

Book Reviews

Review of *The Great Debate: An Introduction to Debate*

[James Venema. Perceptia Press. Nagoya, Japan. 58 pages. ISBN: 978-4939130-55-7.]

Reviewed by David Kluge, Nanzan University

It is difficult to find a good debate book that is appropriate for English classes in Japanese universities. Often debate books written for American universities, or even American high schools, are too difficult for Japanese students and the topics in the books are not relevant to them. Another problem is that often debate books written for the Japanese market are not so much debate books as they are discussion books. This is why it is so refreshing to see a textbook that teaches principles of formal debate written at an appropriate English level with topics that interest Japanese students. *The Great Debate* is such a book.

Appearance

The book is a handy B5 size, and has relatively few pages: ten units and five appendices in 58 pages, making it both appealing and non-intimidating for students. The layout is clean and uncluttered, which adds to its appeal. The graphics are adequate, although some of the photos (all grayscale rather than black and white) lack clarity and interest.

Structure

The book has a simple structure, which is a good trait when introducing a possibly difficult activity, which debate certainly can be. The sequence of the ten units is rational:

1. Getting started with debate
2. Topics and propositions
3. Reasons
4. Organizing the opening speech
5. Giving supports
6. Delivering & judging a speech
7. Organizing the refutation speech
8. Refutations: Logical & reference problems
9. Rebuttal speeches
10. Practice makes perfect

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Perhaps the only part that teachers may question would be the author’s choice to combine delivering a speech and judging a speech in the same unit. However, if you consider that the criteria for delivering a good debate speech should be the same as that used for judging the speech, this combination does not seem so strange.

The units are supplemented by five appendices: *Model speeches*, *Propositions*, *Example note-taking form*, *Note-taking forms*, and *Negative refutation model*. The *model speeches* appendix provides sample opening speeches (constructive speeches), refutations, and rebuttals for both affirmative and negative teams. The appendices are extremely helpful, except for Appendix 2, which would have been more useful if it had contained a list of possible propositions rather than providing a space for the students, or the whole class, to write down possible propositions. Also, a few more models would have been a welcome addition in Appendix 5 Negative refutation model.

The book, with its clean and uncluttered look, seems more like a workbook than a textbook, which is good from both the teacher’s and students’ points of view. Each unit has a simple and effective structure. The unit starts with a short, simple description of the unit topic, often only a half a page or so. This is followed by a subsection, called *Give it a try!* This section contains information, advice, examples, and activities such as identifying essential parts of a speech. There is a section called *Your turn* which asks students to use the information and advice to conduct a speaking activity that will prepare them to debate. Finally, there is a section called *Language practice* that helps students to learn and use the technical language of debate, such as terms like *signpost* or *propositions*, and common sentence patterns like how to report survey data.

Use

The book teaches the basics of debate using simple language. However, it does not dumb down the debate activity by making it a discussion. It teaches three types of debate speeches: opening speeches, refutation speeches, and rebuttal speeches. One thing the book does not do is give a fixed order of speeches or fixed times for the speeches. These missing items, rather than being faults, are in fact strong points for the book. Not indicating the speech order or times allows the teacher to come up with an order and speech time limits that best match the level of students in the class. Even though I have indicated this to be a positive point of the body of the book, it might be helpful to teachers if there were an appendix with some suggested sequences of speeches and speech times.

This book, although primarily a textbook for debate or discussion courses, could also be used in oral communication classes, and even in a writing class. If used as the main book in a debate or discussion course, it would take a whole semester to cover—perhaps more if the teacher wants to allow for more time for the students to practice.

Conclusion

This book is excellent for teaching debate to almost all levels of university students. Although it is a thin book, it contains all that is needed to teach the basics of formal debate and to take students from knowing nothing about it to doing a complete debate. It does so using a simple, unthreatening layout, and by including a lot of scaffolding through helpful activities and many easy-to-understand

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examples. It is one of the few books designed to teach debate to the general student body rather than only addressing small groups of top students. It is also one of the few debate textbooks specifically written for the EFL (English as a foreign language) market. It is definitely worth considering this book to see if it fits your institution’s curricular requirements, your teaching goals, and your students’ English needs.

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SD&D in Hot Water

The next SD&D conference is planned for late February or early March at the Hotel Kusakabe Armeria, a famous onsen hotel in Gero city, Gifu prefecture. <<http://www.armeria.co.jp/f/e/>>

It will be a full conference with presentations and workshops on oral interpretation, speech, drama, and debate—all in a relaxing atmosphere. Stay tuned for more hot information on how to submit presentation proposals and register for the conference!

