

Debate Scorecard: How to Grade the Debates

This scorecard is a subjective evaluation for a debate, in that you will assign points to the candidates based on your own perception of how they performed. However, this scorecard uses measurements that are widely agreed upon by analysts and scholars as keys to winning political debates. The 10 categories used to assign points to the candidates are:

1. Goals

Ask yourself: Did the candidates do what they needed to do? Candidates have goals going into the debate such as appealing to older voters or alleviating concerns about an unpopular vote.

2. Appeal to base

Ask yourself: Did the candidates firm up their base of support? Core party members are the ones most likely to vote and vote for members of their own political party. So, candidates must make sure to unite and energize their core supporters. The Democratic base includes African American, younger, well educated, and urban voters in the Northeast and West Coast, as well as key constituencies like union members, teachers, Jewish voters, and environmentalists. The Republican base includes gun owners, white men, and rural voters in the South and Rocky Mountain states, as well as key constituencies like Christian evangelicals and business owners. It is virtually impossible to win an election and not carry in overwhelming numbers one's core party voters.

3. Appeal to swing voters

Ask yourself: Did the candidates appeal to undecided and swing voters? This is important because many elections are close and undecided and swing voters are often the key to victory. Did the candidates connect with voters?

4. Control the agenda

Ask yourself: Which candidate controlled the agenda of the debate? Sometimes the best defense is a good offense and a leader will set the tone of the debate, stay on message, and make his or her positions known rather than responding to the opponent.

5. Personal exchanges

Ask yourself: When the candidates addressed one another personally, who got the best of the exchange? Inevitably, there will be some head-to-head disagreements and comparisons during the debates, and such moments tend to be very important to voters and the media. Also, they are often memorable debates moments.

6. Content of answers

Ask yourself: Did the candidates answer the questions and do so in an accurate, knowledgeable, and confident manner? Candidates must demonstrate their understanding of the issues, have a clear vision for the country, and not appear to be too hesitant or evasive in tackling tough questions. They must also make a connection to voters.

7. Leadership

Ask yourself: Which candidate looked presidential? Candidates must project leadership in both demeanor/appearance and in their answers, while avoiding looking nervous, tired, and insincere. Because elections are, to a degree, popularity contests whereby personality is the key, candidates must present themselves as leaders.

8. Zingers and blunders

Ask yourself: Did the candidates deliver catchy lines or make embarrassing mistakes? The most memorable moments in debates are often witty one-liners or embarrassing gaffes. The element of surprise – achieved through an unexpected, unforgettable, or bold statement – often helps candidates achieve the “wow factor.” These zingers and blunders will be repeated by the media, and those voters who did not watch the debate may be influenced by these moments.

9. Open

Ask yourself: Were the opening comments of the candidates strong and memorable? First impressions are lasting and debates are no exceptions, as the opening allows candidates to set the tone.

10. Close

Ask yourself: Did the candidates conclude the debate on a high note and with a memorable closing remark? The final remarks are often what people remember and a good debater can wrap up the debate with an effective close.

Scorecard Explanation

Each candidate starts with zero points. Give the candidates points in each of the 10 aforementioned categories. The points range from minus two to two, as noted below. Total the points for each candidate. The candidate with the most points wins.

CATEGORY	Biden	Trump
1. Goals		
2. Appeal to base		
3. Appeal to swing voters		
4. Control agenda		
5. Personal exchanges		
6. Content of answers		
7. Leadership		
8. Zingers and blunders		
9. Open		
10. Close		
Total score		

Points

- +2 = The candidate really helped him/herself in the category
- +1 = The candidate somewhat helped him/herself in the category
- 0 = The candidate was neutral, neither helping nor harming him/herself
- 1 = The candidate somewhat harmed him/herself in the category
- 2 = The candidate really harmed himself/herself

Answer the following questions:

1.) Which topics/issues were brought up by the moderator and candidates? List at least 4 and describe the candidate responses to the issues:

ISSUE:	<u>Biden</u>	<u>Trump</u>

2.) Which of those topics do you think is most important to the nation? Why? To you? Why?

3.) Who do you think won the debate? Why? (you can consider the scorecard above if you wish)