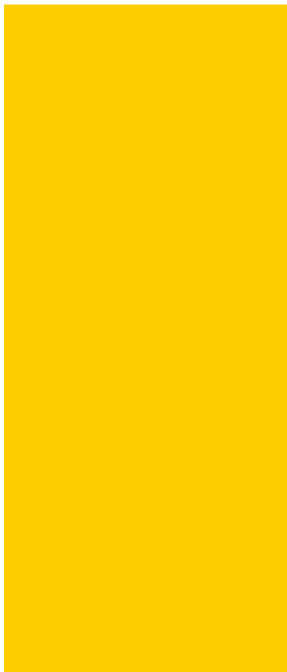




# Debating Skills Rulebook: Student debate in upper-secondary education



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Training partner



In collaboration with



This rulebook presents the student debate format used in the “Debating Skills” project. Written by experienced educators and with the support of the *Nederlands Debat Instituut*, it was pedagogically adapted to upper secondary students entering structured debate initiatives.

The rulebook was used and assessed in earlier projects and in national and international initiatives. It will govern the “Debating Skills” European student debate event in 2025.

Because many educators and schools are just starting their debate activities, the rulebook offers notes and suggestions in the margin that may help designing new and adapted student debate initiatives.

For more information or suggestions:  
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**Notes & suggestions  
for other events**


## Preamble: Why debate in upper secondary school?

Regardless of origin, individual traits, or social context, all youth voices matter. By helping young people to value their voice, the voice of others, and meaningfully speak out, debate strengthens Democracy; by igniting young people to positively address current challenges and shape a better future for all, debate strengthens Citizenship.

Therefore, this project's mission is: *To promote debate as an educational tool that enables the confidence to speak up, empathy, critical thinking, and creative thinking, thus empowering upper-secondary students and strengthening democracy and citizenship.*

In the scope of the project and inspired by its mission, the present regulation was adopted.

 Write a simple regulation coherent with specific contextual needs and goals.

 Identifying the needs and objectives may help the school community to value debate and engage in the project.


## 1. Object


This rulebook is the core of the project “Debating Skills” and its activities.

It will govern the “Debating Skills European Student Debate Event” in 2025.

The event is a debate tournament between teams of upper-secondary students from different European countries.

This rulebook may be used as a baseline for other debate events. Citations may use - CEPCEP (2023). *Rulebook: Student debate in upper-secondary education*. Centro de Estudos dos Povos e Culturas de Expressão Portuguesa, Universidade Católica Portuguesa. [www.debatingskills.eu](http://www.debatingskills.eu)

 Choose an inspiring name for the debate activity, initiative, or event.


 School events or tournaments can be governed by their own rules.

## 2. Coordination team

The project will appoint a Coordination Team with 03 up to 05 persons.

This Coordination Team is responsible for:

- (a) Developing the program (opening session, debate rounds, and closing session)
- (b) Assigning and training the chairpersons, timekeepers, and judges
- (c) Preparing debates materials and information
- (d) Choosing the process to select the motions, following the process, and approving the final selection

 Identify a coordination team with different educators or teachers.

- (e) Assuring the random distribution of the motions, teams, and their positions
- (f) Deciding on any doubts, issues, or questions.

### 3. Motions

Motions are the ideas, topics, propositions, or suggestions to be debated by the teams.

The motions for the event are proposed by EFEE members, discussed by a panel of educators, and approved by the Coordination Team.

The Coordination Team will ensure the random distribution of the motions.

The motions will be published one month before the event.

In the first rounds, teams know the motions they will debate but not their position (proposition or opposition). The position will be decided by a coin toss at the beginning of the debate.

In the final, teams will know the motion and the position (proposition or opposition) one hour before the debate.

### 4. Teams

The teams are registered by EFEE partners of each country.

Teams must have at least one previous participation in structured debates.

Teams include three upper secondary students and one teacher.

All students will participate as speakers (first, second, and third or rebuttal speakers).

If a student, for justified reasons, cannot participate in the debate at the last minute, one of the team members may assume the colleague's role.

The Coordination Team must approve this and other exceptional decisions.


The Coordination Team will invite an extra team that will debate without the possibility of going to the final in case (a) there is an odd number of teams registered or (b) a registered team drops out of the event.


### 5. Organization


The event includes three rounds of debate with all teams, followed by a final round with the two teams with the highest scores.


The debates in each round will take place simultaneously.


Each debate is conducted by a table that includes a Chairperson and a Timekeeper.


 Identify the process to create and select the motions.


 Students, teachers, and parents' suggestions may be helpful.


 Do we want to have a theme for our debates?

