

The Presidential Debates: A Teacher's Guide

**Produced by The Commission on Presidential Debates in
partnership with Kids Voting USA, 2000**

Introduction

What is a Debate?

A debate is a formal, oral contest between two individuals or teams who present arguments to support opposing sides of a question. Debates follow a set of rules so that participants can state their positions and attack their opponents' views in a fair and orderly manner.

How Are Debates Used?

- **Forensic debates:** Formal debates are held in schools or university debating societies as exercises to sharpen thinking and speaking skills and to examine issues.
- **Legislative debates:** The House of Representatives and the Senate debate a bill by allotting fair procedures and equal time for arguments for and against the bill. The English House of Commons was the model for this process. State legislatures have provisions that are similar.
- **Political debates:** For instance, the Lincoln-Douglas debates for the Senate seat in Illinois in 1858 gave the first speaker 60 minutes, the second 90 minutes, and the first speaker 30 minutes at the end. They were festive occasions in the open air, with thousands in the audience.

What's the Recent History of Presidential Debates?

The first televised Presidential debates in 1960 provided the thin margin of victory for John F. Kennedy in a very close election. Despite their popularity, no more debates were held for 16 years. They resumed in the Ford-Carter election in 1976. Since then, debates have been a permanent and very important feature of presidential elections.

These activities were designed in collaboration with Kids Voting USA.

Overview of Activities

Elementary School Students

"Two Ballots"

Young people discover that they must gather and analyze information carefully or they could be fooled by superficial slogans. They will use these critical skills when they watch the Presidential debates.

"Debate Bingo"

A 25-spot bingo card, for use as you watch the debates, provides opportunities for write-in topics predicted by the child. Other spots are specific to key topics likely to be addressed by the candidates.

"The Voting Chain"

Vote with paper links to indicate which candidate appealed to you the most during the debate. Log onto www.kidsvotingusa.org and www.debates.org for links to media websites. What were the analysis from media organizations such as CNN, ABC, CBS, NBC, and the Washington Post?

Secondary School Students

"The Public Agenda"

Students collect and tally newspaper and magazine articles pertaining to the campaigns, and then predict topics that will be addressed during the debates.

"It's Your Turn to be a Political Reporter"

From the transcripts of former presidential debates come thorny questions on topics that are still hot, but also very different, in the year 2000. Students write current questions for Presidential candidates, on nuclear weapons, the environment, etc.

"Debate the Issue"

Forms, teaching strategies, and handouts for a formal classroom debate are provided.

"Solutions"

This lesson provides an organizer page for reflective analysis after all the debates have been concluded.

"Presidential Debate Scorecard"

Parents and older students review principles of logic and techniques of persuasion used by politicians. During the debate, families record examples of "glittering generalities," "bandwagon," "name calling," etc.

Useful Resources

See this section for websites and other information about debating in general and Presidential Debates in particular.

A Viewer's Guide to Political Debates

This section provides tips on viewing political debates effectively.

Two Ballots

Objective

Children experience voting with and without adequate information.

Get Ready

- Make a copy of "Two Ballots" and a copy of "Two Ballots for Parents" for each student.
- Cut the copies in half.

Vote

- Without any instruction, give the children Ballot A and ask them to vote yes or no to each of the categories.
- Tally the results.
- Give the children Ballot B and ask them to vote again. Tally the results.

Questions

- ❖ *What difference was there between Ballot A and Ballot B?*
- ❖ *Did you change your vote once you had the information on Ballot B?*
- ❖ *Why is it important to gather information before we vote?*
- ❖ *Where can we get information before voting?*
- ❖ *What kinds of information will we get by watching the Presidential debates?*

More!

Brainstorm topics for the two blank ballots that children will use with the adults at home. Example: Ballot A says "Fishing" and Ballot B says "No fishing permitted on our favorite lake."

Collect and display election articles, pictures, or materials on a bulletin board.

Vote Quote

"Liberty without learning is always in peril and learning without liberty is always in vain."

