

Effective note-taking

A. The goal of the lesson

The goal of the lesson is to help students evaluate their notetaking skills and share tips and tricks that could help them to improve their existing practices.

B. Activities

Discussion 1 (15-20 min)

Guide the discussion with the students to understand why we take notes in general, which qualities are important and how does this affect our success in debates. The ideas towards which you should move are:

- Clarity - the clearer your notes are, the better you will communicate the argument.
- Continuity - if your notes allow you to follow your train of thought cogently, your argument will flow more coherently.
- Engagement - the better you can track arguments in the round, the more likely it is that you will be able to engage with them effectively.
- Weighing - the better you can track arguments in the round, the more likely it is that you remember to weigh them against yours and do it well.

By this discussion, the students understand the importance of good notes.

Exercise 1 (20 min)

Divide students into teams. Give them a debate motion and ask them to prepare just as they would for a debate. After 15 minutes of prep gather up their notes and evaluate the common practices that the students were using while getting ready for the debate.

If you have limited time you can also gather the notes after some debate in a previous session.

Analysis of the notes (15-20 min)

- What kind of techniques did students use (E.g. highlighting, tearing the paper, A4 or larger, notebooks, boxes, asterisks)
- Do you feel well prepared for the debate?
- Is there something that annoys you regarding your notetaking style?
- Are the notes well structured?
- If you'd have to restructure your notes before debating, would you change anything? Why? Why didn't you do it like this in the first go?

By this analysis students critically evaluate their practices and think how to improve on it.

Discussion 2/lecture – golden rules (30 min)

- WRITE ONLY ON ONE SIDE OF THE PAPER
 - you will forget to turn it over
 - you will replay parts of your argument a waste of time
 - You will lose track of the structure of the argument
 - You have less of an overview of what is covered and how much material you have left
- DO NOT USE MORE THAN 4 SHEETS OF PAPER PER DEBATE

- If you allow yourself to have more paper you will also write on them, although you don't have time to use it
- You may lose or leave behind one of the papers
- You will mess up your structure and flow of the speech by putting arguments where they don't naturally belong instead of focusing on remembering to give yourself space between argument segments to fit in the material you think of later.
- USE SYMBOLS
 - It takes less time than writing words
 - It makes it easier to follow the logic of the argument
 - Which symbols to use – share best practices
 - ↑ (more/increased) ↓ (less/decreased) ⇒ (thus/conclusion)
 - ⇔ (symmetrical/wash) ↳ (because of X, Y) \$/€/£ etc.
 - it doesn't ultimately matter as long as you and your partner know what's happening**
 - Getting used to a new system - do this in training and take the hint on the adjustment period. If you leave it to a tournament before trying to overhaul your practices, you won't do it in the heat of the moment.
- PITFALLS
 - Outrounds / high stakes / theoretical debates: People lose good habits in high stages rooms or where they're less comfortable (topic-wise, or because there's an audience). Before motion release, have a set-list of habits you need to focus on, remind yourself and your partner of them, and set up your pages in advance to mitigate adrenaline/stress.

Ask students to note down their takeaways and plans that they want to do differently the next time around.

In this exercise, the students share their practices and get ideas on how to improve their note-taking routine.

Lecture2/Excercise 2

There are various ways how to write down one's argument. Often people tend to write their notes during prep and then either rewrite them during the debate or add things to the original notes making it more confusing and harder to follow. Have a small discussion to map the struggles that the students have encountered. Then introduce a clearer way to structure their notes (template added to the end) and then formulate the original arguments from exercise 1 with this structure as well.

This structure is a multi-layered approach that helps to structure the thinking process and formulate arguments in one go leaving room for improvements. Most people fall into argumentative habits; they form an argument in a particular way because their brain asks them particular questions in a particular order. You need to disrupt these habits to correct for some flaws in the way you are currently formulating arguments.

Internal structure:

1. Here's the **thesis** of the point (invert the conclusion!) - e.g. instead of ' *The political effects this policy will have* ', the thesis of your argument is ' *This will lead to a decrease in political engagement among young voters* '

- a. **Why?** It's harder for a judge to track where an argument is if they don't know where it's trying to go; it's easier for judges to subconsciously fill gaps in your

argumentation if they know what the ultimate conclusion is; it's less likely they will zone out in the middle of a critical link because they can't tell it's critical - they don't know where you're going with this.

2. Here's the **premise** of the argument: the starting point of the argument.
3. Here are the **impacts** of the argument
4. Here's the **scale** of the impacts of the argument: here's how significant these impacts are / how probable it is that these impacts will happen / why even if it only happens to a small number of people it will be devastating.
5. **Weighing:** The arguments from my opponent that this is beating
6. **Weighing:** The arguments from opening that this is more important than

With this exercise, the students critically evaluate and improve the current argument structure that they use and they will get one try of the new structure as well and therefore, it is easier to apply it next time.

C. Preparation

- Prepare a motion that you will use for the exercise
- Think about your own experiences in debating and taking notes
- Make sure you have a board to write down the brainstorming ideas
- Bring paper and other materials for students to use for taking notes.

D. Hints

- make sure that the students take the first exercise seriously and actually take notes the way usually do. If needed you can say that you will ask someone random to give a speech at the end.
- keep students engaged and sharing their practices as they can be useful for others as well

E. Verification

- What are the main changes that you will make to your prep and notes habits after this lesson?
 - What do you think is the hardest change to make?
 - What do you think has the biggest impact on your style of notetaking?
- What should every trainer do to learn from the lesson for the future:
- What activity/example/discussion produce best results at this lesson?
 - What was the biggest problem during the lesson? How can I avoid/prevent it in future?
 - Did I avoid/prevent the biggest problem which occurred the last time? If no, why?

F. Theory

Fill-in Sheet for Notetaking

Name of Point:

The thesis of the point:

Premise:

Impact:

Subimpact:

Scale of impact:

Weighing: why this beats the other side:

Weighing: why this beats our opening:

*This template was provided by the Athens EUDC CA team at Nordic Debate Academy

