

# Cases (I)

*“What is a truth”*

The main goal of a case is trying to prove a *truth*. Whether it's you trying to prove your policy is better, your side of the world more desirable, or your goals being more important, you are essentially trying to prove to an adjudicator that an idea is more valuable in the debate.

This is the essence of truth in parliamentary debates, truth is not just about honesty and knowledge, but rather the relevance, the value, and the analysis behind the truth.

Why is this the kind of truth preferred in parliamentary debate formats? It's simple, the point of debate is less about what your opinions are (you get random sides) and how knowledgeable you are (you get random topics) and more about the academic exercise of proving arguments to the average intelligent person. In this academic exercise, we put aside the value of absolute truth for a bit, and prefer valuing the debaters' skill rather than them lucking out getting a familiar motion.

## Weak Truths

I cannot stress this enough, it is **impossible** to make exhaustive lists of things like motion types or weak truths, and there will **always** be exceptions to these guidelines. However, for the time being, we will explore three kinds of weak truths that are quite common.

## Tautologies

Outside debates, tautologies are just true statements. But it is useful to be liberal with the definition of this term in debate. Instead of true statements, tautologies can be thought of statements that are not falsifiable.

Falsifiability is the ability to disprove something, and therefore, one may think that the strongest argument is one that cannot be taken down, but in parliamentary debate, these arguments hold little value. An example of a common tautology can be for the following motion:

This house prefers a world without religion

Here, an argument may be made that says:

God exists, therefore a world without religion would not appreciate god.

The issue with an argument like this is not that debaters are inherently atheistic creatures that despise religion, it is that it is impossible to prove or disprove the existence of god in a parliamentary debate. Further, the motion will **never** expect you to debate on tautologies. Such as, in this case, this is an open-ended motion asking you to explore the idea of a world without the idea of religion, rather than if religion is right or wrong.

Further, they create the issue of a *parallel debate*, which we will discuss later.

## Argument By Authority and By Evidence

An argument by authority or evidence is one that defers the burden of proving one's own argument to another entity. For example, if you make the argument:

According to NASA, the world will end in 2012.

You are shifting the burden of proving your argument on an authority (NASA), and since we cannot call NASA to give your whip speech, you will unfortunately not be rewarded for referring to them. Similarly, if you make an argument by evidence such as:

There was a 22% increase in Spotify's traffic after I released my mixtape.

You are shifting the burden of proving that your mixtape is fire away from your team and onto whoever was responsible for collecting those stats. Another issue that this creates is making a parallel debate, which we will discuss soon.

One bit of nuance to note is that arguments by evidence/authority are weak *because* they are a way to avoid responsibility for your arguments, but what if you first prove the argument, and then refer to the evidence? Like so:

My mixtape includes innovative features such as starting with my top ten DT matches, followed by a beat drop featuring Raju. This gave the mixtape a cult-following in GIKI, quickly exploding its popularity throughout the country. As a matter of fact, after I released the mixtape, **there was a 22% increase in Spotify's traffic.**

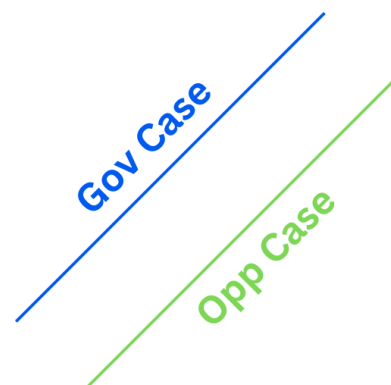
Here, you first complete the burden of proving the argument, then use the evidence to support your claim, and there is nothing wrong with this.

## Parallel Debate

While there are many issues that come with weak arguments, one thing that you as a debater and not a public speaker **must** avoid at all costs is a parallel debate. If you parallelize the debate in front of a competent judge, they **will not** reward you for this.

A parallel debate is when the government cases and opposition cases look like this diagram.

They follow their own lines and these lines never meet. In a more literal sense, the ideas that are being discussed are not interacting with each other.