 The previous knowledge of the motion and position may help students to be more prepared.

 Decide which students, how they apply, and the number of students per team.

 Teams with four students integrate more students and allow research support and substitution.

 Students may apply voluntarily in teams; in some schools, all secondary students participate in debate activities.

 Discuss the best event structure to maximize teams' opportunities to debate.

When possible, teachers will participate as chairperson and timekeeper in debates where their teams are not debating.

At the end of each debate, judges will assess both teams (using specific criteria and scores) and give feedback to the teams. The Coordination Team receives all judges' scores and updates teams' general scores.

The two teams with the highest score will debate in the final round.

The team that wins the final is the winner of the event.

The closing session includes a ceremony to publish results and deliver the awards, specific recognitions, and participation certificates.

## 6. Debate

The debate includes a proposition team that defends the motion and an opposition team that opposes the motion.

### 6.1 Preparation

The teams know in advance of the event the motions that will be debated.

The teams must present themselves to the Chairperson five minutes before each debate.

Before each debate, the chairperson tosses a coin in the presence of both teams. The team winning the toss is the proponent of the motion.

### 6.2 The Debate

The chairperson opens the debate by presenting the teams and the motion.


During the debate, the speakers of both teams can not have or use electronic devices.


The proposition team makes the first intervention.


The constructive speeches, delivered by the first two speakers of each team, have a time limit of five minutes.


The summary or rebuttal speeches, delivered by the third speaker of each team, have a time limit of three minutes.


Between each intervention, there is a 1-minute break.


 While some events use ladder competitions, others use scoring systems.


 Which structure reinforces feedback to enhance improvement?


 It is challenging to be Chairperson or Timekeeper, but many students find it quite rewarding. Training is needed!

 Besides the first places and the participation certificates, which other categories of recognition could enrich the event?

 Taking into account your goals, discuss what can be the best debate format.

 There are many formats for school debate with variations on the number of teams, students per team, number of speeches, and the speech length.

 When the teams know and can prepare their motion in advance, to start the debate by tossing a coin to decide each team's position is more challenging.

 In some debate formats, in the last speeches, the order is inverted. It allows the proposition to close the debate. Why? Because of the proposition's "onus of proof"!

The interventions follow the structure and use the time limits presented in the table below:

1st Speakers	Proposition	5'	Motion definition Setting issues for debate
	Opposition	5'	To present the team's case
2nd Speakers	Proposition	5'	Handle definition if needed Answer other team arguments
	Opposition	5'	Continue to build the team's case
Summary speakers	Proposition	3'	Synthesize the team's case To refute the other team's arguments
	Opposition	3'	Close with the final idea

The Timekeeper tracks speakers' time using a desk bell to indicate the beginning and end of the speeches. A double ring of the desk bell will signal the beginning of the speech, a second ring will signal the beginning of the last minute, and a third and double ring will signal the end of the time, reinforced by another double ring after 10 seconds. The end of the 1-minute break will be marked with one ring.

Summary or rebuttal speakers cannot present new arguments.

At the end of the debate, adjudicators have 4 minutes to decide on each team's score, fill in the score sheet and put the sheet in a closed envelope. Then, they have 3' to give brief feedback to both teams.

The Chairperson closes the debate.

In the first three rounds, teams' scores are delivered to the Coordination Team, which updates the scoring board. In the final round, teams' scores are communicated at the end of the debate.

## 7. Adjudication


Adjudication is the process of assessing teams' participation in the debate.


In this event, teams are assessed by two judges using specific criteria and a score (0-20).


Judges are selected among EFEE members, invited master/ PhD students, or teachers unrelated to any of the teams.


The Coordination Team provides prep training for the adjudication team before the event, assuring judges' readiness, equality, and fairness.

Each judge is responsible for rating both teams' performance using three criteria: (i) *Attitude* regarding the debate, including team engagement and contribution; (ii) *Content* or the compelling strength of each team case,

 It is possible to adjust the time limits of the interventions.

 In some events, the adjudication team often presents a joint decision, disclosure by them at the end of the debate. For teams and audiences, it becomes more evident who won the debate.

 It is important to decide: Who will be the judges? What do we want (criteria) to value in the debates?

 Judges can be older students, other teachers, parents, or other community members. The organization must ensure impartiality and training.

arguments, and refutation; (iii) *Delivery* meaning the ability to present their arguments persuasively and expressively.

The table below presents the three criteria, their value, and main indicators.