- John F. Kennedy



Two Ballots


















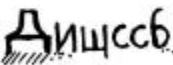







Ballot A			Ballot B		
	Yes	No		Yes	No
1. School	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	1. School will be year round.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Recess	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	2. Recess will be replaced by 20 minutes of sit-ups & push-ups.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Ice Cream	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	3. Only garlic flavored ice cream will be served in the cafeteria.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Homework	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	4. There will be no homework on weekends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Television	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	5. Television will be in the classroom - but only the commercials.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ballot A for Parents			Ballot B for Parents		
	Yes	No		Yes	No
1.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	1. _____ _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	2. _____ _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	3. _____ _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	4. _____ _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	5. _____ _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Debate Bingo

Directions

- Duplicate a bingo card for each player.
- As you watch the presidential debates, write in a key debate word for each square before you "X" it out. Example: Under "China," write "trading."
- The usual Bingo rules apply: cross off five spaces across, down, or diagonally and you're a winner!

 Predict a question	 Candidate hesitates	 Angry candidate	 Candidate laughs	 Predict a question
 Missile defense	 Family	 Environment	 Budget	 Television station
 Education	 China	 Free	 Crime	 Gun control
 Social Security	 Death penalty	 Russia	 Taxes	 Millennium
 Predict a question	 School violence	 Privacy	 First applause	 Predict a question

The Voting Chain

Objective

Participants vote with paper links and tally the totals.

Get Ready

- Cut a small strip of construction paper to make a link (in a chain) for each voter.
- Make a large sign with each debater's name on it. Include the candidate's picture if you can.
- Mount the signs in a suitable place in the home, school or public site.

Make the Chain

- Ask each participant to attach a link under the sign for THE CANDIDATE WHO DID HIMSELF/HERSELF THE MOST GOOD in last night's debate.
- Explain to young children that one link represents one vote.

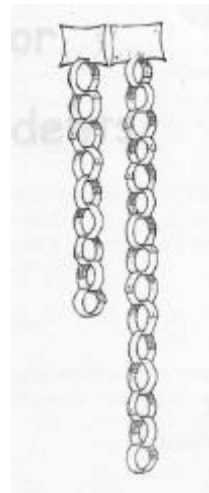
Questions

- ❖ *Who has the longest chain?*
- ❖ *Can you see your own voting link?*
- ❖ *Would the chain look different if you had not voted?*
- ❖ *What might happen if you could vote as many times as you wished rather than once?*
- ❖ *Was this a good way to poll our opinions?*

More!

A family or class could vote on other issues during the week in this way or in another way.

A community could display the voting chains in a central public place, with a Visitors' Book for comments on the debates.



The Public Agenda

Objective

Participants gather articles and classify media coverage to determine national, state and local issues agendas.

Get Ready

- Obtain copies of one week's newspapers and news magazines to form a resource center for students/family members.
- Duplicate the Summary of the National Political Awareness Test for each person.

Build the National Agenda

- Assign to each person the job of finding three current articles from three different sources (in newspapers, magazines or from the Internet) about issues that the American people think the federal government should address.
- Pool the articles and count them to arrive at a consensus on the top 10 items of concern nationally.

Questions

❖ *Different agenda items belong to different levels of government. Were there issues that belonged on the state or local agenda instead of the national one? Are there "crossover" issues that belong on all three?*

❖ *Who are the "key players," the most influential people and groups that placed each item on the national agenda? Who are the people and groups most affected by that issue? Are the answers to these questions identical? Why/Why not?*

❖ *Are there items which you would like to place on the national agenda? How could you help to get them on the agenda if they are not already there? Is this a part of activism?*

❖ *Which agenda items will probably show up in the presidential debates?*

More!

Participants can use the Summary of the National Political Awareness Test to see the national agenda used in 2000 by Project Vote Smart, to compare it with theirs. Which items from the N.P.A.T. have risen to the forefront recently?

Continue to monitor changes and developments in the national agenda by posting articles in the 10 areas chosen on a National Agenda Bulletin Board in home or classroom.

Vote Quote

"Political parties serve to keep each other in check, one keenly watching the other."

—Dwight D. Eisenhower

Topics Addressed in the Year 2000

Project Vote Smart

Presidential National Political Awareness Test

Project Vote Smart asks the Presidential candidates to fill out an extensive issues questionnaire. Each category asks candidates to select and weight policy alternatives from large lists of possible choices. We have enclosed only the question categories, which are excellent indicators to the National Agenda.

