# Essential Elements of a Debate

By Veronica James, eHow Contributor

*Debating is one of the most useful communication skills you can learn. Debating sharpens your critical thinking and rhetorical skills, shapes your relationship with and attitude toward people you disagree with and gives you good grounding in preparing and presenting a good case. Not least, debating calls on maturity and self-control to treat your adversary with respect and dignity while arguing your point of view.*

## Participants

* The University of Notre Dame describes an academic debate as the participation of two teams, one team proposing and the other team rebutting. Also taking part is the audience, who cast their votes for or against the proposition at the end of the proceedings. The chair, or adjudicator, is present to guide proceedings and to keep track of the length of time each debater has for speaking.

## Basis

* The proposing team has the responsibility of presenting evidence to support a proposition. The opposing team presents counter-arguments and an alternative viewpoint to rebut the proposer's evidence. Each side, consisting of an individual or a team of two or more people, uses well-researched evidence, as well as persuasive and rhetorical skills, to convince the audience that its argument has more merit than the opposing side's.

**Structure**

* Each team has two or three minutes, or as agreed before the debate, to present the main thrust of their argument. The proposer speaks first, followed by the opposer. This is followed by an extended presentation from each side, putting forward the evidence, supporting facts, background and whatever other information each team member wants to include. The length of time for the two presentations depends on the scope of the proposition and the occasion, and in a learning environment might be between 10 and 15 minutes. Presentations are followed by a short rebuttal of each side's arguments lasting for a pre-agreed number of minutes. Some debates are followed by questions from the audience before the proposition is put to the vote.

**Ethics**

* Ethics are fundamental to a well-presented and well-argued debate. Respect for one's opponents, their points of view and their rights to their opinions, allows for a wide area in which to share ideas and perspectives and to identify the differences between your positions. Good debate ethics preclude interrupting, using insults or making it personal, and require honesty in the presentation and interpretation of evidence.

# What Are the Parts of a Debate?

By Renee Kristi, eHow Contributor

*A debate is an argument that follows strict rules regarding format and conduct. It begins with the presentation of a topic to which two teams are assigned opposing sides. The team that agrees with the topic is called the "affirmative," and the team opposing the topic is the "negative." Each team argues its position within the framework of the debate format.*

**Openings**

* A debate begins with an opening statement from the speaker arguing the affirmative. This person has several duties she must meet during this portion of the debate. She must first define the topic, which consists of explaining what the topic means. Next she must present her team's position on the topic and give a brief summary of the points her team will make. Finally, she must present the first half of her team's case.

The opening speaker on the negative team also has roles to perform. He must first state whether his team accepts or rejects the opposing team's definition of the topic. He must then state his team's position and provide a brief summary of the points the team will make. The opening negative speaker must also rebut some of the points made by the opening affirmative speaker and present the first half of his team's case.

**First Rebuttals**

* After the opening statement, the next members on each team present the first rebuttals. During this portion of debate, the second speaker from the affirmative team begins by restating the team's position. She then rebuts the main points made by the opening speaker on the negative team and presents the second half of her team's case.

This is followed by the second speaker on the negative team. This person also begins with a restatement of his team's position. He then rebuts the main points presented by the second affirmative speaker and presents the second half of his team's case.

**Second Rebuttals**

* Next a member from each team presents the second rebuttals. This portion begins with a third member of the affirmative team restating the team's position. She then must rebut all of the points previously made by the negative team. She then summarizes her team's case and closes her team's argument.

Next the third speaker from the negative team also restates his team's position. He then rebuts all the remaining points from the affirmative team's case and presents a summary of his team's case before closing the argument. Each speaker is forbidden from introducing new parts of the team's case.

**Question, Answer and Vote**

* After each team offers a closing, the audience and judges are given the opportunity to ask questions of each team pertaining to the debate topic and their positions. These questions are typically given to the debate moderator, who then reads them aloud to the teams. After this portion, the judges or audience vote to determine which team wins.