**PRINCIPAL DEBATE FORMATS**

**(R. Kalytchak, E-book “Soft Skills”, pp. 172-178)**

**Policy Debate (Cross-Examination)**

Policy Debate is the most widely used format. It calls for two teams: the affirmative and the negative. Every speaker gets exactly the same amount of speaking and questioning time (cross-examination). The first four speeches are each nine minutes long, and each is called a constructive speech. During these speeches, debaters may propose or advance new arguments. After each constructive speech, the other team is allowed to crossexamine for no longer than three minutes. The affirmative gives the first constructive speech, followed by a cross-examination from the negative team. The negative gives the second constructive speech, followed by a cross- examination from the affirmative team. The affirmative is allowed to speak again for the third constructive speech, after which it is again cross-examined by the negative. Finally, the negative gives the fourth and final constructive speech, after which the affirmative cross-examines the negative. The teams use all four of their constructive speeches to propose their arguments and inform the audience about their evidence and reasoning to support their arguments.

The last four speeches of the debate are called rebuttals. During a rebuttal speech, the debaters are not allowed to present new arguments, since these speeches are meant to challenge the arguments the other team introduced in its constructive speeches. Debaters also use rebuttal speeches to defend their team’s arguments from challenges by the other team. Each rebuttal is six minutes long. The negative gives the first rebuttal speech. The affirmative gives the second. The negative is allowed to speak again for the third, and the affirmative gives the fourth and final rebuttal speeches. (Broda-Bahm, K., Kempf, D., 2004) (Rybold, G., 2006).

9 min. First Affirmative Constructive

3 min. Cross-examination of first affirmative speaker (by second negative speaker)

9 min. First Negative Constructive

3 min. Cross-examination first negative speaker (by first affirmative speaker)

9 min. Second Affirmative Constructive

3 min. Cross-examination of second affirmative speaker (by first negative speaker)

9 min. Second Negative Constructive

3 min. Cross-examination of second negative speaker (by second affirmative speaker)

6 min. First Negative Rebuttal

6 min. First Affirmative Rebuttal

6 min. Second Affirmative Rebuttal

6 min. Second Negative Rebuttal

**Parliamentary Format**

The parliamentary format is probably one of the most recognized formats the world over. The format has the advantage of a relatively short duration and nearly constant interaction. The format includes the honorific titles: the team usually referred to as “Affirmative” is called “Government” and includes a Prime Minister and a Member of Government; and the team usually referred to as “Negative” is called “Opposition” and includes a Leader of Opposition and a Member of Opposition. These terms may or may not be used.

This format lacks specifically set-aside times for questioning, but includes the possibility for questions offered throughout the first phase of the debate. Once a constructive speech has completed its first minute but before it has entered its last minute, an opposing speaker may rise at any point and request a “point of information”— that is, the speaker requests permission to ask a question. At that point, the speaker holding the floor can either accept the question and answer it, before moving back into his speech, or he can say, “No, thank you,” and continue on with his speech. The strength of this feature is that it offers a chance to address a point just after it has been made. A weakness is that, if overused, it can be distracting to the speaker and the audience.

Another advantage of this format is that it allows for audience participation in the form of “floor speeches”— audience members may make challenges or ask questions of the debaters. (This format requires a firm-handed moderator to keep the floor speeches and responses within appropriate limits.)

A variation on the parliamentary format (World style or British/European Parliament) involves four teams at a time, two government teams and two opposition teams. While such a format permits the involvement of a much larger number of debaters, it also takes substantially more skill in order to maintain clear argument development and refutation. (Broda-Bahm, K., Kempf, D., 2004)

7 min. Government: Prime Minister’s Constructive “Points” allowed after first minute and before last minute.

8 min. Opposition: Leader’s Constructive “Points” allowed after first minute and before last minute.

8 min. Government: Member’s Constructive “Points” allowed after first minute and before last minute.

8 min. Opposition: Member’s Constructive “Points” allowed after first minute and before last minute.

