

THE DDA EXERCISE HANDBOOK

This guide is meant as a source of inspiration if you're starting or running a debate club, either as a group or an individual. It contains tips on how to run a debate club, exercises you can use to improve and motions you can debate. Use it together with the DDA Debate Handbook.

* * *

Table of contents

General tips	1
The process	2
Training formats	3
Exercises	4
Games	8
Motions	12

General tips

The very best way to become better at debating is to do it a whole lot. It can be beneficial to do exercises that isolate a specific skill, especially the first time you get introduced to it. Watching debates can give you new inputs and inspiration. But the single best way to improve is to practice full debates. This teaches you how to integrate all of your skills and apply them in complex situations – and you'll be able to use that at tournaments. Debate clubs usually work best when holding as many debates as possible – try to have one at every meeting, even if just a short one with reduced speaking time. Spend time reflecting on what happened in the round and giving extensive feedback to teams and individuals.

Debating can seem super scary in the beginning. You have to speak alone in front of others, you can't decide when to talk or what to stand for, and you have to improvise. Again, the best way to get over this fear is often to try it out as early as possible. You will learn much more by actively debating than watching and reading – and getting used to it helps overcome your fear.

As the leader of a debate club, try to facilitate that as many people as possible get to debate. Of course, no one should be pressured into trying if they don't want to. But participating can be encouraged by creating a culture in which it's okay to be nervous and to mess up. Remind yourselves that no one knows how to do this from the beginning – it's all about trial and error. Give positive feedback alongside tips for improvement.

Finally, sign up for debate tournaments. Firstly, this is an awesome and inspiring experience for most new debaters and one of the best ways to get people hooked. Secondly, creating teams and having a goal gives everyone something to look forward to and a sense of purpose, which makes people even more engaged in a debate club. Thirdly, tournaments accelerate your learning curve – there's hardly a time when you improve more than during those days. Keep an eye out at our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/DanishDebate/>) and our website (<http://danishdebate.com>) for news on upcoming Danish tournaments. There's also plenty of international ones if you're prepared to travel abroad!

* * *

The process

There's a few stages to the debating process:

1. Introduction to debating (the first 1-3 meetings)
2. General debate training
3. Tournament preparation

For the **introduction to debating**, you can play some debate games, explain the basic rules and then try to have a debate (perhaps on a fun topic). There can be an intro-intro meeting with just games and information, but otherwise we recommend beginning to do debate rounds as soon as possible.

For the **general debate training**, it can be helpful to have a focused topic for each debate meeting. You can use the DDA Debate Handbook as a guide to this – the chapters are in the suggested order of teaching. Some chapters could easily be stretched over more than one training session. There are exercises in this guide to accompany the information in the Handbook.

A typical structure of a debate training session could look like this:

1. Presentation about a certain skill or topic within debating (e.g. rebuttal)
2. Exercise that tests the specific skill or topic
3. Prep time for debate
4. Debate
5. Feedback

Tournament preparation is not very different, only 4 things become extra important:

1. Getting lots of practice on the teams that will be debating together at the tournament.
2. Discussing prep room strategy (see Chapter 11 of the Debate Handbook) and communication during the debates on each of the teams.
3. Making sure that you know the rules of the tournament and meet all of the "requirements", e.g. speaking time and reply speeches.
4. Preparing cases, if there are any prepared debates in the tournament.

* * *

Training formats

The full WSDC format is quite advanced. It should be the end goal, not the starting point – seriously, none of us could do an 8-minute speech the first time we tried debating! It's a good idea to use a simplified format when introducing debate and then gradually work towards the full format. There are suggestions for specific training formats at the end of this section.

On speaking time: 8 minutes can seem like an impossibly long time the first time you try debating – but don't worry, as you become more familiar with the format, it will only become easier and easier. You might eventually find 8 minutes to be way too little! It's all about throwing yourself into it and trying.

On speaker roles: As the debate progresses, the speakers will spend less and less time on prepared material. The 3rd speeches and reply speeches require a lot of improvisation, intuition and understanding of debating – and reply speeches even require a debater to speak twice. These speeches can be very hard in the beginning. It can be a good idea to begin with two-on-two debates, progress to debates with only constructive speeches and finally introduce reply speeches.

It can also be helpful to progress through the speaker roles, for example by emphasizing first speeches in the beginning, since they have a clearer structure and can be prepared almost fully. This helps give an understanding of the basic structure of speeches before having to improvise structure.

On prep time: The length of prep time can be decided ad hoc in the beginning, based on how long you feel that you need. 30 minutes should be enough in the beginning. Even as you progress, it can be beneficial to prep with slightly less time than you'll have at tournaments. This pushes you to be more efficient – and accounts for the fact that at tournaments, you spend more time on stress, confusion, and trying to find your room.

