



*DEBATE*

*HANDBOOK*

# Introduction

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*Welcome to the official Junior State of America Debate Handbook!*

Debating is the heart of almost every JSA event; you can always expect to see informed, passionate students articulately and intelligently debating anything from current events to pop culture. JSA provides a warm, welcoming environment for students to share their opinions, whether they're experienced debaters or first-time speakers.

Speaking in public can be intimidating, which is why we hope this handbook serves as a useful resource for you to familiarize yourself with the structure and style of JSA's debates so you're as prepared as possible for every speech.

In the next few pages, you'll find a comprehensive guide to the ins and outs of JSA Debate, including an explanation of the traditional debate structure, tips for preparing a speech, an overview of what to expect during your debate, helpful hints, and more.

## Role of a Debater

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What is the role of a debater? What does strong debating look like? Below are some suggestions from Junior State of America's Directors of Debates from across the country.

*What makes a great debate?*

- Organization
- Adequate preparation
- Thoughtful and respectful discourse
- Effective moderating

*Why is debating important?*

- Helps create an open political dialogue
- Gives individuals the opportunity to share their perspectives respectfully
- Students can hear a variety of opinions that may differ from their own

*How can YOU be successful as a debater?*

- Be aware of both sides of the debate and maintain an open mind.
- Be prepared! Do your research.
- Be passionate about the topic you are debating.
- Be confident! Your opinion is valued.
- Be respectful to other speakers.
- Be an active listener.

### *Different Roles within a Debate:*

The following roles are positions within a debate you can take. We will be explaining these in detail throughout this handbook.

- Moderator (refer to our Moderator handbook)
- Main Speech
  - Pro Speech
  - Con Speech
- Subsequent Speech

## **Main Speaker**

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A main speaker provides the opening and closing debates for Pro or Con on a resolution. Two main speakers are assigned per debate.

### **Writing Your Speech**

#### *Attention-Getter*

- This can take many forms, including a memorable quote, statistic, story, or personal anecdote that will effectively command interest in your speech.

#### *Introduction*

- Your speech provides the foundation for the entire debate. Use this time to give listeners background information on the topic being debated and define any terms that may be needed to understand the debate.
- This should also include a thesis statement, of sorts. Including a roadmap can make it easier for the audience to follow along.

#### *Main Argument #1*

- Each of your main arguments should be a different answer to the question, “Why should the audience vote in favor of your side?”

#### *Main Argument #2*

#### *Main Argument #3*

#### *Conclusion*

- Use your conclusion to summarize the main arguments of your speech and emphasize any final points you have.

Memorizing your entire speech or writing it out word-for-word is neither required nor recommended. Most JSA speeches are given extemporaneously, meaning that speakers use prepared notecards to aid them in organization and remembering specific details, but also allow them the flexibility to speak freely.

### **Supporting your Arguments**

Although arguing only on principle is tempting, providing adequate support for your side of the

debate makes you appear more credible and persuasive.

For example, imagine that you were debating against the topic, “Resolved, that the death penalty should be abolished.” Your three main arguments could be the following:

1. The penalty must be proportionate for the crime, and the death penalty is used in response to crimes for which the victim cannot be compensated.
2. The death penalty serves as a crime deterrent.
3. The death penalty is compassionate to the victims and their families.

In order for your arguments to be effective, each of your main ideas should be supported by additional evidence. Examples of evidence for each of the above main arguments can be seen in the corresponding numbers below:

1. Appeal to the emotions of your audience members by providing **examples** of some of the heinous crimes for which offenders have been given the death penalty.
2. Appeal to the logic and reasoning of your audience members by citing a **study or statistic** that supports your claim that the death penalty deters crime.
3. Appeal to the ethics of your audience members and convince them of your credibility by **quoting a politician, researcher, or someone who** works in the field of criminal justice **who agrees with your argument.**

For the most part, support for your main arguments should be in one or more of these forms: statistics, historical precedent, quotes from experts, examples, anecdotes, and logic.

## *Answering Questions*

To begin, listen to the questions carefully and don’t assume that the person asking the question opposes your point of view. Sometimes an audience member will ask a question that will allow you to expand on something you’ve said or fill in points that you might have missed. These helpful questions give you a chance to reemphasize your arguments. Before the debate, think about possible questions that might arise and prepare for them. If you aren’t sure of the answer to the question, it’s okay, even better, to acknowledge that you don’t know.

Ultimately, don’t let the questions divert the audience’s attention from your main points! When answering questions, it’s important to stay calm, assert your ideas, and not be intimidated. Answering questions confidently adds to your credibility as a speaker and causes the audience to be more accepting of your presentation.

## Subsequent Speeches

Unlike main speakers, subsequent speakers have 3 minutes to speak, but can also yield their remaining time to questions. For every traditional JSA debate, there will be only 2 main speakers, but a debate can have as many subsequent speakers as time permits. Since subsequent speakers are not predetermined, many are improvised and more casual than main speeches. However, volunteers with research and/or notes are prioritized over those without.

The organization of subsequent speeches is similar to that of main speeches but with fewer main arguments, since the speech is shorter. The most important thing to include in a subsequent speech, however, is *refutation*. Refutation is the act of rebutting, opposing, and/or deconstructing the logic of an

opposing argument. If you're listening to a debate and a speaker makes a point that you disagree with or cites logic that you think is invalid, make a subsequent speech for the opposing side!