15 min. Floor Speeches (2 minutes each)

4 min. Opposition: Leader’s Rebuttal

5 min. Government: Prime Minister’s Rebuttal

**Lincoln–Douglas Format**

This format receives its name from a series of debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas for the Illinois seat of the U.S. Senate in 1858. Focusing largely on the question of slavery, the debates continue to convey the ideal of one person’s ability to influence public attitudes and events. It is promoted as a format that emphasizes advanced preparation, a basic understanding of philosophical and value conflicts, a moderate use of evidence, and a conversational approach toward delivery. Today, Lincoln-Douglas debate is the only major format to feature, instead of teams, one speaker against another speaker.

This format uses two people: one for the affirmative and the other for the negative. The main differences between Lincoln-Douglas and other team debates is that there are fewer speeches and you will not be able to depend on a partner to help you. It has the advantage of promoting a simpler, shorter, and more personal contest.

The Lincoln-Douglas format offers a one-on-one debate including constructive speeches, rebuttals and questioning time in less than 35 minutes. Though the total speaking times are equal, the affirmative speaks three times (beginning and ending the debate) while the negative speaks twice. Each begins with a constructive speech to lay out his principal argument, with the negative debater’s speech being a bit longer so as to include both case development and refutation. The affirmative debater has two short rebuttals in which to refute the negative’s case, defend his own, and conclude the debate. (Broda-Bahm, K., Kempf, D., 2004) (Rybold, G., 2006)

6 min. Affirmative Constructive

3 min. Questioning by negative

7 min. Negative Constructive

3 min. Questioning by affirmative

4 min. First Affirmative Rebuttal

6 min. Negative Rebuttal

3 min. Second Affirmative Rebuttal

**Karl Popper format**

A relative newcomer to the debate world, the Karl Popper format is named after a Viennese philosopher who opposed the idea of absolute truth, embraced the notion of multiple perspectives, and developed the ideal of an “open society,” based on a respect for different points of view, protection of minority rights, and a defense of free media. The format usually focuses on propositions of general value, but has recently included propositions of policy as well. The style encourages advance preparation, but also encourages creativity and the reliance on common knowledge and reasoning. The heavy reliance on quoted materials that is characteristic of American policy debate is not a feature of Karl Popper debate, but research is encouraged, and competitors frequently receive packets of published articles related to the proposition prior to the tournament.

The Karl Popper debate format calls for two teams: affirmative and negative. This format accommodates three speakers per team and provides just one speaking opportunity for each speaker (although four of the six speakers also conduct questioning). Its strength is that it includes a greater number of speakers and provides a gentle introduction to debate for less-experienced speakers. (the responsibilities are somewhat uneven: the first speakers on each team have a total of 12 minutes on stage; the second and third speakers on each team have 8 minutes apiece.)

One challenge of this format is to maintain continuity between the speeches. The third speaker needs to defend the same arguments that were extended by the second speaker and introduced by the first speaker. This need for continuity is present in other formats as well, but when speakers make only one speech each, there is a correspondingly greater need to communicate among the partners. The first speech from the affirmative side has the goal of laying out the team’s main arguments. The first negative speaker follows, developing not only that team’s case but also their refutation of the affirmative’s arguments. The two speeches that follow are designed for extending the arguments and the refutation of each side, but not for introducing new arguments. A final speech from each side provides an opportunity to compare and summarize. (Broda-Bahm, K., Kempf, D., 2004)

6 min. First Affirmative (Constructive)

3 min. Questioning of first affirmative (by third negative)

6 min. First Negative (Constructive)

3 min. Questioning of first negative (by third affirmative)

5 min. Second Affirmative (Rebuttal)

3 min. Questioning of second affirmative (by the first negative)

5 min. Second Negative (Rebuttal)

3 min. Questioning of second negative (by the first affirmative)

5 min. Third Affirmative (Rebuttal)

5 min. Third Negative (Rebuttal)

**Public Forum**

Public Forum (also called Ted Turner Debate or Controversy) is one of the newest events. Public Forum attempts to get more students involved by making the event an audience-oriented contest, usually without expert debate judges involved.

