

FORMAL IN-DEBATE PREP TIME

The Karl Popper format gives each team eight minutes during which they can huddle together and strategize the next section. Teams can use this prep time before or after any speech and in any amount as long as they don't go over the total allotted time.

In theory, you can use the time all at once, but strategically, speakers aim to keep as much prep time as possible for the later stages of the debate. To a certain extent, you should be able to predict what will happen during the opening speeches and have built into your speeches defenses and lines of attack accordingly. However, as ideas progress throughout the debate, you may need more timeouts to adjust your arguments or consider responses to unanticipated twists and turns in the progress of the debate.

Consequently, don't assume that you have to use prep time between every section. Wait until you need it. Equally, while using it, be direct about what is needed; this is not a time for lengthy discussions but for a literal exchange of notes to consider each other's ideas and decide on the best response.

Come to these discussions with practical suggestions for how to move the case forward rather than open questions such as "what do you think?" These periods should be a chance to make a decision between two or three options rather than starting over with new lines of thought. Of course, sometimes the other side will have taken a line that is unexpected and requires more lengthy consideration but, generally, the aim should be to keep the discussion short.

Conclusion

Preparation time is time with a purpose: to produce a working case written up in a set of notes rather than just talking around the motion and seeing what happens. Keep that purpose uppermost in your mind. The three-stage process suggested here is a useful starting point, but you and your teammates will quickly get a sense of what works for you and what doesn't.

Bear in mind that you are preparing one case as well as two or three speeches. Communication and precision are the watchwords here. When you walk into the debate, every member of your team should be clear about what their case is, what their role in delivering that case is, and how they intend to fulfill that role. It is the job of each team member to ensure that is what happens, both for herself and her teammates.

Effective preparation should allow you to look confident, informed, and in command both of the subject and debate.