



How to ask a good question at a candidate debate

In Victoria, **elections are a once-in-a-four-year opportunity** to directly influence who represents you in parliament and how they prioritise the issues important to you. Candidate debates are your chance to ask your local candidates questions about how they will spend their time in parliament if elected. You should approach a candidate debate with an **open mind and a willingness to listen to all the candidates**. If good questions are asked and there is healthy debate, you should leave the candidate debate **more informed and ready to vote with confidence**.

Top tips for asking good questions

1. Use open-ended questions

Asking a question that can be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no' is a missed opportunity to understand *why* the candidate may act or vote in a certain way. Try to ask questions that require candidates to explain and justify their position, and prompt them to outline what steps they will undertake and in what timeframe they will implement change.

2. Succinctly frame the context, then get straight to the question

It is important for the candidates to understand the context of your question (i.e. why are you asking this question), but don't derail your own question by spending too much time telling the long back story. Take one or two sentences to provide context, then ask your question.

3. Direct your question to all candidates to allow for comparison of positions

It's best to ask a question that each of the candidates can answer; this allows you to compare the answers. One exception is that you may want to ask the current sitting member to justify an action or decision during their time in office.

4. Use local examples where possible, but avoid individual issues

You may be concerned about the poor condition of roads in Victoria, so try to name the worst roads in your electorate to back up your argument. This will keep the candidates accountable because they won't be able to deny it is an issue in the local area, and it might reveal how well the candidates know their electorate. However, this is not a time for raising individual issues, such as an ongoing dispute about road maintenance out the front of your farm.

5. Write your question down

There is a lot to remember about asking a good question and even the most confident public speakers can get flustered in the moment, so consider writing down your question before the debate or while you're waiting for your question to be chosen.

Respectful debate

In addition to asking good questions, **engaging respectfully with all candidates and fellow participants is essential to a successful candidate debate**. Avoid any swearing, raised voices, or personalised criticism. Raise your hand to ask a question, don't interrupt or speak over people when they are asking a question, and allow candidates the opportunity to fully answer questions. All debates will have a moderator, and this person will manage the debate so you can focus on listening to the candidates.

Example of a good and bad question (with a frivolous topic)

Bad question:

20 years ago, an ice-cream truck used to come past my house every Saturday and it was great for me as a kid, and all of my cousins... (life story is told)... so will you enforce mandatory ice-cream trucks every Saturday to every house?

Good question:

Ice-cream trucks during summer have been shown to reduce stress and encourage community engagement. What is your position on ice-cream trucks and how will you support or oppose ice-cream trucks if elected?