

Peculiarities of First Affirmative Speakers and Teams

The first speaker in a debate is in a unique position because the rest of the debate hangs on her getting the definition right. Thus, regardless of how much time she and her team have spent preparing, she will need a little time immediately before the debate to gather her thoughts and structure her notes.

Before the debate begins, she should make sure that her notes have clearly written out:

- the definition, with any justification required to get to it from the motion
- the team's overall position or perspective
- a list of the arguments that will make up the case
- the case division for the team (who will say what)
- the argument(s) she will present with supporting evidence

Novice first speakers may also find it useful to have:

- the motion
- the first sentence written out in full
- the names and positions of the other speakers (it's a good idea for all speakers to have this information, but the first speaker in particular doesn't want to be thrown by mis-speaking the name of the first person she needs to refer to)

Obviously, the amount of time First Affirmative gets to gather her thoughts will vary depending on the length of preparation time, but frantically discussing the case right up until she is called to speak is not the efficient use of time it may appear to be. It is incredibly difficult—arguably impossible—to shift from talking about how a teammate should tackle a particular problem to giving the speech that will set out the general structure of the debate as a whole.

Although First Affirmative, in particular, needs time before speaking, other speakers also benefit from a little mental space. During the last minute of the speech immediately preceding yours, listen to what the speaker has to say; it's likely to be a recap of his speech. Resist the temptation to plan furiously with teammates. You need to be aware of what the previous speaker has said. Once he sits down, take the few seconds to take a breath and clarify in your own mind the points you are about to make: How do they relate to what has just been said and how are you going to steer the adjudicator's thoughts back to your territory?