



# Leadership through Persuasion

## *A Debate Manual for Young Professionals*

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## *Foreword* | John Hamre

Much in the world we see or touch started off as an idea in the mind of one person. This holds true for public policy as well. The challenge in a complex democracy is to transform the ideas in one person's mind into the policy directions for a nation. Debate plays an essential, fundamental role in this process. Debates are the means by which ideas are forged through competition into better ideas, and ultimately into public policy. Essays and books are important, but they are not dynamically interactive. That is why laws in this country are made after legislative debate. This is the forge of modern democracy.

Debate is also fundamental to our work at CSIS. I frequently describe CSIS as a predominantly bottom-up organization, one fueled by good ideas rather than partisan ideology or professional status. When these good ideas come from our junior staff or interns—as they often do—it is a result not only of their considerable individual talents, but also of our institutional commitment to the cultivation of creativity and rigorous critical thinking. Constructive and energetic debate is an invaluable tool in developing this critical thinking.

When I started as president and CEO of CSIS in 2000, debate was a modest, ad hoc effort involving perhaps four debates a year, conducted in an intercollegiate, two-team format. I was eager to see the effort significantly expanded so that more of the Center's young leaders could receive the tremendous benefits of instruction and coaching in debate fundamentals. The opportunity arose with our Abshire-Inamori Leadership Academy (AILA) and creation of a debate clinic directed until recently by Bill Taylor. The AILA staff provides complete management support; "debate interns," selected from among national intercollegiate, championship-level debaters, do all debate teaching and coaching.

Debate has become a fixture at CSIS. Our three annual debate clinics, involving 48 interns, are among the most successful components of AILA's professional-development efforts, and this success will only continue to grow. Although it was created here, the CSIS-AILA speed-debate model can and should serve as a guide to similar programs for young professionals throughout government, business, and academia. This AILA Debate Clinic manual, produced for the first time, is an excellent blueprint for such efforts.



## *Preface* | Bill Taylor

*“Leadership.” A word used frequently enough, but what does it mean?*

If a presenter asks his or her audience, even senior corporate officials, for a definition, the reply is most often silence. Those who put this manual together do agree generally on a definition that reflects the organizational environment in which they work—an environment that has been created and shaped primarily by a cofounder of CSIS in 1962, David M. Abshire, by current CSIS president and CEO John Hamre, and by the senior distinguished advisers on the CSIS board.

Our ALLA Debate Clinic is based in large part on Dwight D. Eisenhower’s (politically corrected) definition that “Leadership is the ability to get people to do things you want done because they want to do them.” The latter part of that definition clearly provides a major role for persuasion (from the Latin *per suasio* or “through sweetness”) as opposed to coercion or pressure. This is the major function of debate, which is defined in Webster’s Dictionary as “the direct contest of ideas on given propositions designed to persuade an audience.” In debate, ideas are developed and presented via “arguments” based on reason, logic, and evidence and shaped or tailored to appeal to particular audiences. Of course, audiences vary widely depending on the individuals, organizations, groups, missions, and causes involved—for example, debate judges in intercollegiate tournaments, judges and juries in law courts, superiors in government or business organizations, product consumers, military colleagues, or even potential partners in marriage. To “know your audience” and shape your style or persona in delivery is important. The variables in persuasion, especially when challenged by competition, are numerous. Those who have experienced these kinds of challenges and learned from them—especially through debate—most often develop self-confidence and can overcome the natural fear of “getting out front,” especially in win-lose situations. Many potential employers understand and value this capability.

Leaders with solid debate experience understand that persuading others to follow their ideas and examples often is more than a one-time initiative. Others are more likely to buy into the organizational mission if they know that the mission was well thought out, substantiated, and thoroughly vetted by all levels of staff. Such leadership develops organizational bonds of trust, respect, and camaraderie, where “doing the right thing” is habitual.

As you move through this manual, keep Ike’s definition in mind:  
*“Leadership is the ability to get people to do things you want done because they want to do them.”*

“Competitive debate is the most educational activity in which I have ever been involved. Debate is not simply public speaking, although it certainly hones the ability to present complex ideas clearly and comprehensibly. It also teaches research and critical thinking skills in a way that no other endeavor can match. By harnessing academic pursuits to the natural competitive drive, it motivates students to teach themselves and each other.”

—*Jonathan Massey, Partner,  
Massey & Gail LLP*

## *Leadership through Persuasion* | Debate Theory

This manual is split into two sections—debate theory and debate practice. The description of debate theory encompasses big-picture topics such as the definition of debate and components of an argument, as well as advanced debate strategy.

### WHAT IS DEBATE?

At its most basic level, debate is about convincing someone to agree with an idea you have proposed. Most people engage in informal debates every day, in various settings—during meetings, at conferences, and in interpersonal discussions. The most persuasive advocates get their ideas enacted, their decisions approved, and their opinions endorsed. Understood broadly as a set of advocacy skills, debate expertise would benefit all kinds of people in all types of professions.

This text concentrates primarily on formal, structured debates. These debates usually happen in competitive settings with limitations on speech times and topics of discussion, as in intercollegiate or U.S. presidential debates. By using formal debates as a training ground, we can develop a suite of portable skills useful in many informal situations.

