

TO WRITE OR NOT

In formats that have long-prep, the First Affirmative speaker can assume that the debate will run according to plan, at least for the duration of her speech. Should these speakers write a full speech? Many coaches would say that they should. Prewriting the speech may help ensure a clear structure, but it does have drawbacks. As a debater, you should be in the habit of thinking, and speaking, on your feet, and the habit of prewritten speeches is an obstacle to that. Perhaps most important, we speak and write in different ways; unless you've had a huge amount of practice, a written speech sounds like what it is; someone reading out an essay. It's not persuasive and it's not that interesting. If it helps, write the first minute or so, setting out the definition and the outline of the case but then use notes. However, in the long term, you'll do yourself far more favors by just getting used to speaking from notes.

In-Debate Preparation Time

It's impossible to predict everything that will happen during the course of a debate, and some planning is needed while the debate is in progress. Of the four formats discussed in this book, only one, Karl Popper, formalizes that reality. The following discussion outlines how to address both the formal and informal approach to this reality.

INFORMAL DISCUSSION

Inevitably, teammates need to speak with one another during a debate. This is not ideal, but it's unavoidable. Exchanging a few words or pointing to a phrase in your notes, or those of a teammate, is fine. Quickly strategizing between the members of a team who aren't speaking while another is on her feet is fine. Treating your opponents' speeches as an opportunity for lengthy discussions on the minutiae of the subject for debate is not fine. Indeed, it's both very rude and very foolish. The adjudicator is going to be listening closely to what speakers from the other side have said and will expect you to be able to respond in detail. If you haven't heard it, you can't respond as expected and your speech will suffer. As discussed in Chapter 7, listening is a key skill for the debater. You are better off listening actively to an opposition point and thinking about its flaws and then suggesting a one-sentence rebuttal to a colleague than you are carrying on a lengthy conversation on the subject.