

Tournament debriefing

A. Goal of the lesson

To help debaters understand what went right and wrong during the tournament, how they feel about it and how they can improve or avoid similar mistakes in the future. At the end of the lesson, the debaters will ideally have a clear simple objective in mind for their future competitions.

B. Activities

1. Exercise and discussion - How do we feel? (10-15 min)

Start the lesson by asking the debaters to draw a picture of how they felt about the tournament, or to be more specific, how they feel about their experience at the tournament.

Afterwards, collect the drawings and pin them somewhere where the entire class can see them. Talk through each drawing and ask the artist what it represents. The goal is to establish if the emotion associated with the tournament is either positive or negative. Drawing the emotion is easier than verbalizing it, and it's more likely to get an honest answer, rather than asking point-blank.

2. Exercise and discussion - Strengths and weaknesses (30 min)

Ask the debaters to write down one things that went well during the tournament and one thing that could have gone better, or that they're unhappy about. It can be about their own performance, the preparation, their conduct during matches, attitude towards judges, team cohesion, etc.

Discuss each debaters' answers, with the focus on finding out "why". Why did things go well in certain respects and not-as-well in others? If they say they did very well in a debate about civil rights, maybe it's because they prepared well, spent plenty of time on research, or built a very strong case, or cared deeply about the subject and invested more time and energy. If they didn't get along well with their teammates, what generated that friction? Different approaches to teamplay? Differences of opinion regarding debates? Maybe someone made a mistake and their teammates have not forgiven them. If something went well, reinforce the idea/process/context that led to said outcome, and the reverse is true for the faults, find the cause and try to avoid or remove it.

3. Exercise and discussion - Past and future plans (20 min)

Ask the debaters to write down how they prepared, generally speaking, for this tournament and how they plan on preparing for their future tournaments.

Discuss each answer and see if they can correlate poor preparation with the weaknesses they identified earlier in the lesson. If they prepared by doing tons of

research, but they had weak cases throughout the tournament, then it makes sense to focus on case building for the next tournament.

It's important to identify a plan that didn't work very well, in order to not repeat the same mistake. For future plans, debaters should establish very clear goals for preparation. Instead of a vague plan like "do more case building and less research", maybe they should try something more structured, for example, maybe it wasn't a problem of doing too much research, but rather inefficient research. Then the plan for their next competition should be "divide research task efficiently and work on prioritising what they research before-hand, with a research plan". This not only gives them a goal, but also a process or method for attaining that goal.

Ideally the debaters should finish the lesson with two clear ideas: something they should not repeat and something to focus on in the future. Establishing clear and simple goals creates a higher probability that debaters will actually try to achieve them.

C. Preparation

Basic preparation is needed, like having paper and pens for debaters to write on, in case they don't bring their own. Also, it would help if you had a board or something similar on which to pin the drawings and answers given by the debaters.

If you are interested in some useful insights on the learning process (which is what a debrief tries to facilitate), you can go through this document:

http://cei.ust.hk/files/public/simplypsychology_kolb_learning_styles.pdf

D. Hints

For these types of debriefings, it is recommended to create somewhat compact groups. It becomes very difficult to control the discussion and keep debaters engaged if the group is too big. Under ten seems like a good number.

This type of debriefing works as a sort of counseling session for the debaters, in which they do a bit of constructive introspection. Ideally, the trainer giving the lesson would have a decent degree of experience with debaters and debate in general, because you'll encounter a lot of situations and niche cases/questions/problems that you can't really foresee or prepare for. With more experience in debate and with debaters in general, you can offer more useful insights. Unfortunately, in this case, there isn't a great substitute for experience.

E. Verification

The verification is built in with every step of the process, especially the last one. The best way to verify if the debrief had any effect is to check the results for the final activity, does the debater have a clear idea of what to avoid doing and what to try in future. If so, then the debriefing was probably successful.

