

THE COMMISSION ON PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES:

DEBATE WATCH '96

Welcome to **Debate Watch '96** -- a simple idea to get American voters talking about the candidates and issues, not just listening. **Debate Watch '96** was suggested by voters in the 1992 presidential election who participated in a national focus group study designed to assess the educational value of presidential debates. The study, which was sponsored by The Commission on Presidential Debates, involved 625 voters in 17 cities throughout the United States who met after each of the debates to discuss what they had learned, what they still needed to know about the candidates and the issues, and what they liked and didn't like about each of the formats used in 1992. Focus group members represented a cross-section of America, and the Commission on Presidential Debates took what they had to say seriously.

The focus group members told us that they preferred a variety of formats, that they wanted more citizen involvement similar to what was included in the Richmond Town Hall Meeting during the second presidential debate in 1992, and that they wanted topics covered in more depth. In addition to commenting on the debates, the participants told us that they enjoyed talking about the debates and the candidates with people they previously did not know. They found that they learned as much from the discussions as they did from the debates. And, most importantly, they found that they could disagree and understand why they disagreed without becoming disagreeable. Those 625 citizens from across the country told us to find a way to encourage all Americans to do what they did -- watch and listen to the debates and then talk about what they had just seen and heard. And that's how **Debate Watch '96** was born. It is truly a grassroots example of democracy at work.

You are to be congratulated for choosing to participate in **Debate Watch '96**. All you need to know to conduct a **Debate Watch '96** is contained in this packet; however if you should have a question, suggestion, or comment, call 1-800-xxx-xxxx. This packet contains the following information.

- How to Organize DEBATE WATCH '96
- A Viewer's Guide to Political Debates
- DebateNotes (For Notetaking)
- Facilitator's Guide & Suggested Questions
- Facilitator's Report
- Participant Survey (Optional)
- Resource List (For More Information on Issues, Candidates & Individuals to Help With Your Debate Watch '96)

If you are missing anything, please call Debate Watch '96 offices at 1-800-xxx-xxxx. Since all Debate Watch '96 groups won't be alike, you may make as many copies of the information in this packet as you need. We look forward to hearing from you.

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<h1> HOW TO ORGANIZE DEBATE WATCH '96</h1>

Hosting or participating in **Debate Watch** is easy. Below is a list of questions and answers on what to do to get the most out of the experience.<p><p>

*Q: Who can host **Debate Watch '96**?*<p><p>

A: Anyone or any group, formal or informal. The whole point of **Debate Watch '96** is to get as many Americans as possible talking about the debates, the campaign, the candidates, and the issues that affect our lives.<p><p>

*Q: Where are **Debate Watches** taking place?*<p><p>

A: In all fifty states. If you have friends or relatives in other parts of the country, encourage them to take part.<p><p>

Q: Who should be invited to participate?<p><p>

A: Invite your neighbors, friends, co-workers, or family into your home. Organize a **Debate Watch** for members of an organization wo which you belong in place of a regular meeting. Think about including people of all ages, including teens who might not be old enough to vote yet but are interested in current events. It takes no special expertise to talk about the issues so anyone you know would potentially enjoy participating.<p><p>

Q: How many people should be invited to join?<p><p>

A: Discussion works best if approximately 9-12 people participate. If you belong to an organization that wants to hold a **Debate Watch** in place of a meeting or as part of a parent-student-teacher activity in a school, and you halve more than twelve members, then divide into two or more groups.<p><p>

*Q: Where should **Debate Watch** meet?*<p><p>

A: **Debate Watch** can meet in your living room, in a school, at a community center, in a public library, in a business, at a church or place of worship, in a union hall, at a restaurant or wherever you can watch a television and comfortably form a circle of chairs or meet around a table after the debate to discuss. With large groups, have a large screen television or several televisions to guarantee that everyone can see. If you are planning to divide a large gathering into multiple groups at one location, make sure that you have enough space so that groups have several feet between them.<p><p>

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Q: Do we need a group leader, and what qualifications should a leader have?

A: You should designate a facilitator to lead the group only to get things organized and keep discussion going. This packet includes suggestions for a group facilitator (See Facilitator's Guide and Suggested Questions). Select someone to lead the group who is comfortable giving directions and who won't dominate the discussion. If you want to hold a **Debate Watch**, but no one feels comfortable leading, consult the resource list included in the packet for suggestions of individuals in your area who are willing to be group leaders.

