Debater Developmental Benchmarks

Growth of a CDL Debater: Key Benchmarks

In order to measure the qualitative growth a CDL debater, the Chicago Debate League uses designated benchmarks for each year of a CDL debater's development. These benchmarks help CDL coaches and administrators design teaching strategies and methods, and help them assess the progress of individual debaters and of debate teams as a whole.

Qualitative benchmarks also assist the CDL in balancing the crucial focus on the scope and breadth of programming - student participation metrics - with results-oriented and sustained commitment to programming that is qualitatively meaningful, has depth, is consistent with broader standards of rigor within the broader context of high school competitive academic debate, and perhaps most importantly, produces measurable learning outcomes aligned with broader academic goals.

The numbers attached to each benchmark are for reference purposes and do not imply sequential ordering to their teaching or learning, though year two benchmarks build on year one benchmarks, and likewise year three/four benchmarks build on what should be learned by debaters in their the first two years.

Year One Benchmarks

Debate Round Mechanics
(1) Speeches, cross-examination, prep time
Debater understands when it is their turn to speak and for how long; understands when to ask/answer cross-examination questions; understands prep time (how much available, use)
(2) Role of the judge, function of the ballot
Debater understands the conduct, limitations, and jurisdiction of a judge (including that judge can only vote on what is said in the round, intervention is restricted, and that oral critiques are common protocol.) Debater understands the ballot reflects speaker points and comments as well as RFD

Debate Tournament Mechanics
(3) Debate round scheduling: pairings, prelim rounds, elim rounds
Debater understands how to read a pairing, and the distinctions between prelim and elim rounds
(4) Competitive mechanics: seedings, elim structure, speaker points, and awards
Debater understands how speaker points effect seeding; understands how and why seeding structure set up for elims is different from prelim power matching

Basic Affirmative Burdens
(5) Case burdens: inherency, harms, solvency
1A or 2A understands which parts of case need to be defended (inherency, harms, solvency), understands what evidence or arguments are best used to defend parts of case
(6) Affirmative off-case burdens: desirability, topicality
1A or 2A understands which negative arguments require answers in order to defend case desirability/topicality; understands what evidence or arguments are best used to defend case desirability/topicality; is effective in defending case desirability/topicality

Basic Negative Argument Options
(7) Case attacks - structure and utility
1N or 2N deploys applicable case attacks; rebuts aff answers to case attacks; understands how to extend case attacks (either take-outs or turns) for their utility in winning the round
(8) Off-case arguments: disadvantages and topicality violations - structure and utility
1N or 2N deploys applicable DAs or Ts with proper argument structure; understands how to extend off-case arguments with proper structure; rebuts aff answers to off-case arguments; understands how to extend off-case arguments for their utility in winning the round

Use of Evidence
(9) Evidence formatting: tag, cite, text
Debater reads evidence aloud during speeches using proper evidence formatting
(10) Evidentiary standard in debate: what needs to be evidenced and why
Debater uses evidentiary standard to support own args and rebut opponent args, makes and defends analytical args without evidence when appropriate

Flowing
(11) Mechanics: structure of a flow, what is flowed
Debater uses appropriate amount of flow paper (one sheet per major position); distinguishes what to flow based on argument structure; flows arg tags but not text of cards
(12) Utility: how a flow is used and why it is used that way
Debater uses flow in speeches to refer to opponent args or own team's args; uses flow as a record of args to evaluate or resolve issues

Refutation/Clash

(13) Refutation construct ("they say x, we say y")
Debater refers to specific opponent arguments in order to articulate specific countering argument (they say x, we say y); accurately summarizes opponent argument when referencing

(14) The principle of refutation in debate - silence = assent
Debater recognizes the need to rebut key opponent arguments; capitalizes on own args that opponent does not answer

Speaker Duties

(15) Affirmative speaker duties and roles
1A: reads a complete 1AC, answers CX questions, rebuts key opponent arguments in 1AR -- 2A: rebuts key opponent args and extends relevant case args in 2AC and 2AR, provides closing argument in defense of case in 2AR

(16) Negative speaker duties and roles
1N: reads complete and applicable off-case positions/case attacks, extends portion of negative positions in 1NR while rebutting aff answers -- 2N: extends portion of negative positions in 2NC, makes 2NR argument choices and provides closing argument for neg win

File Organization and Maintenance

(17) Labels and maintenance
Files are divided in binder, accordion or multiple folders; Files are clearly labeled with position title; Multiple argument levels are labeled

(18) Library of argument options
Organization distinguishes between oft-used and less commonly used arguments including filing and sub-divisions and the capacity to easily access commonly used arguments

Introduction to the Topic

(19) Broad Topic Knowledge
Debater displays familiarity with topic knowledge beyond evidence presented in round; familiarity with public policy high-points -- e.g., key agencies, laws, current policies, disputed issues relevant to this topic

(20) Understanding the Core Files
Debater displays comprehension of the Core Files arguments; knowledgeable in cross-ex; ability to discern key arguments; understanding of interrelationship between positions

Speaking Skills

(21) Basic Speaking Skills
Speaking fluidly, clearly, with proper pronunciation, adequate volume, and eye contact

(22) Persuasive Effect
Debater uses emphasis and vocal dynamics for persuasive effect; debater in rebuttal emphasizes key arguments or provides examples/supporting arguments on key point

