

how to open with a clear position statement, how to build arguments with supporting evidence or examples, and how to close with a strong conclusion that ties everything together. I wanted them to understand that a debate is not just about expressing opinions; it is about constructing a persuasive, logical case that can withstand scrutiny from the opposing side.

We spent time discussing what makes a strong argument. I emphasised the importance of clarity — keeping your point focused and easy to follow — and the value of anticipating counterarguments. One thing I often notice in group discussions is that members tend to think only about what they want to say, without considering how the other side might respond. I encouraged Allen and Sara to always think one step ahead: if you make a claim, what is the most obvious objection, and how would you address it? This kind of preparation, I told them, is what separates a good debater from a great one.

How to Write a Good Rebuttal

Perhaps the most valuable part of the session was our deep dive into how to write and deliver an effective rebuttal. This is a skill that many people find challenging because it requires quick thinking, active listening, and the ability to stay calm under pressure. I started by explaining that a good rebuttal does three things: it acknowledges the opposing point fairly, it identifies the weakness or flaw in that point, and it reinforces your own position with a counter-example or piece of reasoning.

I introduced them to a simple framework I like to use: "They say... but actually... because..." This structure helps you stay organised even when you are speaking spontaneously. For example, if the opposing side argues that social media has been entirely harmful to society, a strong rebuttal might sound like: "They say social media is harmful, but actually it has created powerful communities for people who would otherwise feel isolated, because platforms like these allow individuals with niche interests or medical conditions to connect with others who truly understand their experiences." I walked Allen and Sara through several examples like this, using topics that are likely to come up in the party debate.

We also talked about the tone of a rebuttal. I stressed that the goal is never to attack the person making the argument, only the argument itself. Staying respectful, even when you strongly disagree, is not just a matter of etiquette — it actually makes your rebuttal more persuasive, because it shows confidence and composure. I reminded them that audiences and judges tend to be more impressed by someone who engages thoughtfully than by someone who simply raises their voice or becomes dismissive.

Debate Rehearsal

After the theory and discussion, we moved into the part of the session I was most looking forward to: the actual rehearsal. I assigned Allen and Sara opposing sides on a debate motion and gave them a few minutes to collect their thoughts before we began. Watching them debate live was genuinely exciting. I could see them drawing on the techniques we had discussed — structuring their arguments, trying to anticipate each other's points, and making an effort to stay composed even when challenged.

There were moments where the rebuttal technique was applied really well, and I made sure to acknowledge that in real time. There were also moments where I paused the rehearsal to offer coaching — for instance, reminding one of them to directly address the point raised rather than pivoting to a new argument, or encouraging the other to slow down slightly and project more confidence in their delivery. These small adjustments made a noticeable difference even within a single session.

I also drew attention to body language and eye contact during the rehearsal, which are easy to overlook when you are focused on the content of what you are saying. Debating is a performance as much as it is an intellectual exercise, and how you carry yourself on stage can significantly affect how your arguments

are received. I encouraged both of them to stand tall, maintain steady eye contact with the audience rather than looking at their notes the whole time, and use deliberate pauses for emphasis.

Reflections and Looking Ahead

By the end of the session, I could see a real improvement in Allen and Sara's confidence. They came in feeling a little uncertain about the debate format, and they left with a much clearer sense of what to do and how to approach the upcoming event. That transformation, however small, is exactly what motivates me as a group leader.

I am genuinely proud of the effort both of them put in today. Debate preparation is not easy — it requires vulnerability, because you have to put your ideas out there and be willing to have them challenged. Allen and Sara both showed real courage in that rehearsal, and I think that bodes very well for the English party. I will continue to support them in the lead-up to the event, and I look forward to seeing how they perform when the moment comes. Session 5 has set a wonderful tone, and I am confident that the work we did today will pay off.