WORLD SCHOOLS DEBATE MANUAL

PREPARED FOR DSU NATIONAL SCHOOLS CHAMPIONSHIPS

What is debating?

A debate is a contest in which two teams present reasons (or 'arguments') for and against a topic. One team is in favour of the topic and the other team is against it. Both teams try to persuade the audience and the judges that they are right.

The point of debating, then, is to be as persuasive as you can be. The focus is not only on whether you are a good public speaker, but also on whether you can come up with interesting and powerful arguments, present them clearly, and make people *believe* what you're saying. And because both teams are meant to have the chance to persuade the judges that they are right and their opposition is wrong, the debate is very interactive. Speakers are allowed to interrupt each other (using 'Points of Information' – more on this later) and tell the other team exactly why they are wrong.

Just being able to argue well does not make you a good debater – just as being able to kick a ball will not make you a good soccer player. There are rules to debating, and you need to know them and abide by them in order to win a debate. The rules of World Schools Style are really quite easy once you get the hang of it, and change very little from competition to competition. (The only thing that might change is the length of speeches – everything else is the same.)

Appreciations

We are greatful for the vast effort of our friends the South African Schools debating Board from whom majority of this manual was derived for training to Ugandan Schools.-* DSU *Steering Committee

The Rules

The Teams

There are two teams in a debate. One team is called the PROPOSITION, and it is their job to agree with the topic, and argue for it. The other team is called the OPPOSITION, and it is their job to disagree with the proposition. Each team has three speakers on it, and each of them will have a very clearly defined role – more on that later.

The Motion

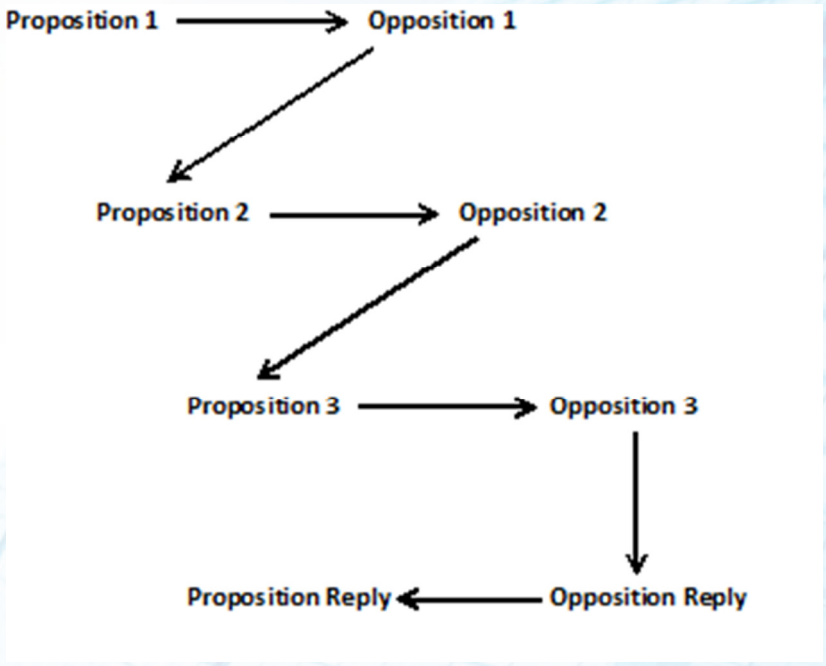
The topic for the debate is called the "motion". Every motion starts with the words "this house". That's just a fancy way of saying "the proposition team". It's important to remember that you can't have a debate about an issue, like "terrorism" or "global warming" – there must be something for each side to *believe in* or *do*, so they can actually prove something. So a motion might be "This house believes that we are losing the war on terror", or "This house would force developing countries to do more to address global warming".

The Speeches

After every team member from proposition and opposition has spoken once, one speaker from each team will give a short "reply speech", which will let them summarise the major issues in the debate and close their team's arguments. The third speaker cannot do the reply speech, because they won't have time to sit down and write a reply speech after delivering their main speech. This means that either the first speaker or the second speaker must do the reply speech – you can choose.

The speeches are all done in a specific order, alternating from proposition to opposition. There is one little difference at the end of the debate, though. The reply speeches happen the other way around from the rest of the debate. The opposition reply speech will happen immediately after the opposition third speaker speech, and the proposition reply speech will finish the debate.

The order of the speeches will look like this:



Points of Information

Points of information (also known as POIs) are one of the most fun parts of debating. If you have ever debated before, you will know that there are times when you wish that you could tell the speaker just how wrong he is. Or throttle him. While you will never be allowed to strangle an irritating speaker, points of information allow you to interrupt his speech and challenge him on what he is saying. To stop the debate becoming a shouting match between you and the speaker, there are a few rules about points of information that you will need to remember.

First, and very important, you cannot just get up and start saying whatever is on your mind. It isn't your speech, after all – so you need to ask the permission of the person who is currently speaking. The way to do this is to stand up and say "Point of information" or "On that point" while holding out your hand, so that the speaker will notice that you have something to say. The speaker can then decide to listen to you, or he can choose to ignore your point. If he doesn't want to hear what you have to say, he will say "No thank you" or tell you to sit down, or just ignore you. If this happens, you must sit down and offer your point some other time.

If the speaker does want to listen to you, then he will say something like "Yes, what is it?" or "What is your point?" or often, just "Yes?". That means that you are allowed to start speaking. It is important to remember that you are using up the speaker's time, so you must make your point quickly. If you take more than 15 seconds to make your point, the timekeeper will tell you to sit down, because you are wasting the speaker's time. Try to think about what you want to say, so that if your point is accepted you will be able to say it quickly.

You can use a point of information to ask a question about what the speaker is saying (especially useful if you don't really understand what he is saying), to tell the speaker why his

argument is wrong, or to correct an important factual inaccuracy in his speech. Try not to offer POIs more often than every 15 seconds. If you offer too many points of information, the speaker will not be able to complete a sentence without telling you to sit down. This is unfair. If you offer too many points of information too close together, the adjudicator will tell you sit down for "badgering" or "barracking".

If you are speaking, and you accept a point of information, you *have to reply* to what the person says to you. If they question something you are saying, you should answer their question, and if they are challenging something you said, you should explain to them why they are wrong. Points of information are designed to test whether you actually understand what you are saying, and whether you can think on your feet and respond to challenges. You cannot ignore what someone says to you in a point of information. A good tip is to accept POIs only when you think the person is going to ask you about something you understand and think you can answer.

In a normal speech, you should accept 2 points of information. Any less, and it looks like you are afraid to answer the other team's questions. Any more, and you'll be so busy answering their questions that you won't have time to talk about what you wanted to talk about. Although 2 is the ideal number, you might find yourself speaking in a debate where the other team only offers 1 or 2 points during your whole speech. If this happens, you won't be penalised for accepting 1 or none. But if you were offered lots of points, then there is no excuse for not accepting 2!

Finally, it is important to remember that you are not allowed to offer POIs in the first and last minute of a normal speech, and you are not allowed to offer POIs at all during the reply speeches. If you try it, you will be told that you are out of order and asked to sit down.

Timing

All of the speeches in the debate, except the reply speeches, are 6 minutes long. The reply speeches are 3 minutes long. (This might be different in your local league – some countries use 7 minutes/3 minutes, and all provinces have shorter times for junior speakers.)

The main speeches are "protected" for the first and last minutes – which means that you cannot offer points of information in the first or last minute of a speech. This gives the speaker a chance to start and end their speech well, without interference.

Once the full 6 minutes are up, the timekeeper will bang twice on the table to tell the speaker that they must finish speaking. If you are speaking and you hear the two bangs, you must finish

off your speech quickly. If you do not finish within the next 30 seconds (20 seconds in some leagues) the timekeeper will bang on the table non-stop until you sit down. Now, the adjudicators will stop listening, so there is no point in speaking any longer.

In reply speeches, there isn't a bang after the first minute, because no points of information are allowed. The timekeeper will bang when there is one minute left, though, to let you know that you should start wrapping things up. When your time is up the timekeeper will bang twice, and you will have 30 seconds to finish before she starts banging non-stop on the table.

In a neat diagram, the times for a main speech look like this:

0 – 1 minute	**Nobody can offer points of information**
1 – 5 minutes	**Points of information are allowed**
5 – 6 minutes	**No more points of information are allowed. Start finishing your speech**
After 6 minutes	**You have 30 seconds before the timekeeper will start banging non-stop**

And for a reply speech, it looks like this:

0 – 2 minutes	**The main part of your speech (Nobody can offer points of information)**
2 – 3 minutes	**Start finishing your speech**
After 3 minutes	**You have 30 seconds before the timekeeper will start banging non-stop…**

So how do we start a debate?

To start off the debate, each team must have a clear understanding of the issues that they will be arguing about. This means that each team needs to bring up some important elements at the beginning of their first speech. In this section, we will talk about those elements.

Definition

The proposition

The very first thing the first proposition speaker needs to do is "define the motion". This DOES NOT mean that you must give the dictionary definition of all the words in the motion! Instead, you must explain what the topic means to your team, and why you are talking about it. The point is to set the boundaries for the debate so that both teams argue about the same thing, and debate about the topic and not about the *words* in the motion.

For instance, if your motion is "This house believes that the USA should withdraw from Iraq", you don't need to define "USA" and "Iraq" – everybody knows where those countries are – but you *do* need to define "withdraw". Do you want to withdraw soldiers, or all military personnel (including medical and strategic staff), or diplomats, or economic assistance, or American-based corporations, or something else? As you can see, there are many possible ways to interpret the word "withdraw", and the opposition and the adjudicators need to know how you will be interpreting it in your case.

Also, if a motion clearly refers to a recent event in the news, you cannot define it to mean anything else. So for instance, in 2016 the motion "This house would find justice for Kasese" was a clear reference to the killings in Kasese by the actors in the kasese chaos. The debate needed to be about particularly those actors in that year. Proposition could not define this to be about any other year or about any other place where killings have ever happened because that would not be a reasonable interpretation of the motion in light of current events.

In your definition, you should also lay the **parameters** for the debate. This means that you should make any reasonable specifications that you want, to make the debate clearer. For instance, you may want to specify that you are only talking about implementing the motion in Uganda, and not in other countries. Alternatively, if there is a word like "school" in the motion, you may want to tell us that you are talking specifically about secondary schools. You can also tell us what you are NOT talking about.

