

KARL POPPER DEBATE AS A FORM OF PUBLIC ARGUMENT

In *Discovering the World through Debate* we focus on the educational form of debate known as Karl Popper debate. We primarily discuss public argument because we are interested in teaching skills to improve your abilities to argue as citizens, including the skills of cooperative argument for engaging in teamwork to build or create as well as skills of rigorous argument to support values and policies that incorporate those values. We also focus on skills needed to present arguments in the competitive marketplace of ideas. In combination, the skills of cooperative and competitive debate are important tools of citizenship; you can learn these skills through studying and practicing Karl Popper debate.

You can develop the cooperative skills of creating arguments both as an individual and as a part of a team. Karl Popper debate provides students with opportunities to work as a part of team, cooperating with their teammates to construct intelligent, coherent, and reasonable arguments. With your teammates and on your own, you will learn research, argument construction, and internal negotiation among team members as well as other cooperative strategies.

Public debates are naturally competitive events. Public debaters develop the ability to frame arguments so they have the best chance of surviving in a competitive arena. Each advocate or group of advocates attempts to frame arguments in a logical and a persuasive manner so they will be most appealing to their audiences. Skills such as effective public speaking, insightful cross-examination, and pointed refutation allow debaters to present and defend arguments in competitive arenas.

The Karl Popper debate format was created with the ideal of public debate in mind. It recognizes that public debate, while a vital part of democratic traditions, does not always function as well as it should. In some instances, public debaters use “sound bites” rather than extended and well-developed arguments. Sometimes they are not well-informed debaters. In other instances, public debaters appeal to their audience’s misconceptions and prejudices. Karl Popper debate seeks to emulate the best of public debate while avoiding its most obvious problems. An examination of the four features of public debate better explains how Karl Popper debate does this.

AUDIENCE

Karl Popper debates ordinarily are judged by a single adjudicator or, at most, a panel of three persons. This audience is, of course, not the same as a public audience. Nevertheless, debaters in the Karl Popper format should be trained to debate *as if* their judges were intelligent and well-informed members of the community. Debaters should *not* debate or be trained to debate as if their judges were evaluating them primarily in the technical dimensions of argumentation and debate. In keeping with this philosophy, judges need to score as excellent those debaters who have designed their arguments to appeal to a universal audience.

EVIDENCE

Audiences should accept arguments only when they are based on solid evidence. Karl Popper debaters should learn to conduct research to discover such evidence and incorporate it into their arguments. Evidence in Karl Popper debate