Before we begin, it is important to remember that debate, in any context, is a special kind of communication. First, debate is about arguing and persuading, not about speaking to an audience who already agrees with you. “Preaching to the choir,” while important in some settings, does not change minds or policies. Second, debate is about using logical arguments to support some course of action, not merely speaking as eloquently as possible. Good public speakers are not necessarily effective advocates. Speaking style is important, but content is paramount. Third, debate is about engaging in a back-and-forth deliberation, not simply delivering a persuasive speech. Speakers in forums that feature presentations from opposing sides often end up “talking past each other,” emphasizing their talking points but ignoring the arguments from their opponents. This text presents a type of debate where each side actively engages the other speaker or team.

### Debate is...

- Persuading an audience,
- Speaking logically; and
- Engaging in back-and-forth deliberation.

### Debate is not...

- Preaching to the choir;
- Speaking eloquently but vacuously; or
- Delivering a persuasive monologue.

## THE ELEMENTS OF PERSUASION

The fundamental goal of debate is persuasion—convincing a relatively neutral audience that your opinion is superior to your opponent's. Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* theorizes three modes of persuasion: *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*.

- *Logos* functions through appeals to reason and logic;
- *Ethos* functions through establishing the believability and credibility of the speaker; and
- *Pathos* functions through appeals to emotion.

Since debate training involves learning the principles of rational argument, it is tempting to assume that debate functions primarily through *logos*. In reality, not all audiences are sufficiently knowledgeable to evaluate arguments on a purely logical basis—despite their best efforts. The result is that *ethos* and *pathos* inevitably play important roles in successful debating. Good debaters must have a strong command of *ethos* and *pathos*, and they must be able to deploy it differently depending on the audience.

For demonstration purposes, this manual walks through some arguments that may occur in a debate about “Global Zero”—whether the United States should pursue the abolition of nuclear weapons. Like all good debate topics, one can imagine many persuasive arguments on either side.

In this context, take the argument that pursuing “Global Zero” is necessary to avoid miscalculation that causes nuclear war. When talking to a knowledgeable audience, one may choose to emphasize the numerous near-misses throughout history (such as the Cuban Missile Crisis), appealing to *ethos* by casting the speaker as a history buff. When talking to an audience of non-specialists, by contrast, that same speaker may choose to emphasize the destruction caused by nuclear weapons—appealing to *pathos* by making the audience fearful of nuclear war.

In both cases, the fundamental argument is the same, but the modes of persuasion are different. *Logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* are appropriately balanced in each case to appeal to a specific audience. Successful debaters, through experience, refine their ability to perceive the leanings of a given audience and tailor their presentation appropriately.

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With ideas and information exchanged more rapidly and succinctly than ever through tweets and sound bites, debate uniquely harnesses your competitive drive so you can see the big picture. In order to win a debate, you have to learn how to separate strategically important arguments from interesting facts, while rapidly constructing a narrative to convince observers how your way makes the world a better place. No activity has ever taught me how to see and communicate the larger puzzle into which those pieces fit like competitive debate.

”

—Alex Lennon, *Editor in Chief,*  
*The Washington Quarterly*

## WHAT MAKES A COMPLETE ARGUMENT?

At its core, every good argument states a belief, provides a reason for that belief, and discusses the significance of that belief if it is determined to be true. So, if a speaker were advocating for a world without nuclear weapons, she may say: “The world would be better without nuclear weapons because they could cause unparalleled destruction, so we ought to pursue a global disarmament treaty with other nuclear-armed nations.” In this example, the speaker has included all three parts of a complete argument:

Belief (claim): “The world would be better without nuclear weapons

Reason (warrant): because they could cause unparalleled destruction,

Significance (impact): so we ought to pursue a global disarmament treaty with other nuclear-armed nations.”

You may have noted the parenthesized words accompanying each component of this hypothetical argument. These words are common debate-speak for the each respective argument component.

The first part is the **claim**, a statement, prediction, or position the speaker presents to the audience. By themselves, claims do not carry much weight; they are just assertions. The second part is called a **warrant**, and it provides the meat of the argument. Warrants supply reasons the claim should be accepted. Finally, the significance of the claim-warrant combination is its **impact**, which may be a predicted consequence of or a recommended response to the argument. Ideally, the impact offers both.

As another example, take the following statement responding to the first speaker’s argument: “Disarmament treaties are impractical because the incentive for signatories to cheat will be too high. The United States should avoid such treaties; at best they would be unenforceable for all nations, and at worst they would benefit a handful of cheaters.” We can break this statement down into its claim-warrant-impact pieces:

Claim: “Disarmament treaties are impractical

Warrant: because the incentive for signatories to cheat will be too high.

Impact: The United States should avoid such treaties; at best they would be unenforceable for all nations, and at worst they would benefit a handful of cheaters.”

In both examples, the debaters' arguments would have been unpersuasive had they stopped after the claim. Read just the claims again. "The world would be better without nuclear weapons"; "But disarmament treaties are impractical." Such a debate feels shallow. Also notice that each warrant began with the word "because." This is not a necessary transition word, but it serves as a helpful flag. When crafting your own arguments, there should be some place where inserting the word "because" would make logical sense. If such a spot does not exist, you may not have a warrant. Similarly, the impact attempts to answer the question "so what?" Why should we care if the claim and warrant are true? An argument cannot be persuasive and impactful without a "so what?"—that is, an impact.

There are a variety of ways to offer support for beliefs, but every good argument must contain a statement of belief and reasons to believe that statement. Better yet, include the implication of that statement. What do you think, why do you think it, and why should someone care? If your argument can answer those three questions, then you are on the right track.