- ★ Budget, Spending and Tax Issues
- ★ Defense Spending
- ★ Budget Surplus
- ★ Abortion Issues
- ★ Taxes
- ★ Campaign Finance Issues
- ★ Crime Issues (including death penalty, juvenile crime, and school violence)
- ★ Drug Issues
- ★ Education Issues (including standards and testing, vouchers, charter schools, grants and funding, merit pay, tax incentives, etc.)
- ★ Employment and Affirmative Action Issues
- ★ Environmental Issues
- ★ Gun Issues
- ★ Health Issues (including medical research, Medicare, Patient's Bill of Rights)
- ★ Immigration Issues
- ★ International Aid, International Policy and Trade Issues
- ★ Moral and Ethical Issues
- ★ Social Security Issues
- ★ Technology Issues
- ★ Welfare and Poverty

It's Your Turn to be a Political Reporter

Objective

Students review pressing questions on topics from previous debates and then decide what questions they would ask the presidential candidates on these same topics in the 2000 presidential debates.

Get Ready

- Duplicate a copy of the "It's Your Turn to Be a Political Reporter!" worksheet for each student.
- Label four pieces of butcher paper as follows: "Nuclear Weapons," "The Environment," "The Economy," and "Personal Style and Qualifications."
- Mount the signs in the corners of the room.

Play Political Reporter

- Review aloud the questions asked by reporters in 1960, 1976, 1980, and 1988. Students may need some background information, best delivered by the teacher or discovered through research teams.
- Explain that the situations have changed drastically over the years, but that the *topics* addressed are still important to the public.
- Ask students to formulate one relevant question for each topic that would be good to ask in the presidential debates this fall. (Example: "What would you do about nuclear weapons testing in India and Pakistan?" for "Nuclear Weapons.")

- After 10 minutes, ask students to write each of their four questions on the paper signs.
- When the questions have all been posted, allow students to read the signs and place a star or colored dot in front of the question on each sign that they think is most relevant.

Questions

- ✧ *Are any of the best questions similar to the ones asked in earlier years?*
- ✧ *Which questions could never have been asked in prior election cycles?*
- ✧ *How did members of the media frame questions to trap a candidate or make him/her look bad? What kinds of traps do you foresee for candidates in 2000 debates?*
- ✧ *Will online reporting increase or decrease voter participation?*
- ✧ *What did this exercise make you think about the political power of the media?*

Vote Quote

"Both scholars and pundits agree that Nixon won the debate on radio, but most important is that Kennedy won on the emerging medium, television. (1960) The question I pose to you today is, *who will win online in 2000?*"

-Steve Case, CEO, America Online

It's Your Turn to be a Political Reporter!

Topic: Nuclear Weapons

Debate: Kennedy/Nixon, October 21, 1960, ABC Studios, New York, New York

Reporter: John Chancellor, NBC News

Question: (to Senator Kennedy): "...should the United States resume nuclear testing, and if the Russians do not start testing, can you foresee any circumstances in 1961 in which the United States might resume its own series of tests?"

Your question on nuclear weapons for the 2000 presidential debates:

Topic: The Environment

Debate: Carter/Ford, September 23, 1976, Walnut Street Theater, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Reporter: Frank Reynolds, ABC News

Question: (to Governor Carter): "Well, Governor...would you require mandatory conservation efforts to try to conserve fuel?"

Your question on the environment for the 2000 presidential debates:

Topic: The Economy

Debate: Carter/Reagan, October 28, 1980, the Public Music Hall, Cleveland, Ohio

Reporter: Harry Ellis, the Christian Science Monitor

Question: (to President Carter): "Mr. President, when you were elected in 1976, the Consumer Price Index stood at 4.8%. It now stands at more than 12%...Can inflation in fact be controlled?"

Your question on the economy for the 2000 presidential debates:

Topic: Personal Style and Qualifications

Debate: Bush/Dukakis, October 13, 1988, Pauley Pavillion, UCLA, Los Angeles, California

Reporter: Margaret Warner, Newsweek magazine

Question: (to Governor Dukakis): "The American public admired your performance [in the first debate], but doesn't seem to like you much. Now, Ronald Reagan has found his personal warmth to be a tremendous political asset. Do you think that a president has to be likeable to be an effective leader?"

