

Conclusion

To answer in greater detail the question posed in the introduction—can a debater who never wins a debate be said to be successful—requires an understanding of why we learn debate in the first place. Ultimately, we do so not to become brilliant debaters, although that is no mean accomplishment, rather, it is to acquire certain skills that will prove useful in both in education and in wider life. You may have noticed that “a confident public speaker” is not one of the attributes of a successful debater listed above. This is, in part, because it should be self-evident but also because it can be a distraction. Debate does improve public speaking skills; however, that is not the be all and end all of learning to debate.

Of course, it is unlikely—more than unlikely—that the imaginary debater with these attributes will not have won a debate. Even were that the case, she could still quite comfortably describe herself as a successful debater because she can develop arguments logically and in a manner that is easy to follow, hear inconsistencies and confusion in the arguments of others, use logic and evidence to reach decisions, and appreciate that someone with whom she disagrees is not a bad person, although he may be a person with a bad argument.

EXERCISE

Watch a debate online or, if possible, live. If you don’t have the opportunity to see a live debate, the Appendix has a list of websites where you can watch recorded debates.

1. Act as the adjudicator for the debate and take notes as the debate progresses.
2. Discuss in a group who you think won. You should not focus on the debate topic or on which side you agree with personally. Instead, focus on which team had the most persuasive arguments:
 - Who used evidence the most effectively?
 - Whose arguments were the most logical?
 - Who was most involved in the debate, interacting well with other participants?
 - Who guided you most clearly through her own speech and gave the best insights into those of other speakers?