## MAKING CAUSAL ARGUMENTS

The structure of an argument outlined above can be applied to any controversial statement in any field, including historical, scientific, or mathematical arguments. For people in the field of public policy, however, debates often focus on the desirability of a particular course of action. In these contexts, it is useful to have a model for arguing over the *consequences* of a proposed policy.

Predicting consequences can be thought of as a chain. A causes B, B causes C, C causes D, and so on until Z occurs. In debate parlance, each link in the chain is called, not surprisingly, a **link**. Continuing with our "Global Zero" example, imagine that the first speaker has offered the following claim: "Abolishing nuclear weapons will free up billions of dollars in national budgets." The link in this example is that disarming causes governments to have more money for other expenditures.

What the speaker has failed to do so far, however, is identify an impact; there's no "so what?" A complete response to the question "so what?" must demonstrate that the link is both (a) important and (b) timely. Let's take each of these characteristics in turn.

First, why is extra money important? What if countries spent the money on researching even deadlier weapons? To prove that their preferred policy causes something good to happen, debaters must win that the consequence is desirable. So, this speaker might say, “Abolishing nuclear weapons will free up billions of dollars in national budgets to use for other beneficial programs such as education and health care.” In debate jargon, the importance of a proposition is its **impact**.

Second, why is extra money timely? What if government budgets are flush with cash? To prove their preferred policy change is urgent, debaters must argue that the important result will not happen without their proposed plan. For example, making a large campaign donation to a candidate in a small, local election may sway the vote in a close race. But if one candidate was already extremely likely to win, then it would be inaccurate to say that an additional donation to the leading candidate was the likely “cause” of his or her electoral victory. Simply put, you cannot cause something that is going to happen anyway. Following this lesson, a debater could complete his or her position by arguing: “Abolishing nuclear weapons will free up billions of dollars in national budgets to use for other beneficial programs such as education and health care, which are currently being cut because of political pressure surrounding the national debt.” This component of *timeliness* is called **uniqueness**.

To recap, a causal argument has three parts: uniqueness, link, and impact. We can describe each term as follows:

Link: The proposal will cause something to happen.

IMPACT: THAT OUTCOME IS IMPORTANT AND DESIRABLE.

*Uniqueness: Pursuing that outcome is urgent, since it will not be achieved now.*

If an argument is lacking any of these three components, it has not proven that the proposed policy causes a desirable outcome.

To clarify, let's diagram these components in a couple of arguments related to "Global Zero":

#### ARGUMENT 1:

Russia's nuclear weapons deployed in Europe are poorly secured and vulnerable to terrorist theft—WHICH COULD RESULT IN A DEVASTATING NUCLEAR ATTACK. *A U.S. commitment to "Global Zero" would convince Russia to dismantle these arms and secure or destroy their components.*

#### ARGUMENT 2:

Nuclear weapons create a world of relative parity, WHICH UNDERCUTS U.S. FREEDOM OF ACTION. *Abolishing nuclear weapons would tilt the strategic balance back to the United States, which enjoys considerable conventional superiority.*

#### ARGUMENT 3:

We could use the fuel from dismantled nuclear weapons to ease the *tightening uranium market*, allowing nuclear power to replace POLLUTANTS LIKE COAL.

As you can see, these components can be delivered in any order. The examples above are relatively skeletal. In a debate, each component of an argument requires a claim and a warrant. What reasons does the speaker offer to believe the uniqueness, link, and impact? Without warrants, this causal chain will seem shallow and poorly thought-through. But by combining claim-warrant pieces into a robust causal chain, the speaker makes a persuasive case for adopting his or her policy.

“ The best leaders and the most effective professionals I know are also the best debaters. They know how to frame an argument, how to test evidence, how to ask and answer tough, pointed questions, and how to use argument as a path to truth. We learn these skills in the laboratory of competitive debate. Time spent on building the technical skills of debate pays dividends for decades. I don't know of any academic pursuit with greater long-term value. ”

—*Jack Midgley, Director,  
Federal Strategy, Deloitte*

## INTERNALIST RESPONSES

Once one side has established its position, the other side must respond—both by directly attacking the logic of the opponent’s argument and by introducing new reasons to doubt its overall position. The internalist response does the former—attacking the other side’s argument.

### Internalist Response:

You identified the proper issues, but analyzed them incorrectly.

Although it is tempting to be thorough, one need not attack each component of an argument in order to successfully defeat it. Take, for example, an argument diagrammed above:

We could use the fuel from dismantled nuclear weapons to ease the tightening uranium market, allowing nuclear power to replace pollutants like coal.

Remember, you need cut only one link for a chain to fail. Consider the following counterarguments, for instance:

*Uniqueness: Uranium markets are not tight.* (The solution is not timely.)

Link: High construction costs—not the price of uranium—make nuclear power non-competitive, so “Global Zero” will not alter our energy mix. (Their proposal does not cause a change to occur.)

IMPACT: NEW FEDERAL REGULATIONS MEAN THAT COAL IS NO LONGER A MAJOR POLLUTANT. (The solution is not important.)

If you win any one of these three positions, the causal force of the initial argument is nullified. Keeping these concepts in mind will assist you in targeting your response on the most vulnerable component of your opponent’s position.

