



GREAT DEBATERS CLUB



2016



Introduction

It has never been easier to make your voice heard on issues you care about than it is today. You can give MPs a piece of your mind on Twitter, you can launch a petition and get 100,000 signatures within days on change.org, and you can rant your heart out on Facebook. The combination of catchy slogans, witty memes, and ‘profound’ quotes makes leadership look like a simple task of deciding between obviously right and obviously wrong.

Yet in reality, we can’t know how difficult those decisions are until we put ourselves in the shoes of those who have to make them. There is a reason these decisions are made through the medium of impassioned debate – because they are hard and they have consequences. But when these debates are taken online, they all too frequently descend into hateful tirades, personal abuse, and even death threats. Some people simply withdraw from these debates altogether in a desperate desire to insulate themselves from offensive opinions.

The Great Debaters Club exists to provide the role models that the opinion formers and decision makers of tomorrow so badly need. Our founder members include aspiring politicians, civil servants, senior health professionals, bankers, journalists, and lawyers among many more professions that are perhaps less noted, but no less noteworthy. By learning how to defend opinions other than their own, so that they can engage respectfully with the people they disagree with the most, they are changing the face of public debate.

Fortnightly gatherings attended by anywhere between 20 and 80 people at a time provide them with the platform to do this, while our charity *The Debating Foundation* enables them to share their wisdom with groups and communities across the world. To date our debate trainers have worked with school pupils from some of the most deprived areas in London, and travelled to Rwanda to deliver the country’s first national debate training programme. Meanwhile, they continue to refine their transferable skills of public speaking and critical thinking, which help them advance their own personal and professional development.

We can do so much more. Imagine a debate club in every city across the country, where each member is valued because they have a different opinion and not in spite of it; where each member is able to express themselves with confidence and without fear of reprisals; where each member reserves judgment until they have heard all the arguments and asked all their questions; where each member realises the best way to prove themselves right is to do everything in their power to prove themselves wrong; where each member has the humility to stand in the shoes of their leaders and submit to the scrutiny of their peers.

Welcome to the Great Debaters Club!

Tony Koutsoumbos, Founder of the Great Debaters Club



Contents

Page 4	Why join the Great Debaters Club?
Page 5	2015 review
Page 6	2016 programme: the Great Debater Scale
Page 7	2016 programme: events
Page 8	2016 programme: dates and venues
Page 9	Membership benefits and prices
Page 10	FAQ
Page 11	Terms and conditions
Page 12	How to join the club



Why join the Great Debaters Club?

in the words of our founder members...

"I have always enjoyed listening to debates on all kinds of subjects but have had very limited opportunity to participate. As I rose to a more senior position in my profession and got involved in clinical management, I realised how the skills of debating transferred to the management and negotiating table. I am so glad I decided to join this group of debaters because I have gained so much from this club: the surprisingly good feeling of belonging to a group of like-minded people wanting to attend debates and improve their own debating skills, as well as the social interactions with the members, who are an eclectic group of people with very different opinions and ideas of the world and yet very amiable socially and respectful of the others views."

(Rupi, Consultant orthopaedic surgeon)

"Through the Great Debaters Club, I have been able to connect with people who have a genuine passion for getting to the heart of important matters. Being a member has enabled me to come face to face with people who share and do not share my world view and also those that offer totally new ways of looking at things that never occurred to me before. This has been invaluable in developing my own thinking in line with reason and reasonableness. It's hard to think of a part of my life that the skills gained from being a member have not been useful or relevant!"

(Anna, Masters student)

"I think it's fair to say that joining up and learning from you helped give me the confidence to dive into politics, so I owe the club an awful lot. Thank you very much. I will be having a private drink tonight to the club's continued growth and success in the new year."

(James, Intelligence analyst)

"I was happy to take part in the workshop [debating counter-terror laws after Paris] on Saturday. It was a very emotional subject for me. Afterwards I realised I had not really tackled the subject for this reason but I enjoyed the experience. I think that it has never been more important to organise debates on hot topics. Democracy is precious but fragile."

