

Recording the Whole Debate

Many debaters and adjudicators find it useful to flow the debate. They divide sheets of paper into a grid or columns before the debate, marking out space for each speaker or stage of the debate. One side of two sheets is generally preferred to both sides of one sheet because it's easier to refer to and harder to get lost in. Some debaters use quarters of the page in a portrait format (Fig. 1), while others use columns in the same format running across the full width of the page (Fig. 2). They reserve a quadrant or column for each phase of the debate or speaker.

Within that space, they record the progress of the debate. By having everything on one or two sheets, they can record the arguments thematically across the page and by speaker running down the page. This arrangement makes following what happens to a particular argument easier and gives you a more accurate overview. Flowing is particularly popular with summation and reply speakers as well as adjudicators. If you use this approach, flow the debate as one document to be used for reference and the notes for your own speech as another.

In Figure 1, the third Negative speaker has given herself the four quarters of a sheet of paper (in portrait orientation) to take notes on the first four speakers and one half of another page for the third Affirmative speaker's comments, which she will need to rebut directly. She's also left herself space on the second sheet to record any interesting points that come up in POIs and to note down other thoughts about general themes for the debate as a whole. In addition to these two sheets, she would have a third sheet on which to write the notes from which she will deliver her own speech.

In Figure 2, the speaker has taken a different approach. She uses a landscape page to record each of the preceding speakers' ideas in columns. Utilizing this approach allows her to more clearly identify themes and particular arguments as they run between speakers. Here too, she would use another sheet to set out the notes for her own speech.

Any type of note-taking balances what would be ideal and what is practical. For example, using the second approach, the debater sacrifices the luxury of space for the convenience of seeing the debate at a glance. What approach works for you—and that may be one of these or another one entirely—has as much to do with individual factors (how big is your handwriting, for example) as with the more generalizable considerations of the balance between clarity and comprehensiveness. Just as with how you use abbreviations, you should choose the approach that feels most comfortable for you. It's worth trying out different ideas and, quite possibly, different approaches depending on your position in any given debate.