

What Is a Debate?

A debate is a type of discussion where people give their opinions on a topic.



Debating in Parliament



In Parliament, debating is one of the most important things members of the House of Commons and House of Lords do.

They spend a lot of their time debating what should be made into law as well as other important issues affecting the UK such as schools, hospitals and the police.

Debates in the House of Commons

A debate is based on a suggested idea called a motion. An example of a motion could be 'the voting age should be lowered to 16'.

Members who are arguing to support the motion (usually MPs belonging to the Government) are called the proposers.



Members arguing against the motion (usually the Opposition) are the opposers.

Members take it in turn to speak and there are certain rules that have to be followed.

What Are The Rules?

- A debate in the House of Commons is chaired by the Speaker, whose decision on all matters is final.
- Members should stand up to show that they would like to speak.
- When the Speaker selects someone, everyone else must sit down while the chosen Member makes his or her point.
- When the Member has finished speaking they sit down again and everyone else who wants to speak stands up again.
- Only one person may speak at a time.
- If anyone breaks the rules or the session becomes too rowdy, the Speaker will say 'Order, order', which means 'be quiet'.
- The Speaker's decision is final!



Debates in the House of Lords

Every day the House of Lords has the chance to question the Government, grilling them on their actions and decisions.

This is an important way they hold the Government to account.

They ask the Government what they are going to do about certain issues and then they debate their response.

Unlike in the House of Commons, Members asking the question don't actually ask them out loud in the Chamber. They are written down on an order paper which is published and sent out before the debate.

The House of Lords regulates itself and so, unlike the Speaker in the House of Commons, the Lord Speaker simply guides the debate and doesn't control it.

The House of Lords also has a Speaker, but the Lord Speaker's role is different to the Speaker's role in the House of Commons.

We held our own debate in English this year. We debated whether people should be allowed to live in areas of frequent natural disasters. Think back on the process and answer these questions.

How did you reach your final decision?

Did you change your mind and if so, why?

What did you think of the process and could it be improved?

Share your ideas with the class.

