

Preparation Time

A debate doesn't start when the two teams sit down to face each other. It begins in the weeks, days, and minutes before the round as the teams prepare, generate arguments, and make notes. All formats give preparation time (frequently called "prep") before the debate. Prep can be as little as 15 minutes (short prep) or as long as a month (long prep). Some formats alternate between the two for different rounds, others announce the motion in advance but speakers will not be told their sides in the debate until shortly before it starts, allowing for general research but discouraging the building of specific cases. Some formats, including Karl Popper, also include formal prep time during the debate. Prep time is an important component of debate. It is through good, well-structured prep that debaters develop good speeches and arguments.

This chapter first offers some general suggestions about how to utilize pre-debate prep time and then examines the challenges of short and long prep. Finally, it looks at how to utilize prep time strategically during a debate for those formats that include it.

Preparing for a Debate

Regardless of how long or short pre-debate prep time is, the purpose is the same: to allow speakers time to analyze the motion and build as much of a case as is possible, ensuring that the case is consistent and well-informed. In practical terms, this means developing notes that can be used as a working document throughout the debate.

THE PROCESS

Broadly speaking, however long the prep time, preparing for a debate follows the same three-stage process: