

## Soapbox

Remember when universities were the melting pot of ideas, and we learned so much from the passionate, sometimes radical opinions of our fellow students? “Soapbox” is the opportunity to express your opinion and influence your peers on any topic you feel strongly about. Come and listen to the opinions of others, even if you might not agree with them. Get up and explain why you don’t agree. The topics might be contentious, even politically incorrect, but the group always decides on the agenda. You are not obliged to express an opinion – you can “lurk” if you like. Warning: not suitable for people who choose to be offended easily, and are not prepared to explain why.

### **Format**

No agenda exists before the meeting starts, although participants should come with some preparation if they want to speak. Debate should be informed. You should anticipate what arguments might come your way, and have supporting facts available. Speaking only – no audio/visual, props, or handouts.

### **The first five minutes:**

Those present can nominate topics (as a debating statement) for the agenda, which are written onto a whiteboard, along with the name of the nominee. The nominee needs to “sell” that the topic should be included for that day’s agenda, in 15 seconds only. Max of 10 topic nominations. The meeting then votes by show of hands on which topics will be on that day’s agenda, maximum 5.

### **The next 75 minutes**

Each topic will last for 15 minutes, starting with its nominee speaking uninterrupted for 4 minutes. After that there may be short interjections, at any time, or questions or debate with opposing points of view. Keep to the topic. The Chair selects the next speaker from raised hands. No subsequent speaker can speak for more than three minutes at a time (“the honourable member’s time has expired!”)

On invitation by the Chair, each speaker/questioner/debater must stand and introduce themselves and declare their interests before speaking. Only one person is standing at any time. Interjections may occur (to be controlled by the Chair) for which the speaker may choose to respond.

The topic expires exactly after 15 minutes, or earlier on the Chair’s decision. There may well be no conclusion nor agreement, or even common ground. The topic may be proposed at the next meeting if a member believes it warranted. You might lobby other members to vote for the topic at the next meeting.

### **The last 5 minutes – Rant Session**

From a show of hands, the Chair selects a ranter who is restricted to 60 seconds (max) of ranting on any topic. There is no debate or interjection. At the end of the rant, the group might ask “do you feel better now?”

A sample agenda:

1. Adoption laws in Australia need to be more flexible
2. The North Adelaide Aquatic Centre, funded by Adelaide City ratepayers, should be closed.

3. When the Queen dies, Australia should become a republic.
4. Drug users should be compulsorily rehabilitated
5. The ABC is biased.

On enrolment, participants must agree to the following rules.

- The Code of Conduct of U3A must be upheld.
- There must be no illegality – e.g. slander, physical assault, etc
- No recording permitted - nothing may be published from the meeting
- All activity must be courteous, with no personal attacks (play the ball, not the person).
- No swearing or profanity.
- The Chair's decision is final and must be respected, and adhered to.