

CHAPTER 8

Karl Popper Format

The Karl Popper (KP) format of debate is named after the twentieth-century philosopher who argued that critical thinking is a collaborative process of dialogue and that knowledge progresses by the rigorous public testing of ideas and opinions. KP is popular in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and now has an established presence in Africa. The format was devised by the Open Society Institutes and has been adopted by the International Debate Education Association's annual Youth Forum. Karl Popper format is promoted primarily as an educational tool to encourage critical thinking, tolerance for different views, and respect for ethical principles. It is often considered a good starting point for high school debaters.

The Karl Popper format particularly accentuates role of the team within debate. Team members perform individually and have different responsibilities, but the format requires them to work together to succeed. The constructive speeches present each side's basic case, while later speakers elaborate and expand the arguments as necessary. The two rebuttal speakers on each team may not usually introduce new arguments. The team works as a unit throughout a competition, switching between Affirmative and Negative over the course of a tournament. Reflecting the format's emphasis on cooperation, teams are judged as a unit.

Variants of the format have evolved as it has been adopted in different countries. The length of speeches, length of prep time during the debate, point system for evaluation, and sometimes even the notes for adjudicators may vary. Many KP formats now allow for the Second Affirmative speaker to introduce a new argument, although in practice this happens very rarely. The original format is referred to throughout this book.

Structure

In Karl Popper format, six individuals speak during each debate. Three for the Affirmative support the proposition; three for the Negative oppose it. The debate is composed of