When making internalist arguments, it is particularly important to establish a strong ethos. Since your opponent has introduced the argument, he or she will be presumed to be more knowledgeable about it. To combat this tendency, you must convince the audience that your expertise compares to that of your opponent. The best way to do this is to emphasize the superiority and specificity of your *warrants*—the quality of sources you draw from, the data supporting your position, etc.—with reference to historical example, theory, or expertise.

## EXTERNALIST RESPONSE

The flip side of an internalist response, which refutes the other side's argument, is an externalist response, which attacks its ultimate *position*. An externalist response typically has little to do with the specific

argument advanced by your opponent. It essentially boils down to “well, that may seem like a good idea, but there’s something important that they’ve overlooked.”

For example, consider the argument that pushing “Global Zero” would improve the United States’ moral authority around the world.

### Externalist Response:

You failed to identify the proper issues, and as a result your conclusion is wrong.

An internalist response might argue that such a policy would not improve U.S. moral authority (no link), that U.S. moral authority does not influence the behavior of states (no impact), or that U.S. moral authority is already strong (no uniqueness). An externalist response would argue something totally different. It could contend, for example, that pushing Global Zero would frighten our allies, who depend on U.S. extended deterrence, making them more likely to pursue their own nuclear arsenals.

As you can see, externalist responses need not invalidate your opponent’s original position. In this case, both sides could be right—pushing Global Zero could both improve U.S. moral authority and frighten U.S. allies. That means that a different sort of comparison is in order—instead of assessing the relative validity of competing claims, one must assess the relative *significance* of competing priorities. Which is the more important objective: bolstering U.S. moral authority or preventing allies from developing nuclear weapons? This sort of argument is called **impact comparison**.

There are many ways to compare impacts. It’s fundamentally an argument about prioritization—why are your objectives more important than a competing set of objectives? One can imagine a wide range of arguments along these lines—from moral first principles to assessments of the threat environment to the interconnectedness of various negative outcomes. This essentially boils down to the relative *importance*

and *timeliness* of the priorities pursued by both sides. Consider the following examples:

- It is better to preserve U.S. moral authority. Our allies will stick with us no matter what—they have little choice, given our overwhelming power. U.S. moral authority generates goodwill among countries that may not always jump to our side—which can help us solve problems in major hotspots, such as Syria and Iran.

The goal of preserving U.S. allies is not urgent or timely. Therefore, we should prioritize preserving U.S. moral authority.

- It is better to avoid frightening our allies. While moral authority is a nice idea, it matters little to the behavior of other states, which tends to be based on cool-headed self-interest. We must maintain the trust of our allies, or they may calculate that their interests are better-served with different partners.

Making successful impact comparison enables you to use one of debate's most powerful tools—the *'even if' statement*.

This is an argument

that, *even if* significant parts of the other side's position are correct, you should still win. There are a number of reasons why this may be true, but a major one is that your impact is more significant. For example, "*even if* Global Zero risks complicating relations with NATO allies, we should still pursue it because preserving U.S. moral authority is a more important, timely objective."

U.S. moral authority is insignificant. Therefore, we should prioritize maintaining the trust of our allies.

Making successful impact comparison enables you to use one of debate's most powerful tools—the *'even if' statement*. This is an argument that, *even if* significant parts of the other side's position are correct, you should still win. There are a number of reasons why this may be true, but a major one is that your impact is more significant. For example, "*even if* Global Zero risks complicating relations with NATO allies, we should still pursue it because preserving U.S. moral authority is a more important, timely objective."

It is hard to overstate the value of ‘even if’ statements in winning debates. Remember, the audience is presumed to be relatively neutral. You may be persuaded that everything your opponent says is completely wrong, but it’s unlikely that the judge feels the same way. ‘Even if’ statements are like giving the audience instructions on how to put together a series of persuasive arguments by both sides in a way that favors you. It’s also an ethos-booster—admitting that they may win a component of their position makes you seem more reasonable, particularly to judges who are unlikely to fully side with either team.

## OFFENSE VS. DEFENSE

Any debate should have both internalist and externalist positions. A useful heuristic for thinking through these positions is the contrast between *offensive* and *defensive* arguments.

- Offensive positions are arguments that the other team’s conclusion is bad; whereas
- Defensive positions are arguments that the other team’s position is not that good.

Phrased differently, offensive arguments are reasons why their conclusion is *wrong*, whereas defensive arguments are reasons why their conclusion is *not right*. This heuristic is useful because you typically need offense in order to win a debate.

This does not mean that defense should be forsaken, however. Take, for example, the following argument: *The United States should pursue Global Zero because it will bolster U.S. nonproliferation leadership, which will avoid the collapse of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and a wave of destabilizing nuclear proliferation.* The following chart depicts a variety of potential responses, separated categorically into offense vs. defense and internalist vs. externalist.

This should not be understood as a grab-bag where any number of arguments could be used together. For example, the two positions in the offensive-internalist box are contradictory—one contending that Global Zero causes proliferation, and the other contending that proliferation is good. Clearly these two positions cannot go together.

