

The Seattle Times Newspapers In Education presents

Electing the President: *A Guide to the Election Process*

Produced in partnership with the League of Women Voters



Thank you for joining our Wednesday series about the presidential election, produced in partnership with the League of Women Voters through November 5. Last spring's chapters are posted online at lwvwa.org and will help students of all ages to understand the people, the parties and the issues regarding our election process.

Week Five: Debate Watching 101:

WHAT IS A DEBATE?

A debate is an event at which viewers can directly compare the candidates and their positions. During a debate, candidates meet face-to-face to answer questions, state their views and respond to their opponents' statements.

The most common debate formats are:

- Single moderator: one person asks the candidates questions
- Panel: a select group of people question the candidates
- Town hall: questions are submitted to the candidates by voters in advance or during the debate

The debate usually begins with an introduction of the candidates, who may also give opening statements. Then the candidates are asked questions and they respond — usually within a time limit. The questioner may ask follow-up questions to get the candidates to clarify their responses. Some debates give candidates an opportunity to ask questions directly of each other. At the end, the candidates are usually given time to make closing statements.

Before the Debate

You can prepare for the debate by focusing on information you need to decide who you will vote for. Take some time to:

- Learn about the candidates and their backgrounds
- Find out what the important campaign issues are

- Decide what issues are most important to you
- Think about the questions you have and the information you need to help you in your decision making
- Open your mind to new opinions and impressions of the candidates

Watching the debate in a group and discussing it may help to clarify your thoughts about what was said and how the candidates performed.

During the Debate

While watching the debate, ask yourself questions to judge the fairness and the performance of the candidates:

- Does the format give each candidate an equal opportunity to speak and respond?
- Are the questions clear, fair and equally tough on all candidates?
- Is the moderator in control of the debate? Does the moderator need to say less and let the candidates say more?
- Do the candidates answer questions directly, or do they evade them?
- Do they give specifics about their stands on the issues, or do they speak in generalities?
- Do they talk about their own policies and positions, or do they mostly attack their opponents?
- Can they actually carry out the promises they are making?
- Do they show how their backgrounds and experience qualify them to hold the office?
- Are their answers consistent with their previous positions, and if not, why?
- What image are they trying to create?
- Do their responses appear "canned"?
- Are reaction shots or other techniques used to create a sense of drama or conflict?

- Are you being influenced by comments made by reporters and commentators immediately before and after the debate?

After the Debate

Take some time after the debate to reflect on what you have just seen and heard.

- Turn off the TV to avoid listening to the commentaries
- Ask yourself which candidate appears most qualified for the office
- Identify the issues on which you agree with each candidate and those on which you disagree, and decide whether that makes you more or less likely to vote for a particular candidate
- Ask yourself if you learned something new about the issues or the candidates
- Think about whether you have more questions about the issues or the candidates that you want to follow up on

Learn More:

- Three Presidential Debates are scheduled for the next two weeks. All are at 6 p.m.
 - October 2, **Vice Presidential Debate**
 - October 7, **Presidential Debate with Town Hall Format**
 - October 15, **Presidential Debate with a Domestic Policy Focus**

Prior to watching a debate, prepare as suggested in the section, "Before the Debate." Plan ahead and arrange to watch with friends or family, or set up a time to talk about it later. Create a chart with some of the questions from the "During the Debate" section on the left side and space to write your reaction on the right side. Use this format to determine the quality of each question the candidates were asked, and then decide how well they answered. What did you learn about debates?

Candidate and Ballot Measures Forums 2008

Monday, Sept. 29, 7:30 p.m.: **Candidates Forum**, sponsored by the LWV First Hill Unit and the Residence Council at the Performance Hall, Horizon House, 900 University St., Seattle.

Thursday, Oct. 2, 7 p.m.: **Ballot Measures Forum** at Seattle First Baptist Church, 1111 Harvard Ave., Seattle.

Monday, Oct. 6, 6:30 p.m.: **Local Issues Forum**, sponsored by the LWV Issaquah Unit at the King County Library Service Center, 960 Newport Way NW, Issaquah.

Thursday, Oct. 23, 7 p.m.: **Ballot Measures Forum**, sponsored by the LWV - South King County at the Normandy Park Congregational Church, 19247- 1st Ave. S., Normandy Park.

Monday, Oct. 27, 7:30 p.m.: **Ballot Measures Forum**, sponsored by the LWV First Hill Unit and the Residence Council at the Performance Hall, Horizon House, 900 University St., Seattle.

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