

External Timing

External timing is the single biggest issue for most beginner debaters. Nervousness about speaking in public or, just as frequently, poorly structured notes can make filling the allotted time seem like an impossible task.

There are three overlapping approaches that will help the debater tackle the problem of filling time:

1. *Have a clear structure.* Knowing what your introduction will be and how you will road-map your arguments enables you to navigate the rest of the speech. If arguments follow sensibly from one another, you can develop the speech in a way that will fill the time quite comfortably. Normally, writing out any part of a speech is a very bad idea, but for your first few speeches, jot down your first couple of sentences so you have a clear idea of how you will begin.
2. *Remain focused and avoid the temptation to gabble.* Delivering a speech can be nerve-racking, so there's an understandable desire to get through the process as quickly as possible. Slowing down the rate at which you speak gives both you and the audience the chance to keep up with what's going on. If you watch most professional speakers, from politicians to actors, you'll notice that they tend to speak more slowly than people do in regular conversation; it helps them think and the audience listen. For the novice debater, speaking slowly also fills valuable seconds. You may see some more experienced debaters speaking at a mile a minute and think that you should be doing the same. It's a widely held misconception that squeezing an extra 150 or so words into a speech will make for a better speech; it really doesn't. Speaking with the precision that a steady approach allows for will prove easier for both you and the adjudicator—remember, she has to write your excellent ideas down.
3. *Remember that the business of the debater is to prove her case, not just to state it.* Let's assume that the speaker is allotted seven minutes and is making three points as well as giving an introduction and conclusion. Let's further assume that the introduction and conclusion should take about a minute each. That leaves about five minutes. Subtract another minute to take and answer two POIs, and the speaker is left with four minutes. That's only 1 minute and 20 seconds to prove each point. Proving anything in that time is difficult. Simply stating the evidence, mentioning the warrant, and then making the claim can take most of that time. And, you still have to refer your teammates and rebut what the other side has said. If you structure your thoughts and your notes to reflect all the tasks you have, then, very quickly, your allotted time becomes worryingly short.