(Jessica, Business auditor from Paris)



2015 Review

What we achieved in 2015

Since the launch of the Great Debaters Club in May 2015, we have held 13 public debates, 7 practice workshops, 6 evening masterclasses, a speech and debate conference in Eastbourne, and a Christmas Dinner. Having started out as a crowd-funding campaign with the aim of recruiting 50 founder members, the programme now boasts a total of 97 Great Debaters. The average attendance of each training workshop, meanwhile, has ranged between 10 and 20 people, including non-members paying to attend on a one-off basis.

The Great Debaters club covered a range of topics too, with members learning how to defend both sides of the argument on issues as complex and sensitive as: tackling gender bias in the media, the use of drone strikes in the Middle East, legalising prostitution and medically assisted suicide, anti-terror laws in the aftermath of the Paris attacks, allowing parents to select the sex of their children, and the merits of positive discrimination.

Finally, the partnerships built with like-minded organisation allowed the club to secure numerous special offers for members including half price tickets to Spectator debates on redistributing wealth through higher taxes and privatising the BBC, and the Battle of Ideas, a weekend conference held at the Barbican by the Institute of Ideas. Members also took advantage of opportunities to judge school debating competitions and volunteer with a film crew run by the citizen journalism charity, WorldBytes.

Where there is still progress to be made

Out of the entire plan for 2015, only two items remain yet to be fulfilled: the debating competition planned for November and a comprehensive training manual. However, neither has been forgotten.

The competition is simply something we lacked the capacity to get off the ground in our first year, but the club is deep in talks with one of London's most prestigious student housing bodies to host it in the spring of 2016.

The training manual is much closer to completion and members have been by no means left empty-handed with handouts from workshops and debate summaries abound. The challenge has been to aggregate all these notes into one document, which itself has been continually changing throughout the year. Indeed, it is the lessons learnt from running each of this year's workshops that has allowed for the codification of what defines a Great Debater. This has led to the creation of the *Great Debater Scale* (see next page), which members will be able to use in 2016 to formally track their progress.



2016 Programme

The Great Debater Scale

Next year's training programme is designed to take members on a journey from Absolute Beginner to Great Debater with each grade representing the attainment of a new skill set, so members can track their progress.

Absolute Beginner	New and nervous but full of potential
Skilled Orator	A good talker but offers more style than substance
Deep Thinker	Can prove they're right but struggles to win people over
Great Debater	Turns conflict into an opportunity to build consensus

Rather than focus individually on each of the key skill areas required to become a Great Debater, as the 2015 evening class series did, each training workshop will instead teach members how to bring each of those skill areas together in order to meet the criteria of each grade. The skill areas themselves and redefine under the new acronym of *SPADE*.

Structure	The ability to see the big picture and work out what your most important points are
Preparation	Knowing your facts and understanding what it will take to convince your audience
Analysis	Applying critical thought to root out implicit bias and improve decision-making
Delivery	Holding the attention of your audience and embedding your ideas in their memory
Engagement	Facilitating your audience to resolve a conflict and make a difficult decision

The scale is designed to help members identify gaps in their skills and knowledge and attend the workshops that best meet their needs. It will also allow them to be assessed on their performance and receive detailed feedback on how to improve further. Finally, those who do attain Great Debater status will then become eligible to deliver training workshops of their own for both the club and as volunteers for our charity, *The Debating Foundation*.



2016 Programme

Events

- **Public Debates – 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month**

Our signature event, each public debate is centred on a topical issue in current affairs. This year, speakers will be selected exclusively from the membership of the Great Debaters Club, but admission will remain free and open to all. Active audience participation through an in-depth Q&A is the hallmark of our debates and remains the best opportunity for speakers to change the minds of their audiences.
- **One day masterclass – 1st Saturday of the month**

As you progress up the Great Debater Scale, our one day masterclasses will help you track your progress through each grade from Absolute Beginner to Great Debater. Focusing on the key skills required to master each grade, the interactive classes will include a series of short talks, group exercises, reading materials and an open Q&A. Anyone can attend a masterclass, but only members will have their progress through each grade documented.
- **Practical training workshop – 3rd Saturday of the month**