Suggestion for different formats:

1st-timers: 2 members on each team, 1 or 2 minute speeches, no reply speeches, 20-30 minute prep

After a couple of practices: 2-3 members on each team, 3-4 minute speeches, no reply speeches, 30 minute prep

With some experience: 3 members on each team, 5-6 minute speeches, 2-3 minute reply speeches, 30-40 minute prep

Full format: 3 members on each team, 8 minute speeches, 4 minute reply speeches, 1 hour prep

Exercises

Introductory exercises

These mini-exercises can be used for the very first meeting(s) as warm-up exercises, to get you into the feel of debating.

Opinionated

Pair up with the person sitting next to you. One person says an opinion that they have and give a reason why they think so. The other person then tries to take the opposite view and argues against that opinion. Try to discuss the matter for 1-2 minutes. Then swap roles.

If I was president

Everyone stands in a circle. One person says: "If I was president, I would..." and then proposes something they would do if they were the president. The next person in the circle says: "That's a bad idea, because..." and tries to argue against the proposed policy. That person then starts over with a new "If I was president..."

Minute

Pair up with the person sitting next to you. Each pair takes turns either being the speaker or the controller. The controller chooses a topic for the speaker (preferably a simple everyday topic like "family dinner" or "to-do lists"). The speaker must then try to speak about the chosen topic for 1 minute – without ever saying "umm", "err", using filler words or repeating themselves. It doesn't matter what you say about the topic – you just have to keep going for a minute without any fluttering.

The controller notes when the speaker "violates" the rules and can either count the number of "transgressions" or make the speaker restart every time (in that case, the exercise might take a few hours). The roles are then swapped.

Isolating a skill

One of the simplest and best ways to train a specific skill is to do a task that isolates that skill, i.e. focuses only on that. This can be done working in pairs or alone, and presenting in front of everyone or just a partner. It can be a more comfortable way of getting to try out something new with less pressure. If the topic is "making arguments", "making POIs" or "burdens", it's as straightforward as giving everyone a motion and having them come up with and present an arguments, POIs or burdens. Here's some ideas for skills that are not as easy to isolate:

Structure

1. Each person does a **speech with no content** (or random, brief content) *only* focusing on the structure of the speech. So you say only all of your transitional and concluding phrases: "Firstly, I'll present our model. It has three parts. One,

two, three..." etc. This might seem a bit silly, but it's a nice way to internalize the structure when you just start out debating.

2. Another good way to practice structure is simply to have everyone do **1st prop speeches**, as these are the ones with the clearest structure that can most easily be co-opted because the speeches are planned entirely in advance.

Style

1. **Practice snappy intros.** This is the time where you have the most freedom to be stylistic, and where style matters the most. It can be helpful to practice both the writing of intros and the presentation. The debaters can give each other feedback and present their intros again – or even give feedback after each sentence. Snappy intros should be rhetorical, but this can mean both powerful, emotional, humorous, surprising or something else entirely. They should be presented in a way that underlines what is being said – for example using emphasis and pauses to give the words extra power. Finally, they should be suitable for the topic – so if you're talking about people dying of in a warzone, don't be too offhand, and if you're talking about interest rates, don't be overly dramatic.
2. **Speak about a random topic.** Each student can choose a topic (debate-related or not) and hold a brief speech about it, in which they focus not on the content, but on being as fluent and stylistic as possible – e.g. using few filler words, holding appropriate pauses, avoiding repetition and so on. This can be a good way to get into the mind-set of carefully considering every sentence that makes up a speech.
3. **Impersonate characters.** Each person picks a person (real or fictional) whom they think has a great speaking style. It could be a politician, another debater or a movie character – some examples could be Obama, Jamie... Each person then does a speech or intro about a debate topic, in the style of that character. This might be a bit too much for some debaters or seem too silly – and while it *is* also silly, try to take the speaker seriously and see if there aren't some good insights to be gained from the impersonation.

Internal structure (arguments, rebuttal and reconstruction)

1. The **ARR** exercise is a way to practice the structure of both arguments, rebuttal and reconstruction at once. A motion is set and everyone quickly agree on 1-3 arguments for each side. Each person is then assigned one argument to present, one to rebut and one to rebuild, and everyone has a few minutes to prepare. One person then presents the first prop argument, another person rebuts it, and a third rebuild it. This is repeated for all of the arguments until everyone has tried all roles at least once. Since there is so little thinking time, emphasis should be on clarity and structure, rather than quality of responses. Because there is only 1 argument to deal with each time, speakers are better able to isolate the skill of structuring on the spot.

