

Learning to Lead Through Debate

During my first debate club meeting in ninth grade, I avoided eye contact with the audience. Public speaking felt uncomfortable and unpredictable. I joined the club because a teacher suggested it would strengthen research skills. I did not expect the experience to reshape how I communicate.

Our first assignment involved preparing arguments about renewable energy policy. My partner and I spent hours reviewing reports and summarizing research findings. When the debate began, I focused on reading prepared notes. My voice sounded steady, yet my responses felt mechanical.

The turning point arrived during a regional tournament later that year. An opposing team challenged our evidence and questioned our interpretation of economic data. My prepared notes did not address their argument. I paused, reviewed the research in my memory, and responded with a different source we had studied the night before.

That moment changed my view of debate. Success did not come from memorizing lines. It came from understanding the issue deeply enough to respond in real time.

Over the next two years I became responsible for mentoring new members. I helped them organize research files and practice structured arguments. During practice rounds I reminded them to listen closely before responding. Debate requires attention as much as persuasion.

Through this experience I learned that leadership often begins with communication. Clear thinking, careful listening, and evidence based discussion create stronger collaboration within any group.