The opposition

If the definition is a reasonable interpretation of the motion, the opposition must accept it, and debate the case that the proposition presents. So, using the above example, if proposition defines "withdraw" to mean "withdraw soldiers and other military personnel", the opposition must accept that definition, even if they have prepared a case about withdrawing diplomats. The proposition has the right to define the terms of the debate, and as long as their definition is reasonable the opposition must accept it.

If the motion is unreasonable, then the opposition can challenge it. **This happens very seldom and always results in messy debates – please do not do it unless it is absolutely necessary! An opposition team that challenges a definition that is reasonable WILL lose the debate.**

A definition is unreasonable if:

(i) It is a truism (i.e. something that is obviously true) – so for instance if the proposition defines the topic in such a way that they have to prove that guns can kill people, or that the sun rises in the East. Both of these things are obviously true and an opposition team cannot be expected to argue against it.

OR

(ii) It is unfairly time-set or place-set. So if the proposition defines "This house would ban drugs" to mean "This house would ban drugs, specifically in Spain in the 18th Century", that is unfairly time-set (to the 18th Century) and place-set (to Spain). Generally speaking if a team wants to limit the geographical reach of a debate it is only reasonable to limit it to Uganda (because we can't expect all debaters to have an in-depth knowledge of other countries). And debates virtually always happen in the present time.

OR

(iii) The proposition has defined the words in the motion unreasonably, so that they do not refer to the obvious meaning of the topic. (So for instance the debate about the Kasese Killings above.) This is also called "squirreling the motion".

If the definition falls in to one of the above three categories, you are allowed to challenge it. If you decide to challenge the motion, *you must do it in the first minute of the first opposition speaker's speech*. Otherwise the adjudicator will assume that you accept the definition. Challenging the definition works like this:

(a) Say "We are challenging the proposition's definition".
(b) Explain why the definition given is unreasonable.
(c) Offer your own definition, which must be reasonable.
(d) Continue with your speech as usual

Be prepared to defend your new definition later in the debate!

Policy and Counterpolicy

In many debates you have to argue about **doing** something, and not just argue about whether an idea is good or bad. For instance, in "This house would legalise prostitution", the proposition actually wants to legalise prostitution, and not just argue about whether prostitution is good or bad in principle. These debates are sometimes called "change debates" because you are changing the status quo.

In these debates you sometimes need to give a detailed plan of how you would implement the motion – this plan is called the **policy**. So for instance you might want to say that you would have to be over 18 to be or hire a prostitute, and that the government would implement regular health checks for prostitutes and regulations governing the way prostitutes conduct business.

If you are on opposition, you can often just stick with the status quo – in other words, you can say that keeping things as they are now is better than implementing proposition's policy. However, sometimes you might want to agree that there is a big problem with the status quo. If you do that, you should probably give an alternative way of solving the problem – an alternative policy, or a **counterpolicy**.

So, now that everything is clearly set up, what happens?

Speaker Roles: What each speaker does

Every speaker on a debating team has a very specific role. If they do not do what they are meant to do, their team is likely to lose the debate. There is no one speaking position that is more important than any of the others. Every speaker plays an important part in winning a debate, and some people are more suited to first speaker, while others do better as a second speaker, or maybe a third speaker. You need to find the positions that you do best in, and practice those. It is normal for good speakers to be able to do at least two out of the three positions.

First Proposition

First proposition is the first person that the adjudicators will get to see, and it is their job to set up the debate clearly. If they don't do their job properly, the debate **will** be a mess. That said, you can handle speaking in first proposition quite easily if you follow these easy rules:

Explain your position

Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. If anything might even possibly not be clear to the adjudicators or the other team, explain it in such depth that a class of pre-school children would understand it. This really is that important. If you are not clear when you explain your team's position, then the opposition can make all sort of weird assumptions about what you mean, because it makes their job of making you look wrong easier if they can say that you said strange and silly things. And they can get away with it if the adjudicators aren't clear on what it was that you actually said. Stop this before it starts. Make sure that the adjudicators know exactly what you mean, the first time around.

To make sure everything gets set up clearly, you need to include the following elements:

1. Definition
2. Parameters for the debate
3. Policy (if necessary)

We've already covered how to do these things – see the previous section for a reminder.

Split the Case

Provide a **case split**. In debater language, a case split means explaining exactly what issues and arguments your entire team will be dealing with the course of the debate. It's like a table of contents for what your team is going to say. You do it by listing the arguments that each speaker will deal with. For instance:

> "I, the first speaker, will deal with the arguments about Self Defence and the Incompetence of the Police. My second speaker, Patrick, will deal with an argument about Public Perception of Safety." (You don't need to tell us what your third speaker will talk about, because a third speaker only ever does rebuttal.)

A case split is important because it gives the adjudicators and the other team an overview of where your team will be going in the course of the debate, and what the issues are likely to be. This is good because it allows them to concentrate on what you and your team members are saying, instead of wondering why you are talking about it and how it fits into your case. Also, it will help the adjudicators judge whether you are working together as a team or not. If you say that your second speaker will be dealing with argument X, and he does, then your team will score for working together. If he doesn't, then your team will suffer because he is contradicting what you said he would do – and it makes both of you look silly. A case split is very important – always include it.

Give your arguments

Now that you have done all the basics, you can move on to explaining your part of the case split. Use explanations and examples to build good strong arguments that demonstrate why your team is right. For details on how to make a good argument, see the section later on called '**Making Arguments**'.

Something very important to remember while you make your arguments is something called **signposting**. Signposting means that you tell the adjudicators every time you move between the arguments that you said (in your case split) that you would deal with. If your case split is a table of contents, you can think of signposts as chapter titles. So, if you said in your case split that you would be dealing with A and B in the course of your speech, just before you start to explain those arguments, take a second to say something like "…and now I will deal with the argument A, which is…" and carry on. Also point out when you finish argument A and start argument B. This way, it is easy for the adjudicators to follow the flow of your speech. They will understand your arguments better, and you will also receive a good mark for structure!

First Opposition

In a lot of ways, the first opposition speaker has the same job as the first proposition speaker, with one **major** exception. This speaker has the responsibility of dealing with what has already been presented by the first proposition speaker. So, in addition to explaining the opposition team's case, presenting a case split, and giving arguments, they must also explain exactly *why* they disagree with the proposition team's case and arguments.

Explain your position

Explaining your position is just as important for a first opposition speaker as for a first proposition speaker. You need to make it clear exactly what you are saying and how you will disagree with the proposition, otherwise the adjudicators might not understand your case properly. To make sure everything gets set up clearly, you need to include the following elements:

1. Clash
   *(**OR** challenge the definition, but only if strictly necessary!)*
2. Counterpolicy (if necessary)

The clash is a one sentence summary of exactly how and where the opposition team will disagree with the proposition team. This is an incredibly important job, because if the adjudicators can't understand how you are proving that the proposition is wrong, you will lose. Sometimes, there is more than one way of disagreeing with the proposition. For instance, if you are debating the motion *This house would withdraw American troops from Afghanistan immediately*, you can either clash by saying that America should not withdraw its troops from Afghanistan, or by saying they shouldn't remove them immediately, or both. It needs to be clear from the start what you will be arguing.

We already know what a counterpolicy is. See the previous section for a recap.

Split the Case

Provide a case split. In debater language, a case split means explaining exactly what issues and arguments your entire team will be dealing with the course of the debate. It's like a table of contents for what your team is going to say. You do it by listing the arguments that each speaker will deal with. For an example of how to give a case split and an explanation of why it is so important, see the outline for First Proposition.

Rebut the proposition

Explain why the major arguments that the first proposition speaker brought up are wrong or irrelevant or simply aren't important. For more information on how to rebut, see the section called **'Breaking Arguments'** later on.

You need to do this before you give your own arguments, because otherwise the adjudicators will be thinking about how the proposition's arguments show that the motion is true, instead of paying their full attention to your case (which shows that the motion is false). You must first show the adjudicators that the proposition's arguments are wrong and they don't have to worry about them, before you can convince them that your arguments are the right ones.

Give your arguments

Now you can move on to explaining your part of the case split. Use explanations and examples to build good strong arguments that demonstrate why your team is right. For details on how to make a good argument, see the section later on called **'Making Arguments'**.

Remember to signpost while you make your arguments! (See the outline for First Proposition for a recap of signposting.)

Second Proposition

The second speaker has the job of explaining the bulk of the proposition team's arguments. He or she will do some rebuttal of the opposing team, but will focus mainly on making more arguments to support proposition's case.

Give a roadmap

The very first thing you should do is give a 'roadmap' of your speech. This is like a case split, but for one speech instead of an entire team. So, tell us what arguments you will be dealing with, and in what order.

Rebut the opposition

You will have to do two types of rebuttal: defensive rebuttal and offensive rebuttal. Defensive rebuttal is when you explain why the opposition is wrong in the attacks they made on *your arguments*. So, the first opposition speaker should have rebutted some the arguments that your first speaker made. You need to tell the judges why that rebuttal does not effectively destroy the points that your first speaker made. This is important because otherwise the adjudicator will continue believing that your first speaker's arguments are wrong.

Offensive rebuttal is when you explain why the opposition's own arguments are wrong. This is the same sort of rebuttal that the first opposition speaker made. Here, you need to explain why the major arguments that the first opposition speaker brought up are wrong or irrelevant or simply aren't important. For more information on how to rebut, see the section called **'Breaking Arguments'** later on.

Give your arguments

Now you can move on to explaining your part of the case split. Use explanations and examples to build good strong arguments that demonstrate why your team is right. For details on how to make a good argument, see the section later on called **'Making Arguments'**.

Remember to signpost while you make your arguments! (See the outline for First Proposition for a recap of signposting.)

Second Opposition

The second opposition speaker's job is virtually identical to the job of second proposition. You just have more rebuttal to do, because two speakers from the other team have spoken before you stand up (as opposed to only one, if you were second proposition).

Give a roadmap

The very first thing you should do is give a 'roadmap' of your speech. This is like a case split, but for one speech instead of an entire team. So, tell us what arguments you will be dealing with, and in what order.

Rebut the proposition

You will have to do two types of rebuttal: defensive rebuttal and offensive rebuttal. Defensive rebuttal is when you explain why the proposition is wrong in the attacks they made on *your arguments*. So, the second proposition speaker should have rebutted some of the arguments that your first speaker made. You need to tell the judges why that rebuttal does not effectively destroy the points that your first speaker made. This is important because otherwise the adjudicator will continue believing that your first speaker's arguments are wrong.

Offensive rebuttal is when you explain why the opposition's own arguments are wrong. This is the same sort of rebuttal that the first opposition speaker made. Here, you need to explain why the major arguments that the proposition has brought up are wrong or irrelevant or simply aren't important. Although you can rebut arguments that have already been rebutted by your first speaker (especially if the second proposition speaker has done some work to defend and rebuild those arguments), you should spend most of your rebuttal time dealing with the arguments brought up by the second proposition speaker. For more information on how to rebut, see the section called **'Breaking Arguments'** later on.

Give your arguments

Now you can move on to explaining your part of the case split. Use explanations and examples to build good strong arguments that demonstrate why your team is right. For details on how to make a good argument, see the section later on called **'Making Arguments'**.

Remember to signpost while you make your arguments! (See the outline for First Proposition for a recap of signposting.)

Third Proposition

The job of the third speakers is to rebut. You just need to rip the other team's case to shreds. And then show how that means you win the debate this is called *biased weighing*.

Give a roadmap

The very first thing you should do is give a 'roadmap' of your speech. This is like a case split, but for one speech instead of an entire team. So, tell us what issues you will be dealing with, and in what order. In a third speech, you won't have any brand new arguments – these should have been brought up by your first and second speakers. Instead, the issues in your speech should be the big "clashes", or things that both sides have spent a lot of time disagreeing about. You might find a clash where an argument from one team is directly in conflict with an argument from the other team, or it might be where one team's argument has been repeatedly rebutted and defended throughout the debate.

Rebut the opposition

Work methodically through the issues you listed in your roadmap, explaining why the attacks that the opposition made on your case, and the arguments they presented, don't hold up under scrutiny. Use the normal techniques of defensive and offensive rebuttal to do this. You can't make any new arguments, but you can use new examples or new rebuttals to go deeper into arguments that have already been brought up. It can also be useful to point it out if the opposition hasn't dealt with some of your arguments, or has contradicted itself. **Your key role as a proposition third speaker is to show that your case still stands after all of the opposition's matter has been considered.**

Remember to signpost while you work through your issues! (See the guidelines for First Proposition for a recap of signposting.)

Third Opposition

The job of the third speakers is to rebut. You just need to rip the other team's case to shreds. And then show how that means you win.

Give a roadmap

The very first thing you should do is give a 'roadmap' of your speech. This is like a case split, but for one speech instead of an entire team. So, tell us what issues you will be dealing with, and in what order. In a third speech, you won't have any brand new arguments – these should have been brought up by your first and second speakers. Instead, the issues in your speech should be the big "clashes", or things that both sides have spent a lot of time disagreeing about. You might find a clash where an argument from one team is directly in conflict with an argument from the other team, or it might be where one team's argument has been repeatedly rebutted and defended throughout the debate.

Rebut the proposition

Work methodically through the issues you listed in your roadmap, explaining why the arguments that the proposition presented, and the attacks that they made on your case, don't hold up under scrutiny. Use the normal techniques of rebuttal to do this. You can't make any new arguments, but you can use new examples or new rebuttals to go deeper into arguments that have already been brought up. It can also be useful to point it out if the proposition hasn't dealt with some of your arguments (and what that means for their case), or has contradicted itself. **Your key role as an opposition third speaker is to show that the proposition's case does not stand at the end of the debate.**

Remember to signpost while you work through your issues! (See the guidelines for First Proposition for a recap of signposting.)

Reply Speeches

A reply speech is a biased summary of the debate, given by the first or second speaker of each team. Imagine that you have to explain the most important bits of the debate to someone who has missed the first six speeches, who wants to know who won and why. Remember that you only have 4 minutes, so you can't just repeat the main arguments – you won't have time, and you won't prove anything. Rather, you need to find a way to weigh up what both teams have said, to determine who wins.

One way of doing this is to look at what each team needed to prove in order to win the debate, and then show that your team proved what it needed to (using certain arguments and rebuttals), while the other team didn't. Alternatively, you could look at a few questions that needed to be answered by both sides, and show that your side answered them better. Or, you could look at "clashes" in the debate, like a third speaker would do. (Your clashes don't have to be the same as your third speaker's clashes.)

You can also use a reply speech to highlight any contradictions or irrelevancies in the other team's case. Also, you can point it out if they haven't dealt with any of your arguments – this will show the adjudicators that the other team hasn't done their job properly.

It's very important to remember that you are allowed no new matter in the reply speeches. This means no new arguments, and no rebuttal. The other team won't have a chance to respond to you, so it's not fair.

One last reminder…

Debating speeches are speeches! So even though you need to include lots of technical things like definitions and rebuttals, you also need to remember what you would include in any speech – an **introduction** and a **conclusion**. The introduction will help you grab the attention of your audience and your judges, and the conclusion will help to tie everything together and explain why your speech was important. Don't leave these out – they can make your speech much more engaging and persuasive.

Making arguments

When you make an argument, you are giving the adjudicators a reason to believe your side of the motion – and then you are backing it up. In order to back it up properly, you need to **prove** your argument. But what does it mean to prove something, and why do we need to do it?

Proving something means demonstrating that it is true – or at least convincing someone that it is true. Fundamentally, good debating is all about proving things that will convince the judges that you are right. Of course, you also have to be able to destroy the arguments that the other side is making, but even this is a lot easier once you know the difference between a good and a bad proof.

So how is proving things supposed to work? Well, if you're trying to convince someone that something is true, chances are they don't believe in it already. The best way to change their minds, and get them to believe you, is to take things they already *do* believe, and use them to show that what you are saying is true. For example, what if someone didn't believe that the government should keep drugs illegal? How would we prove that the government should be doing something? Well, it would go something like this:

The government has a duty to protect the people of the country from things that will harm them.
(This is something that the person would believe to be true.)

And…

Drugs harm people in the country.
(This is also something that the person would believe to be true.)

So…

The government should not let us access drugs.

You see? We looked at two things that the person would believe are true, and then showed that it meant something else was true. If the person believes that drugs will harm people, and he believes that the government should protect people from things that will harm them, then he has no choice but to accept that the government should protect us from drugs!

Of course, you can't just assume that the person will believe the statements you make. You have to back those up as well. So you need to tell the adjudicators WHY the government has a duty to protect people in the country, and HOW drugs harm people in the country. Then your argument will be complete.

It can be useful to use examples when you are backing up the statements in your proof. Examples show that the statement you're making is obviously true, because it happens in the real world. You can also use examples to back up your entire argument. This can also be handy – people are more likely to believe your argument when you can show that it has real world consequences, and that it doesn't only work in Debate Land. But remember – never use an example instead of an argument! An example by itself doesn't prove anything. You need the reasons of your proof to explain why that example is important. Otherwise, it might just be an exception. (And the same thing applies for statistics.)

Making your own proofs (the do-it-yourself guide)

Proving things is easy when you get the hang of it. The only difficult bit to making an argument is choosing the right statements at the start, so people will end up having to believe what you say – but even this is really not so difficult when you get the hang of it. In debating, you are usually trying to prove why something is good/why we should be doing it, or you are trying to prove why something is bad/why we shouldn't be doing it. Depending on what you are trying to prove, there are useful recipes for these arguments – they give you an idea of the sorts of statements you should choose in order to prove your point.

General Pattern:

(a) To prove X is good or useful (so we should be doing X)

- Show that doing X will have some sort of effect, on the country or some group of people.
  And…
- Show that this effect is something we need/want.
  So…
- We should be doing X.

(b) To prove X is harmful (so we should not be doing X)

- Show that doing X will have some sort of effect, on the country or some group of people.
  And…
- Show that this effect is something we do not want.
  So…
- We should not be doing X.

This is a very powerful and clear way of showing why we should or shouldn't be doing something. This something could be banning guns, bringing back the death penalty, trading with China, or virtually anything else! Just be sure to follow the recipe and explain all your statements, and you'll have the judges eating from the palm of your hand.

Breaking Arguments: The Handy Guide To Fighting Proof

(A.k.a. How to rebut arguments)

Rebutting the basic statements

This proof stuff can be rock-solid if it's done right, so it's very difficult to attack if it is being used against you. It's not impossible though. As you saw above, if we accept the first two statements, then we don't have any choice about accepting the final statement (the conclusion). So, to rebut arguments, we need to show that one or both of the first two statements is not always true. Remember, if one of the first two statements is false, we don't have to accept the conclusion, and the proof collapses. Let's look at an example:

Criminals would commit fewer serious crimes if we had the death penalty, because they would fear it.

And…

Uganda needs less serious crime.

So…

Uganda should bring back the death penalty.

This argument will fail if the first statement OR the second statement is false. We can't argue that Uganda needs less serious crime – of course it does – but we *can* argue whether criminals would really commit fewer crimes if we had the death penalty. How would we do this? The best way is to use a proof of our own:

Criminals would only fear the death penalty if they thought they would get caught.

And…

Criminals generally don't expect to be caught.

So…

Criminals won't fear the death penalty, so they won't commit fewer crimes.
(Obviously you need to back up the first and second statements here.)

Rebutting the Conclusion

In the previous section, we looked at rebutting an argument by challenging one of the basic statements. If you can't do this, or don't want to do this, there are sometimes ways to challenge the conclusion.

(a) One way is to use a counterexample – an example which shows that their argument cannot be true. For instance, you can point out that in many countries that have the death penalty, the serious crime rate is just as high as, or higher than, it is in countries without the death penalty – for instance, the USA and Rwanda (countries that have the death penalty) have very high murder rates, while Sweden (which doesn't have the death penalty) has a low murder rate. You can then argue that there is no link between the death penalty and the murder rate.
(You should note that you might need to add some extra reasons here, which would involve challenging the basic statements.)

(b) Even if we have to agree that we *should* be doing something, it doesn't mean that we *can* do it, and it doesn't say *how* we should be doing it. You could argue that the government simply can't do whatever it is, because it doesn't have the money, or the skilled people, or the motivation, etc. You could also admit that there is a problem, but that the other team is not offering the best possible solution (this is where you would use a counterpolicy).

(c) You can argue that the conclusion doesn't matter, because the opposing team has forgotten to consider something else that is more important. This is called a **counterconsideration**. For this argument, a possible counterconsideration could be that it is so important for the South African government to take a pro-life stance, in light of South Africa's history and our new constitution, that they should not do anything to undermine that stance, including legalising the death penalty.

Tips on when and what to rebut

- Spend most of your time rebutting the big arguments that the other side has made, or defending against attacks that they have made on your most important arguments. Don't waste time on rebutting small unimportant arguments in too much depth. Only do this if you have some time left over after you're finished with the big ones.
- Always respond to the most recent version of an argument. So, suppose the first proposition speaker makes an argument which is rebutted by the first opposition speaker. The second proposition speaker then defends that argument – in other words, he shows why the rebuttal against it did not succeed. Then, you, the second opposition speaker, decide that you also need to deal with the argument. You must respond to the 'fixed' version of the argument that the second proposition speaker made – it won't do

you any good to rebut the first version of the argument again (your first speaker has already done that).

- If a speaker from the opposing team made an obvious slip of the tongue (for instance, if he said "ban" when he clearly meant "legalise"), don't bother rebutting it. It was just a simple mistake and the adjudicators know it as well as you do. It didn't mean anything.
- Remember that your rebuttal doesn't have to focus only on individual arguments. You can also show problems with the other team's case as a whole. For instance, if two of their arguments contradict each other, point it out and explain why that weakens their case. Or the opposition case might be irrelevant because even if it is true, the proposition's case doesn't have to be wrong. These are important things to point out!

Ways not to make an argument (common logical fallacies)

There are some arguments that seem to come up again and again in debates, that are just not good arguments because they don't prove anything. Some of them might sound very convincing the first time you hear them, but they don't stand up under close inspection. Here is a list of those arguments. Once you know what they are, you can avoid making them, and you'll be able to rebut them easily if they are used against you.

Many of these mistakes have specific names (you'll see them below), but it's not important to know what they are called. It's much more important to know why these sorts of arguments are wrong when you hear them, and that you tell the adjudicators why they are wrong (either in a point of information or in rebuttal).

Confusing causation and correlation

This happens when you claim something caused something else, just because they happened around the same time (i.e. they are correlated). This isn't always true. For instance,

Peru introduced the death penalty, and the violent crime rate dropped, so we can see that the death penalty discourages violent crime.

This might be true. On the other hand, it might be that Peru started some social upliftment and rehabilitation programmes around the same time, which were the cause of the drop in the violent crime rate. The point is, this argument doesn't tell us what the link is between the death penalty and the violent crime rate – and without that link, the other team can just give an alternative explanation for the facts. You always need to show **how** something (the death penalty) caused something else (the drop in the violent crime rate). You can't just assume it.

Not giving reasons

We should ban drugs because they are bad.

We should not allow prostitution because it is immoral.

These are very, very weak arguments. Saying that something is "bad" or "immoral" is no argument at all. What is the definition of "bad"? Who is it bad for? What does it mean to say that something is "immoral"? Whose morals? A better set of arguments might be:

We should ban drugs because they damage the users' health.
We should not allow prostitution because it degrades women.

This is better, because it tells us what *exactly* the reason is for doing something. You'll still need to do more work, though. You will need to back up these statements. (Exactly how do drugs harm your health? And how does prostitution degrade women?) And you will have to form full bulletproof arguments using other statements to help you. See the section called **'Making Arguments'** for more detail.

Arguing from authority

When you are debating, it is fine to mention the opinion of someone who is an expert on the topic, but often people will use just any famous figure and expect people to believe that they are an expert on the current topic. So for instance,

Hon. Rebecca Kadaga *says that HIV does not cause AIDS, so it probably doesn't.*

This is not a basis for a strong argument, because Rebecca Kadaga is not an expert in medical science. But if you were to say:

Hon. Rebecca Kadaga *says that the* Ugandan Parliament *is corrupt, so it probably is*.

This would stand more chance of being true, because Hon. Rebecca Kadaga **is** an expert on things to do with the Ugandan Parliament.

Another type of appeal to authority is to say *"The constitution says so, therefore it's right"*! This is not a good argument! You have to decide why the constitution says a certain thing, and explain why you think the constitution is right or wrong.

A third common appeal to authority is to say "God doesn't want us to do it", or, "it's against the Bible". This also doesn't work, because it assumes everyone believes the Bible is true. In a debate, we just can't assume those things. You need to prove everything you say, in a way that everyone will be able to believe (no matter what their religious views are).

Attacking the person, not the argument

How can you talk about women's rights? You are a man!

How would you feel if your mom was murdered – wouldn't you want the death penalty?!

This is always silly. In the first instance, just because you are a man it doesn't mean that you can't have legitimate views on women's rights. That would be like saying no one can comment on the way we treat those accused of child molestation, unless they are themselves child molesters! In the second instance, someone is missing the point that in debating you don't have to personally believe what you are arguing for – in fact, you often won't. But that doesn't mean their arguments about it will be untrue. It is important to address what a person is saying *in the debate*, and not think that they *must* personally believe in what they are saying.

Circular arguments

This is when you use the conclusion of an argument, to prove the foundational statements of the argument, which prove the conclusion. So for example:

I know that Uganda is transparent because the constitution demands it*, and I know that the* constitution is right because it is the supreme Law of Uganda.