Debaters use evidence but usually will not read it verbatim during the debate. The two-person teams in Public Forum are pro (affirmative) and con (negative). The proposition can either be a policy or a value topic.

Instead of cross-examination speeches, Public Forum has crossfire. During this time, the debaters who just finished speaking can ask and answer questions of each other.

The summary speeches allow the debaters to recap the best arguments for their side. This is a chance for more refutation but not new arguments. In the last shot, each team will reprise the one argument that they believe will win the debate for them. (Rybold, G., 2006)

4 min. Team A Speaker 1

4 min. Team B Speaker 1

3 min. Crossfire (between Team A Speaker 1 & Team B Speaker 1)

4 min. Team A Speaker 2

4 min. Team B Speaker 2

3 min. Crossfire (between Team A Speaker 2 & Team B Speaker 2)

Summary 2 min. Team A Speaker 1

Summary 2 min. Team B Speaker 1

3 min. Grand Crossfire (all speakers)

**The “Town Hall” Format**

This is a format for two teams that includes a focused period for audience interaction. Based on a form of debate used at the National Communication Association’s “Town Hall Debates” held at the association’s annual conventions, this 50–60 minute format has proven to be useful and popular for public on-campus debates as well.

Through the first four speeches, the first half hour of the debate roughly, the audience hears from each of the speakers, and hears each speaker ask questions and answer questions. The goal of the four constructive speeches is to lay out all of the arguments for one’s side and to introduce all of the planned refutations against the other side. Up to this point, the debate follows the pattern of the policy debate format described above. After all four debaters have been heard, there is a 15-minute questioning period, during which audience members can make their own arguments or can directly question the speakers. A moderator can handle this audience participation period by providing individual speaking times to audience members who would like to give speeches from the floor (2 minutes, for example) or by simply letting audience members speak for a reasonable amount of time.

The moderator should attempt to balance the questions and statements for the two sides as much as possible— for example, by allowing the other side time to answer or react to a question that was asked of their opponents.

Finally, the debate ends with two summaries presented by each side. This summary, presented by one member of each team (it doesn’t matter which one) reviews the main issues of the debate and provides reasons why the speaker’s side should be chosen the winner. (Broda-Bahm, K., Kempf, D., 2004)

5 min. First Affirmative Constructive

2 min. Questioning of first affirmative (by second negative)

5 min. First Negative Constructive

2 min. Questioning of first negative (by first affirmative)

4 min. Second Affirmative Constructive

2 min. Questioning of second affirmative (by first negative)

4 min. Second Negative Constructive

2 min. Questioning of second negative (by second affirmative)

15 min. Audience Speech/Question Period

3 min. Final Negative Summary

3 min. Final Affirmative Summary

**A “Quick Debate”**

Format Debates sometimes must be accomplished in very short amounts of time. Debaters with experience in tournament debate, as well as public policy advocates, may feel that any issue worth debating needs at least an hour of debating time—but it is possible to offer the core of a debate, the fundamental give and take on the central controversy, in far less time. The following format requires only 10 minutes, and provides two speaking opportunities and a questioning opportunity to two sides.

This format requires speakers to have both discipline (selecting only one or two arguments) and a great deal of word economy. While the abbreviated format may not permit very complete argument development or extension, it does allow the basic points of view to be communicated and contrasted.

As such, it might be ideal for a program that includes debate along with other activities—for example, a talk show or a radio call-in show. Starting such a program with a quick debate may be an excellent way to gain attention and briefly communicate the gist of the controversy. (Broda-Bahm, K., Kempf, D., 2004)

2 min. Affirmative Constructive

1 min. Questioning of affirmative

2 min. Negative Constructive

1 min. Questioning of negative

2 min. Affirmative Summary

2 min. Negative Summary