

# CHAPTER 2

## Lift Off: Great Games to Get You Started



### Coming Up!

It often takes a quick and enjoyable warm up to get your mind ready for speech and debate. This section will tell you about a few games and exercises that will help prepare you to speak. These activities will also introduce you to some common speech and debate techniques.

## NOT YOUR TYPICAL ‘BORED’ GAMES

In addition to warming up and practicing your vocal skills, there are a number of games and exercises that will gear up your mind for speech and debate. Some of these activities, such as *Rapid Speak* and *Pass the Baton*, can be done with two or three people. Others, such as *Crossfire* and *On That Point*, require a larger group. You're encouraged to adapt these games to your specific situation, including the number of people in your group and how much time you have.

### Success Tip!

Play a game at the beginning of a practice session.



### **Rapid Speak**

The main purpose of this game is to allow you to practice speaking without preparation, also known as impromptu speaking. It will encourage you to use effective transitions, which will help make your phrasing smoother. Here's how *Rapid Speak* works:

- *Step #1: Chairperson with cards.* A Chairperson has a stack of 30 to 40 cards, each of which has a random word that the participant must incorporate into his or her speech.
- *Step #2: Participant starts to speak.* The Chairperson shows a randomly selected word to the participant, who must then start a speech on that subject or on a related area.
- *Step #3: Flipping to new words.* The Chairperson flips to a new word every 15 seconds, at which point the speaker has to make a logical transition to the new subject. Each speaker goes through 12 words, or approximately three minutes of speech.

You'll probably end up with a rather creative and humorous speech, especially considering the random nature of the word selection. It's okay for you to take some time when transitioning to the new point. Here's a condensed example of *Rapid Speak*:

“[Pizza] Yesterday evening, I went out for pizza with my family. My younger brother had the misfortune of spilling his pop all over

the table which, sadly, did not come as a surprise. My parents told him [School] that he would get a detention if he did that sort of thing at school, but of course my brother tends not to listen to anything. Last week, he got into trouble for spitting at another student [Music] in the middle of his music class.”

## **Crossfire**

This game allows you to participate in a dynamic, back and forth debate without having to deliver a lengthy explanation for each argument. It forces you to come up with points on the spot—a key skill in debate. *Crossfire* also gets you used to debating both sides of an issue, which you’ll have to do in a debate tournament. Here’s how it works:

- *Step #1: Form teams.* At the front of the room, split into two lines: one side arguing for the topic and the other side arguing against it.
- *Step #2: Set the debate.* The students at the front of the lines should be facing each other at the center of the room. A Chairperson then presents a statement for debate.
- *Step #4: Point in favor.* The first speaker in favor of the statement speaks for 15 to 30 seconds and moves to the back of the other line.
- *Step #5: Point against.* The first speaker against the topic speaks for 15 to 30 seconds and moves to the back of the other line.
- *Step #6: Continue the debate.* The back and forth process continues until every debater has spoken at least once for both sides.

Each time it’s your turn, limit yourself to one clear point. It can be a new argument or opposition to an argument made by the other side. Make sure to keep the debate flowing, as the goal is to form and respond to arguments quickly.

## **On That Point**

This game allows two participants to work together as they represent a perspective, while everyone else gets practice asking challenging questions. It’s particularly good practice for parliamentary debate,

which allows seated debaters to ask questions to the person speaking. *On That Point* operates according to the following procedures:

- *Step #1: Get into teams.* Two participants go to the front of the room to argue for an opinion statement of their choice. Everyone else is in the audience, which forms the team debating against this statement.
- *Step #2: Two speakers start.* The two debaters arguing in favor of the statement talk one at a time. Only the person holding the baton can speak. When the debater who has the floor passes the baton to his or her teammate, this individual continues the debate.
- *Step #3: “On that Point.”* Anyone from the audience can stand up at any time and say, “On that point” and ask a critical question to the two debaters. The game goes on for up to 10 minutes.

It’s important that the audience strikes a good balance between asking enough questions and not bombarding the two debaters with too many questions. Allow the speaker to complete the answer and to continue the speech before asking another question. Below is an excerpt from a sample game of *On That Point* on the topic, “Students have a right to privacy in schools.”

