

MRHS English - English 621 Debate

The debate is a structured persuasive argument during which teams of speakers present opposing positions to try to win over an audience. Debating allows participants to gain interest in current issues, develop research skills, support arguments with research, express ideas clearly, think critically, and defend positions.

Debating Terms

There is always an affirmative team (*usually called the government*) that argues in favor of the topic. The negative team (*sometimes called the opposition*) argues against the topic. Each team member must fill the following role simultaneously: researcher, recorder, rebuttal specialist, speaker. The topic - called a **resolution** - is a formal declarative statement and is worded so that the affirmative side proposes some sort of change. Debates begin with the phrase: *Be it resolved that...*

Be it resolved that the Canadian government should adopt a program of mandatory national service for high school graduates.
Be it resolved that an exemption policy be adopted in Prince Edward Island high schools.

There are several parts of debate: **Opening Remarks, Constructive Speeches, Individual Rebuttals, Group Rebuttals, Closing Remarks, and the Vote.** *The affirmative team always begins and ends a debate.* It is given this favored position because its task is most difficult: to persuade the audience to support a change, which is against human nature. Another student in the class, who is not involved in the debate, will act as the **Speaker** - like in the House of Commons - to control the order of speaking and time. The speaker begins the debate by stating the resolution.

Opening Remarks

Much like the introduction to an essay, these **group-created remarks** introduce your side of the argument and **preview the constructive speeches** of your team members. Again, these are prepared in advance of the debate by **all** members of the team. They state your case explicitly and also acknowledge the possible faults in your opponents' attack.

Constructive Speeches

Research is required to prepare your constructive speech and gather facts that can be used against the speeches of your opponents. Suggestions:

- Make friends with Mrs Pendergast and access her wealth of knowledge in research. Ask her for all the assistance she's willing to give.
- Record all researched information on **index cards**, labeling each card according to sub-topics, noting the sources of your research.
- Index cards also must include **proper MLA citation**.
- Speeches must be loaded with evidence to support your case: facts, statistics, specific examples, quotations, expert opinions.
- Good speeches also are loaded with emotional language, persuasive appeals and rhetorical devices. Try to get the audience to agree with you.
- Constructive speeches also look into both sides of the issue in order to be able to respond to positions and questions from the opposition.
- You have to know your opponents' arguments almost as well as your own.

Rebuttals

The purpose of the rebuttal is to point out and expose weaknesses in the arguments of the opposition and to further defend your own case. Success in rebuttal depends on how well students have researched/listened/taken notes during the debate and how convincingly they can refute the points made by their opposition. In our debates, opportunities are given to individual rebuttals (**person to person**) and group rebuttals (what we call the **'bare knuckle round'**). Some rebuttal suggestions:

- Remember that the whole point of rebuttal is to prove that the opponent's evidence and arguments are weak.
- Try to show that your opponent's sources are unacceptable, untrustworthy, or disreputable.
- Show the opposition is avoiding major issues, sticking to the safe or insignificant arguments, or arguing points that do not apply to the resolution.
- Try to quote your opponent's words exactly when making a valid point - the words will come back to haunt the original speaker.
- Knowing how your opponent is going to argue will help you when planning rebuttal strategy. Try to anticipate possible points.
- The final speaker during the rebuttal round should urge the audience to accept his/her team's proposal.

Closing Remarks

Like a lawyer's final summation at the end of a trial, the closing remarks are your team's last chance to appeal to the audience to agree with you. The closing remarks should be delivered by a team member who is good at thinking on his/her feet since good closing remarks combine a loose outline of a speech with details raised during the debate itself.

Vote

Following the debate, the Speaker asks the audience (by show of hands) to vote. Individuals vote in favor of the affirmative, the negative, or abstain. Following the vote, the Speaker announces the winner, teams rise from their positions, meet in the centre, and shake hands.

Research

Each debate will concern a topic which won't be absolutely familiar to all students. Research, then, is paramount if a debate is to be successful. Use of **rhetorical devices** is also vital. Any argument that sways an audience member is a vote in favor of your side's arguments. Having research to support your position is the strongest method in building your argument.

Debate Specifics

- Students will be provided with 3 - 5 library research days. They are on their own for the rest of the time.
- Each team should appoint a captain to keep the team organized with planning strategies, information gathering, and time management.
- Each team should decide who is researching each aspect of the issue, including possible counter-arguments your opponents may be developing.
- Members must keep researched information on **10 - 15 formal index cards**. Each team member must submit his/her cards after the debate.
- Each team member is also required to submit a formal MLA format **References** page (there should be at least three sources listed).
- Each team member must submit a good copy of his/her **constructive speech**.
- Each team must submit a good copy of its **Opening Remarks** and its proposed **Closing Remarks**. Remember, opening and closing remarks are a team responsibility - don't leave it up to one person.

