

Aim to be within about 10–20 seconds of the time limit. Like a sort of rhetorical Goldilocks, most debaters' first speeches are too short, their next speeches are too long, and then they get them just right. On the basis that it's easier to cut material out than to make it up on the spot, notes that err on the side of being too long are better than those that would come in short—but not by much. With early speeches, getting to the time limit is an important goal. If that means repeating information, so be it. The speech won't win the debate, but one that finished three minutes early wouldn't either, and as long as you're speaking, you may well think of something new to say about something you've already mentioned.

When speakers start going over time, the best advice is: stop. It may seem terribly important to get through the remaining 57 points that would really clinch the argument, but most adjudicators put their pens down about 20 seconds after the final time signal anyway. They certainly stop awarding points and start deducting them.

Filling out time takes practice. After a few speeches it becomes fairly straightforward.

Internal Timing

Once you've become comfortable with external timing, internal timing often becomes the issue. No sooner have you become confident about filling the full time limit than you find yourself having run out of time while only halfway through your introduction.

Internal timing has more to do with tactics than anything else, so allocating time to the various parts of the speech can be critically important. Keeping introductions and conclusions within protected time (if the format has this) allows the speaker to get through these vital stages with a clear head and no interruptions.

After the introduction, first tackle rebuttal, but don't let it consume the majority of your time. Particularly following a weak speech from the opposition, a speaker can be tempted to spend all of her time in rebuttal, pointing out the many flaws in the preceding speech. Tempting, but ultimately unhelpful. The judge or audience heard the speech as well and will be perfectly able to figure out the mistakes for themselves. The best rebuttal in the world won't win the debate if the speaker doesn't present her own ideas. If you can deal with rebuttal in 30 seconds—which is frequently possible—then you can spend more time developing your own case, adding more evidence, and protecting it with further lines of argument.

When allocating time for individual arguments, make the first argument both the strongest and longest. If you end up running out of time, it's far more sensible to truncate an