

GUIDANCE FOR MODERATORS

Moderators play an important role in facilitating an engaging and successful debate. It is important that moderators are non-partisan, comfortable with public speaking, and experienced with moderating. This role is key in ensuring that debates remain civil, on topic, on time, and fair for all candidates. Thank you for taking on this important responsibility.

Before Debate Day:

- Meet with the debate organizers a couple of times to **review and finalize** the debate format, Points of Order, Rules for Decorum, and debate questions. You can find some ideas for the Points of Order and Rules for Decorum in our [Debate Format](#) guide.
 - Feel free to *share your perspectives* on these with the debate organizers, since you want to ensure the debate is structured to suit your *needs* and *strengths* as a moderator.
 - Consider where there could be opportunities for keeping the debate *interesting* and *engaging* for the audience, since this is also part of your role.
- Ensure you know not just the **planned format**, but how the “**room**” (physical and/or virtual) will be set up during the meeting. (e.g., Will candidates be seated at a table, or will they be coming to a podium? Have organizers invited other community partners to pose some of the questions, or will you ask them all?)
- **Familiarize** yourself with the candidates and environment-related issues in your region at a high level – including linkages to health, the economy, and more (particularly if candidates will engage in open-ended discussion during your debate.)
 - **TIP: Don't** feel like you need to be an expert on every issue – your primary role as moderator is to uphold the debate format and maintain a respectful environment.
 - To the extent that you're *informed* on the topic under discussion, you can identify when candidates share false information.
 - If you're *not well-acquainted* enough with the topic to fact-check candidates, there's no need to stress – you may find that candidates will step in when another candidate shares misinformation (if the debate format allows for rebuttals or closing commentary).
- Participate in a **dress rehearsal** so you can get comfortable with the venue and the audio equipment provided.
- Ensure you have a *plan* for **keeping track of the time** allocated for each question. You may find it helpful to have a timekeeper who will notify you when time is up (e.g., yellow card means 15 seconds left, red card means time is up).
- Keep in **regular contact** with the debate organizers so that you're always aware when new details are being finalized (i.e., the debate format, questions, Points of Order, Rules for Decorum.)

The Day of the Debate:

Before the Debate:

- **Meet with the candidates** and introduce yourself. Make sure to ask for and take note of each candidate's preferred name and pronouns, and provide your own.
- **Re-explain** the debate format and rules to candidates.
 - Alert candidates that all time limits will be strictly observed. If applicable, inform them that there will be signals as they come to the end of their time.
- **Notify** candidates and audience members 5 minutes before the start of the debate.

Starting the Debate:

- Start right **on time**.
- Begin with a territorial / [land acknowledgement](#).
- Welcome and thank audience members and candidates for attending. Provide a *brief introduction / overview* of:
 - Host Organization / Organizer(s)
 - Yourself
 - Candidates
 - Debate purpose and format, including:
 - How long the debate will last
 - If/when there are breaks
 - Question types and response formats
 - Moderator Points of Order
 - Rules for Decorum for audience members
 - Explain that the order in which candidates respond will be **randomized**.

During the Debate:

General Tips:

- Ask all questions in a confident, friendly, genuine, and forthright **tone**.
- Throughout the debate, convey **attentiveness** and enthusiasm about hearing what candidates have to say. The audience's mood often reflects that of the moderator's, so this will help keep the audience more engaged.
- Ensure that your debate is **respectful** and **productive**. Some things to keep in mind:
 - Keep the debate on time by following the debate format as closely as possible. This ensures that candidates have equal opportunity to respond to questions.
 - Candidates can (and will) *disagree* with one another, but you should remain alert to when discourse turns uncivil. Politely interrupt candidates and audience members if:
 - A *sensitive topic* is raised (i.e., personal information about a candidate);
 - A candidate *runs over* their allotted share of time;
 - They consistently *talk over / interrupt* another candidate;

- They are speaking during *someone else's* allotted time;
- There are *off-topic* discussions / side conversations
- There is *harassment*, use of *demeaning language* (e.g., targeting aspects of a candidate's identity or intellect), or other forms of *adverse treatment* towards any debate participants (audiences, candidates, and organizers)
 - **TIP:** Be decisive when this kind of behaviour occurs. Here's an idea as to what you can say:
 - "I'd like to remind candidates of their commitment to uphold an equitable and respectful debate environment, and that any form of harassment towards a fellow debate participant is unacceptable. If this behaviour persists, it is my responsibility as moderator to call this out."