Your question on a President's personal style and qualifications for the 2000 presidential debates:

Debate the Issue

Objective

Students debate a topic in the election to examine democratic ideas.

Get Ready

- Generate a resolution for the debate. Presidential campaign issues will lead you to a topic, and the class may vote together on a choice of resolution.
- Phrase the resolution in the affirmative: "Resolved: that our state must better fund education."
- Select two teams of four students.
- Make ten copies of the "Debate Format/Ballot," one for each of the eight debaters and two for yourself. (You will make a full classroom set of ballots when parts have been chosen and it's time for the classroom debate.)
- Make multiple copies of the "Presidential Debate Scorecard."
- Locate a stopwatch.

Debate!

- On Day 1, assign 4 students to each team.
- Assignment for the rest of the class: Practice writing statements with the 10 Techniques of Persuasion/Logical Fallacies, using the Debate Scorecard.

- Ask team members to choose parts. The opening argument may be prepared in advance, whereas it is difficult to do so for the question session.
- Tell debaters to keep their ideas on two pages of cards: "Our Arguments" and "If They Say ____, We Say ____." Prompt the affirmative and negative teams to write down at least one entry on each page while you are coaching each team for a few minutes. Students will finish preparations for homework that night.
- Duplicate ballots with names filled in for Debate Day.
- Day 2: Hand out the ballots and hold the debate, enforcing time limits. Have students circle the winning side and list the most convincing argument, but tell them to leave their names off the ballots. Read the most convincing arguments as the debate ballots are tallied.

Questions

- ❖ *Which debate arguments impressed you most and affected your decision on the issue?*
- ❖ *Was it difficult to separate argument values from performance and personality aspects? How does this relate to Kennedy/Nixon or Bush/Clinton?*
- ❖ *Is this an effective format to discuss democratic ideas? Why? Why not?*

More!

Students will use the Debate Scorecards to evaluate the Presidential debates on TV, applying the same criteria they used with their peers.

Debate Format and Evaluation

TOPIC "Resolved: that _____"

Debate Team Members

Affirmative Team

- 1.
- 4.
- 5.
- 7.

Negative Team

- 2.
- 3.
- 6.
- 8.

Sequence of the Debate

Follow the numbers for proper order of speakers.

Affirmative Team Suggested Time

- | | |
|----------------------|---------|
| 1. Opening Statement | 3 min. |
| 4. Rebuttal Argument | 3 min. |
| 5. Question Session | *5 min. |
| 7. Summary | 3 min. |

Negative Team Suggested Time

- | | |
|----------------------|---------|
| 2. Opening Statement | 3 min. |
| 3. Rebuttal Argument | 3 min. |
| 6. Question Session | *5 min. |
| 8. Summary | 3 min. |

*Debater answers four questions, one from each member of the opposite team, and if there is time also answers questions from the floor.

Ballot

The winning team was (circle one):

AFFIRMATIVE

NEGATIVE

This team won the debate because: _____

Student Tips for Selecting the Winning Team

- ★ List at least one argument that convinced you that one side was more effective than another.
- ★ Try to be objective in your decision, by ignoring everything except the ideas presented. In making your choice, you may consider only the evidence and logic that is actually presented during this debate. Try to use only information that you hear in the debate, rather than information that you have already had. Remember, you are judging the relative strength of each team's arguments, not your personal opinion.

Solutions

Objective

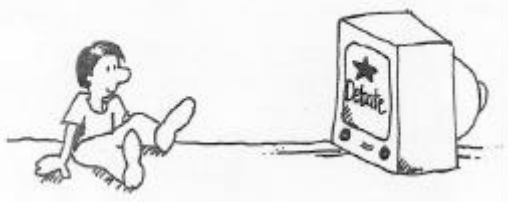
Students gather information to prepare to vote.

Getting Ready

Copy activity sheet "We Elect Leaders to Help Solve Society's Problems" for each student.

