



Aalto University
Language Centre

Debates

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Today's class

1. **What is a debate and why should you want to take part in one?**
2. **How to debate**
3. **Choosing arguments**
4. **Refutations**
5. **Points of information**
6. **Practice debate**

What is a debate? Why are debating skills important?

Group Work

Discuss the worksheet

Share your ideas with
the class.



Why debate?

“The debate process is still one of the best techniques for applying the principles of critical thinking” (Roy & Macchiette 2005, p. 264).

Argumentation and debating skills are needed when engaging in academic discussions, where it is essential to be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of other people’s standpoints, and to formulate one’s own positions supported with relevant and adequate grounds.

(Marttunen & Laurinen 2001, pp. 127-128)

Why debate?

“Debates demand the development of oral communication skills, which are vital for success in most careers” (Kennedy 2007, p.188).

Why debate?

Learning benefits of debating:

- Helps students identify salient ideas and concepts
- Enhances skills in evaluating research and evidence
- Improves reasoning and the ability to recognize logical fallacies
- Teaches students to communicate forcefully

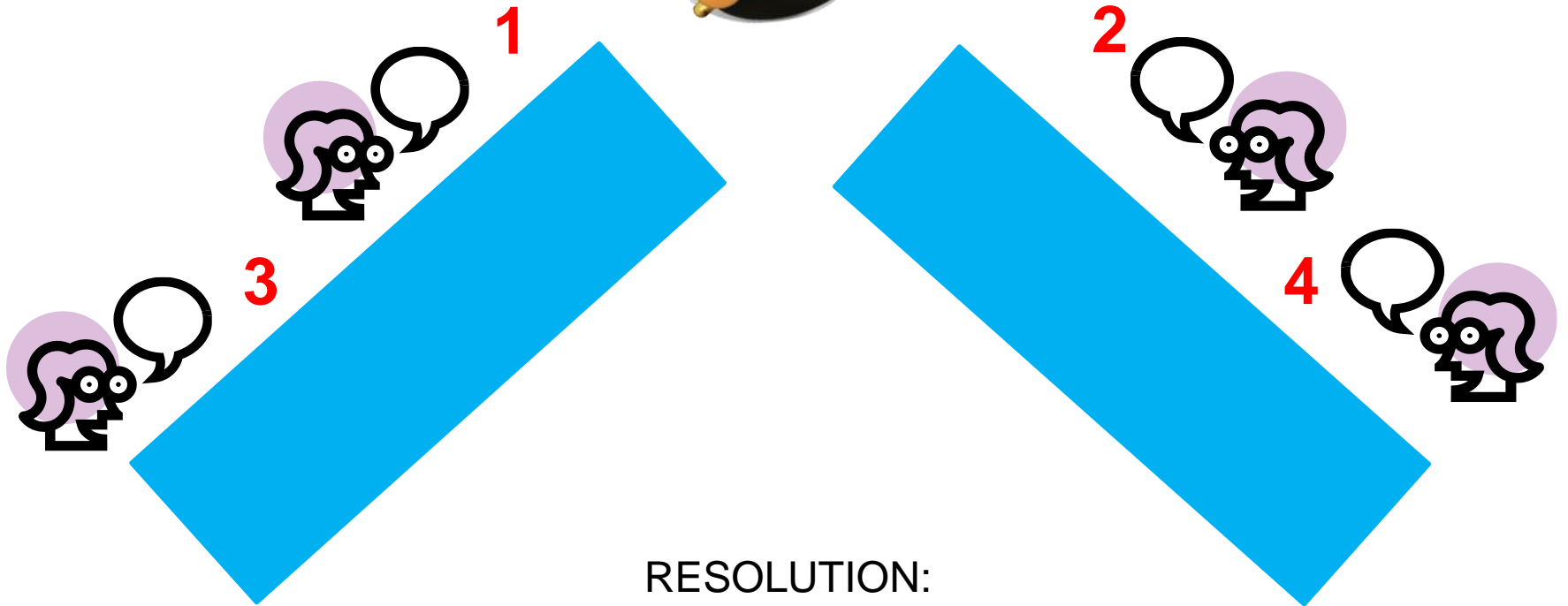
(Roy & Macchiette 2005, p 265)

Chairperson



Government Team
= FOR

Opposition Team
= AGAINST



RESOLUTION:
"Animal testing should be banned."

Parliamentary Debate Rules

1. Government team starts.
2. Two rounds, 1min 30 sec per person per round.
3. After 1st speaker, 50% refutation and 50% speech.
4. No interrupting except for Points of Information (POIs)

Debate Speech structure (per person)

1. Introduction

- Introduce self (or team), brief overview

2. Refutation*

- See refutation sheets

3. Speech

- Individual speech – own arguments, but cohesive with team

4. Conclusion

- Brief summary of main points

Spontaneous debates

Spontaneous debates

Groups of 12. Choose a resolution.