Active Question Asking: Here are some good practices to get candidates to provide the responses audiences need to make an informed decision on voting day:

- Encourage candidates to go **beyond** reciting their party's platform commitments and talk about *what they would personally do as an MP/MPP/MLA/etc about that issue*.
- Where appropriate, ask candidates to **follow up** on points they've made. You can either ask for further *elaboration*, or have them answer *follow-up questions* (which you can plan ahead with your debate organizers.)
 - **TIP:** Try to ask for follow-up or elaboration on points that have a *diverse range of candidate perspectives* (rather than issues that all candidates seem to agree on.) Your audience will be more engaged and informed when they hear multiple sides of an issue.
- Notice when candidates may not be providing a **direct answer** to the question being posed and ask them to provide a clearer response if necessary.

Accounting for the Audience:

- Remain sensitive to the **audience's needs**. Make sure to not let the debate go on too long or extend past the planned end time.
 - If you're running out of time, consider *skipping a question* or *shortening the time* allotted for candidate replies for later questions.
- Be prepared for the **unexpected**. If faced with a disruption, remember that humour diffuses tension.
 - If someone is being *routinely disruptive*, note that the Rules for Decorum dictate that the person can be asked to leave.
 - **TIP:** One of the most unpredictable parts of your debate will be the *audience's behaviour* – particularly during the **live audience question period** (if your debate format has one.) If taking live questions (i.e., written down and submitted to the debate organizers), make sure to keep an eye out for questions that are

blatantly-partisan or **off-topic**. You may choose to either select a different question or tweak it slightly to be more on-topic.

- Oftentimes, you can make the question more relevant by simply broadening its initial focus or neutralizing its framing (e.g., changing a question that attacks the approach of the sitting government to: “How would you work to strengthen Ontario’s current approach on issue X”).

Maintaining a Safe and Equitable Space: It is your responsibility as the moderator to create an environment that is inclusive of all debate participants. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Use candidates’ **preferred pronouns** and ensure other candidates do as well. Make sure to call others by their preferred names.
- **Keep the dialogue inclusive** by using plain language that’s not too full of jargon. This helps ensure that everyone can be engaged in the debate.
- If you want to reference a candidate’s earlier statement when asking for elaboration on a particular topic, **take notes** so you can *accurately paraphrase* what they said.
- Pay attention to **nonverbal communication** just as much as verbal communication. Debates can be intense, and candidates may feel a lot of passion for the topics discussed. It’s not unusual for a candidate to become flustered or emotional. You might want to offer a moment so they can regroup.
- **Consider the earlier points** about maintaining a respectful and productive debate – specifically, when to interrupt candidates / audience members because of their behaviour.
 - **TIP:** Remember that as the moderator, part of your role involves acting on *behalf* of the audience – even when it feels uncomfortable to have to interrupt or single out an individual for their behaviour.

After the Debate:

- Thank audience members for attending and candidates for participating in the debate.
- Thank debate organizers for coordinating the debate.
- Encourage audience members to share their feedback on the debate (if organizers have created a feedback form) and to vote.
- Debrief with the debate organizers to discuss what did and didn’t go well.

Sample Statement on Ground Rules and Protests

Thank you all for attending and being part of this debate. Debates are a critical first step in making progress on the issues voters care about because what doesn’t get debated, doesn’t get done. In order for this event to be safe and inclusive to all, we are setting some community ground rules. Firstly, there will be absolutely no tolerance for hate-speech, personal attacks towards candidates or other participants, or anything of the like. In order to have productive conversations and a healthy democracy, respect for one another is absolutely essential.

Secondly, while disagreement is inevitable and healthy discourse is encouraged, our debate is tightly structured for verbal discussions between candidates and the community. Various forms of protest will not be permitted in order to ensure that everyone has a chance to hear candidates' positions on various subjects, especially as we have many topics to cover in an extremely limited amount of time.

Additional Sources and Information

On how to *moderate* a panel discussion/debate:

- https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/92496/best_practices_for_moderators_guide_0.pdf
- <https://www.icsc.com/uploads/default/Moderators-Guide.pdf>
- <https://www.cpd.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/R01-How-to-be-a-Great-Moderator.pdf>
- <https://lwvma.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Moderators-Handbook.pdf>

On how to encourage an *engaging, inclusive* debate:

- <http://www.toastmasters101.net/toastmasters-debate/>
- <https://www.toastmasters.org/magazine/magazine-issues/2021/may/the-art-of-argument>
- <https://my-cms.rotary.org/en/document/rotary-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-code-conduct>