Q: How do we organize the evening?

A: If possible, duplicate and distribute the "Viewer's Guide to Political Debates" prior to the evening of the debate. Have **Debate Watch** participants arrive at the viewing/discussion site about 30 minutes before the scheduled beginning of the debate. If participants want to participate in the research on **Debate Watch '96** (see the question below on the research), have them complete the forms in the packet that are identified as pre-debate surveys and then read "Viewer's Guide to Political Debates" if they weren't sent out ahead of time (please duplicate the forms so that everyone has a copy). Don't turn the television on until a few minutes before the debate begins, and don't turn the volume on until the debate is actually ready to begin. Forms to make it easy to take notes are included in the packet. Make them available to those who want them. Arrange for seating so that everyone can see the television easily. Have some soft drinks, tea, and coffee and finger foods to help create a relaxed atmosphere. You might have each member of the group bring something such as ice, cups, napkins, food, etc. As soon as the debate ends, turn the television off. Take about ten minutes to stretch, etc. (**but don't use the time to discuss informally**), and then have the leader gather everyone around a table or put chairs in a circle to discuss. The leader can follow the suggested set of questions. Talk until you run out of things to say. Most groups should be able to hold a discussion for about an hour. When you have said all that you want, complete the post-discussion forms for the research. Even if you don't participate in the research, please complete and mail the facilitator's form so that we can gauge the number of people who participated. If you had a successful evening, get together again for one of the other debates.

Q: Should we participate in the research -- and who's doing it anyway?

A: Participation in research is purely voluntary and is an individual decision. Some members may want to participate; others might not. The research is being conducted by members of the Speech Communication Association, a professional organization which promotes the study, criticism, research, teaching and practice of communication. Most SCA members participating in Debate Watch are university professors. The research is being coordinated by Dr. Diana Carlin at the University of Kansas who organized the 1992 focus group research. As was done with the 1992 research, a book about the results will be published (the 1992 report, *The 1992 Presidential Debates in Focus* is available from Prager, Greenwood, CT). If you want your opinions to be part of the research, then participate. We would like to hear what you think about the project. Collect the forms and send them in the enclosed envelope or send them individually to the address listed on the forms. The facilitator's response form doesn't require an

envelope.<p><p>

Q: There is only one copy of everything in the packet. Is it all right to make copies?<p><p>

A: YES. Make as many as you need.<p><p>

Q: There is a resource list in the packet. What is its purpose?<p><p>

A: The resource list has several uses. First, it gives you sources for information on the candidates and the issues in case you want to follow up on what you heard in the debate or if you want to read information before the debates. Second, it has the names of individuals or groups who can supply you with a facilitator should you want one. Third, it has information on InterNet discussion sites in case you want to participate in continued dialogue via the Net.<p><p>

Q: Should we use the DebatesNotes form to pick a winner?,<p><p>

A: No. They are designed to help you remember issues you want to discuss. We encourage you not to go into the debates trying to determine who won or lost as there is no single way to make such a decision. use this experience to learn as much as you can. The real winners in debates are the voters who learn from them.<p><p>

Q: What if I have additional questions?<p><p>

A: Call the 800 number on this sheet or call the Speech Communication Association contact person nearest you who is listed in the Resource List.<p><p><p><p>

Debate Watch '96@, P.O. Box _____, Lawrence, KS 66044. 1-8---xxx-xxxx.

A VIEWER'S GUIDE TO POLITICAL DEBATES

Voters typically identify candidate debates as the source of the most influential information gained during a campaign. Because of their importance, the Commission on Presidential Debates and the Speech Communication Association prepared this information to assist you in getting the most from your debate viewing. This guide describes commonly used debate formats and questioning techniques and provides guidelines for getting the most from a debate.

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The Structure of Debates

Debates use a variety of formats. Primary debates, featuring candidates from the same party, and local debates traditionally were more free-wheeling and incorporated a wide range of formats because of multiple candidates. In 1992, those two features characterized the general election presidential debates, which included a different format for each debate including a town hall meeting with citizen questioners.