This is a big issue for both teams. For the team that is causing the parallelism, they will be penalized for this, but the other team must also resolve the parallelism otherwise they will be stuck in a low quality match,

## Truth Power

You might be getting used to this disclaimer, but it is so important that it is worth repeating before every subtopic: this section is simply a rough guideline. You **will** find amazing arguments that do not follow any of the guidelines laid out here and you will find poor arguments that still technically check all the boxes.

That said, truth power is a way to gauge how persuasive an argument is. It sounds like this would be subjective to the listener but in parliamentary debates, you can have a good idea as to how convincing a particular idea will be when *written down*. Of course the way you express these arguments will influence how they land, but there will be inherent truth power to your arguments.

How do you judge this? Although there is a deceptively neat equation, remember that the strength of your arguments is **not** a mathematical calculation. This is just an easy way to roughly ballpark how good an argument is.

$$Power_{Truth} = Relevance \cdot Impact \cdot Engagement$$

Now we return to the disclaimer at the start of this section. **This is not gospel and debate is not simple enough to be won on equations.**

The purpose of this equation is to show the three degrees of freedom you have to balance when making your arguments. If any one of these hit zero, your entire argument zeroes out. This is **not** a formula adjudicators or most debaters will be looking at, but you can use these as a rule of thumb for how persuasive your arguments will be.

## Relevance

An irrelevant argument is a useless argument. In the motion:

This house regrets social media's (e.g. WeChat etc.) replacement  
of traditional outlets as the dominant source of news

It is a waste of time to prove that there is cyber-bullying which is not only extremely impactful but also very likely. However, this is quite a clear cut argument, sometimes you will be making or facing subtly irrelevant arguments, such as for the motion:

This house believes that states should not instill nationalism through the education system

In this motion, teams may go through great lengths characterising that states are bad, when the motion subject is “instilling nationalism” and “states” are only a specification<sup>1</sup>. Although there will always be some inherent relevance to ideas, relevance must be built using *linkages*, and an irrelevant argument will make it quite difficult for you to build linkages.

A linkage is your argument being connected with the need, the subject, or other ideas within a debate. For example, when giving a rebuttal, you must link it to the clash it’s building.

## Impact

Impact is simply how much harm or good an idea does. Here, you have two variables to play with: severity and likelihood. For example, a drug is tested over several cycles and goes through many stages of approval, this is because even if a few people will be affected by it, the severity of the impact is so high that we take it seriously. Similarly, for a motion like:

This house would ban the use of religious items and symbols as a part of fashion.

An argument such as:

Crosses are commonly worn without recognising the sensitivity of the topic

Does not carry as much severity as something like a global pandemic or world peace, but is still considered to have significant impact because of how commonly people practice religion and Christianity. Of course government does not just have to prove that we are likely to find a Christian, but also that it is likely for one to be offended by this.

However, this is not to say that just because an argument is severe it cannot be likely or vice versa, most arguments will be impactful because they are both severe and likely. Even if the extent of this severity and likelihood is limited.

## Engagement

In debate, engagement has a particular meaning. An engaging argument is one that is not strong in a vacuum, but rather addresses the other side. Since parliamentaries are not just a public speaking exercise, but rather a debate exercise, arguments that are uncomparative, semantic, or ambiguous are simply weak arguments.

Within engagement, the most powerful tool is making comparatives: which is exactly what it sounds like, comparing two ideas and explaining why one is better (more important, relevant, impactful, etc.)

Further, sometimes it can be tempting to go into semantics (regrets are always retrospective, China isn’t communist, etc.) or taking advantage of weak/ambiguous arguments but it is usually better to give other teams some leverage and engage on best cases and higher ideals. When you give your

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<sup>1</sup> If this seems confusing to you, please refer back to deconstructing a motion (from the motions handout).

opponents leeway (after calling them out on it ofc) you prove that your argument would have won in a stronger debate match, which means you should get higher points regardless of the quality of the debate you're in.