*Speaker #1:* “A student’s locker should be a private space to store possessions. We wouldn’t allow police to search arbitrarily the bedrooms of students at their homes. Likewise, what a student keeps in a locker is nobody else’s business.”

*Audience Member A:* “On that point! But when students enter a school, aren’t they entering a public space, subject to the rules and regulations of that particular institution?”

*Speaker #1:* “Certainly, what they do in classrooms and hallways should be governed by the school’s rules. But the very nature of a locker—a closed, locked area—makes it a student’s private area.” (Baton gets passed to partner.)

*Speaker #2:* “Not only that, but allowing school officials to search students’ lockers is a system that’s very prone to abuse. In particular, there’s no formal warrant process, and no legal justification is ever

required before a search is conducted. This leaves students wondering whether they can trust school officials.”

*Audience Member B:* “On That Point, sir. Don’t you think that school officials have a responsibility to ensure that drugs, weapons, and other banned items aren’t brought to school?”

## Pass the Baton

*Pass the Baton* aims for the type of back and forth flow seen in *Crossfire*, but it takes place as a group discussion rather than as a head to head battle. It gives you virtually no time to prepare an argument, which serves as a true test of debating skills. The game involves the following steps:

### Watch Out!

When playing debate games, be careful not to get off topic.



- *Step #1: Start the debate.* Everyone in the group stands in a circle and jointly selects a topic for debate. One person, who holds the baton, begins the debate by making an argument in favor of the statement.
- *Step #2: The next person opposes.* Once the first speaker has finished making a single argument, the baton gets passed to any other person in the circle. This participant must oppose what the first speaker has said, either directly or with a new argument.
- *Step #3: The debate continues.* The second speaker passes the baton to another participant, and the process continues until each person has spoken two to three times.

You won’t know when you’ll be called to speak or what side you’ll be arguing. It’s essential that you listen carefully to the flow of the discussion and anticipate what you would do if you had to speak next. This dynamic and lively game is sure to keep you on your toes. Below is a selection from a sample *Pass the Baton* game on the subject, “Museums and theatres should fund themselves.”

*Participant #1 (in favor):* “If people truly want museums and theatres, they should be willing to pay for them. Why should the public subsidize someone’s *personal* entertainment?” (Baton gets passed on.)

*Participant #2 (opposed):* “However, let’s not forget that museums and theatres are good for the public as a whole. We all benefit when we preserve and enhance our culture.” (Baton gets passed on.)

*Participant #3 (in favor):* “Well, not everyone benefits equally. We each have likes and dislikes. There’s no vote to determine whether an art institution gets public funding. Let the people decide with their wallets!” (Baton gets passed on.)

*Participant #4 (opposed):* “You’re basing your argument on the idea that museums and theatres should all be commercial, for-profit operations. I believe that they shouldn’t be run exactly the same way as private companies. They’re supposed to serve society as a whole, not just the business interests of an owner.”

## **Traffic Lights**

The purpose of this game is to give every participant a chance to speak three times, each time for a distinct purpose. You’ll either have to make a point, raise a concern, or refute a point made by another participant. You get to decide when you want to speak, what side you want to take, and how to argue for the perspective of your choice. *Traffic Lights* runs according to the following rules:

- *Step #1: Cards get distributed.* Every member of the group has a green card, a yellow card, and a red card. Each card can be used only once in the debate, and cards cannot be traded between players. To talk, you must use the appropriate card:

*Green is Go:* Make a new argument that adds to the debate.

*Yellow is Caution:* Raise a concern or question you want addressed.

*Red is Stop:* Oppose the argument that has just been presented.

- *Step #2: Anyone begins the debate.* The first person to use a green card starts the debate. A green card guarantees the person using it at least 30 seconds of uninterrupted time.
- *Step #3: Another person interjects.* After this 30 second period has expired, anyone else can use a card. A green card guarantees a fresh 30 second period, a yellow card 15 seconds to ask a question, and a

red card 30 seconds to oppose the point made previously. If either a yellow card or a red card is used, the original speaker gets to continue thereafter until someone else uses a card.