Key Points When Planning Opening Remarks and Constructive Speeches

It is important to remember that all comments (Opening and Closing Remarks, Constructive Speeches, Rebuttals) are directed at the audience and the Speaker - **not to the other debaters**. It is considered poor debating practice in parliamentary debate to engage your opponent. It shows a lack of respect for the rules and process of debate.

Opening Remarks

- clarify the parts of the resolution that may be unclear to the audience, including important terms and unfamiliar language.
- provide background to the resolution (basically, identify why these changes need to be made).
- recognize the other team's position when making your opening remarks (but only to tell the audience how it is the incorrect position).
- ensure the opening remarks reflect the arguments of all team members.

Constructive Speeches

- no need to re-state the resolution - the Speaker has already done that.
- each team member is responsible for a portion of the argument and states the various reasons this change is needed (or not made, if opposition).
- this is where the volume of your research comes in handy; the more facts (information, examples, statistics) and expert opinions you have on your side to support your opinions, the better your speech will be.
- this speech is also where your use of rhetoric and persuasive appeal (using emotional and logical appeals) will win over audience members.
- if you are Affirmative, prove that your plan is practical (it will work) and desirable (it has many benefits).
- if you are Negative, you should question the Affirmative's position (using facts, examples, testimony from experts - there is no need to change).

Rebuttals

- make sure you take notes during the speeches of your opponents - this comes in handy when planning rebuttals.
- make very sure that you pay extra attention to the speech of your direct opponent (First Negative vs First Affirmative; Second vs Second; etc)
- for the individual rebuttals, you speak only to the points raised by your opponent for one full minute.
- during group rebuttal (Bare-Knuckle Round), you may speak to anyone's points - the reason for keeping very detailed notes - for 3 - 5 minutes.
- make sure to share your notes with all team members during the five-minute preparation for individual rebuttals.
- following the Bare-Knuckle Round, teams will be given two minutes to prepare Closing Remarks.

Closing Remarks (1 Minute)

- Negative speaks first, followed by Affirmative.
- in addition to a summary of your team's position, the Closing Remarks should also make reference to the strongest parts of your debate/rebuttal and the weakest parts of your opponents' debate/rebuttal.
- both sides strongly urge the audience to agree with or reject the resolution.
- closing remarks that fail to reach the one-minute time limit will be considered quite ineffective. There should be lots to say.

English 621 Debate Format

1. Affirmative Opening Remarks	(1 Minute)
2. Negative Opening Remarks	(1 Minute)
3. First Affirmative Constructive Speech	(2 Minutes)
4. First Negative Constructive Speech	(2 Minutes)
5. Second Affirmative Constructive Speech	(2 Minutes)
6. Second Negative Constructive Speech	(2 Minutes)
7. Preparations for Rebuttals	(5 Minutes)
8. First Negative Rebuttal	(1 Minute) - you speak against the arguments of the First Affirmative
9. First Affirmative Rebuttal	(1 Minute) - you speak against the arguments of the First Negative
10. Second Negative Rebuttal	(1 Minute) - against Second Affirmative's speech
11. Second Affirmative Rebuttal	(1 Minute) - against Second Negative's speech
12. Bare-Knuckle Round (Group Rebuttal)	(3 - 5 Minutes) - each member must speak at least twice
13. Preparation for Final Remarks	(2 Minutes)
14. Negative Closing Remarks	(1 Minute)
15. Affirmative Closing Remarks	(1 Minute)
16. Vote	(1 Minute)
Total Time for Debate	29 Minutes

English 621 Debate Assessment

Students will be assessed on an individual and group scale. Most value is placed on individual performance, but as this is a group project, points will be awarded for teamwork and team planning.

Individual Assessment

- Index Cards	4 Points
- References	4 Points
- Constructive Speech	20 Points
- Rebuttals	12 Points
- Self-Assessment	4 Points

Group Assessment

- Opening Remarks	4 Points
- Closing Remarks	4 Points
- Peer Assessment	4 Points
Total Assessment	56 Points

