WHAT EXACTLY *IS* A "DEBATE"?

To this point in the semester, we have *__informally debated__* several issues. The term **"debating,"** a verb, means "to actively **discuss**, **deliberate**, **examine**, or **negotiate**."

To this point in the semester, we have not yet had a *__formal debate__*. A "**debate**," as a noun, is "a specific, **regulated discussion**, often founded upon **rules** followed by two matched sides."

You're probably asking yourself:

"So what does THAT mean?

"How do 'debates' and 'debating' differ from each other?"

Let's get some answers!

WHAT IS A **REGULATED DISCUSSION**?

A "**regulated discussion**" means that there are agreed-upon rules. A debate is *not* a "shouting match." Debaters take a *__logical__*, **organized** approach to a *__principled__* discussion, based on specific **roles**, required **listening skills**, and **rules**. In a debate, participants *__listen__* *to each other* and **respond *carefully***, point-by-point, often within *rigid* **time** restrictions.

To say that a debate is "regulated" means that there are specific procedures. Perhaps the hardest concept to grasp is that, to "**win**" a debate, you are judged *not* only on **what** you say, but also *__how__* you say it: the **organization** and **specificity** of information as provided within a **confined** (not "**free-for-all**") debating setting.

<div align="center"><u>"P<small>LAYERS IN THE</small> G<small>AME</small>"</u></div>

A debate is like a game. Furthermore, there are different types of debates. Like all games, some debates are simple. Some are intermediate. Some are intended for experts.

This booklet outlines the most standard of all debate formats. This should provide a solid foundation upon which to learn "debate **lingo**" so that you can firmly grasp **the rules and format** of the **simplest** of debates.

First—some introductory debate vocabulary…

D<small>EBATE</small> V<small>OCABULARY</small>: T<small>HE</small> P<small>ROPOSITION</small>

Every debate needs "**The Proposition**": A statement that is **controversial**, open to **interpretation**, and ultimately "**arguable**." Stated **declaratively** ("as if fact"), a Proposition is the equivalent to a Toulmin Model **claim statement** (or a **thesis**). The Proposition must be specific; it must have two sides with near-equivalent "backing" in terms of arguing one side or another. Furthermore, like Toulmin Model claim statements, Propositions must have explainable **warrants**, or identifiable **context** referred to by debaters within their arguments. (After all, if we don't address the immediate or **urgent *need*** to debate The Proposition, then why debate it in the first place?)

As mentioned, the Proposition is *only debatable* if it's controversial—that is, there must be **divergent ("differences in") opinions**, and a **conflict** must arise as a result of those differences.

DEBATE VOCABULARY: THE **"RESOLVED"**

A Proposition must be worded such that it is a **resolution** to an end. We call this The **"RESOLVED."** That sounds awkward, and this is where the process of debating starts to get *really* complicated. Patience is a *must*.

The Proposition must be stated in such a way—using the term "RESOLVED" (yes, in all caps)—that it reminds everyone, from the debaters, to the judges, to an audience, of **the specific subject** the **debaters** seek to *resolve*.

Here's an example of a Proposition, stated as "RESOLVED":

Proposition—
RESOLVED: That appropriate dress for school
should be left up to individual students
rather than being dictated by a specific code.

Notice: If we were to remove the word "RESOLVED," we would have a *very* **debatable statement**—a **two-sided issue**, worded almost like a factual **declaration**. (Toulmin would be proud!)

Proposition—
~~RESOLVED: That~~
[A]ppropriate dress for school should be left up to individual students
rather than being dictated by a specific code.

HOW DO YOU WIN A DEBATE?

Formal debates are **judged**. Judges (we'll discuss their role later) are like **referees**. They must ensure that rules are being followed. Furthermore, judges must **evaluate** the **quality** of the **evidence**, **elaboration**, and **organization** through which debaters address the issue at hand.

So in a formal debate, no side "wins" by having the "**right or wrong**" answers. Judges must evaluate debaters' organization of information as it pertains to the stated resolution. (If a Proposition is *truly* controversial, then there is *never* a "right or wrong" answer… just a better ***argued*** one…)

More often than not, debates are conducted with one person (**"The Negative"**) debating another person (**"The Affirmative"**). Since we are learning this process in small groups, we will discuss The Negative and The Affirmative as **teams**.

DEBATE VOCABULARY: THE NEGATIVE

The Negative Team represents **one side** in a debate. The Negative Team *challenges* the Proposition. Specifically, The Negative Team's job is to argue *against* the Proposition. In a formal debate, the Negative Team would organize their statements as so to explain why the Proposition is *not* a **resolution** to some larger **issue**.

That deserves restatement. Using evidence organized in a logical, effect manner, the Negative Team's *ultimate* **goal** is to demonstrate *exactly* why the Proposition is **wrong or flawed**. The Negative Team does *not* initially set out to **prove** why *other debaters* are wrong.

DEBATE VOCABULARY: **THE AFFIRMATIVE**

The Affirmative Team defends, supports, or—you guessed it—**affirms** the Proposition. The Affirmative Team must use **evidence** to **demonstrate** why the Proposition is the *best* **resolution**, why its **flaws** are **minimal**, and how those flaws are **resolvable**.

This gets tricky: The Affirmative Team must *highlight* **the positive** attributes of the Proposition, but cannot *dwell* **on those positives**—certainly not as the sole basis for their argument. In other words, The Affirmative Team cannot get hung up on defending the Proposition. Rather, when The Negative Team makes its case *against* the Proposition, The Affirmative Team must **quietly argue** *in favor* of the Proposition, but not in such a way that arguing in favor *dominates* the debate.

