

Foreword

Discover the Art of Speech and Debate

TAKING TALK TO THE NEXT LEVEL

We're surrounded by speech and debate everyday and everywhere, so it's no surprise that we often view oral communication as a natural, effortless activity. But is everyone you hear equally clear or equally convincing? Or do some people stand out, capturing your attention and securing your agreement?

There's a big difference between talking effortlessly and communicating effectively. Talking takes little effort, requiring others only to hear what you have to say. Communicating is much more advanced. Your audience has to be motivated—motivated by you, that is—to listen, understand, and respond favorably.

Similarly, there's a big difference between stating your opinion and presenting an argument. Stating an opinion calls on you to say what's on your mind, essentially making conversation or going with your gut instinct. Presenting an argument calls for convincing logic, clear structure, and confident delivery. A strong argument compels others to agree with your perspective or to take the action you want.

THE STYLE OF SUCCESS

If you think that great speakers and debaters are dry, think again! They often use humor, and they keep their audiences engaged and interested in what they're saying. Most importantly, they enjoy what they do, which becomes apparent in the expressiveness of their delivery. They're interesting and dynamic people—or at least speech and debate brings out their 'concealed' personalities.

Great speakers and debaters have a variety of styles. Some are powerful communicators because of their convincing tone, commanding stage presence, and passionate oration. Others are just as successful by presenting thoughtful, intelligent ideas with a calm and methodical style. Excellent communication skills aren't exclusive to the most talkative among us.

Despite the diversity of styles, there are certain traits common to all effective speakers and debaters. They have a sound grasp of structure, making sure that their speeches flow well. Delivering clearly and confidently, they captivate their audiences. Most importantly, they have the right attitude. They want to improve their skills, and they enjoy new challenges. They're active listeners who strive to learn from what others have to say.

WHY BOTHER?

Debating is one of the oldest and most common art forms. From Aristotle to John F. Kennedy, dinner tables to national legislatures, and students to seniors, the art of debate has been used to discuss competing views for centuries.

Throughout 25 years as a speech arts teacher, I've seen students become confident communicators and talented debaters. Discovering the art of speech and debate isn't easy. It does take hard work and dedication. And what's the result? I've witnessed hundreds of young leaders unearth their vocal potential to achieve success in their schools, communities, and careers.

The case for achieving excellence in speech extends much further than competition. You'll gain a powerful life skill guaranteed to improve your performance every time you communicate. Effective speaking enhances your performance in school presentations and class discussions. It helps you take charge in leadership positions and makes you shine in interviews for jobs, awards, and scholarships. Less tangible, but equally important, is how it improves your confidence whenever you deal with people.

Learning to debate will help you become more logical when you examine issues, thoughtful when you come up with ideas and insights, and convincing when you argue your perspective. In addition, you'll become more confident talking about what you already know. What use are biology, chemistry, history, and literature if you aren't comfortable articulating your knowledge to others? In today's competitive

world, it's not enough to know the right answer. It's just as important to know how to *communicate* your knowledge to others.

PRACTICE MAKES (ALMOST) PERFECT

Speech and debate can't be learned through reading alone. If you want to discover this art, enjoy *Talk the Talk* and put what you learn to good use in your everyday activities. I can't emphasize enough how important it is to make speech and debate part of your daily routine. Participate in class discussions, debate social and world issues at the dinner table, and get involved in practice rounds. Also, you should join a debate club and compete in tournaments. If one isn't already established at your school, get a few friends together and start one up. Competitions will give you an opportunity to put your skills to the test against other students. Your experiences may even take you across the country or around the world.

Enjoy learning speech and debate and developing your own dynamic style. Individuals who excel at this powerful and necessary skill will be a step ahead in achieving success.

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