

Timing

All debate formats impose time limits on speeches. It's not uncommon to have speeches of different lengths depending on speakers' positions in the debate or different lengths for speeches at different stages of a competition. Time limits are set out in advance and you will lose points if you ignore them.

Timing can be either external or internal. External timing is simply speaking for the allotted time; internal timing is how best to apportion time to different parts of your speech. For novice debaters both external and internal timing can be a challenge. This chapter looks at how best to deal with both and how to get a feel for the length of your speeches. The two remaining time-management elements, Points of Information and Cross-Examination, are discussed in Chapter 21.

Why Time Limits?

Formats impose time limits for several reasons. Some are practical; other people need to use the room or the adjudicators need to decide a winner and, in a competitive debate, someone will be waiting for that decision. Some are based on the fairness inherent in debate: all speakers and both sides should have the same amount of time to make their points.

The most important reason for imposing time limits is that they help the speaker clarify her thoughts. Given 30 seconds, she might be tempted to simply announce that something was true, making little effort to explain why it was logical or sensible. Alternatively, given an hour, she might wander her way through the general topic rather than structuring a case around a few critical issues. Time limits help keep the speaker focused.