

# IPFA09 - Debate guidelines

## 1. FORMAT

We'll be having three debates this semester. Each of you must participate in one debate. With help from me, the volunteers for each debate will pick the resolution and divide into two teams. The two teams are called *the affirmative* and *the negative*: the affirmative are arguing for the resolution, and the negative are arguing against it. (More about the resolution below.) Each team will have five opportunities to speak: an *opening*, a *rebuttal*, a *closing*, and two *cross-examinations*. The debate runs in this order (time, in minutes, in parentheses):

- (1) affirmative opening (7)
- (2) negative cross-ex (3)
- (3) negative opening (8)
- (4) affirmative cross-ex (3)
- (5) affirmative response (8)
- (6) negative cross-ex (3)
- (7) negative response (8)
- (8) affirmative cross-ex (3)
- (9) negative rebuttal (4)
- (10) affirmative rebuttal (5)

Before giving their responses, each team can take up to 3 minutes of additional prep time. During cross-examinations, the team that is speaking has an opportunity to ask the opposing team questions. Cross-examinations are the only times the teams directly interact. No new arguments are allowed in the rebuttals; each team presents its complete case during its opening and response, and uses the rebuttal to give a summary and review of their case. Each team must write its opening speech in advance, and email it to me at least **three days** before the debate; this opening speech will be sent to the opposing team.

## 2. RESOLUTION

The *resolution* should be a short declarative (true-or-false) statement. Despite its name, the resolution is the central issue in the debate. The two sides are arguing over whether or not the resolution is true. Here are some good examples of resolutions:

- There is only one true account of the good human life.
- Individual rights are more important than the well-being of society as a whole.
- Capitalism is unjust.
- Our causal claims about the world are not justified.
- Ethical values should not be used to choose a scientific theory.

If some of the terms of the resolution are vague, the affirmative is allowed to give them reasonable definitions in their opening. For example, the affirmative might define 'capitalism' as 'an economic system with a completely unregulated free market'. This helps focus and clarify the debate. For example, this definition of capitalism takes regulated, partially-free market systems off the table; the debate is only dealing with completely unregulated systems.

At the same time, the affirmative has the *burden of proof*. In order to win, the affirmative must give at least one conclusive argument for the resolution. On the other hand, for the opposition to win, they only have to show that none of the affirmative's arguments are conclusive. For example, the opposition don't have to give conclusive arguments that capitalism is just; they just have to knock down all of the affirmative's arguments that capitalism is unjust.

### 3. GRADING

Your performance in the debate will be determined by the other students in the class. They will evaluate you in four respects: the clarity of your speech, the strength of your arguments, your overall persuasiveness, and your fairness to the other team. I'll add these to calculate your grade. I will decide the overall winner of the debate, and this team will receive a small increase (about 1/3 of a letter grade) to their debate grades.

### 4. SOME TIPS

**Affirmative opening:** As the very first speech, the affirmative opening needs to set up the terms of the debate. Explain, for example, exactly how you're interpreting the resolution, so that the audience (who haven't been spending the last week thinking about this topic) can understand what the debate is about.

**Signpost your speech:** Just like I encourage you to do in your papers. "I'm going to give four arguments to support the resolution. First, . . . The second of my four arguments is . . ." When you're responding to your opponents, do the same thing: "Their first argument was . . . However, this argument is flawed because . . ."

**Rehearse:** Since you'll be getting the opening speeches in advance, you'll be able to write and practice both the opening and response before the day of the debate. Write your speech (you are allowed to bring notes to the podium), then read it 3-4 times out loud, until you're reading it at a comfortable rate. Then time yourself. Try it out on your teammates or some other practice audience. That goes triple if you're afraid of public speaking!

**Notetaking:** Debates go *fast*. Competitive debaters learn a style of notetaking called *flowing*, in which you divide your paper into columns (one for each speech) and line up arguments and replies next to each other. You can see a simple example here: <http://www.ggsa.org/parli.pdf>. Taking notes in this way makes it easy to see where you've responded to your opponents, and what you still have to talk about.

**Clash:** Make sure you're responding to your opponent's arguments – debaters call this 'clash'. If you haven't addressed something specifically, then you've 'dropped' that line of debate, and that's a point in favor of the other side.

**Quality, not quantity:** The best debaters build their cases around a few very strong objections, rather than using the shotgun strategy. A debate with a thousand bad objections is just too complicated and boring to keep the audience's attention.