Year Two Benchmarks

Advanced Negative Options: Counterplans and Critiques
(23) Counterplans: structure and utility
Team presents complete CP (text, solvency, competition, net benefit);   articulates difference between plan and counterplan; extends all necessary parts of CP in speech; displays content knowledge of specific CP
(24) Kritiks: structure and utility
Team presents complete Kritik (links, impact, alternative); links and compares K and aff case impacts; defends alternative as ballot option; displays content knowledge of specific Kritik

Creating Negative Strategies
(25) Forming a coherent strategy from argument options
(26) Executing a strategy
Debater extends key arguments in rebuttal to retain viable strategy, including risk calculus

Advanced Affirmative Strategy
(27) Leveraging the affirmative case to answer negative case and off-case arguments
(28) Offense, defense, and impact calculus
Debater uses both offensive and defensive arguments to counter negative arguments; compares impacts using applicable criteria

Advanced Refutation Skills
(29) Line-by-line debating
Perfecting the refutation construct ("they say x, we say y") and using the flow to respond
(30) Grouping and cross-applying arguments
Debater groups similar arguments to make refutation easier; cross-applies own arguments from one flow to another when applicable

Argument Inter-Relationships and Clash
(31) Real World Context
Analyzing argument inter-relationships within the broader policy context by using examples or facts to support own arguments or refute opponent arguments
(32) Resolving clashing arguments
Debater identifies which arguments clash and must be refuted; resolves in favor of own team

Advanced Flowing
(33) Efficient Flowing
Proper use of readable symbols; ability to condense opponent arguments into short tag-lines
(34) Flow Organization
Proper use of spacing on and within individual sheets paper and self-flowing

Introduction to Debate Research
(35) Electronic and library research
Productive use of methods of research techniques, both electronic and library
(36) Targeted research
Researching for individual pieces of debate evidence

Advanced Use of Evidence
(37) Argument Selection
Choosing the most useful evidence, supplementing with research to not use weaker evidence
(38) Organizing the Use of Evidence
Highlighting or underlining all key arguments from the Core Files (or other prepared files) for efficiency and strategic value

The Topic: Key Themes
(39) Reading the key articles and book sections
Debater has read supplemental material outside of Core Files to enhance understanding of the Resolution
(40) Understanding the broader themes on the topic
Debater understands and reflects on the public policy contexts of the Resolution

Advanced Speaking Skills
(41) Speaking Skills
Speaking clearly and articulately, minimal use of verbal crutches, even at high speed
(42) Speech Organization
Maintaining clear organization throughout a speech including a roadmap and signposting without jumping around

Year Three and Four Benchmarks

Affirmative Case Research and Construction

(43) Modify or write an affirmative case

Locating evidence sufficient to modify and improve upon a Core Files case or to construct a new affirmative case

(44) Constructing extension blocks

Refining three layers of affirmative blocks for integration of 1AC, 2AC front-lines and rebuttal extension blocks

Researching Cases on the Negative

(45) Researching case attacks

Locating negative case evidence, starting with affirmative research sources, and creating negative case blocks

(46) Negative case links

Approaching negative case research as a search for links and case-specific strategies, including counterplans and other off-case arguments

Deploying Generics

(47) Deploying generic positions on the Neg

Understanding the utility of each component of big negative generic positions that apply to a wide variety of cases on the topic

(48) Adaptation of generic positions

Maintenance of negative generics as to make generic strategy more case-specific

Advanced Topicality Debating

(49) Debating Topicality Standards

Effective, specifically applied, clearly articulated debating about standards for interpreting the meaning of the words in the topicality violation

(50) Evidenced Interpretation Debate

Evidence-based, comparative debate about the language and context of definitions

Analyzing and Arguing Over Text

(51) Analyzing warrants and "micro-debates"

Reading and interpreting closely to successfully execute "micro-debates" (e.g., debates about individual pieces of evidence)

(52) Resolving micro-debates for gains

Identifying key arguments that warrant micro-debates Connecting "micro-debates" to the full round in order to give it weight

Advanced Cross-Examination Skills

(53) Projecting a Winning Ethos

Projecting confidence, mastery, and a winning ethos in cross-ex

(54) Using Cross-Ex Strategically

Using cross-ex to set up strategies or gain concessions, not merely for clarification

Risk Calculus

(55) Components

Understanding the components of risk calculus (time-frame, probability, magnitude)

(56) Comparative Risk Calculus

Using comparative risk calculus to explain which arguments are most important in the debate and to support an effective narrative

Story Telling

(57) Narrating a Round Strategy
Narrating the overall, big-picture story of the debate in the last two rebuttals, or setting up that story-telling in the previous two rebuttals

(58) Argument Relationships and Concessions
Identifying inter-relationships between issues in the debate and making strategic or conditional concessions in order to enhance one's overall position

Advanced Theory

(59) Advanced Theory issues
Comprehending conditionality, dispositionality, PICs, kritik framework, agent specification, permutation theory, and other common theory arguments

(60) Performative and Critical Debate
Attaining a facility with performative and other forms of critical debate - including facility with links, the implications of discourse/speech acts, kritik alternatives, e.g.

Refining Rebuttal Technique

(61) Advanced Rebuttal Technique
Demonstrating word economy, embedded clash and other advanced methods to increase refutation within speech time limits

(62) Rebuttal practice methods
Improving notably through the use rebuttal re-works, mini-debates, and other practice methods to refine rebuttal technique

Making the Topic Your Own

(63) Formulating an intellectual position on the topic
Formulating an intellectual position on the topic, and converting that intellectual interest into an affirmative case and negative generics

(64) Overall strategic view of the topic
Gaining an overall strategic view of the most effective arguments on the topic, and building on that view to obtain a deep knowledge of at least one sub-area of the topic