

Debate FAQ

What is Debate?

In Lexington, debate is both a series of classes and a team. You must be in a debate class to be on the team and everyone in the class must participate in debate tournaments. Each of the several types of debate involves research, argument construction and competitive speaking against students from around the country.

Why do Debate?

Debate teaches critical thinking and organizational skills and introduces students to large topics and bodies of research that go well beyond nearly all other high school classes. Students who do debate are attractive to colleges because colleges know that debaters have the skills needed to exceed in higher education. Debate is also fun because it allows students to develop a sense of team at home and allows them to meet people from across the country when we travel, and to experience new places.

What does Debate look like during the pandemic?

Debate began planning for the online world early last Spring and official online tournaments started last April. In May, the MA State Tournament piloted the use of an online platform which is now in wide use across the country and there are several other online platforms as well. Although online debate will never be better than in-person debate, the fact that we have been online this year has made it possible for our students to compete in more tournaments and in more distant locations than would ever be possible in the physical world, should they want those experiences.

What will Debate look like when the pandemic is over?

Students travel on coach buses to places as distant as Philadelphia, and on airplanes when we travel further than that. We use a limited number of school buses for tournaments in MA, but usually rely on parents to drive to local events. Students stay in hotels and get a chance to try new foods,

make new friends through face to face meetings and see new places when debate is in-person, but there are limits on the number of people who can travel to each event, especially those that require flying.

What are the different kinds of Debate we do in Lexington?

Lincoln Douglas Debate

- 1 Person Per Team
- Topics Change Every Two Months
- Topics Tend to be More Philosophical than Political
- Best Suited to Students Who are Happiest Relying on Themselves

Public Forum Debate

- 2 People Per Team
- The First Two Topics Last Two Months/The Rest Only One Month Each
- Topics are General and Require Debaters to Prove Them True or False
- Best Suited to Students Wanting to Practice Speaking Skills/Persuasion

Policy Debate

- 2 People Per Team
- The Same Topic Lasts All Year
- Topics Tend to Call for Change in Existing Political Structures/Policies
- Best Suited to Students Who Want to Dig into Issues and Speak Fast

How do students learn Debate?

In addition to classroom instruction, students are exposed to a range of mentors. Students teaching students has long been the model practiced in Lexington so there are Senior TAs in the beginning classes, Varsity mentors for novices and Junior/Senior mentors for second years.

Why start Debate now?

The current beginning classes are fairly small, probably because of the uncertainty surrounding debate (and everything else) during a pandemic. This means that the 2021-2022 school year is the right time to start debate because there will be more slots open than in some previous years.

When can you start Debate?

Students should start in debate as freshmen and may stay in debate throughout high school. It is also possible to start as a sophomore. We have beginning and advanced classes in all three debate disciplines.