	OFFENSE	DEFENSE
INTERNALIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reducing U.S. nuclear capabilities emboldens rogue proliferators such as Iran and North Korea.</li> <li>▪ Proliferation is stabilizing—it enhances deterrence relationships among states.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No countries are likely to develop nukes even absent U.S. leadership.</li> <li>▪ U.S. leadership is unrelated to proliferation—countries decide based on national security priorities.</li> <li>▪ Proliferation is not destabilizing.</li> </ul>
EXTERNALIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reducing U.S. nuclear capabilities will prompt a Chinese buildup, causing miscalculation over Taiwan.</li> <li>▪ The absence of nuclear deterrence will make wars appear less risky, causing great power wars.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Favoritism toward India will make U.S. nonproliferation leadership impossible regardless of nuclear weapons policy.</li> <li>▪ The global spread of nuclear energy will make the NPT irrelevant.</li> </ul>

Instead, debaters should piece together a coherent strategy that uses defense to leverage their offense. For example, the argument that countries decide to proliferate based on national security priorities (and not U.S. leadership) is defensive, and probably not sufficient to win the debate as a stand-alone position. However, when combined with the argument that Global Zero emboldens rogues, it serves as a strong reason to fear rogue proliferation resulting from U.S. weakness more than proliferation resulting from a lack of U.S. leadership. Add some impact comparison—that rogue possession of nuclear weapons is more dangerous than possession by status quo states, even if their scenario is accurate—and you have a complete, compelling strategy!

## *Leadership through Persuasion* | Debate Tactics

The following section describes how to implement the previously describe strategies for argumentation in a competitive debate round, following the model used during the CSIS Taylor Debate Clinic and Tournament.

### PREPARING

The topics used during the CSIS Taylor Debate Clinic and Tournament focus on current controversies in the news that affect the United States' foreign policy. Each topic is framed as a resolution, a public policy proposition that the affirmative argues in favor of and the negative argues against. Debaters must be prepared to take either side of the resolution. Whether a debater personally agrees with a position that he or she advocates is irrelevant: competitive debate is about persuasive, logical argumentation—not ideology.

#### Example topics include:

- Resolved: the United States should cease the use of drones in counterterrorism operations.
- Resolved: the United States should reduce its military or diplomatic support for Taiwan.
- Resolved: the United States should increase its efforts to promote a better world without nuclear weapons.

After determining the central point of controversy of the resolution, the debater should attempt to brainstorm arguments that could be made in support of his or her side. After brainstorming various arguments—following the model described in the previous section—debaters should prioritize the arguments that they consider to best support their position; this is important in light of the time constraints in a debate round. Debaters should also consider arguments that the opposing side may make. Attempt to identify potential weaknesses in your argument, as well as major indictments of your position. Use this understanding of the other side's arsenal to **refine** and fine-tune your presentation.

## DEBATING

### *Format*

While each debate will differ in the arguments presented, there are aspects that will remain constant:

- **Participants**—Four individuals participate: a two-person team defends the affirmative (arguing in support of the resolution) and a two-person team defends the negative (arguing against the resolution).
- **Speech Order**—Each debate will include four speeches: two “constructive” speeches and two “rebuttal” speeches, which alternate between the affirmative and the negative. The affirmative gives the first speech, while the negative speaks last.
- **Speaker Responsibilities**—In a given debate, each team member will speak—one giving the constructive speech, and the other giving the rebuttal speech. As a general practice, the affirmative constructive speaker should be the negative rebuttalist, and vice versa.
- **Speech Times**—Each constructive speech will last three minutes; each rebuttal will last two minutes.
- **Preparation Time**—Teams will receive two minutes of preparation time between the announcement of the resolution and the first affirmative speech. Teams will also receive two minutes of preparation time after the constructive speeches, prior to the rebuttal speeches.
- **Question and Answer (“Cross-Examination”)**—After each constructive speech, a one-minute cross-examination period will take place. After the first affirmative constructive, the negative rebuttalist will ask the affirmative speaker questions. After the first negative constructive, the affirmative rebuttalist will ask the negative speaker questions.

Two 2-person teams, one affirmative and one negative.

Preparation time—2 minutes

**Affirmative Constructive (AC)—3 minutes**

Cross-examination of AC—1 minute

**Negative Constructive (NC)—3 minutes**

Cross-examination of NC—1 minute

Preparation time—2 minutes

**Affirmative Rebuttal (AR)—2 minutes**

**Negative Rebuttal (NR)—2 minutes**

“ Debate is not just for aspiring lawyers or politicians. It’s not obvious from the outside, but the process of writing TV shows and feature films is surprisingly similar to that of crafting a debate argument. Both involve creating a logical, consistent structure that, in a limited amount of time, succeeds in persuading or moving an audience. Without question, my experience assembling debate arguments has proven my most useful training for a career of assembling scenes into a coherent, compelling plot. ”

—*Chris Keyser, President,  
Writers Guild of America West*

## *General Speaker Responsibilities*

Each debater will be responsible for the following:

- **Taking Notes**—Debaters should write down the points made by the other side and by their own partner. The note-taking process will be described in greater detail below.
- **Making Arguments**—Each debater will be responsible for developing or elaborating upon arguments that support his or her position.
- **Answer Opposing Arguments**—Debaters should make an effort to respond to every argument presented by the opposing side; arguments that are unanswered are considered “true.”
- **Switch Sides**—Each debate team will be required to both affirm and negate the resolution. As such, debaters must be willing and able to advocate positions that they may personally disagree with.

## *Specific Speaker Responsibilities—Constructives*

The affirmative constructive speech sets the stage for the debate. During this speech, the affirmative presents a set of arguments about why the judge should endorse a policy change that is consistent with the resolution.