- *Step #4: The debate continues.* *Traffic Lights* continues until every participant is out of cards. This means that everyone will have raised an argument, opposed an argument, and asked a question, all of which are important debating skills.

## **Debate Duel**

*Debate Duel* allows you to go head to head against other competitors, spicing up the debate with some heated rivalry. Your goal is to survive the battles as long as you can by continuing to win mini-debates against different opponents. But your fate lies in the hands of your peers. Here's how to play *Debate Duel*:

- *Step #1: Take your positions.* There are two debaters standing at the front of the room facing each other: the Champion and the Challenger. Everyone else sits in the audience and makes up the Jury. The Jury must act objectively. Alternatively, you can opt for an independent Jury that doesn't participate in the debate.
- *Step #2: Begin the battle.* The Champion, who is selected randomly for the first round, gets 30 seconds to present an argument on any topic of his or her choice. The Challenger then gets 30 seconds to present a counter-argument.
- *Step #3: The Jury votes.* After both people have their say, the Jury, by a majority vote, eliminates the debater it believes lost the duel. The person left is the Champion, and the participant voted off becomes a member of the Jury.
- *Step #4: A new Challenger emerges.* According to a pre-set order, a member of the Jury then takes the position of Challenger, and the process starts again. The person who has the longest consecutive run as the Champion wins the game.

## The Great Race

This game pits teams against each other in a battle of quick thinking, which is great practice for the fast-paced world of competitive debating. Hesitation will cost you dearly. Here's how *The Great Race* works:

- *Step #1: Get into two teams.* Half of the participants form one team and stand on one side of the room, and the rest of the participants face them and make up the other team.
- *Step #2: Prepare for the race.* In between the teams, there's a table with a buzzer or bell. A member from each team stands on either side of the table. Both competitors must have their hands behind their backs.
- *Step #3: The race is on.* The Chairperson announces a statement for debate. The first person to ring the buzzer or bell has to make an argument in favor of the statement, which should last for approximately 10 seconds. The team represented by this participant scores a point. If, however, the speaker waits or hesitates, or if the Chairperson decides that the argument isn't a valid point, the other team scores a point.
- *Step #4: The sprint continues.* After each round, a new person takes the position at the table. Keep on playing the game until each person has spoken at least once, or twice if there are only a few participants.

## Survivor

*Survivor* is a 'winner takes all' competition in which every debater tries to outlast everyone else by presenting the strongest arguments. To win at *Survivor*, you have to perform well round after round, or else you may get voted off the Island. Here's how to play the game:

- *Step #1: All aboard the Island.* The Contenders stand in a group at the front of the room. The Jury sits in the audience, which consists only of the Chairperson at this point.
- *Step #2: The round begins.* The Chairperson announces a topic, and every debater has to present an argument of approximately 15 seconds for or against this statement.



- *Step #3: Someone gets voted off.* Each member of the Jury—one person in the first round—casts a vote for the debater whose argument seemed the weakest. The person who gets the most votes is eliminated from the Island and joins the Jury. In the event of a tie, the Chairperson casts the deciding vote.
- *Step #4: Battle to the end.* After each round, the Jury pool will increase by one member and the Contender group will decrease by one member. Keep on playing the game until only one Contender, the ‘Survivor’, is left standing.

The games and exercises discussed in this chapter are a few of the ways that you can get into the right frame of mind for effective debating and public speaking. They’re lively and enjoyable, making them great activities for a group of people.

## Chapter 2: Keys to Success



✓ **Listen to the back and forth flow of arguments.** Understanding how the arguments shift from side to side is central to grasping the debate. Equally important, pay attention to what causes an argument to go off topic, so that you can avoid such situations when you debate.

✓ **Think about how you would expand on the points.** Most of the games require very brief arguments. In an actual debate, you would have to expand these brief arguments into more complete points by adding explanations and details.

✓ **Be fully involved.** If you're a beginner, these games will help you get comfortable making arguments. Even if you have significant experience, they'll keep your skills sharp and provide great ways to warm up before you debate.

✓ **Enjoy yourself.** You'll find that these games often get rather lighthearted and humorous, which is why they're great for warming up and practicing. So don't analyze your performance too critically. Enjoy the games, particularly the interaction with your fellow participants.