## Principles – Weak Strong Truths

Principles are an exceptional kind of tautology, one that humans believe to be universal. Since it is easy to fall into the trap of avoiding engagement and making the debate parallel, even seasoned debaters struggle to give principle arguments.

Unfortunately, here I really cannot give you a nice looking equation or simple set of categories to identify principles, you just have to know that something is universally acceptable.

For example, a principle could be right to freedom of religion. As debaters in any debate match, it is prohibitively hard to prove that freedom of religion is a bad thing. Another one could be debate specific, for example, a common kind of motion is an actor debate featuring the feminist movement, eg:

This house, as the feminist movement, opposes female influencers from using an idealised family life as the main-source of content.

This house, as a feminist residing in a progressive nation, would actively advocate for separatist feminism

This house believes that female feminists should intervene in the romantic relationships of the women in their lives

In these motions, you may expand the set of principles to things that the feminist movement considers as principles, such as suffrage, opposition to patriarchy, or even something like intersectionality.

However, just because you get to use tautologies does not absolve you from proving these. You just have to approach proving them in a different way. The techniques used<sup>2</sup> to prove principles are:

1. Analogies
2. Extensions to Universal Principles
3. Moral Theory
4. Cultural Principles

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<sup>2</sup> Same disclaimer as always, this is NOT an exhaustive list, it is a guideline.

## Analogies

The easiest way to prove that a principle is by drawing analogies from common beliefs. For example, if you are given the motion:

That we should have quotas for the number of women in national parliaments.

You may want to prove that it is more important to have women's ideas in national parliament than to have a *technically pure* democracy. Here, you can derive the analogy of an authoritarian government:

The point of democracy is for the government to act in a way that is favorable for its people this is in contrast to an authoritarian government, which is an external body which you cannot influence.

Unfortunately, due to the male dominant nature of politics, a disproportionate amount of men make up most of our current national parliaments. This means that women face a similar form of oppression to that under an authoritarian government, and this must be corrected in some way.

Here, although the debater is drawing an analogy to an authoritarian government, note how they are not trying to equate the two. They are simply using a universal principle of us wanting to have democratic governments and linking it to the debate at hand.

## Extensions of Universal Principles

It may also help to extend a universal principle instead of inventing a new one. For example, in the United States, freedom of speech has been extended significantly to include various kinds of speech. For example, burning a flag can be considered "speech," and so can refusing to sing the national anthem.

How this applies to debate is that you can also extend universal principles (only if you can prove that this extension is reasonable). For example, for the motion:

This house supports the legalisation of euthanasia

Here, a principle you can extend is the hippocratic oath, in particular, the vow to do no harm. According to a traditionalist interpretation of the oath, you may consider killing to be a harm and therefore extending to not allow euthanasia.

However, the contemporary interpretation also recognises that refusing to take action may also count as harm. Just as refusing to operate on someone on a prejudicial basis is the same as you committing harm to a human, refusing to end a life may be causing harm (in the form of severe physical or psychological pain).

## Moral Theory

Although there are way too many aspects of moral theory to cover, we will just cover two common ideas.

### Veil of Ignorance

This is the idea that you are designing a world where you will be a participant, but you do not know who you will be until you confirm what the world will be like. For example, from behind a veil of ignorance, it may not be wise to introduce slavery because you do not know whether you will be born a slave or owner.

### Contracts

It is generally considered a good thing to stay true to your word. While explicit contracts are easy to see, there may also be an implicit contract. For example, a parent is obligated to care for their child, it is a contract they are implicitly entering.

## Cultural Principles

While these are rarely needed in debate, they can come up and it is useful to have them in mind.

For example, a common cultural principle in Pakistan may be the opposition to Western ideals. While it is rare for this to come up in a debate, in a motion like:

This house regrets the centrality of colonial determinism in third world academia

– LUMS Asians 2024 U19 Finals

The debate being set in Pakistan means you will make it unnecessarily difficult for yourself if you do not recognise that there is a cultural opposition to colonialism in the country. Therefore, you **must** address these thoughts and ideas regardless of which bench you are on.