Most debates impose time limits on answers to ensure that all candidates have equal opportunity to respond. Topics may focus on a wide range of issues or may be on a particular theme such as education or the economy. General election presidential debates usually divide the time between foreign and domestic topics.

Candidates may have an opening statement or a moderator may introduce each candidate and begin questioning immediately. In most debates candidates have a closing statement.

Questions guide the content of debates. There are three types of questions: initial; follow-up; and cross-examination. Initial questions get the debate started by asking candidates to explain or defend a position or compare it to an opponent's. Many initial questions are hypotheticals in the form of, "What would you do if?" Follow-up questions are directed at a candidate after an answer is given. Their purpose is to probe the original response by asking for elaboration or clarification. Some follow-up questions are on an unrelated topic. Follow-up questions may be asked immediately after an initial response is given or after all candidates have answered the initial question. Cross-examination questions are questions that one candidate addresses to another. A separate time can be set aside for cross-examination questions or they may be included as follow-ups.

Questions may be posed to candidates from a variety of sources. Members of the media typically serve as questioners in presidential and state office debates. In primary and local debates, experts on the topic debated may serve as panelists. A single moderator or a panel of media representatives or subject experts are the most common questioners. Many debates, especially at the local level, allow for questions from the audience at some point in the debate. The Richmond town hall meeting in 1992 was the first general election presidential debate to involve citizen questioners.

How to Get the Most Out of a Debate

Focus your attention on a few key points. Know what it is you want in an office holder, then watch and listen to see which candidate best fits your ideal. The following suggestions will help you focus:

<L1> **Set aside your partisan views.** Use the debates to learn as much as possible about all candidates and their positions.

<L2> **Pay close attention to the candidates when they talk about how to solve problems.** Listen carefully for comparisons candidates make between or among their programs and their opponents.

<L3> **Decide to whom the candidate is appealing.** Listen closely to opening and closing statements to determine to whom the candidate is appealing. If a candidate does not answer a question directly, to what groups does it appear the candidate is appealing?

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<L4> **Identify the candidate's overriding theme in the debate.** If you can readily identify it, the candidate has done a good job of getting major points across. If you have difficulty, the candidate's message may not be well developed.

<L5> **Identify the candidate's debate strategy.** Does the candidate speak directly to the issues, provide specifics, and present new policies or information? Or does the candidate debate "not to lose" by interpreting questions to suit the candidate's agenda?

<L6> **Identify the images which candidates try to create for themselves.**

Most candidates try to portray themselves as leaders and identify themselves with cherished American values while suggesting that their opponents lack these qualities. What in the responses supports their claims?

<L7> **Be aware of the visual information communicated in televised debates.**

Observe candidates' faces and mannerisms to help determine whether you like, trust, or believe a candidate.

<L8> **Be aware of the technical limitations of televised debates.** Television works by showing action. To create action and minimize monotony, directors sometimes include "reaction shots" to show one candidate's response to an opponent's statement. This can detract your attention from what is being said. It is wise to remember the role of action shots when watching.

<L9> **Don't watch a debate to determine a winner or loser.** All candidates have goals for a debate; as a result, all could claim victory if winning is defined as achieving goals set by the campaigns or the media. The overriding question for you to concentrate on is who would make a better president, senator, governor, legislator, or county clerk.

This guide was adapted from material prepared by the following Speech Communication Association members: Diana Carlin, University of Kansas; Robert Friedenber, Miami University, Hamilton, OH; James Gaudino, Speech Communication Association; Susan Hellweg, San Diego State University; John Morello, Mary Washington College; Michael Pfau, University of Wisconsin.

About the Commission on Presidential Debates: The non-partisan Commission on Presidential Debates has sponsored all the general election presidential debates since 1988. For information about the Commission and the 1996 debates, contact Commission on Presidential Debates, 601 13th Street, NW, Suite 300, Washington DC 20004 or call 202-872-1020.

About the Speech Communication Association: The Speech Communication Association is the oldest and largest national organization promoting the study, criticism, research, teaching, and practice of the artistic, humanistic, and scientific principles of communication. Its headquarters is located at 5105 Backlick Road, Building E, Annandale, VA 22003.

For more information contact **DEBATE WATCH '96@**, P.O. Box _____, Lawrence, KS 66044 OR CALL 1-800-XXX-XXXX.