



debating

Edited by Charlotte Ames-Etridge

Debating can enhance your ability to reason, to question and to adapt. If you're a newcomer, the prospect of your first debate competition can be both exciting and daunting. Here are some tips to help you prepare for the big event:

1 Brainstorm and research

When you receive a motion (the statement that will be disputed during the debate), brainstorm ideas for both your side and for the other side. This will help you not only prepare for your team's case, but also pre-emptively work out your opponents' arguments and come up with rebuttals.

Get a big piece of paper or use the blackboard to jot down your points. At this stage, all ideas are welcome. After all, everything is possible! Then, put the ideas into different categories. This will give you an idea of what you need to do more focused research on.

Beginners may find it hard to brainstorm points at the very first stage. Doing some background research is a good first step. But what's even better is regularly keeping up to date with what's going on in the world; get into the habit of watching the news and reading newspapers (including the one you are reading now). The best debaters are always aware of their surroundings.

2 Define carefully

It's very important to know the exact definition of certain keywords to ensure that every debater understands them. Novice debaters usually consult a dictionary, but more experienced debaters can branch out and use a wider range of resources. They will also most likely adopt a definition which assists their team's case.

Here's an example: Our motion is "This House believes that Hong Kong should have a cashless economy".

A dictionary would tell you that "a cashless economy" refers to one that operates solely with

Get into the habit of watching the news and reading newspapers

credit and debit cards and electronic systems, without notes nor coins. However, if you read academic journals, they may tell you that "a cashless economy" refers to one in which it is easy to make digital transactions, but notes and coins may still exist. If you were on the affirmative side, which definition would you adopt?

3 Work as a team

All speakers should sit together to decide how to divide a case between members so that all the speeches are connected, but there is no overlapping of points. A short, punchy team line which covers all the arguments should be

decided together and highlighted in each person's speech. Those on the team who are not speakers should feel free to contribute, too; it can help to have a second pair of eyes and ears to point out any mistakes in speeches. This is also about becoming a meticulous debater who pays attention to details.

4 Get your friends to attack you

This is a great way to practise before the actual debate. Ask one of your friends to be your foe temporarily. They will take on the role of your opponents and attack you. This can help you predict arguments that your opponents will raise in the real debate, and you'll be able to prepare rebuttals. More importantly, this improves your wit. You will learn to listen and identify the main arguments, so that you focus on your opponent's core ideas instead of the peripheral details.

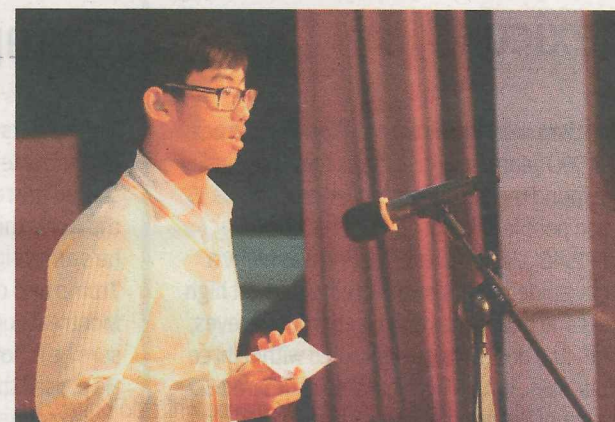
5 Be open-minded and take advice

Your teachers and friends may give you advice on your speeches and performances during practice sessions. Always be open-minded and listen to advice. Some debaters tend to be too critical and they won't readily accept feedback. Being critical to a certain level helps you construct arguments. But being too critical may mean you are learning less. Try to get advice from as many people as possible, and you will find out that people are all thinking from a different point of view. Learning to think from different perspectives strengthens your arguments and improves your debating skills.

Shawn Leung Ho-hon speaks at the finals of the 2016/17 Hong Kong Secondary School Debating Competition

Not sure how to prepare for your first debate competition? **Peggy Chau** has some guidelines that will make you feel confident on the day

Plan (and win) your first debate



Max Li Pak-man speaks at the final of the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups Lee Shau Kee College Inter-house Debate Competition. Photos: Lai Kwok-ho

Now, you are all set for your debate. As you participate more in debate competitions, you will find the knowledge you acquire and skills you develop mean much more. Enjoy this voyage of discovery!

To find out more about debating, visit www.hkssdebating.com

To enter a team in the 2017/18 Term 2 Competition, contact Hong Kong Secondary Schools Debating Competition Coordinator Stan Dyer at hkssdebating@gmail.com



Peggy Chau has been Debate Team coach of HKFYG Lee Shau Kee College since the team was first established in 2009. She has judged a number of conflict debate, world schools debate and British parliamentary debate formats.