Gather Information

- Assign students to watch all four of the Presidential debates, recording each candidate's views on the "We Elect Leaders..." page.
- In discussion, ask students what they consider to be their society's, community's, state's or nation's greatest problems. Have students list them on the activity sheet.
- As they learn the views of the candidates during the presidential debates, have them list those views on the activity sheet. Have students list their own solutions to the problems.
- Ask students to put an asterisk by one problem they could work on now.



Questions

- ✿ *How do you feel about Candidate A's solutions?**
- ✿ *How do you feel about Candidate B's solutions?**
- ✿ *Did any of your solutions match those of a candidate?*
- ✿ *Might this be a good reason to vote for a candidate?*
- ✿ *What should/could you do if you feel you have a good idea for a solution?*
- ✿ *Who would you vote for, considering the issues on the activity sheet?*

More!

Make an election scrapbook. Collect articles, cartoons, etc., and place them in the scrapbook. You might consider donating it to the school library upon completion to serve as a historical document.

Vote Quote

"I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education."

- Thomas Jefferson

*The CPD will not apply its three selection criteria until late September, at which point the participants will be invited to the debate.

We Elect Leaders to Help Solve Society's Problems

Problems	A's Solutions*	B's Solutions*	Our Solutions
Economy			
Pollution			
Violence			

*The CPD will apply its three selection criteria in late September, at which point the participants will be invited to debate.

Debate Scorecard: Techniques of Persuasion

Politicians' most powerful arguments can be misleading. In fact, research shows we're often swayed by faulty logic. As you listen to the presidential candidates debate the issues, give them the "logic check-up." If you catch a candidate using one of these techniques, record the examples in the spaces provided.

Techniques	Candidate A	Candidate B	Candidate C
Appeal to Emotion			
Bandwagon			
Card Stacking			
False Cause			
False Dilemma			
Glittering Generalities			
Hasty Generalization			
Name Calling			
Slippery Slope			
Testimonial			

- ★ **Appeal to Emotion:** Summons fear, anger or pity to secure listener support.
"If we don't fight crime my way, your child won't feel safe walking the streets."
- ★ **Bandwagon:** Encourages the listener to do something because it's the popular thing to do.
"More and more of us want new blood in Washington, and we're voting for Jones."
- ★ **Card Stacking:** Presents the evidence in a partial or slanted way.
"The average income is rising" - technically correct, but only the top 10% incomes are up.
- ★ **False Cause:** Insists that one event caused the other just because it came first.
"As soon as Jones was elected, savings banks began to fail."
- ★ **False Dilemma:** Poses only two choices when there are a variety of possibilities.
"Choose Smith and you'll get inflation; choose Jones and the budget will be balanced."
- ★ **Glittering Generalities:** Says little specifically, but conveys emotion.
"John Jones has made this nation a better place."
- ★ **Hasty Generalization:** Bases a conclusion on insufficient evidence.
"Dropping out of school must be a problem because I saw an article about it."
- ★ **Name Calling:** Uses negative labels to stigmatize opponents.
"My opponent is a card-carrying liberal."
- ★ **Slippery Slope:** Claims that an event will lead to an uncontrollable chain reaction.
"First they outlaw machine guns, and then they'll take your hunting rifles."
- ★ **Testimonial:** Convinces only through the endorsement of a respected personality.
"If he's okay with General Colin Powell, then he's okay with me."

Useful Internet Resources

On Debating:

- <http://debate.uvm.edu> Debate Central – “Everything about Debates and Debating”
- <http://debate.uvm.edu/nfl.html> National Forensic League – Home page of the national U.S. high school debating organization
- <http://debateamerica.org> “How to Debate,” “Create Your Own Debate,” etc.

On Election 2000 Political Debates and Policy Resources:

- <http://www.debates.org> The Commission on Presidential Debates website contains information to form a DebateWatch 2000 group, links to sites related to education, and a complete set of the transcripts from every Presidential debate since 1960.
- <http://www.lobbyforme.com> Politics1.com’s Directory of Political Debates and Issues – contains hundreds of online resources for debates on many popular issues, all from online magazines, newspapers and journals.
- <http://www.publicagenda.com> Public Agenda’s Issues Digests are a gold mine for teachers planning a secondary school classroom debate; includes “Issues Overview,” “Fact File,” a digest of recent news stories, and “Framing the Debate: 3 Viewpoints” for each topic.