Attitude	0-8	Ability to listen and respond Team members support Respect for the other team Valuing the structure and rules of debate
Content	0-8	Argumentation relevance and strength Rebuttal pertinence and quality Overall compelling and consistent case
Delivery	0-4	Body language Vocal style Rhetoric techniques


Note: See Template 1 adjudication tool


Judges' punctuation is individual. However, the team's punctuation for each debate is achieved by adding both judges' punctuation in a final score.

## 8. Code of conduct

During the event, all participants and other people present should:

- a) Value debate as an opportunity to develop empathy, critical and creative thinking
- b) Understand the critical importance of debating for the common good and shared future
- c) Acknowledge both teams' roles in deepening each motion
- d) Exercise active listening
- e) Show respect for each other at all times and in all roles
- f) Comply with existing regulations
- g) Avoid remarks or casual jokes that can be easily misinterpreted
- h) Contribute to a positive debate environment where everyone's voice and ideas are heard

 To discuss the criteria related to specific needs or goals.

 To discuss which attitudes can help debate activity to be more rewarding.

## Template 1 – Assessment template for judges

Judge \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Room \_\_\_\_\_

Motion \_\_\_\_\_

Attitude (0-8)	Content (0-8)	Delivery (0-4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ability to listen and respond</li> <li>✓ Team members support</li> <li>✓ Respect for the other team</li> <li>✓ Valuing the structure and rules of debate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Argumentation relevance and strength</li> <li>✓ Rebuttal pertinence and quality</li> <li>✓ Overall compelling and consistent case</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Body language</li> <li>✓ Vocal style</li> <li>✓ Rhetorical techniques</li> </ul>

Proposition		
<b>1st Speaker</b>	Name: _____	
Attitude (0-8)	Content (0-8)	Delivery (0-4)
Notes:		

Opposition		
<b>1st Speaker</b>	Name: _____	
Attitude (0-8)	Content (0-8)	Delivery (0-4)
Notes:		

<b>2nd Speaker</b>	Name: _____	
Attitude (0-8)	Content (0-8)	Attitude (0-4)
Notes:		

<b>2nd Speaker</b>	Name: _____	
Attitude (0-8)	Content (0-8)	Delivery (0-4)
Notes:		

<b>3rd Speaker</b>	Name: _____	
Attitude (0-8)	Content (0-8)	Delivery (0-4)
Notes:		

<b>3rd Speaker</b>	Name: _____	
Attitude (0-8)	Content (0-8)	Delivery (0-4)
Notes:		

Final score		
Attitude (0-8)	Content (0-8)	Delivery (0-4)
Total:		
Notes:		

Final score		
Attitude (0-8)	Content (0-8)	Delivery (0-4)
Total:		
Notes:		

**Note 1:** Argumentation structure: (a) Statement/ label (main idea); (b) Explanation (why it is true and why it is relevant); (c) illustration (examples that can prove the argument's soundness).

**Note 2:** Refutation clearness - (1) They say that..., (2) But they are wrong... (3) Because..., (4) Therefore ...

**Note 3:** The score for each speaker aims to help judge's feedback. Final scoring should not be the mathematical sum or mean of the individual scores.