In order to convince the judge to vote affirmative, the affirmative team must first describe why maintaining the status quo is undesirable, outlining the potential harms that could result from inaction. The speaker must then outline why affirming the resolution may alleviate these harms. Each of these harms—called “advantages”—presents the judge with a reason to vote affirmative. This constructive should aim to have one or two “advantages” of affirming the resolution. With any remaining time, the affirmative speaker should anticipate and respond to potential negative arguments.

The speech should begin with a brief, attention-grabbing preview of your arguments in order to bolster your ethos. The overview also provides the affirmative speaker the opportunity to set the terms for the debate by defining the scope of the resolution.

After the speech, the affirmative speaker will be cross-examined by the negative rebuttalist.

### Affirmative constructive:

- Present a specific proposal
- Isolate 1-2 advantages
- Anticipate major negative responses

The job of the negative constructive is to prove that affirming the resolution produces more harms than advantages. During this speech, the negative team must present reasons to oppose the resolution and respond to the arguments advanced by the affirmative.

- In order to convince the judge to vote negative, the speaker should advance a variety of “offensive” and “defensive” arguments. These can include:
- Provide arguments for why maintaining the status quo is more desirable than affirming the resolution (offense);
- Describe why the current state of affairs relating to the resolution is sufficiently desirable (defense);
- Advance arguments about how affirming the resolution could either worsen the harms that the affirmative aims to solve or cause other negative, unintended consequences (offense);
- Explicitly answer each affirmative advantage. The negative could provide arguments for why: the affirmative cannot solve the advantage (defense); the harms outlined by the affirmative are manageable or exaggerated (defense); and/or why the affirmative worsens the harms (offense).

The negative may also wish to respond to the affirmative team’s definition of the scope of the resolution by offering a different interpretation of what the topic means.

After the speech, the negative speaker will be cross-examined by the affirmative rebuttalist.

### Negative constructive:

- Answer all affirmative advantages
- Advance 1-2 disadvantages to the affirmative

## *Specific Speaker Responsibilities—Rebuttals*

The **affirmative rebuttal** should briefly explain and reiterate the harms connected to maintaining the status quo, in addition to the advantages of affirming to resolution—while responding to the negative’s arguments.

Where the negative has attacked the affirmative advantages (the harms or the solvency), the rebuttalist should try to bolster their position in order to overcome the negative’s objections. To give time for this additional depth, the rebuttalist may wish to focus on one advantage.

Where the negative has introduced disadvantages, the rebuttalist should attempt to demonstrate that affirming the resolution does not produce the negative externalities outlined by the opposing team. If possible, the rebuttalist could make arguments for why affirming the resolution could manage or prevent the unintended consequences introduced by the negative.

This speech also provides an opportunity for the rebuttalist to assess the relative importance of the advantages and the disadvantages. The rebuttalist should seek to answer the question of why the affirmative should win, even if the negative team wins their best argument.

The affirmative rebuttalist should respond to new negative positions, but their argument should be consistent with that advanced by the affirmative constructive.

### **Affirmative rebuttal:**

- Select one advantage to reiterate
- Respond to negative disadvantages
- Defend the relative importance of your advantage

The **negative rebuttal** should reiterate the desirability of the status quo and the undesirability of affirming the resolution—while responding to the affirmative’s arguments.

The negative rebuttalist should narrow the debate, focusing on the best offensive arguments (disadvantages) against the affirmative. The rebuttalist should reinforce their position by contesting affirmative responses to the

disadvantage. The negative rebuttalist should couple this position with a restatement of their arguments against the affirmative advantages.

Similar to the affirmative rebuttal, this speech provides an opportunity for the rebuttalist to assess the relative impact of the advantages and disadvantages. The rebuttalist should answer the question of why the negative should win, even if the affirmative team wins its best argument.

The negative rebuttalist should avoid introducing topics that had not been previously discussed, remaining consistent with the general approach of the negative constructive.

### Negative rebuttal:

- Select one disadvantage to reiterate
- Respond to the affirmative advantage
- Defend the relative importance of your disadvantage

## *Other Speaker Responsibilities*

As noted above, following each constructive speech, the speaker will be subject to a **cross-examination** by the rebuttalist on the opposing team. The cross-examination period, while brief, has the potential to dramatically shape the course of the debate; the cross-examination allows for the rebuttalist to expose weaknesses and/or extract strategic concessions from the constructive speaker.

The rebuttalist—the one asking questions—should keep the following tips in mind:

- Strategy—Determine questions that can weaken the argument(s) of the opposing team and bolster your position(s). Prioritize your most important questions. Be sure to have follow-up questions that you can ask. Avoid asking open-ended questions—you should always know (roughly) what your opponent's response will be. Remain cautious when asking questions: do not let the opposing

team use the question to bolster its case. Keep your aims limited, as the opposing side will never concede to a question. Finally, anticipate the opposing side's evasiveness in answering questions.

- **Presentation**—Face the judge during the cross-examination period and make eye contact. Remember, you are trying to persuade the judge; you are unlikely to persuade your opponent.
- **Efficiency**—Be concise when asking questions because you have limited time. Do not waste time restating the position of the opposing team.

When answering questions, you should keep the following in mind:

- **Strategy**—Be aware that the opposing speaker is trying to identify flaws in your argument. Be direct in answering the speaker's questions, yet unwilling to readily concede points. Use the cross-examination period to elaborate upon the arguments contained in your speech.
- **Presentation**—Face the judge, not your opponent, during the cross-examination period.
- **Efficiency**—Exploit open-ended questions posed by the questioner by giving lengthy, detailed responses.

