



Debate
Hub

The Fundamentals Debating Course: A Guide





How the Fundamentals Debating Course Works

Who Is this course for?

The fundamentals debating course is designed for students who are new to competitive debating- it is about experience, not skill. At South Hampstead, every student regardless of natural talent does the full year of fundamentals training before progressing to either our intermediate or advanced training.

The reason for this is that even students with absurd natural talent- great world knowledge, sharp minds, confidence- benefit the most from learning these fundamental concepts. An analogy we sometimes use is any martial art, as physical gifts matter a lot in combat. If a student arrives new to Ju-Jitsu, eighteen years old, six foot three, 18 stone of muscle they are of course going to always win against another novice who is forty years old, five foot six and ten stone. But both students, while of unequal fighting ability, have the same level of experience and need to learn the same basic things to improve. Just because a student can win debates does not mean they should focus on advanced concepts.

Fundamentals is also the course where students will improve the most. The biggest difference in debating is not between an intermediate and advanced debater, it's between someone at the start of the fundamentals course and someone at the end. In the past, we have had the unfortunate experience of some students trying to skip fundamentals and sit in the intermediate or advanced training. They always learn less, and slower. Fundamentals is the most valuable course for a simple reason:

Most debates are won by the teams not doing anything fancy, but just absolutely nailing the basics. Relevant arguments, explained well, while engaging with the other teams in the debate.

What resources does debate hub provide for fundamentals?

- Lesson plans, designed for 60-90 minute sessions with classes of five-twenty five.
- Micro lesson videos that you can watch yourself or share with students. These correspond to, but do not exactly replicate, the lesson plans.
- The power points we used for our video lessons, for you to use when teaching. (Edit them and tailor them for your classes.)
- Three Kahoots
- Our extensive motion list, tagged with categories for ability level as well as genre
- Our debating podcast

Coming soon, recorded debates to watch, learn from and judge.





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Practice and Training

Our best advice is to have a lunchtime club and an after-school club, both running weekly all year. The lunchtime club should be a place to discuss issues or have a casual debate- probably in an intuitive format like the SHHS format. Time is limited so have ten minutes for preparation and two or three minutes for each speech. There is a big advantage to running multiple concurrent debates across a few classrooms with helpful older students supervising- more practice. There is also an advantage to just having one debate and everyone else watching- a crowd makes it fun. We tend to opt for the former, but many of our partner schools do the latter.

While lunchtime should be fun practice, after school sessions should be more serious. We recommend weekly after school sessions that last at least an hour, ideally 75-90 minutes. These sessions should alternate between lessons and practice debates. As most of our students who attend after school also attend lunchtime practice and because we run so many competitions at SHHS, our after-school sessions go two weeks of training, one week of practice. If you are doing relatively few competitions or struggle to get attendance at lunchtime, you may want to do a practice session every other week.

If you are not sure how to set up quick practice debates for lunchtime or training, we have a video on that entitled 'Tips for coaches 1- Setting up practice debates'

The Lesson Plans

The lesson plans were written to be accessible to teachers who have never been involved in debating before and have never coached before. Most teachers who get into debating were not debaters themselves and started with nothing but guesswork and a can-do attitude. That takes you very far!

Most of the lessons examine one skill or aspect of debating in detail, then suggest a focused practice activity. The majority of all training sessions should be practicing skills and doing drills. This will be what the students enjoy the most and it is easy to teach- set up the drill, watch them and give encouragement and advice.

Judge as many of the lunchtime practice debates as you can and keep giving the basic feedback '*explain your points, why are they true, why are they important.*'

Remember. No one expects teachers to be expert debaters or world champion public speakers. That's not needed to be an excellent coach. You are a facilitator, you are giving students opportunities to practice and a small amount of guidance





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Developing as a coach

Debating can seem an impenetrable world of debating experts who are also weird and speak in strange jargon. It is a niche game and some people have been in it a long time, but it's a very friendly world and once you penetrate the surface layer, you realise it really isn't that deep or complex.

We offer an online CPD course where teachers meet online once a half term to discuss various coaching topics, led by the Director of Debate Hub, Michael Hepburn.

There are lots of good ways to develop as a coach. Our podcast is designed for coaches and students alike, with many episodes focused on best coaching practice, not how to debate. Watch our micro lessons if you are interested, they are not only for students. Going to competitions is a great way to develop as a coach, talk to other teachers, listen to judges' feedback and watch a debate each round, you will learn a lot.

Our best advice to anyone using this course

- **Make it your own.** Some activities and lessons will work great for your students and their level, and you'll want to re-use them every term. Others, maybe not so much. We recommend weekly practice, maybe you can only do fortnightly. We like BP as a format, maybe there are not many BP competitions near you. Adapt our ideas and suggestions to your school. Trust your instincts.
- **Any debating is good.** It can be easy to get caught up in all the technicalities of formats. If there is a space in your school for young people to come along, express some opinions, engage in serious issues, and build confidence, you are changing their lives for the better. It doesn't matter if the format you use is different than the one Oxford does.
- **Go to competitions.** Nothing motivates students more than competitions and they are so much fun. Yes, your students will lose some debates, and some will stress out or get upset. But if they have done a half term of weekly practice and lessons with you, they are ready to get their feet wet.
- **Enjoy the ride.** Running a debate club- a real, competitive, popular debate club- is such a rush. It can be hard work, but it is so worth it. We love debating. We think you will too.

