# Kentucky Youth Assembly: Debate Workshop

This workshop will introduce participants to the basics of debate and parliamentary procedure for the Kentucky Youth Assembly model state government conference. It could be led by an adult advisor or by a veteran member of the school's Student Y or KYA delegation.

Each participant should have a copy of "The Kentucky Youth Assembly Debate Guide" which is available for download on the KYMCA website ([www.kyymca.org](www.kyymca.org)) If the space permits it could be useful to set up a head table with a podium and two banks of forward-facing chairs with a central aisle. This will simulate the basic layout of a typical committee room at a KYA conference.

## Introduction: Addressing the Chair at KYA (5-10 minutes)

KYA utilizes a version of Robert's Rules of Order specifically adapted for youth-in-government programming. It is not hard to learn but will need to be practiced for students to use it confidently during debate.

Facilitator should tell students that they are going to learn about "parliamentary procedure" which are the rules for speaking which keep debate at KYA flowing smoothly and fairly.

The first thing students will need to do whenever they are speaking is "address the chair," that is, formally introduce yourself. Facilitator should ask participants to refer to the "Being Recognized to Speak" section of the Debate Guide. Facilitator can model the "address the chair" procedure by saying:

"_____, representing _____,"
(full name)                         (school name)

Facilitator should explain that "addressing the chair" follows the tradition in parliamentary procedure that legislators are not directing their speeches at each other but rather giving their speeches in an open forum with the chairperson  acting as the recognized facilitator of the debate.  This is intended to maintain civility and decorum and prevent debate from degrading into shouting matches between two or more legislators.

Facilitator should now allow a few minutes for participants to practice introducing themselves by "addressing the chair." Depending on the size of the group this can be done in pairs or small groups. This practice session can be finished with a Whip Around of each participant "addressing the chair" (facilitator). This handily doubles as a way of students hearing each other's names if the group has many new members.

## Phases of Debate: NDTQ and Pro/Con Debate (10-15 minutes)

Debate at KYA has two main phases: a time for "non-debatable technical questions (NDTQ)" and a time for "pro-con debate."

Facilitator should refer students first to the "non-debatable technical questions" portion of the debate guide and go over the examples given there. Facilitator can ask participants to offer a few additional examples of a non-debatable technical question vs. a debatable question (Will the bill include fines or punishments for non-compliance? Vs. Will Kentuckians like this bill?)

Facilitator emphasizes that the NDTQ phase of debate is just for delegates to receive additional factual or statistical information on a bill. After the chairperson declares that the time for questions has elapsed he or she will then announce the beginning of the "Pro/Con Debate" phase. It is during this time

that delegates raise their placards to be recognized by the chair to come to the podium to speak either in favor of a bill (pro) or in opposition to a bill (con).

*\*\*\*NOTE: The debate guide includes several options beyond giving a pro or con speech that are available to delegates during pro/con debate; namely, "yielding" time, asking a question or series of questions, or introducing amendments. It is recommended that these details of pro/con debate NOT be discussed in this initial workshop. Rather, these nuances should be layered in once students have a stronger grasp of the basic parliamentary procedure.*

## Parliamentary Procedure Script: Walking them through it...(15-20 minutes)

The final part of this workshop is to walk students through the procedural script for a typical bill debate and then do some fun practice. Facilitator should refer students to the "Parliamentary Procedure Script" portion of the debate guide. Facilitator should emphasize that this script reflects almost word-for-word what they will hear in actual debate rooms at KYA. This part can be approached in different ways. Facilitator can quickly read the script while students follow along or students can simply be instructed to read through the script. Either way, students should get a sense of the flow and phases of the process.

Once students have had a chance to review the script it is time for a run through. Facilitator should act as committee chair to help role play this effort, but students can be assigned to act as "clerk" and as "bill sponsors." Students chosen to act as bill sponsors will have to "present" a pretend bill that all participants can then debate. An old favorite for this is "A Bill to Register All Unicorns in the State of Kentucky." You don't have to use this but it is best practice to introduce some good-natured silliness here, especially if the participants are mostly new to the process (Older or experienced students will probably do fine with a straightforward "real" bill proposal like raising or lowering the driving age). The goal here is just for students to learn procedure and they will more easily do so if they don't feel pressured to be coming up with "serious" pro/con speeches on a "real" topic.

Facilitator should lead the debate process on the pretend bill while following the parliamentary procedure script, being sure to "gavel" students who don't address the chair, go over time, or ask a debatable question. This is practice and the chair/facilitator should liberally gavel any procedural miscue while keeping it a fun and friendly process. Facilitator should follow the script all the way through to an actual vote on the pretend bill. Facilitator can then emphasize that while the subject matter of any debate depends on the bill at hand, the procedure at KYA is always the same.

Subsequent meetings of the delegation are a good time to practice debate on a serious bill. Examples from recent conferences can be found in the Assembly Pages on the KYYMCA website. One way to conclude the workshop is to give students copies of a real bill that they should think about and be ready to debate at a future meeting. Having a delegation mock debate their own bill sponsors' bill is a great way to build delegation teamwork and provide effective debate and bill presentation practice for your members.