1. Organic fruit is better than regular fruit.
2. Technology will solve global warming.
3. Cheap production is more important than sustainable production.
4. People are more important than the environment.

Now, divide your group into 2 teams of 6 people
3 FOR and **3 AGAINST** the resolution.

Strong versus Weak Reasons

Strong versus weak reasons

A strong reason has the following qualities:

1. It logically supports the opinion → **LOGICAL**
2. It is specific and states the idea clearly → **CLEAR**
3. It is convincing to a majority of people → **NORMATIVE**

(LeBeau, Harrington, Lubetsky 2000)

Strong versus weak reasons

Consider the following:

Smoking should be banned in public places because:

- it is bad.
- it gives people bad breath and makes their teeth yellow.
- second-hand smoke is harmful to non-smokers.

Which of these reasons is the strongest / weakest and WHY?



Activity: Gimme one good reason...



Groups of Three

- The Judge reads a proposition from one of the pieces of paper.
- Students A & B must give a reason *in favor of* or *against* the proposition.
- Alternate roles.

- Student A starts and must give one reason IN FAVOR within one minute.
- Student B then gives one reason AGAINST within one minute.
- Student C judges which reason was the strongest.
 - It logically supports the opinion.
 - It is specific and states the idea clearly.
 - It is convincing to a majority of people.

Reasons to support your side

Team work

- What are the main reasons supporting your team's point of view?
- Which are the strongest and weakest?

Evidence

Giving support for your reasons

- Support consists of evidence.
 - Four kinds of evidence:
 - Example *Own experience, or something you read / heard*
 - Common sense *Something you believe everyone knows*
 - Statistics
 - Expert Opinion
- } *Research-based evidence*

(LeBeau, Harrington and Lubetsky 2000)

Giving support for your reasons



Smoking should be banned in public places

Example:

For example, when I go to a restaurant or bar and there are people smoking near me, I feel that I am breathing their smoke. This makes me a smoker even though I don't want to be!

Giving support for your reasons



Smoking should be banned in public places.

Common sense:

Nowadays, everyone knows that second-hand smoke is very unhealthy for non-smokers.

Giving support for your reasons



Smoking should be banned in public places.

Statistics:

Second-hand smoke causes about 250,000 respiratory infections in infants and children every year, resulting in about 15,000 hospitalizations each year.

Giving support for your reasons



Smoking should be banned in public places.

Expert opinion:

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, “second-hand smoke causes approximately 3,000 lung cancer deaths in nonsmokers every year”

Giving support for your reasons

- Example
- Common Sense
- Statistics
- Expert Opinion

Which type of support do you think is most convincing?

Or does it depend on the topic / context of the discussion?

Evidence for your reasons

- What evidence can you use to support your position?

Refutations

How to refute

- Every speaker* spends **50%** of their time refuting the previous speaker's argument(s).
- Refutations are spontaneous.
- You can prepare by **predicting** the opposing team's arguments

*** Except 1st Govt speaker in first round**

How to refute

1. Take notes!! (Have a pen and paper ready)
2. Identify the opponent's arguments
3. Use logic (logos) to disprove it
 - Statistics, facts, evidence, etc.
4. Use emotion (pathos) to reduce its significance
 - Analogies, anecdotes, stories, etc.

How to refute

An argument can be refuted in different ways:

- A. A point is **not always true**
i.e. there are some important exceptions
- B. A point is **not necessarily true**
i.e. there is some doubt about the evidence given in support
- C. A point is **deemed unimportant**
i.e. it has nothing to do with the resolution and thus is not relevant
- D. A problem **could be easily solved**

(See Handout)

How to refute

A good tool for attacking arguments is the five step refutation in ‘Stating a refutation’

1. Signpost: state their argument
2. Rephrase their argument: “They say..”
3. Refute it
4. Give a reason “Because...”
5. State the rationale

(See Handout Table 1)

Brainstorm!

In your debate teams

Brainstorm the most obvious arguments against your position.

Decide on the 5 - 6 most effective.

If you are the opponents, consider what is their strongest arguments.

Refute!

Group work

Each of you should refute at least one of these arguments using the 5 step model in the **Refuting Explanations** sheets.

Give feedback on your partners' refutations.

Points of information

Point of Information!

- A point of information (POI) is an interruption by a member of the nonspeaking team. (max. 1 per speech.)
- POIs are phrased as questions
 - Isn't it true that...?
 - How can you defend...?

Point of Information!

- You are trying to distract the speaker and break their rhythm by pointing out possible contradictions in the team's arguments, inadequate evidence, etc.
- POIs can only be presented after the first minute of the speech.

POI Preparation

In your debate teams

- Compile a list of ten questions.
- You will want each question to address a different aspect of your opponents' arguments.

e.g. Nuclear energy

- How can you say nuclear energy is safe when we have had so many nuclear accidents? (Safety)
 - Are we not going to run out of uranium in the near future? (Supply)
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