Using recorded rounds

There are hundreds of recorded debate rounds online, and these can be an excellent resource to use while training, both at group meetings and alone. Here are some ideas for how they can be used.

Analysing debates

Watch a debate together. Pause between each speech and talk about what you took particular note of, what the speaker did well, what they could've done better, and what you would expect the next speaker to do. You can also focus on a specific topic, such as rebuttal, burdens or structure. You can also pause within the speech between each section.

Share notes

This is particularly useful for practicing 3rds and replies, but it can be used for all other speaker positions as well (other than 1st prop).

While watching, take notes as if you're doing one of the later speeches. Write down their arguments, ideas for rebuttal, etc. After each section within the speech (e.g. the set-up, the rebuttal, the 1st argument, POIs), pause the debate. Talk about what each of you have written down – for example, how many ideas have you written within the first argument, and what have you called those ideas? What model picks do you have? How does it look on your paper – how much space do you have for responses?

While it can be a little daunting to share your notes with others, it's a nice way to gain inspiration from other people and helping each other improve how you take notes. For example, you can often write down much less than you think. Maybe you didn't need two sentences for the first arguments, but just a few words – or maybe you missed something in the argument that the others picked up. Such discussions can be really fruitful.

Be in the round

Finally, you can do one of the speeches as if you were in the round. For example, after the 1st prop speech, one of you can try to do a 1st opp speech. You can then watch how the 1st opp speech was done in the actual round and talk about the similarities and differences. Alternatively, you can pair up and perform your speech with a partner, who then performs their version of the speech. This way, you get 3 total speeches to compare. This can be a particularly good way of getting many people to debate roles other than 1st prop, especially if people are shy about speaking in front of an audience. It's especially beneficial for practicing 3rds and replies, since a full round takes a lot of time and only a few people get to try these roles. Watch the "real" 3rd speech afterwards for inspiration.

This is also one of the best exercises if you want to practice on your own. Try filming yourself doing a speech and rewatching it afterwards, taking notes on things you do well and things you could improve. You might be totally surprised by how you appear from an outside perspective – it's usually different than what it seems like in your head. This can be intimidating, but it's also one of the best ways to learn and improve!

Games

Here are some ideas for debate-related games. They focus less on direct practice and instead prompts you to use your debate skills in a different context. They are especially useful in the “introduction to debate” stage, but they can also be used afterwards as a warm-up exercise, to create variation, or at special meetings.

Either/or

This game practices arguments and persuasion in a fun context.

This game is centred around “either-or” dilemmas – those that typically occur in party games. They present two (more or less) similarly good or bad options, for example “Would you rather lose both of your arms or both of your legs?”. Prepare some dilemmas in advance – it’s important that they are balanced so approximately half will be likely to choose each option. See some suggestions further down.

Get everyone to stand. Clearly indicate that one side of the room is “Option 1” and the opposite side is “Option 2”. Read out one of the dilemmas. Everyone walks to the side of the room that corresponds to their preference – note how many are on each side. Each person then walks towards the middle and finds someone with the opposite opinion (if there’s more people on one side, it might have to be 2 to 1 or similar). Both sides argue why they chose the option that they did. After a few minutes of discussion, everyone again walks to the side of the room that corresponds to their preference – changing your mind is allowed! The side that convinced most people to join them, wins!

Ideas for dilemmas:

Would you rather...

- be famous in your lifetime **or** go down in the history books?
- have society focus on science **or** culture?
- forget who you are **or** forget who everyone else are?
- sing everything you say **or** dance all of your movements?
- cheat on your partner **or** be cheated on by your partner?
- wear crocs **or** socks and sandals for the rest of your life?

You can find more inspiration at <http://either.io/>

Hot Air Balloon

This game practices arguments, rebuttal and weighing – and thinking on your feet.

Prepare 4 names of people or characters that all of the participants know (fictional or real). Alternatively, you can get the debaters to come up with one each. Divide people into groups of 4.

Each person is assigned a character at random. You are then to imagine that these 4 people are stuck in a hot air balloon together – but it's dropping towards the ground. In order to stay in the air, you have to throw someone overboard.

In the first round, each person has 1 minute (in random order) to argue why they are particularly valuable and should stay in the Hot Air Balloon. When everyone have spoken, a judge decides which person argued the worst and must be kicked out of the balloon. Alternatively, the players can vote on who will stay.

The second round works like the first round. The remaining players must now try to come up with additional arguments and reasons why their character must stay in the balloon. Again, one player is eliminated.

In the final round, there are only two players left. Rather than argue why they should stay, they now have to argue why the other character doesn't deserve to be in the balloon and must be kicked out rather than themselves. All of the eliminated players and the judge can vote on the winner, who gets to survive in the Hot Air Balloon!

Sliding scale

This game practices nuanced argumentation.

