

Taking and Using Notes

Taking good notes is just as much an essential skill for a successful debater as speaking, active listening, and critical thinking. Debaters use notes to see clearly the progression of the debate, to alert themselves to good points or missed arguments in their team's case, and to record opposition arguments and jot down thoughts on rebuttal. Notes are also essential in setting out the structure and contents of your own remarks.

This chapter examines how to take and use notes. It begins with some general pointers on note-taking, then looks at a technique called "flowing" before discussing speaker notes. Finally, it highlights the importance of taking notes on the entire debate.

Some Notes About Notes

You have probably taken notes for your school classes—jotting down key facts and concepts as the class progresses, but these types of notes are not sufficient for debaters who must accurately record and organize the arguments made and evidence offered by both teams. Consequently, debaters develop a rapid means of note-taking that relies heavily on abbreviations and symbols to track the progress of arguments through the debate.

Each debater must develop a system that works for her, so offering a detailed description of how to take notes is not useful. Nevertheless, some useful suggestions can be offered. Much of what is said below may be intuitive but better to be aware of such information when you start debating, rather than, as tends to be the case, when you are nearing the end your debating career.

When writing notes:

- *Record what is happening in front of you.* Always remember that, from the unveiling of the motion through to the adjudicator's closing remarks, the debate in which you are