**Note-taking** in debate—also referred to as “flowing”—is extremely important. Flowing allows you to keep an organized account of all of the arguments made in the debate. By doing so, you can more easily identify all of the arguments that you need to respond to and craft organized rebuttal speeches that address those arguments.

While taking notes, you should develop shorthand that efficiently captures important points made by the other team. One simple example: you should never fully write “United States”; you should always write “US.” Another example: if the topic pertains to nuclear weapons, you should abbreviate them to “NWs.”

Most debaters flow in adjacent columns from left-to-right on a page. By doing so, you can line arguments up from one speech to the next. An example flow can be found below.

# Resolved: The United States should pursue global abolition of nuclear weapons.

Affirmative Constructive	Negative Constructive	Affirmative Rebuttal	Negative Rebuttal
The US should pursue global abolition of nuclear weapons			
Continued posession of nuclear weapons is a global danger: it risks accidental or miscalculated launch	Accidents are unlikely due to safety mechanisms	Even if safety mechanisms work in most instances, they are not universally implemented - for example, Pakistan, Russia, NK, etc.	Countries implement effective safety mechanisms because nuclear weapons are expensive and dangerous - even seemingly irrational states protect their nuclear weapons
Nuclear war = results in millions - if not billions of deaths - must do everything possible to prevent it	The nuclear taboo checks use	The nuclear taboo will fail if the lauch is miscalculated - for example, early-warning systems could be spoofed	Red lines and hot lines prevent nuclear use and escalation
			The nuclear taboo means no intentional use
		Even a low-risk of nuclear war justifies voting aff since the impact of nuclear war would be catastrophic	
Nuclear weapons cost billions of dollars that could otherwise be used for health care, education, etc.	Savings from nuclear weapons wouldn't be dedicated to social issues - we would spend the savings on other defense programs		
Cutting nuclear weapons won't hurt national defense -- the US will maintain conventional superiority			Conventional weapons are distinct--nations don't feel as secure with conventional weapons as compared to nuclear weapons
	US nuclear cuts scare allies - they perceive that we can't protect them	The US would shift to protecting allies with conventional weapons - which would assuage their concerns	
	Feelings of abandonment cause Japan and South Korea to develop nucelar programs	Other countries would model US nuclear weapons cuts - so Japan and South Korea wouldn't have any reason to feel threatened	China and NK would keep their nuclear weapons because they want military superiority over the US
	Development of those nuclear programs causes instability and conflict in East Asia		
			Continued Chinese and North Korean possession of nuclear weapons at the same time as US nuclear disarmament causes Japan and South Korea to nuclearize out of fear - generates regional instability and is the greatest chance of nuclear war and conventional conflict

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A background in competitive debate is invaluable for careers in government relations and strategic communications. Debate teaches ways of developing arguments, understanding complicated literature, and comparing relative strengths and weaknesses of client and opponent positions. More importantly, debate allows its participants to analyze a topic in real time, moving message to market persuasively and quickly. I have found over and over again that including debaters on our team—or imparting debate skills to those that are not alumni of the activity—is a great pathway to success in government relations or in framing issues for the media.

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—*Scott Segal, Founding Partner,  
Policy Resolution Group,  
Bracewell & Giuliani LLP*

## Conclusion

The purpose of this manual has been to help you understand the fundamentals of debate. It's important, however, that you not overlook the most crucial factor in becoming a successful debater: actually debating! Getting out there and arguing is not only fun and educational, it will allow you to look past the ideological talking points that govern much of contemporary U.S. political discourse. In the art of debate, practice really does make perfect—it will refine your understanding of the concepts presented here, and more importantly, help you hone your presentation skills.

## Background

This Abshire-Inamori Leadership Academy Debate Clinic Manual was the idea of Jack Midgley, a Deloitte LP director and CSIS adjunct senior fellow. He thought it wise to assemble and make available in a single document teaching materials needed by clinic teachers, interns, and interested observers. The manual might also serve as a guide for creating similar clinics for young professionals in various types of institutions where leadership development carries a high premium.

Interest in debate at CSIS began to escalate in the early 1980s, when Bill Taylor, director of national security studies and director of debate at West Point, retired from the Army to become CSIS senior vice president and director of the Political-Military Studies Program. Bill brought into his program a few younger scholars who had been intercollegiate debaters, such as Jim Blackwell from West Point and research assistants Mike Mazarr from Georgetown and Alex Lennon from Harvard. Each carried out primary program assignments while attending part-time graduate degree programs.

In 1996, one of the research assistants, Alex Lennon, now editor in chief of *The Washington Quarterly*, volunteered to work with the director of human resources to create an informal process for selecting each year a “Taylor Debate Intern.” Via Alex’s informal network of identifying and recommending interns into the formal selection process, a steady stream of highly qualified former intercollegiate debaters (19 over the past 16 years) entered one of the CSIS programs and assisted in coaching intern debaters as an additional duty. All who applied for a research assistant position have been selected. Some of them coached a few interns each semester on public policy topics and helped arrange one or two standard intercollegiate-format debates per semester with teams from other think tanks in the Washington, D.C., area. The intern debates held in evenings at CSIS were unique in Washington. They always drew large audiences and the teams were outstanding.

