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—1934—

# 1. INTRODUCTION

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# What is Debate?

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**Debate requires three things**

- 1. The debaters must have opposing views on a subject**
- 2. They must each try to convince us to agree with them; and**
- 3. They must give reasons in favour of their view**



# Why do we engage in debate?

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**Our views differ on specific issues. In debate competitions, the issues being debated are called '*motions*'.**

**Debate motions often begin with the words 'This House'. Why this formality?**

**Because debate motions were set as topics for debate in parliamentary assemblies, like the House of Commons in the United Kingdom**



# What do we disagree about?

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**First, we often disagree on what the world is like.**

**Let's see how this Works with the motion:**

***This House Believes That United nations (UN) has failed.***

**Whether the motion is true is unclear. But to argue for or against the motion, you must review what the UN has done thus far.**

**This means painting a Picture of the UN by assessing the success of the missions it has engaged in. Since this involves describing the UN in detail, this is a descriptive debate.**



# What do we disagree about?

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**Second, we often differ on what the world should be like.**

**Let's explore this with the motion:**

**This House would ban X**

**You are not being asked to prove that the motion is true or false.**

**Instead you must assess whether X should be banned. This means explaining whether a certain policy (banning X) should be put into practice.**

**This involves offering a prescription, as a doctor would when he prescribes medication to a patient. Hence, such debates are prescriptive.**



# How do I engage in prescriptive debates?

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For prescriptive debates, you can offer two broad types of arguments:

**1.** You could argue that your position is consistent with an important principle

Say you were on Opposition for the motion:

This House would ban X

The following argument could be raised:

X should be legal as it is consistent with the principle of free choice.

- **Important principle: Free choice**
- **Justification for principle: Free choice is an important principle as it allows people to decide on how best to live their lives based on specialised knowledge they have about their desires and goals.**
- **How making/doing X legal affirms free choice: This increases the number of options open to people who want to earn a living**
- **Why we oppose the motion: Banning X violates the important principle of free choice. This will not happen if X is legalised.**



# Why do we engage in debate?

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**2. You could argue for your side of the motion by claiming that it produces certain practical benefits for society.**

**Say you were on Proposition for the motion: This House would ban X.**

# Why do we engage in debate?

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The following argument may be offered:

**X should be banned to improve the status of society.**

- **What is the nature of X?**  
The vast majority of X are men/women who are paid because of X.
- **Why is this harmful?**  
This encourages society to view women/men as slaves, and not human beings worthy of respect.
- **Why would banning X fix this problem?**  
A ban on X will be carried out by the government and is backed by criminal penalties. This will send a strong signal to society that women/men are not slaves, but citizens equally deserving of our protection.
- **Why support the motion?**  
Banning X improves the status of women/men because it sends a strong message to society that women/men are not to be treated as slaves.





Is there always a clear distinction between principles and practical arguments?

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**No.**

**Arguing that a certain policy creates a practical benefit is only meaningful if our society actually values the benefit created. To show this, we often have to appeal to a principle that society values.**

**Let's revisit the argument that banning X improves the status of women/men in society.**

**This argument actually contains an assumption I didn't state earlier: society benefits when women/men are not treated as slaves.**

**To prove this assumption, we must appeal to the principle of human dignity. One must argue that as human beings, women/men deserve respect for their status as agents capable of determining their own future.**

**Hence, arguments of principle and arguments of practical benefit cannot always be separated easily. Many arguments are enhanced when the principles they rely on are made explicit.**



## Why do you debate competitively?

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Debate involves going back and forth between arguments of principle and arguments over practical outcomes. Such arguments are at the heart of many disputes about what the world is like and how we can make it better. I have always been interested in such disputes. This led me to think deeply about the arguments behind them.

Representing my school and my country as a debater has always be a great honour. But I think debate has left its mark on me far beyond the accolades and the applause. To me, debate is not about the debaters. It is about persuading the people before you using reason and emotion.

This is why I think debate is more important than ever today. It allows us to reach out to people from different countries and cultures on issues that matter to everyone. Debate lets us lend our voices to champion peoples who may not be empowered to speak out for themselves.



Thank you!

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