Obviously the problem here is that if we don't already believe that Uganda is transparent, then we won't believe that the constitution is respected. And so the claim that constitution is the supreme law can not prove that Uganda is transparent. These arguments are not useful in debates because they *assume* that your side of the debate is true – and so they won't convince anyone who doesn't already agree with your side.

Attacking a straw man (i.e. rebutting something no one ever said)

Sometimes, it is a lot easier to rebut something that is superficially similar to what the opposition said, than to rebut what they actually said. But this is the same as "attacking a straw man" – you won't win any battles by attacking a straw man, and you won't win a debate by just making up arguments because they are easier to rebut. You have to attack what the other team *actually* says.

An example of attacking a straw man is:

Team A: We should relax the laws on who can drink beer.
Team B: No. Any society with unrestricted access to intoxicating substances loses its work ethic and becomes obsessed with immediate gratification.

You see? While Team A proposed relaxing the laws on beer, Team B exaggerated this to a position harder to defend, i.e. "unrestricted access to intoxicating substances".

If another team does try to make a straw man out of your arguments, point out in your speech that you didn't actually say that, and so you don't need to deal with their fake rebuttal.

Over exaggerating (sometimes called a "slippery slope" or a "golden elevator")

If we close the animal control units*, then there will be more dogs in the roads, which means more people will be bitten, which means more people will have rabies, which means that more people will go to the hospital, which will lead to the breakdown of the healthcare system, which will cause a revolution! So we should not close the* animal control units*.*

The problem here is that someone is taking a fairly small change (closing the animal control units) and using a series of small steps to get to a catastrophe. While each small step might not sound ***too*** ridiculous, going from closing the animal control units to a revolution is mad! (You can trust your common sense here – if it sounds too ridiculous to be true, it probably is.) It can work the other way around, too, to show that doing some good thing, will lead to better and better things:

If I walk outdoors more often, I might find some change lying around, which might win me some money in the casino, which might be enough for me to buy enough Lotto tickets to become a billionaire, which would mean that I could live in luxury and save the world. So I should walk outdoors more often.

The trick with rebutting these sorts of arguments is to find the links in the chain that are the weakest and attack them. Try find a link early on. In the first example, you could argue that the number of dogs infected by rabies, who will bite people who haven't been vaccinated, is not large enough to trigger a breakdown of the healthcare system. In the second example, you might say that the chances of earning millions of Rand at a casino with some change you find on the street are so small that we can't base an argument on them.

Contradicting yourself

We should bring back the death penalty to teach people that taking a human life is never OK.

So, to show us how important it is not to kill people, the government should be allowed to kill people? This doesn't make sense, because the solution is in contrast to what you are trying to achieve. Don't do this. It makes you sound silly.

Preparing for a debate

Three types of motions

When you are preparing your case, it is useful to remember that there are three main types of motions. This will help you to approach the motion in the right way.

1. Change debates

e.g. This house would legalise all drugs, This house would require doctors to support all cases of suspected domestic abuse, This house believes that America should withdraw from Iraq immediately.

Change debates are all about **doing** something. On proposition, you need to establish three things in order to win the debate:

a. Necessity – that there is a problem that needs to be solved (unless the existence of this problem is particularly controversial, this can usually be done fairly quickly in the introduction to the first speaker's speech).
b. Effectiveness – that the policy you are proposing does lead to a better situation (this is usually the bulk of your positive matter).
c. Justifiability – that your policy is legitimate, or that its benefits outweigh the costs of implementing it (often this will depend on what the opposition says, and is usually dealt with in rebuttal).

On opposition, you have three options. Unlike proposition, you can choose just one of these options!

a. Argue that there is no problem (this is not usually enough for a whole case).
b. Argue for the status quo (i.e. show that proposition's policy will make things worse than they already are).
c. Argue for a counterpolicy (i.e. show that there is an alternative solution that is better than the status quo, and better than proposition's policy).

Just remember that you can't simply argue (a) **with** (b) or (c). Because then you are saying "There is no problem. And proposition doesn't solve the problem." Which obviously doesn't make sense. What you CAN do is put everything together using the words "even if", like this: "There is no problem. But **even if** there were a problem, proposition wouldn't solve it". This is often a very good way to make an opposition case in a change debate.

2. Normative Debates (i.e. debates about the way things should be)

e.g. This house believes that terrorism for a just cause is justified, This house believes that abortion is morally wrong, This house believes that freedom of speech should be absolute.

Normative debates are all about the way things *should* be – about what is right and wrong, fair and unfair, just and unjust. In a normative debate, you need to determine:

a. What makes something right/wrong, just/unjust, etc.
b. Show that what the motion suggests is right/wrong (depending on your side of the debate).

It's quite possible that proposition and opposition will have different ways of measuring what makes something right or wrong (or whatever), so part of your rebuttal time will have to deal with why your system is right and theirs is wrong.

3. Evaluative debates

e.g. This house believes that Thabo Mbeki's presidency was a success, This house believes that the war on terror has failed, This house supports the decision to award the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize to Barack Obama.

In these debates you need to establish two things:

a. The best criteria we can use for evaluating the subject under discussion (for instance, what criteria/categories we should use to measure the success of a presidency)
b. That those criteria are adequately met (on proposition) or are not adequately met (on opposition).

Laying Foundations

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