Speaking in a public debate can be a daunting experience if you've never done it before. So, our monthly practice workshop is a chance to test yourself in a challenging but supportive environment and receive in-depth feedback from a seasoned debate coach. Attendance is capped at 25 per workshop to ensure an optimal working environment, while members will have their performance scored using the Great Debater scale.
- **Eastbourne Weekend Retreat**

A time-honoured tradition (started in 2010) where Debating London partners with the capital's longest standing speaker clubs: the Cogers, formed in 1755, and the Sylvans, formed in 1868, to celebrate the art of speech and debate on the Eastbourne seafront. Held on a weekend in mid-October every year, members pay only for their transport, food, and accommodation. The retreat itself is free.
- **The Great Debaters Competition**

A chance for members to put their skills to the test in a competitive environment, this competition seeks to unify substance with style. Debaters compete in front of both a live audience and a panel of judges over a series of rounds with the top two teams making the Grand Final. The proceeds of this competition are donated to The Debating Foundation, a charity set up to carry out our voluntary work both here in the UK and abroad.
- **Discounts on partner events**

In 2015, Great Debaters Club members received discounts on public debates organised by The Spectator and the annual Battle of Ideas conference run by the Institute of Ideas. You can expect more of these special offers this year along with first refusal on invitations to attend and take part in televised debates and discussion shows.
- **Annual Dinner**

An intimate evening of food, drink, and interesting conversation with your fellow members. One of our last events of the year, the dinner doubles up as an unofficial Christmas party. In 2015, a group of ten members took over the Tea House Theatre in Vauxhall for a night to enjoy a four course meal and mulled wine for just £35.



2016 Programme

Dates

January	July
Public debates - Wednesday 6 th and 20 th	Public debates - Wednesday 6 th and 20 th
Debating for beginners workshop – Saturday 9 th	Critical thinking workshop – Saturday 9 th
Practice debate workshop – Saturday 23 rd	Practice debate workshop – Saturday 23 rd

February	August
Public debates - Wednesday 3 rd and 17 th	Public debates - Wednesday 3 rd and 17 th
Public speaking workshop – Saturday 6 th	Great Debater workshop – Saturday 6 th
Practice debate workshop – Saturday 20 th	Practice debate workshop – Saturday 20 th

March	September
Public debates - Wednesday 2 nd and 16 th	Public debates - Wednesday 7 th and 21 st
Critical thinking workshop – Saturday 5 th	Debating for beginners workshop – Saturday 10 th
Practice debate workshop – Saturday 19 th	Practice debate workshop – Saturday 24 th

April	October
Public debates - Wednesday 6 th and 20 th	Public debates - Wednesday 5 th and 19 th
Great Debater workshop – Saturday 9 th	Public speaking workshop – Saturday 8 th
Practice debate workshop – Saturday 23 rd	Practice debate workshop – Saturday 22 nd
Great Debaters Competition – tbc	Annual speech and debate conference - tbc

May	November
Public debates - Wednesday 4 th and 18 th	Public debates - Wednesday 2 nd and 16 th
Debating for beginners workshop – Saturday 7 th	Critical thinking workshop – Saturday 5 th
Practice debate workshop – Saturday 21 st	Practice debate workshop – Saturday 19 th

June	December
Public debates - Wednesday 1 st and 15 th	Annual showcase debate – Wednesday 7 th
Public speaking workshop – Saturday 4 th	Great Debater workshop – Saturday 3 rd
Practice debate workshop – Saturday 18 th	Annual members dinner - tbc

Venues and Times

- Tea House Theatre in Vauxhall for public debates from 7.30 pm to 9.30 pm
- Wedge Issue in Farringdon for training and practice workshops from 10.30 am to 4.30 pm



Membership Benefits

Event	Members rates	Non-members rates
Public debates	FREE + guaranteed speaking opportunities	FREE
Monthly masterclass	FREE	£50
Monthly practice workshop	FREE	£25
Great Debaters Competition	£20 per person	£30 per person
Spectator Events	£12.50	£22.50
Annual dinner	Cost of set meal only	Exclusive to members
Eastbourne weekend retreat	Accommodation food and transport only	Accommodation food and transport only
Debate training manual	FREE	£5

Cost of membership

[£159 for 12 months \(click here to join\)](#)

OR

[£24.99 per month \(click here to join\)](#)

Concessions

Full-time students	Senior Citizens	Benefit Claimants
20% off membership	20% off membership	50% off membership

Email Tony Koutsoumbos at info@debatinglondon.com to request concession rate, if eligible.