When CSIS president John Hamre watched one of the debates in 2005, he was impressed with the performance of a CSIS team competing against a team from another think tank—four fine young interns debating in the normal one-hour format before an audience of about 80—and expressed his appreciation enthusiastically. He asked Bill Taylor and Linda Jamison—dean of the recently inaugurated Abshire-

Inamori Leadership Academy (AILA)—whether we could capitalize on our efforts by expanding the numbers of interns we trained, transforming our speed-debate tournaments into “debate rodeos.” Bill Taylor was asked to reorganize his debate efforts to become one of the new leadership initiatives under AILA, and moved quickly to put in place the Debate Clinic. Since 2006, CSIS has trained 16 interns per semester—48 during the year—in “speed debate” (a CSIS invention) and has hosted three outstanding debate tournaments each year for CSIS intern teams and teams from institutions ranging from other think tanks to the World Bank to the Georgetown School of Foreign Service.

The time devoted to focused and effective speed-debate coaching, learning, and practicing is made possible by the leadership and management practices of AILA dean Karen Meacham and her marvelous staff. Support of the debate effort is center-wide. In seven lunchtime meetings and one evening debate tournament, new director Eli Jacobs and the other clinic coaches employ an effective, active-learning methodology for argumentation, combined with technologies that permit, for example, recording and uploading videos for debaters to watch and critique their own presentation techniques and styles.

The system works, according to colleagues and managers who work with those individuals with enough talent to be selected for a CSIS internship. CSIS program directors have found over the years that the kinds of interns who volunteer for AILA debate are young winners across the board. They are especially welcome in CSIS, where it is understood that brains are not issued with age or rank.

“ For a research scientist, debate teaches critical skills. One learns how evidence is used in the formulation of an argument. This is as important when analyzing scientific data as it is in evaluating the evidentiary basis for political arguments. Indeed, the skills one gets from debate helps to sensitize the listener to the inappropriate use of evidence—to instances when a finding is being oversold given the underlying data. Further, debate provides the training required to translate often highly technical material in a way that it can be widely understood, such that its significance can be appreciated. ”

—*David Glass, Executive Director, Muscle Diseases, Novartis*

## About the Authors

JOHN HAMRE was elected president and CEO of CSIS in January 2000. Before joining CSIS, he served as the 26th U.S. deputy secretary of defense. Prior to holding that post, he was the under secretary of defense (comptroller) from 1993 to 1997. As comptroller, Dr. Hamre was the principal assistant to the secretary of defense for the preparation, presentation, and execution of the defense budget and management improvement programs. In 2007, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates appointed Dr. Hamre to serve as chairman of the Defense Policy Board.

WILLIAM (BILL) TAYLOR is a retired CSIS senior adviser in the International Security Program. He was professor, director of national security studies, and director of debate at West Point. He has extensive experience both debating before government, academic, and corporate groups, and coaching debate, most recently as director of the Abshire-Inamori Leadership Academy Debate Clinic. A former U.S. Army colonel, he served in tank and rifle battalions in Germany, Korea, and Vietnam, where he was decorated for heroism.

KAREN MEACHAM is dean of the Abshire-Inamori Leadership Academy (AILA) and director of educational outreach for CSIS. She oversees a number of education-related initiatives including speaker series and training sessions for young professionals; executive education for embassies, corporations and universities; and the Seven Revolutions Program focusing on global trends looking out to 2030. Previously, she helped stand up the CSIS Global Health Policy Center, where she served as deputy director for two years.

ELI JACOBS is director of the Abshire-Inamori Leadership Academy (AILA) debate clinic and a research assistant and program coordinator in the Defense and National Security Group at CSIS, where he specializes in nuclear and biological weapons. He was a member of the debate partnership ranked second in the nation at Harvard, where he continues to work as an assistant debate coach.

SARAH WEINER is a research intern with CSIS's Project on Nuclear Issues and the 2012 William J. Taylor Debate intern at CSIS. She received her bachelor's degree in political science from the University of California, Berkeley, where she competed as an intercollegiate debater for four years and was ranked nationally among the top 10 debate teams and top 10 individual speakers at the 2012 National Debate Tournament.

MATT FISHER is a research assistant and project coordinator at the CSIS Global Health Policy Center, where he focuses on U.S. global HIV/AIDS policy, the global health policies of emerging powers, and U.S. global water and sanitation policy. He is a National Debate Tournament champion and finalist, and continues to work as an assistant debate coach for his alma mater, Northwestern University.



## About CSIS

For 50 years, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has developed solutions to the world's greatest policy challenges. As we celebrate this milestone, CSIS scholars are developing strategic insights and bipartisan policy solutions to help decisionmakers chart a course toward a better world.

CSIS is a nonprofit organization headquartered in Washington, DC. The Center's 220 full-time staff and large network of affiliated scholars conduct research and analysis and develop policy initiatives that look into the future and anticipate change.

Founded at the height of the Cold War by David M. Abshire and Admiral Arleigh Burke, CSIS was dedicated to finding ways to sustain American prominence and prosperity as a force for good in the world. Since 1962, CSIS has become one of the world's preeminent international institutions focused on defense and security; regional stability; and transnational challenges ranging from energy and climate to global health and economic integration.

Former U.S. senator Sam Nunn has chaired the CSIS Board of Trustees since 1999. Former U.S. deputy secretary of defense John J. Hamre became the Center's president and chief executive officer in April 2000.