said, the critical piece of information that has been glossed over or conveniently forgotten. (See more detail on active listening in Chapter 7.)
- *Clear leadership skills.* A good debater leads her audience. She clearly outlines and structures her speech. She knows what content can be covered quickly and where the audience or adjudicator will need more help to see the logic of the argument. Where necessary, she points out difficulties and then explains how to get through them. (We discuss some approaches to guiding an audience in Chapter 2.)
- *An evidential understanding of the world.* Good debaters are good researchers. They read newspapers and blogs, keep up-to-date with current affairs, and have a working knowledge of the current disputes in a range of social policy areas. They know where to find evidence, and, just as important, they know how to evaluate whether that evidence will be strong and persuasive. (Evidence is discussed further in Chapter 5.)
- *The empathy to understand the perspective of another.* Debate requires a speaker to argue positions that she does not personally hold. Being required to do so allows her not only to appreciate the strengths of that position but also to identify the weaknesses in her own—and then to either rectify those failings or, in some cases, abandon that position. She develops a growing empathy for those who disagree with her and realizes that they are neither bad nor mad—they may simply have followed a different intellectual path. Yet, it would be untrue to deduce from this that a debater must assume that all positions are equally valid. She is likely to conclude that the validity of a position comes more from the rigor with which it has been established than from the position per se.