**A T T I T U D E**

**C O N T E N T**

**D E L I V E R Y**

<p>Excellent ability to listen/respond: they repeat opposing arguments precisely and respond convincingly to their opponents.</p> <p>Strong support between team members.</p> <p>All speakers are very respectful to opponents.</p> <p>Promotion of debate structure and rules.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>8</b></p>	<p>All arguments are relevant and supported with explanations and examples.<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Rebuttals clearly strengthen the case of the debater(s).</p> <p>The overall case is very compelling and consistent: debaters structure and lead the debate with their line of argumentation.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>8</b></p>	<p>Body language is excellent; debaters stand firmly and use fitting hand gestures to support the message. They are the argument.</p> <p>The variation in vocal style (volume, pace, and intonation) elevates the message and makes it very convincing</p> <p>The use of many rhetorical techniques makes the message especially convincing.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>4</b></p>
<p>Good ability to listen/respond: they repeat opposing arguments correctly and respond well to these.</p> <p>Team members support each other.</p> <p>All speakers are respectful to opponents.</p> <p>Team values debate structure and rules.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>6</b></p>	<p>Most arguments are relevant and supported by either an explanation or an example.</p> <p>Debaters rebut most opposing arguments; the rebuttals are compelling.</p> <p>The overall case is compelling and consistent: debaters structure debate, and there is one clear line in argumentation.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>6</b></p>	<p>Body language is good; debaters stand firmly; some hand gestures support the message.</p> <p>The variation in vocal style (volume, pace, and intonation) supports the message and makes it convincing</p> <p>Various rhetorical techniques support the message and make it more convincing.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>3</b></p>
<p>Some ability to listen/respond: opposing arguments not always repeated correctly and, thus, not always well responded to.</p> <p>Team members try to support each other.</p> <p>All speakers are somewhat respectful to opponents.</p> <p>Respects the debate structure and rules.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>4</b></p>	<p>Argumentation seems relevant but lacks strength: arguments are not always supported with explanations or examples</p> <p>Debaters rebut some opposing arguments, and the quality of the rebuttals is average.</p> <p>Case of average quality: argumentation consistent but not always compelling (or vice versa). Structure is not always visible.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>4</b></p>	<p>Body language is neutral; debaters try to stand firmly and use small hand gestures.</p> <p>Variation in vocal style (volume, pace, and intonation) is present; it doesn't distract from the message but does not support it.</p> <p>Debaters try to use rhetorical techniques to support the message and make it convincing</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>2</b></p>
<p>Lack of ability to listen/respond: opposing arguments are not repeated and are only responded to in the form of loose statements.</p> <p>Team members barely support each other.</p> <p>Speakers ignore or are rude to opponents.</p> <p>Some contempt regarding the debate structure and rules.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>2</b></p>	<p>Argumentation is irrelevant and/or very weak: what is being said are statements rather than arguments</p> <p>Debaters do not rebut opposing arguments.</p> <p>Overall case is not compelling nor consistent: the debate lacks structure and is hard to follow</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>2</b></p>	<p>Body language is absent or distracts from the message; debaters move a lot or stand frozen</p> <p>Variation in vocal style (volume, pace, and intonation) barely present or distracts from the message.</p> <p>Scarce use of rhetorical techniques that do not always support the message or make it convincing.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>1</b></p>
<p>Debater(s) did not participate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevance, ability to listen/respond, and relation to team/opponents cannot be addressed.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>0</b></p>	<p>Debater(s) did not participate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Argumentation is non-existent</li> <li>• There are no rebuttals or reactions</li> <li>• No argumentative case</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>0</b></p>	<p>Debater(s) did not participate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nor body language, vocal style, or rhetorical techniques can be adjudicated</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>0</b></p>

**Observations: (1)** It is possible to give points between two categories (e.g., 7 or a 3.5). **(2)** An argument includes the statement (Assertion), explanation (Reasoning), and illustration (Evidence).



## Template 2 - Chairman and timekeeper template

Jurado \_\_\_\_\_ Data \_\_\_\_\_ Sala \_\_\_\_\_

### Teams and motion

Proposition	Motion	Opposition
1 -		1 -
2 -		2 -
3 -		3 -

### Speakers and time

Speaker	Position	Time	Ac.	Hour	Observations	Ideas
<b>Arriving and organization</b>		2'	2'			
<b>Presentation</b>		5'	7'			
<b>1st speakers</b>	Proposition	5'	12'			
	Opposition	5'	17'			
<b>2nd speakers</b>	Proposition	5'	22'			
	Opposition	5'	27'			
<b>Reply speakers</b>	Proposition	3'	32'			
	Opposition	3'	37'			
<b>Time for scoring</b>		3'	40'			
<b>Judges feedback (3' each)</b>		6'	43'			

### Ideas to launch the debate

Arrival	Presentation	During	Closing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare the room</li> <li>Receive audience &amp; teams (proposition on the chairman's right and opposition on the left)</li> <li>Receive the judges</li> <li>Toss the coin (winner assumes proposition)</li> <li>Help teams to settle in and relax</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To introduce himself</li> <li>To welcome and present the teams (applause to each)</li> <li>To welcome and present the judges (name and occupation) and remind the adjudication criteria: Attitude, content, and delivery</li> <li>Brief presentation of the rules: 3 speakers proposition and opposition; 5 minutes for each team's first two constructive speakers and 3 minutes for the last reply speaker. A double ring marks the beginning of the time, one ring warns of the last minute, and a double ring marks the end of available time.</li> <li>The end of 1 min break of one is marked with one ring.</li> <li>Possibility to use the timer on the table to control time.</li> <li>To introduce the motion and its interest without providing arguments – e.g., actuality, interest, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To ensure tracking time</li> <li>Warn beginning (2 rings)</li> <li>Warn last minute (1 ring)</li> <li>Warn ending (2 rings)</li> <li>Mark the end of the 1 min. break (1 ring)</li> <li>To call the next speaker.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applause for both teams (no applause during the debate)</li> <li>To thank and congratulate teams</li> <li>Give judges 3 min to score.</li> <li>Pass the word to judges for feedback – remember they have 2 min each</li> <li>Close the debate by thanking everyone.</li> </ul> <p><u>Note:</u> Having time, open for comments from the audience.</p>