On Historic Debates in the United States:

- <http://debateinfo.com/> The “Hall of Fame” section of this site contains excerpted transcripts of the Lincoln/Douglas and Kennedy/Nixon debates.
- <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwed.html> The Library of Congress’ “American Memory” site includes the debates in state legislatures over adopting the United States Constitution in 1787 – a great tie-in to the Presidential debates for U.S. history classes studying this era.
- <http://www.cspan.org> C-SPAN’s pages on the Presidents contain information about 20th century debates, and its online service will archive sections of the Presidential debates in 2000 to replay in the classroom or computer lab.

A Viewer's Guide to Political Debates

Voters typically identify candidate debates as the most influential source of information received during a campaign. Because of their importance, this guide describes commonly used debate formats, questioning techniques, and guidelines for viewing a debate. It is designed to be useful in viewing presidential, state, and local debates.

The Structure of Debates

Debates use a variety of formats. Since 1992, the general election presidential debates have also featured multiple formats including a town hall meeting with citizen questioners.

Most debates impose time limits on answers to ensure that all candidates have equal opportunity to respond. The debates may focus on a wide range of issues or may target a particular theme such as education or the economy. General election presidential debates usually divide the time between foreign and domestic topics.

Candidates may have an opening statement, or a moderator may introduce each candidate and begin questioning immediately. In most debates, candidates have closing statements.

Questions guide the content of debates. There are three types of questions: initial, follow-up, and cross-examination. Initial questions get the debate started by asking candidates to explain or defend a position or compare it to an opponent's. Initial questions may be hypothetical, phrased in the form, "What would you do if...?" Follow-up questions are directed at a candidate after an answer is given. Their purpose is to probe the original response by asking for elaboration or clarification. Follow-up questions may be asked immediately after an initial response is given or after all candidates have answered the initial question. Cross-examination questions are asked by one candidate to another. A separate time can be set aside for cross-examination questions or they may be included as follow-ups.

Questions may be posed to candidates from a variety of sources. In primary and local debates, experts on the topic debated may serve as panelists. A single moderator, usually from the media, or a panel of media representatives or subject experts are the most common questioners. Many debates, especially at the local level, allow for questions from the audience at some point in the debate. The Richmond town hall meeting in 1992 was the first general election presidential debate to involve citizen questioners.

How to get the most out of a political debate:

Focus your attention on a few key points. Know what it is you want in an office holder, then watch and listen to see which candidate best fits your ideal. The following suggestions will help guide you:

- Set aside your partisan views. Listen to the debates to learn as much as possible about all candidates and their positions.
- Pay close attention to the candidates when they talk about how to solve problems. Listen carefully for comparisons candidates make between or among their programs and their opponents’.
- Identify the candidate’s debate strategy. Does the candidate speak directly to the issues, provide specifics, and present new policies or information? Does the candidate evasively answer questions to suit his/her agenda?
- Identify the images which candidates try to create for themselves. Most candidates try to portray themselves as leaders and identify themselves with cherished American values while suggesting that their opponents lack these qualities. What in the responses supports their claims?
- Be aware of the technical limitations of televised debates. Television works by showing action. To create action and minimize monotony, directors sometimes include “reaction shots” to show one candidate’s response to an opponent’s statement. This can draw your attention away from what is being said. It is wise to remember the role of action shots when watching the debates.
- Consider the questions asked by the panelists. The essence of the debate is comparison and contrast. How do the questions themselves shape the debate?
- Don’t watch a debate to determine a winner or loser. Instead, evaluate each candidate according to your own personal ideas and standards. Focus on the question, “Who would make a better president, senator, governor, legislator, county clerk?”

About this Guide

This guide was adapted from material by the following National Communication Association members: Diana Carlin, University of Kansas; Robert Friedenberg, Miami University; Hamilton, OH; James Guadino, Speech Communication Association; Susan Hellweg, San Diego State University; John Morello, Mary Washington College; Michael Pfau, University of Wisconsin.