



INTRODUCTION

When was the last time that you debated?

Was it today? Yesterday? Perhaps even last week?

If you said, “never”, you are wrong. Everyone has debated, and almost everyone has debated more recently than they think. If you said, “never”, or “not since the end of the last debating season”, you obviously think of debating as something formal; an activity involving two teams of three speakers each, with a set topic and an adjudicator. That is certainly one style of debating – the style discussed in this book. However, it is not the only style. Debating is all around us; on the television, in the newspapers, and in our own homes. As a society, we debate about almost everything - from tax reform to mowing the lawn. Debating is everywhere, and everyone can do it.

What’s more, *debating is fun!* Debating gives you the chance to meet new people and new ideas. Best of all, you have the opportunity to stand up and argue with someone in public, in a stimulating and organised dispute about real issues. That’s what this book is about – improving your skills of formal argument. Hopefully, this book will help you to develop the right skills and strategies to be a successful debater. Most of all, this book should help you to make debating fun.

This is a book to make debating as simple as possible. Many people imagine that debating becomes more complicated and more abstract as debaters develop. It should not. Instead, even if topics become more abstract and the subject matter more technical, the debating itself should become simpler. There is very little skill required to make a complicated concept sound complicated. The challenge is to make complicated concepts easy to follow and simple to understand. It is a challenge that all debaters should set themselves. It is certainly a challenge I set myself in writing this book.

How to use this book

Very few skills can be learned by reading alone. If you are learning to play the piano, you need to sit down and start striking the keys; if you want to play cricket, you need to pick up a bat. The same is true of debating. You can’t learn debating simply by reading a book – you need to stand up and ‘give it a go’. Only by ‘giving it a go’ – by

putting theory into practice – will you really understand the challenges and techniques of good debating.

This book is written for all debaters – from those who have never debated before to those who have significant experience. It is also written for the people who coach and support them. However, this does *not* mean that every section of this book will be relevant or helpful for every debater and every coach. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, and the process of learning how to debate is indeed a journey.

For this reason, many concepts in this book are divided into ‘levels’. There are three levels: ‘beginner’, ‘intermediate’ and ‘advanced’.

‘BEGINNER’ refers to debaters who have limited or no experience. If you are about to start debating, or you have only debated for one or two years, this is probably the level for you.

‘INTERMEDIATE’ refers to debaters who understand the basics well. If you have debated for more than two years, this is probably the level for you.

‘ADVANCED’ refers to debaters who understand the basics completely, who are very comfortable with the ‘INTERMEDIATE’ techniques, and who are looking for a challenge. If you are debating in a strong senior side at school, or you are in a representative team, this is probably your level.

I suggest that you only read up to your ‘level’. If you are a ‘BEGINNER’, read that level. If you consider yourself ‘INTERMEDIATE’, read the ‘BEGINNER’ *and* ‘INTERMEDIATE’ sections. If you are ‘ADVANCED’, read the entire book! I suggest that coaches read up to the level of the team that they are coaching.

Hopefully, no part of this book is particularly complicated. It is entirely possible that a new debater might read the ‘ADVANCED’ sections and think, “I understand that! I will follow those techniques in my next debate!”. However, this misses the point. Understanding the words and concepts of a section is one thing: it is another thing to know how and when to use specific techniques. Debating techniques are something that you, as a debater, need to ‘come to’ in your own time and with your own experience. My suggestion, therefore, is simple: ***Read up to your ‘level’. Go away and debate – try to put the techniques from your ‘level’ into practice. When you are comfortable with those techniques, come back and read the next ‘level’.***

In this way, this book should stay relevant for your debating as you improve. This book is not an instant ‘fix all’ for every debating challenge: it is a travel guide for a long and interesting journey!