Prepare a few motions or statements – they can be fun, for example “Movie nights are better than parties”, or more serious, for example “The state should protect people against their own bad decisions”.

Indicate a clear line in the classroom, for example by placing two opposite poles (“fully agree” and “fully disagree”) at each end of the classroom. Make sure there is free passageway between the two poles. Read out one of the statements. All of the players then place themselves where they think they “fit” on the scale. If, for example, they mostly agree with the statement, but with some reservations, they stand far to one side – if they're totally in doubt, they stand in the middle. Ask some people why they're standing where they are – what exactly do they stand for, and why? Allow people to move up and down the scale. You can also get people to talk to those next to them, to see if their position relative to each other is actually “correct”.

An alternative version of this game can be used to practice principle arguments. Rather than statements or motions, use rights such as “the right to free speech”, “the right to education” and “the right to freedom of religion”. Most people agree that people should have these rights, but often have different opinions on to what extent we should have these rights. Try to create some extreme end poles, for example:

Right to free speech – Say whatever you want **vs.** The state must approve everything

Right to education – Basic reading, writing and math **vs.** Fully paid tuition at any university

Right to religion – Individuals can believe in whatever religion they want **vs.** Government funding for churches and religious education

The game works in the same way as with statements – people argue what version of a certain right they support, and why. Players should try to give examples of what they support and don't support, and, if possible, set up a more nuanced principle for when they support this right being enforced. For the "right to free speech", that could for example be "as long as it doesn't harm others", "as long as it doesn't incite to violence", "as long as it's true", etc.

Argument battle

This exercise tests the ability of coming up with as many arguments as possible.

You should have 3-5 motions prepared for this exercise. Divide people into teams of 3-5 members. All teams get the same motion and side. They have 5 minutes to come up with as many arguments as they can as a group – they should write a common list.

When the time is up, a person from the first team is asked to say an argument (only one sentence of explanation is needed). The game master decides whether the argument is valid or not. If it is, a representative from the next team has to say an argument. The game continues to shift between the teams. A new team member should present each time so everyone gets to speak. Once the game master decides that it's too hard to come up with more arguments for a motion, a new motion is presented to the teams.

If the argument is judged not to be valid, or the team can't come up with an argument within 10 seconds, they get a strike. Once a team has 3 strikes, they're out of the game. The last team left standing wins!

Debate board games

This activity is mostly recommended as a fun activity, e.g. for social events or the last meeting of the year. Several board games are centered around some form of debate. These include:

1. **Red Flags:** A game about dating. Players have to create and choose between different suitors who all have 2 positive and 1 extremely negative trait(s).
2. **Superfight:** This game sets up fights between superheroes. Players have to create characters with different powers and argue why one would beat the other.
3. **Debatable:** In this game, players have to argue about all sorts of topics using debate strategies such as "resort to blackmail" and "sing your arguments".

Ask if anyone in your debate society have any of these games – or make your own versions! You can usually find the rules online if you google the game. You can then make your own cards – maybe even in the debate club. Especially Red Flags and Superfight have very simple set-ups that can easily be homemade.

Motions

This is a bank of suggestions for motions you can use for exercises and debates. You can select ones you find particularly interesting or choose one at random. These motions are just suggestions, though – there are tons of other motions out there, or you can make your own, based on what the members of the debate club are interested in. As long as the motions you use are balanced, so both sides can reasonably win.

Other places to find motions:

<https://www.debate-motions.info/> – motions from university and high school tournaments

<https://schoolsdebate.com/resources/motions/> – motions from WSDC since 1994

<http://hellomotions.com/random-motion> – random motion generator

Fun motions

1. TH, as a young person, would not be on Tinder
2. THW ban wearing socks in sandals
3. THW use Game of Thrones in history class

Serious motions

1. THW ban alcohol
2. THW create a global democratic government
3. TH opposes organised religion
4. TH regrets the invention of nuclear weapons
5. THW ban technology in the classroom
6. THW allow imprisoned parents to raise their children in jail
7. TH supports arranged marriage (not forced marriage)
8. THW legalize all drugs
9. TH believes that politicians should be paid the median wage of the country
10. THW ban meat eating
11. THW allow elected politicians to select public officials
12. TH believes that the police should not carry arms on regular patrols
13. THW ban boxing
14. THW allow employers to offer a contract to their female employees giving up their right to become pregnant.
15. THW make adult children legally responsible for providing for their parents
16. THW create LGBT-only schools
17. TH regrets the media's intrusion into the private lives of public figures
18. TH supports the use of torture when certain information is deemed crucial to national security
19. THBT mass surveillance is justified
20. THW cut welfare support on compulsive gamblers
21. THW legalize euthanasia