

The Karl Popper Debate

As long as there are two sides to every story and conflicting opinions about which is better or right or wrong, there will be a need to organize structured debates. Debate has been the foundation for democratic societies over thousands of years; we debate before casting votes to elect officials, and we debate before judging and sentencing defendants. It is essential that people argue constructively prior to making important decisions.

High school forensics and debate teams have used the following simplified format to generate thrilling debates in the auditorium as well as the classroom:

There are two teams, an *Affirmative Team* and a *Negative Team*, and there is a *Proposal*. For example, the proposal for a debate might be "Testing cosmetics on animals must be made illegal." The Affirmative Team would essentially agree with the Proposal as written. Their stance, then, is that using animals to test cosmetics should be made illegal. The Negative Team will oppose the Proposal, arguing that testing cosmetics on animals should not be made illegal. The Proposal is the boundary for the debate; it is the Proposal that is being argued, not the broad topic of product testing in general or whether the government should be able to legislate business enterprises.

Each team consists of three members, and each person must take both a researching and a speaking role. Roles can be assigned according to individual strengths and preferences. One student may want to handle the first cross-examination while another handles the opening speech. In the schedule of rounds that follows, each team member is assigned a number: 1, 2, or 3.

The Karl Popper Debate Format

- 1) Affirmative Speech, Student #1 (6 minutes)
- 2) Negative Cross-Examination, Student #3 (3 minutes)
- 3) Negative Speech, Student #1 (6 minutes)
- 4) Affirmative Cross-Examination, Student #3 (3 minutes)
- 5) Affirmative Speech, Student #2 (5 minutes)
- 6) Negative Cross-Examination, Student #1 (3 minutes)
- 7) Negative Speech, Student #2 (5 minutes)
- 8) Affirmative Cross-Examination, Student #1 (3 minutes)
- 9) Affirmative Speech and Closing Remarks, Student #3 (5 minutes)
- 10) Negative Speech and Closing Remarks, Student #3 (5 minutes)

During cross-examination rounds, the examining debater has 3 minutes to ask the answering debater questions. This time cannot be used by either debater to deliver a speech. Questions should be asked in an "if" format to keep things moving, and responses should be brief and direct.

During each debate round, both teams have 4 minutes to use for preparation. How the team divides this time is its own decision. No preparation time is available once speaking has resumed, and the prep time does not "roll over" to the next round.

Victory is determined by a panel of judges, and a referee will enforce time limits and all other restrictions.