English 621 Debate - Individual Assessment				
Categories and Criteria	4 - Mastery	3 - Above Standard	2 - Adequate	1 - Below Standard
Constructive Speech: Quality of Information, Source Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All information presented is sufficient, relevant, accurate, and clear; evidence taken from highly credible sources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most information clear, sufficient, accurate and relevant; sources mostly credible; facts/opinions mostly clear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information somewhat sufficient and relevant, but containing inaccuracies; few credible sources; unclear facts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information insufficient, irrelevant, inaccurate. Sources unidentified; fact/opinion indistinguishable.
Constructive Speech: Understanding of Topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly understood the topic in-depth and presented info forcefully/convincingly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly understood the topic in-depth and presented information with ease. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understood the main points of the topic, but didn't present with ease. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did not show an adequate understanding of the topic; led to awkward presentation.
Constructive Speech: Emotional/Logical Language & Rhetorical Devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliberate/effective use of logical, emotional, rhetorical appeals to persuade. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses logical, emotional and rhetorical appeals to enhance effectiveness of argument. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some appeals to persuade, but not a mix of logical, emotional and rhetorical appeals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes minimal use of persuasive appeals; does not use persuasive rhetoric.
Constructive Speech: Language Use & Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is stylistically sophisticated; language works to enhance all arguments. Shows confidence, energy, passion; respectful tone; accesses research materials with ease throughout. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is appropriate; language adds interest to most arguments. Shows confidence, energy; respectful tone; accesses research materials effectively through most of debate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is mostly appropriate; adds interest and relevance to arguments. Nervous, yet confident; respectful tone; use of research materials distracts from the speech. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic but clear language used; language is colloquial or overly simplistic. Demonstrates little or no preparation; fails to maintain respectful tone; use of research materials inappropriate.
Rebuttal: Preparation & Responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well-prepared rebuttal notes for referral; shows outstanding listening skills. Responds to issues raised by opponents with concise, accurate, logical answers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notes prepared for rebuttal; shows strong listening skills. Responds to issues raised by opponents with accurate and generally concise answers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few notes prepared; few active listening skills demonstrated. Caught off-guard; offers tentative, accurate - but vague - or illogical responses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No prepared rebuttal notes; active listening skills not demonstrated. Is unable to respond to issues raised by opponents in a meaningful or accurate way.
Rebuttal: Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectively challenges the arguments made by opponents with argument and evidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges the arguments made by opponents; challenges are generally effective. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers arguments, but no evidence, to counter the arguments made by opponents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempts to challenge arguments of opponents are weak and illogical.
Index Cards:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessed for quality of information, credibility of sources, plagiarism, MLA format; must be between 10 and 15 index cards used. 			4 Points
References Page:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A formal References (Works Cited) page must be submitted in good copy, proper MLA format, with a minimum of three credible sources. 			4 Points
Self-Assessment:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An honest self assessment of your own performance in the debate (see attached self-assessment rubric) 			4 Points
Individual Assessment Subtotal				36 Points
English 621 Debate - Group Assessment				
Peer Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An honest assessment of your performance in the debate from the point of view of your peers. 			4 Points
Opening Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical terms clarified; opposition points acknowledged/refuted; reasons for change/controversy indicated; summarized arguments effectively. 			4 Points
Closing Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed opponents' weakest points; re-emphasized team position; synthesized strongest debate points; made solid recommendations. 			4 Points
Group Assessment Subtotal				12 Points
Final Debate Score				48 Points

TO BE DISTRIBUTED ON THE DAY OF THE DEBATE:

English 621 Debate - Self-Assessment			
4 = Strongly Agree	3 = Agree	2 = Agree Slightly	1 = Not at All
1	I had all relevant information fully prepared prior to this debate.		
2	I completely understood all team concepts/arguments for this debate.		
3	I fully examined my partners' and opponents' points of view for this debate.		
4	I was able to thoroughly analyze and interpret information presented by others.		
5	I expressed my ideas logically, confidently, and convincingly.		
6	I provided a well-prepared and convincing rebuttal, supported by listening and note-taking.		
7	I used debating techniques well: eye contact, gestures, expressive speech, etc.		
8	I listened intently while others were speaking and made note of what I wanted to re-visit.		
9	I actively participated in the planning/writing of my team's Opening and Closing Remarks.		
10	I was open and available in terms of planning and practicing my team's debate.		

English 621 Debate - Peer Assessment			
4 = Strongly Agree	3 = Agree	2 = Agree Slightly	1 = Not at All
1	He/she had all relevant information fully-prepared prior to the debate.		
2	He/she made every effort to completely understand all concepts relative to our debate.		
3	He/she was open and willing to discuss alternative points of view on our topic.		
4	He/she expressed ideas logically and in a convincing manner.		
5	He/she paid close attention to opposition's speeches in order to deliver an effective rebuttal.		
6	He/she provided a well-spoken, well-supported, and convincing rebuttal.		
7	He/she was on task and focused during the research and planning process.		
8	He/she actively participated in the planning and writing of Opening and Closing Remarks.		
9	He/she was always respectful of all group members on both Affirmative and Negative teams.		
10	He/she was open and available in terms of planning and practicing our team's debate.		