It is helpful to refer back to a point by stating "as a previous speaker said," and then refuting it. Essentially, refutation is the difference between real debate and just a series of speeches.

Subsequent speeches are responsible for most of the "direct debate" that makes JSA debates so interesting and informational – though less thoroughly prepared, they give listeners the opportunity to share their own opinions on a controversial topic in just 2-3 minutes, and allows two sides of an argument a forum in which to directly address and respond to one another.

After the subsequent (or main) speaker finishes giving their thoughts, they have a couple of options if they have time remaining. The first is "yielding time to the chair." In this case, the speaker does not want to answer questions and ends their speaking time. The second (and more popular) choice is "yielding time to questions." Here, the speaker will use the remainder of their time to answer questions by individuals selected by the moderator.

## **Presentation and Delivery**

Now that you're confident in the content of your speech, you can focus on the presentation. Keep in mind, if you lose the audience's attention, your message will lose its impact. Below are a few helpful tips for giving your speech:

- Maintain eye contact! It's perfectly acceptable to glance at your notes from time to time, but making eye contact with all the audience keeps them engaged and focused.
- Speak clearly and confidently – your speech won't have the same impact if your audience can't hear you!
- Read the room. If people look confused, provide more explanation. If they look bored, try to make your speech more entertaining or move on to your next point.
- Maintain professional posture. Don't slouch and avoid fidgeting. If you move, move with purpose.
- Practice makes perfect! If you're nervous about speaking in front of a crowd, practice your speech in private or in front of a few friends. Rehearsing can help you speak more smoothly.

# Tips from our Student Leaders

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“A successful debater is one that's central message is as clear as possible. While they may make multiple different points, the connection to the side their arguing for must be clear. If a debater isn't a strong speaker, then the point of their speech could be distracted by that fact. Additionally, they may be hard to understand if they're not enunciating, speaking slowly, or taking pauses. An unsuccessful debater may also try to cover too many different points, but then doesn't fully explain why those points matter. When speaking, the audience should do no level of thinking– everything should be explained out for them. A successful debater will have a clear message, and fully connect every example to why they believe an issue is a certain way.”

- Natasha Salmi, Former Director of Debate, Northern California

The role of the JSA debater is to come prepared with talking points and be ready to have polite discourse with their opponent. They should be serious, but should not take questions personally or attack their opponent/question-asker even if their points are invalid.

- Jenny Wang, Former Northeast State Governor

“The role of a JSA debater is important because they promote the Junior State's mission of creating a more politically aware youth. They do this by voicing their political views which gives other students the opportunity to broaden their horizons in politics. Last but certainly not least, they serve as the voice of those who may not have the courage to speak in front of a crowd but share the same views.”

- Wendy Figueroa, Southern California State

## Appendix:

### Debate Structure

*Below is an example of a debate from start to finish, explaining how each role is utilized, the amount of time allocated for each step and the general language used throughout a debate.*

1. The Moderator begins by calling the debate to order, reads the resolution, and introduces the main speakers.
2. The main speaker for the \*pro side gives a speech of up to **6 minutes**, followed by the main speaker for the \*con side, who does the same.
  - Main speakers can speak for up to 6 minutes, and can then choose whether or not to answer questions from the audience for the time they have remaining by saying “I yield the remainder of my time to questions” or “I yield the remainder of my time to the chair.”
3. The Moderator calls on a volunteer from the audience to give a subsequent speech for the pro side for up to **3 minutes**. The Moderator then calls for a subsequent speaker for the con side who does the same.
  - Subsequent speakers can also choose to answer audience questions for however much time they have remaining after speaking.
4. Step 3 is repeated for as many cycles as time permits.

5. When there are about **10-15 minutes remaining** in the block, a motion to previous question is made, and the main speaker for the con side gives his/her closing speech for up to **3 minutes**, followed by the main speaker for the pro side, who does the same.
  - There are no questions following closing speeches.
  
6. The moderator leads the audience in voting on the resolution, and passes out and collects Best Speaker Ballots.

## Debate Procedure

JSA Debates are run in accordance with Parliamentary Procedure. Below are some of the most common motions you will encounter during a debate. If you choose to propose a motion, please do so between speeches.

For a motion to be passed, an audience member would announce his motion to the moderator, his motion would receive a second, and a vote would be taken with whatever margin is necessary for passage.

<b>Type of Point/Motion</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>When it can be proposed</b>	<b>How to Vote</b>
Motion to Extend Speaker's Time	To extend the amount of time a speaker can use for their speech/questions	After a subsequent speaker's time has elapsed	Simple Majority of Aye vs. Nay
Motion to Suspend the Rules and move to Pro/Con	To suspend normal proceedings and select a Pro/Con speaker directly after a speaker who spoke on the same side.	When there are no volunteers for a certain side during subsequent speeches	Simple Majority of Aye vs. Nay
Motion to Move to Previous Question	To move on to main closing speeches	When roughly 10-15 minutes remain in the block	Simple Majority of Aye vs. Nay
Motion to Caucus	To allow the audience members a span of time ranging from 2-5 minutes to discuss the debate	When there are no volunteers to speak on either side.	Simple Majority of Aye vs. Nay
Motion to Convert the Debate into a Thought Talk.	To improve the engagement of the audience on the topic	If there are no volunteers for either side, or if all speeches have minimal effort and engagement.	Simple Majority of Aye vs. Nay