Rules for Debates

Good luck and have fun with these!

Each ten-minute debate will take the following form. Debaters will stand at the front of the room and follow each other in quick succession. Each team (Pro/Con) is allowed 3 minutes for presentation of argument, then each side has 2 minutes for amplifying arguments and rebutting the opposition. Although you are not required to write out your speech, you may find it helpful to do so.

1st affirmative (+) (3 minutes)
1st negative (-) (3 minutes)
2nd affirmative (+) (2 minutes)
2nd negative (-) (2 minutes)

Use your time well. Someone from class—the timekeeper—will keep time and cut you off after the allotted times (even in mid-sentence). It is important not to use either less than or more than the time allotted.

Before the start of class, each team hands in one page bibliography of resources used in the preparation of the debate, with the date, the number of the debate team, pro or con side, and names of debaters listed at top of page. After the debate, the class will vote. They are your primary audience (not just the instructor, and certainly not a formal debating judge). This is a modified Lincoln–Douglas debate, not a parliamentary debate, so any questions you ask of the opposing side are rhetorical only (i.e., they are not required to respond). It will be in your best interests to use as much specific evidence from the text as you can. Be sure to meet with your partner beforehand to prepare a unified strategy of attack or defense.

Students are expected to attend each class, and to debate on the dates assigned. The debate topic always refers to the readings assigned for that day, and the debates must focus directly on the material in those readings (and include other resources you have found relevant, but NOT Wikipedia, please). If for any reason you are unable to debate on the date assigned, you are personally responsible for finding a replacement: you must make alternate arrangements with a classmate willing to exchange debate dates. The professor will not be involved in these arrangements. There is no possible ‘make-up’ for a missed debate for which a replacement has not been arranged. Costumes are permitted, even encouraged, but—as a courtesy to your teachers and fellow students, who need to see your facial expressions fully—hats and masks are forbidden. No hats are to be worn in class at any time.

Boiled down:

Debates

- two persons on each side, all debaters stand and face audience for whole debates
- 10 minutes total: pro (3 minutes), con (3 minutes); pro (2 minutes), con (2 minutes)
- debaters will be evaluated on the cogency of their arguments and the clarity of their presentation -- not on whether or not their side “wins” in the class vote which will be taken at the end
- pedagogical goal of debates: to identify as many arguments and positions as possible with respect to the issue at hand
- a debate schedule, list of student email and phone contacts, and debate topics will be distributed
- scheduled debaters who are no-shows will be summarily executed at the next class -- the axe to be wielded by the partner they left in the lurch
- At beginning of term, two ‘officials,’ a timekeeper and a vote counter will be appointed
Suggestions for making a good debate presentation

• state your position at the outset
• state the main points you intend to argue; this is often most effectively done by listing them, briefly and precisely: “Our first point is..... Our second point is..... And our final point is.....”
• then present each of your main points in more detail; provide whatever explanations and clarifications are needed, and give arguments or evidence in favor of your position
• summarize one final time, briefly and precisely, the main point(s) you have just made

Note: Keep searching until you find the exact word or formulation that best conveys what you are trying to say at any given point. Precision is essential.

• feel free to use notes, but do not read word for word from a prepared text; look at and address your audience
• each of your presentations may last no more than time allotted (3/3, 2/2) (rehearse and time yourself in advance; we'll have an official timekeeper)
• be sure to coordinate your arguments and strategy with those of your partner
• the function of these debates is threefold:
  (1) to give you practice in working through a topic in some detail and formulating your findings with brevity and precision
  (2) to teach other students about an aspect of the day's work which you will have spent more time considering than they
  (3) to stimulate class discussion
• in other words, is your presentation sound? clear? interesting? persuasive?