

STYLE

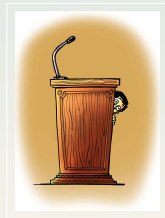


Style

Style refers to the ‘presentation’ aspect of debating.

As a speaker, you should always aim to **be yourself** — everyone has a natural speaking style, this is the style that audiences will generally find most **most persuasive**.

Of course, style can **always** be improved, but this does **not** mean trying to imitate someone else’s approach.

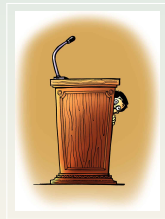


Visual presentation

Debating focuses mainly on the **spoken** word — but **visual presentation** can still have a large impact.

Let's examine a few **specific aspects** of visual presentation. . .

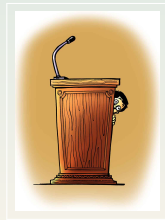
- 1 **eye contact,**
- 2 **gesture,**
- 3 **stance** and
- 4 **mannerisms.**



Eye contact

Eye contact is **very important** for effective style. Good eye contact can mean the difference between an audience feeling that they are being **talked to** rather than being **talked at**.

It is not enough to glance at your audience **occasionally**, or to stare at the **back wall**. . . you should work on **actually** making eye contact with audience members!



Gesture

When speaking, try to free your hands and let your **natural** gestures occur.

When trying to improve gesturing, it may seem tempting to pre-prepare some appropriate movements. But **beware**: prepared gestures can seem **unnatural** or **insincere**.

Instead, focus on **engaging** your audience and letting gestures flow **naturally**.

Stance

When it comes to stance, what comes **naturally** is usually **best**.

However, you should avoid movement that is **repetitive** or **distracting** — for example, rocking on the spot, or swaying from side to side.

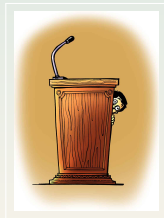
Repetitive movements will only distract your audience. Try to stand reasonably still, unless you are moving **intentionally** and **naturally** to emphasise a point.

Mannerisms

A **mannerism** is a **distinctive** or **idiosyncratic** trait of visual presentation — for example, a particular hand gesture.

Mannerisms are not **inherently** problematic — indeed, they may serve to enhance your **natural** speaking style.

However, mannerisms can cause problems if they become **repetitive**.



Vocal presentation

Vocal presentation concerns the way that you enunciate and deliver your words to the audience.

We will consider three main elements:

- 1 **speed,**
- 2 **volume** and
- 3 **variation.**



Speed

Speed is often the most important issue concerning vocal presentation.

It is easy to speak **too fast** to an audience, particularly if you are nervous. Speaking too fast can encourage audience members to **stop paying attention**.

Remember: you won't be convincing if your audience is forever **playing 'catch up'** to understand what you are saying!

Volume

Volume must be tailored to the **context** of your speech.

Large halls generally require a **loud voice**; small classrooms are better suited to a more **conversational tone**.

Sometimes, the best way to **emphasise** a point is to speak **very quietly!** This encourages the audience to **listen more carefully** to what you are saying — almost as if you are letting them in on a secret.

Variation

Vocal **variation** is crucial as part of maintaining a natural and therefore engaging manner.

Reading a speech often results in a very monotonous tone of voice, which is usually very unconvincing and boring for listeners.

Try changing both **volume** and **speed** throughout your speech to keep your audience's attention and emphasise your most important points. Use **pauses** to grab your audience's attention.

Verbal presentation

Clarity of expression is the most important aspect of verbal presentation. Precisely explaining your arguments is a **crucial** skill for any debater, and can relate to **style, content** and **strategy**.

Some pointers:

- Avoid complex vocabulary — **simple is good!!**.
- Acronyms can confuse — **state full terms**, at least the first time.
- Technical terms are only useful if **properly explained**.
- If you pose a **rhetorical question**, make sure you answer it, and **explain** your answer.

Humour

Humour can be a **double-edged sword** in debating — it can help to **engage** with your audience, but may also compromise your **credibility**. Some pointers:

- **Humour is not necessary!**
- Humour must be **appropriate for the context of the debate** — not all topics lend themselves to humour.
- **Isolated jokes aren't helpful** — humour must relate to what you are discussing.
- **Don't get personal or sarcastic.**
- Keep it **clean!**
- **Laughter is not rebuttal** — you must still show the audience **why** your opponents' case is wrong.
- **Don't be distracted** by making jokes — you still need to convey your point!

Effective use of notes

Use of **notes** and **palm cards** is often a challenge for new debaters.

Most importantly, you should **never write your speech out in full!** A debater who simply reads from notes will usually have poor **eye contact**, a **monotonous delivery** and will struggle to **engage**.

Instead, you should write as **little as possible** on your notes, while preserving the key ideas of your speech. Developing a 'style' for writing palm cards is up to each speaker — and **the sooner you start, the sooner you can perfect it!**

STYLE



Slides by Andrew Quinn and Simon Quinn. Artwork by Armand Homsî for the Arabic translation, 'The Complete Guide to the Art of Debate', published by OstarDebate.