

Opening Speeches

This chapter looks at the role of opening speeches—both their formal roles and the strategic function they fulfill in relation to what will come later in the debate. After some introductory remarks on the challenges facing opening speakers, the chapter looks at the issue of definitions in some detail before examining how both First Affirmative and First Negative speeches should work. Finally, it considers the role that opening speakers have in establishing a platform for their colleagues in terms of framing the material for subsequent debate and establishing their perspective as being the more reasonable.

First Words

As seen in the previous chapter, opening speakers have the opportunity to frame the debate in the mind of the adjudicator and set the direction for the other speakers. The opening Affirmative speaker is required to do so in a formal way by giving a definition of the motion—delineating in more detail the topic for discussion during the debate. In turn, the First Negative speaker outlines the approach his team will take by setting out the key areas of disagreement (establishing clash). In some cases, the First Negative speaker will set out a series of objections the Negative side has to the Affirmative's case, in others he may offer an alternative solution. By the end of the two opening speeches, all participants should have a clear idea of what areas the debate will cover and a sense of the main lines of argument for both teams.

Each side is trying to demonstrate that the other is wrong, thus the position each team takes must be mutually exclusive—what the Negative proposes cannot occur simultaneously or as an addition to the Affirmative plan. More specifically, the Affirmative team is putting forward a specific solution to an acknowledged problem, the Negative team is trying to demonstrate that such a course of action is impractical, immoral, or both. Before she is able to make a decision about which side of the debate is the more persuasive,