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

If you have any questions about membership that you can't find answers to here, then please email Tony Koutsoumbos on tony@debate-training.co.uk.

1) **What is the difference between Debating London and the Great Debaters Club?**

In short, members of the Great Debaters Club automatically become members of Debating London, but not vice-versa. This is because membership of Debating London is free and only secures admission to monthly public debates, while membership of the Great Debaters Club is paid for by a subscription and secures entry to all training and practice workshops as well as the public debates. The intention is to eventually merge the two into one and call it the Great Debaters Club, but with 4000 people on the Debating London mailing list, which has existed for six years, and only a handful ready to commit to the training programme when it launched in May, a wholesale name change was considered too big a risk at the time.

2) **Can non-members still attend training and practice workshops?**

Absolutely. In the membership benefits section on the previous page, you will see how much it costs to attend each workshop if you are not a member of the Great Debaters Club. You will also be more than welcome to attend one-off special events such as our annual competition and the speech and debate conference in Eastbourne. Provided you are on the Debating London mailing list, or belong to either one of the Debating London groups on Facebook and meetup, you will receive updates notifying you about all upcoming events.

3) **Can non-members still take advantage of special offers from partner organisations?**

Any special offers that involve discounts on tickets to events run by partner organisations are exclusive to members of the Great Debaters Club. However, non-members who are on the Debating London mailing list will still be alerted to the availability of full price tickets to the same events. There will also be plenty of free events that will be open to members and non-members alike, such as attending live election debates between party leaders in the 2016 London Mayor election – should we be invited to attend by the broadcasters hosting them (which we normally are).

4) **Who runs Debating London and the Great Debaters Club?**

Debating London was founded in 2009 by Tony Koutsoumbos and Jason Maude, who became friends at university. Tony founded the Great Debaters Club last year and is responsible for running all training and practice workshops, while Jason is solely involved with helping to plan, organise and run the club's public debates.



Terms and Conditions

- 1) Guaranteed speaking opportunities in public debates entitles members to a minimum of two speaking opportunities during the 12 months of their membership. This is conditional on members volunteering themselves to speak and will be considered fulfilled provided two speaking opportunities have been made available whether or not the member chooses to avail themselves of them.
- 2) 30 days' notice is required to cancel an annual subscription upon which the member will receive a refund equivalent in value to the remaining months until the expiry of the subscription (e.g. if a member chooses to leave five months into a 12 month subscription, their cancellation will take effect one month later and they will be refunded 50% of their annual subscription fee).
- 3) No notice period is required to cancel a monthly subscription.
- 4) Membership does not guarantee admission into all training and practice workshops and is contingent on members booking their place before maximum capacity is reached. However, exceptions can be made for members who are unable to register due to technical problems or for members registering for their first workshop, provided such exceptions do not compromise health and safety guidelines of the premises used for said workshops or undermine the learning experience of other members.
- 5) The concessions available to full time students does include both under-graduate and post-graduate students as well as students enrolled in one year courses such as the Graduate Diploma in Law.
- 6) The concessions available to senior citizens apply to individuals who have reached or exceeded pensionable age.
- 7) The concessions available to benefit claimants refers to the collection of benefits that will be rolled into the Universal Credit, including: child tax credit, housing benefit, working tax credit, income support, income-related employment and support allowance, income-based jobseekers allowance.
- 8) Members are required to respect the personal space of fellow members and guests, refrain from using abusive language towards another member, or from behaving in a way that is considered to be intimidating, threatening, abusive, or from making unwanted physical contact or sexual advances towards another member. Violation of these rules will be met with all reasonable attempts to resolve the dispute and, where necessary, immediate expulsion from the club and termination of subscription, in the event of which, annual subscribers will receive a refund equal in value to the remaining months of their subscription, and monthly subscribers will simply have their subscriptions terminated.
- 9) Members are expressly forbidden from producing and/or distributing copies of all and any training guides (including workshop notes) without the express permission of the club's founder and proprietor, Tony Koutsoumbos.