



## **How to Debate a Difficult Question**

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Document owner: OHC State President

Contact info: [president@ohconline.com](mailto:president@ohconline.com) or go to 'Contact Us' to find current committee chair phone number.

**How to Debate a Difficult Question (as presented in powerpoint slides to members at a January, 2017 winter planning meeting)**

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# "How to Debate a Difficult Question"

Eric Estill & Jim Wallace  
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# Parliamentary Rules

Parliamentary procedure has 4 goals:

- 1. One thing at a time
- 2. Courtesy to everyone
- 3. The rule of the majority
- 4. The rights of the minority

# Why Debate?

# Danger of poor debating practice

- Many won't speak up
  - Vocal minority gets their way
- Intimidation influences the vote
- Feelings get hurt
- Emotions take the place of reason

# How do people learn to debate

Three phases of cowboy learning:

- 1. Learn from others**
2. Learn from books
3. Pee on the electric fence for yourself

Most people learn how to debate by watching others.

# Rules of Debate

*Debate is an essential element in the making of rational decisions. Debate is the time to express your opinion. Don't complain about an item after it has been decided. (Silence is consent.)*

- The chair must remain neutral.
- You must be recognized by the chair.
- Confine your remarks to the pending question.
- Only one person may speak at a time.
  - Each debate should provide new information.
- You may only speak twice on an item. Time is limited to 10 minutes each time.
  - You may not speak a second time until after everyone who wants to speak has spoken once.
- Address all remarks to the Chair.
- Avoid the use of members' names.
- You must speak courteously and never attack the motives of another member.

# **TECHNIQUES TO AVOID A CONTENTIOUS DEBATE**



# Refer to Committee

- Appoint a committee to find a compromise
- Include one committee member from each side of the issue
- Choose committee members that can work with each other

# Postpone to the next meeting

- Allows time to review the issues in smaller groups before the debate
- Allows time to gain acceptance by a larger group
- Lay on the Table
  - Not Debatable
  - Must vote to remove from the Table

# Postpone indefinitely

- Used to kill the question without further debate
- Use if the difficulty of the debate outweighs the merits of the question

**READY TO DEBATE**

# The chair must remain neutral

- Must not slant opinion to either side of the issue
- Must be perceived as a facilitator by all sides
- Good technique:
  - Ask for discussion supporting the question, then ask for discussion opposing the question, alternate.
- If the chair wants to debate, must select temporary chair

# Only one person may speak at a time

Each speaker should provide new information

- Chair recognizes each speaker
- Speak until you have made your point, but can't go over 10 minutes
- Don't repeat what someone else has said
- Avoid arguments

# You must be recognized by the chair

- No side comments
- Don't talk over the speaker
- Good Technique:
  - Stand when you have the floor

# Confine your remarks to the pending question

- No side remarks on other issues
- Chair should interrupt if discussion gets off the pending question
- Chair may warn the speaker not to do it again



# You may only speak twice

Time is limited to 10 minutes each

You may not speak a second time until after everyone who wants to speak has spoken.

## Think before you speak.

- Forces each speaker to think carefully
- Technique: Use your second opportunity to speak to rebut items that you don't agree with
- Use your second speech to change your opinion
- Must be enforced by the chair, free discussion doesn't work
- Technique: Before the chair gives the floor to a member to speak a second time, ask "Have I recognized everyone who wants to speak?"

# Address all remarks to the Chair

## Avoid the use of members' names

- Makes debate less personal
- Lowers emotions
- **This is very important.**
- Chair must warn a member who violates this rule. Don't let it continue.
- Technique: Chair, pay close attention to each speaker.

# You must speak courteously and never attack the motives of another member

- Must be enforced by the chair
- Chair must warn a member who violates this rule
- Speak to the idea, not the person
  - Good: I don't like this proposal because...
  - Bad: I don't like John's idea because...
  - Really Bad: John, that's the stupidest idea I've ever heard.

# How to End Debate

- Stop the debate (call for a vote) when discussion starts to repeat
- Good Technique: “I’m not hearing new discussion points, are we ready to vote?”
- Members Can End Debate
  - Move the Previous Question (2/3 vote)
  - Vote to limit debate (2/3 vote)

**HOW DO YOU MAKE THIS WORK?**

# Practice!!!

- Use the rules of debate for all questions
- Cannot start using this technique the first time a difficult debate starts
- Must become the normal practice for your group