Think back to Toulmin. The Negative Team presents a **counterargument** to the Proposition. The Negative Team is tasked with the job of *refuting* (or **rebutting**) The Negative Team's **counter-argumentative** statements.

It all sounds pretty complex. But consider this: The Proposition is *already* worded as **assertive**, **declarative**, and "**factual**." The Negative must do all that it can to "poke holes" in the **validity** of The Proposition. The Affirmative operates on the idea that The Proposition is *already* **resolved**—that The Proposition is the *only* answer—and that the Negative Team is wasting its time. Therefore, it is the job of The Negative Team to (i) **refute or rebut** The Affirmative's statements, and not obsess on (ii) **defending** the Proposition.

Other Elements and "The Debate Model"

Debates are formally judged. There can be anywhere from one to three judges involved. Judgment is *not* an indication as to what perspective "**won**" the debate. The judge or judges must evaluate which side **better presented its argument** in terms of either team's specific goals and roles.

Debates are rigidly **timed**. Timing isn't limited to how long a person speaks. Timing includes **how long it takes debaters to formulate their argument** *in conjunction* with **how long it takes to speak**.

At its most basic, in terms of timing, the standard debate looks like this:

1.   Judge(s) introduce **The Proposition**.

2.   The Affirmative **Constructive**: **Eight** Minutes
"Constructive" means "constructing a speech." The term "Constructive" is a fancy debate term used interchangeably with "**argumentative**."

The Affirmative Team has eight minutes to collaborate, develop an argument based on logical evidence, and present that argument in a civil, structured manner. The Affirmative Team can **divide** its eight minutes however it sees fit. The Affirmative Team must take this time to provide all necessary **support for the Proposition** as a resolution. Constructive speeches present The Affirmative Team's major points.

The Negative Team can neither **collaborate** nor **talk** while The Affirmative Team discusses and presents its Constructive speech. The Negative Team can only **listen and paraphrase** using notes.

3.   The Negative **Constructive**: **Eight** Minutes

The Negative team has an equal amount of time to collaborate, develop an argument based on logical evidence, and present that argument in a civil, structured manner. At this time, The Negative Team *cannot* **rebut** The Affirmative Team's argument**.** Rather, at this state in "the game," The Negative Team can only **rebut (or "poke holes" in) the Proposition itself**, without reference to what The Affirmative Team said. The Negative Team can divide its eight minutes however it sees fit. The eventual Constructive speech should serve to present all of The Negative Team's major points.

The Affirmative Team cannot collaborate or talk while The Negative Team discusses and presents its Constructive speech. The Affirmative Team can only keep notes.

4.   The Negative **Rebuttal**: **Four** Minutes

It is within this time frame that The Negative Team can *finally* **rebut the opening statements** made by The **Affirmative** Team. The time allotted can be used in any way The Negative Team sees fit. (More often than not, someone on the Negative Team is preparing this **rebuttal** while others on the team prepare the Constructive speech. In doing so, The Negative Team can launch right into its rebuttal, using all four allotted minutes to speak.)

At this time, The Affirmative Team can only keep notes. They cannot talk or collaborate.

5. The Affirmative **Rebuttal**: **Four** Minutes

It is within this time frame that The Affirmative Team can **rebut** *both* The Negative Team's **Constructive** *and* The Negative Team's **Rebuttal**.

While The Affirmative Team presents, The Negative Team cannot collaborate or talk.

6. At the discretion of the judge or judges, The Affirmative Team and The Negative Team may be asked to provide two more additional **Constructive speeches**, followed by two additional **Rebuttals**.

PLEASE NOTE:

Rebuttals using this format should not be confused with "**cross-examinations**." There is another type of debate that deals with rebuttals and cross-examinations. That format is called (you guessed it!) a **Cross-Examination Debate**. We will conquer that style after mastering the standard debate format.

SAMPLE

JUDGE:
"Proposition—RESOLVED: That appropriate dress for school should be left up to individual students rather than being dictated by a specific code."

THE AFFIRMATIVE CONSTRUCTIVE: EIGHT MINUTES
The Affirmative Team provides all necessary support for the Proposition as a resolution—in this case, all the reasons why appropriate dress for school should be left up to individual students. (The Negative Team can neither collaborate nor talk while The Affirmative Team discusses and presents its Constructive speech. The Negative Team can only listen and paraphrase using notes.)

THE NEGATIVE CONSTRUCTIVE: EIGHT MINUTES
At this moment in the debate, The Negative Team CANNOT *rebut The Affirmative Team's argument.* The Negative Team can simply elaborate on *its* major points—in this case, why individual students need a dress code. (The Affirmative Team cannot collaborate or talk while The Negative Team discusses and presents its Constructive speech. The Affirmative Team can only keep notes.)

THE NEGATIVE REBUTTAL: FOUR MINUTES
The Negative Team may now rebut statements made by The Affirmative Team. The time allotted can be used in any way The Negative Team sees fit. (The Affirmative Team cannot collaborate or talk while The Negative Team discusses and presents its Constructive speech. The Affirmative Team can only keep notes.)

THE AFFIRMATIVE REBUTTAL: FOUR MINUTES
It is within this time frame that The Affirmative Team can rebut both The Negative Team's Constructive *and* The Negative Team's Rebuttal. (While The Affirmative Team presents, The Negative Team cannot collaborate or talk.)

AT THE DISCRETION OF THE JUDGE OR JUDGES…
The Affirmative Team and The Negative Team may be asked to provide two successive Constructive speeches, followed by two separate Rebuttals.