Cases (II)

It is tempting to get into the pitfall of stuffing your cases with as many ideas and arguments as possible, but not only do you have limited time to prove your ideas, the strategic decisions you make while deciding your case are often what actually decides matches, especially in competitive debates.

Case Design

In a parliamentary debate format, you will typically only have time to give 2-3 well presented and argued positive arguments and 2-3 well presented and argues negative arguments.

A successful parliamentary debate case is a structured framework designed to present a team's stance on the motion (resolution) clearly, logically, and persuasively. It typically consists of several key structural elements, presented through the speeches.

Essential Components

1. **Stance/Team Line:**
   ○ This is the team's core position on the motion, usually stated immediately. It defines what the team intends to prove (in the proposition/government) or disprove (in the opposition).
   ○ *Example (Motion: THW ban private cars in city centres):*
     ■ *Proposition Stance:* "We believe that banning private cars in city centres is a necessary step to reclaim public health, space, and environmental sustainability for urban dwellers."
     ■ *Opposition Stance:* "We oppose this ban as it unfairly penalises essential workers and people with mobility issues, and destroys the economic vitality of city centres."
2. **Definition/Interpretation:**
   ○ The teams set the parameters of the debate by clearly defining key terms in the motion and stating the specific mechanism (or model) they propose, if necessary. This ensures the debate is focused and fair.
3. **Roadmap/Signposting:**
   ○ A brief outline given at the start of a speech, informing the adjudicator and the opposing team of the order of arguments and rebuttals to be presented. This is crucial for organisation.
4. **Arguments (Themes):**
   ○ These are the 2-3 main pillars of the case, each representing a distinct, high-level theme or impact area that supports the overall stance. As previously mentioned, these themes group together smaller, individual ideas.

Clashes and Arguments

A complete argument in a parliamentary debate cannot be just a claim; it needs to be a structured way to persuasively argue your case to an intelligent person. It must clearly establish a premise, explain the logical path to its conclusion, demonstrate its real-world effect, and connect back to the team's overall case.

One of the ways to structure any single argument is by using this checklist:
Assertion -> Characterisation -> Reasoning -> Impacting -> Grounding -> Tie Back.

Elements of a Complete Argument

Element	Description	Function/Goal
Assertion	The core statement or high-level idea you are trying to prove. It must directly support your team's stance.	States *what* you believe to be true.
Characterisation	Providing the necessary context, definitions, and framing to ensure the assertion is understood correctly within the debate's parameters.	Defines *how* the assertion operates or appears.
Reasoning	The logical explanation and analysis for *why* the Assertion is true. This involves philosophical justification, principle defense, or mechanism explanation.	Explains *why* the Assertion is valid; builds the logical bridge.
Impacting	Explaining the significance, stakes, and real-world consequences of your argument. This shows the positive outcome for your side or the negative outcome for the opposition's side.	Shows *what* the argument achieves; quantifies the stakes.
Grounding	Specific facts, statistics, historical examples, analogous situations, or well-developed causal chains that demonstrate the argument's real-world truth or effect.	Shows *how* the argument manifests in reality, making it concrete.
Tie Back	Explicitly connects the successful establishment of this argument back to the overall debate motion, the need and your team's case line. Quantifies the *importance* of the argument relative to the motion.	Answers the question: *So what?* Explains the argument's weight in the round.

Case Consistency

In parliamentary debates (and most speech and debate formats), case consistency is paramount. As a matter of fact, a case with a hundred inconsistent ideas is **always** going to be worse than a case with a few consistent (relevant) ideas. This is because inconsistent cases are hard to defend and the concessions you inevitably make due to inconsistent cases makes it hard to defend such cases. The elements of case consistency are:

1. Compatibility
2. Coherence
3. Organisation
4. Linking

Within case consistency, we also have argument consistency, which is an even stricter set of standards that ensures that the arguments we make are not confusing and hard to follow. The extra restrictions on argument consistency typically includes:

1. Complementing
2. Grouping
3. Limiting

Compatibility

Ideas are said to be compatible if their premises can be true at the same time. An incompatible set of ideas may be:

{ "Debaters do not have souls,"
"I am a debater,"
"I have a soul" }

Note how you having a soul implies that debaters have souls, which is a logical impossibility, therefore, the set of ideas presented in this case are incompatible. Your case must be such a set that **all** the premises presented in the case can be true simultaneously.

Coherence

Coherence is the idea that the conclusions and premises are consistent. This is very similar to compatibility, however, it doesn't just look at the claims (premises) you are making but also the conclusions (results) you are drawing from the claims. For example, an incoherent case for a motion such as:

This house regrets the dominant narrative that individuals should do what they love

There may be a team that argues that individuals should do what they love because life is short. While this seems like a perfectly reasonable statement, in debate, it is your responsibility to prove why life being short implies that people should do what they love. Therefore, to make this argument coherent, one must explain that life is short, which means that we are severely limited to what we

can do and if we do not do what we love, we may severely regret it. This is the same argument presented "coherently."

Organisation

It is not enough to have logically consistent arguments, however, it is even more important to group your smaller ideas into larger ideas (themes) and work from there. Further, you must sign-post this organisation by calling it out explicitly.

Why must I do this even though my case makes sense on paper? The answer to this common concern is simple: your adjudicators are human, and thus, it is quite difficult for one to follow a case that is poorly organised. Sometimes, a worse case with better organisation may win over a better case with worse organisation simple because the worse case was understood better.

You may be tempted to blame and shame adjudicators, but this will not change their decision, and it is up to you to keep them engaged, which is why even in debate formats that do not consider a style score, you must still focus on keeping an easy-to-follow style. Similarly, organising your case in a way that is easy to follow will inevitably influence your performance.

Further organisation will be discussed in the prioritisation section.

Linking

Floating ideas are confusing ideas. This is why we group them into arguments and try to simplify whenever possible. It is not practical for an adjudicator to link ideas presented by 8 speeches with each other. It is up to the presenter to not only identify linkages, but explain them clearly.

Complementing

Ideas can not be in the same argument if they are not complimentary. For example, for the motion:

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"THW legalise all drugs"

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We may make a case with the following space of ideas:

{(1): "The government is not allowed to deem an act that does not harm others a 'crime',"
(2): "Drugs are a personal choice,"
(3): "The war on drugs is costly,"
(4): "The government has no right to violently crack down on civilians"}

Ideas (1) and (2) are complimentary to each other, and actively help build each other. Even idea (4) may be added to this argument depending on your approach. However, idea (3) is clearly not part of this argument, and therefore must be included in a separate argument.

Grouping

You may break down ideas and build multiple ideas together. This is known as grouping (or synthesis). For example, in the legalise drugs debate, idea (1) and (4) can be grouped as such:

PREMISE: Although the government has wrongfully taken this responsibility, it is beyond the scope of its legal powers to police drug use.

LINKAGE: We will be using two essential principles to prove this: "Defining Crime" and "Justifying Violence"

PRINCIPLE: Crime has been incorrectly defined to include the sale and use of drugs. The traditional definition of crime is actions that harm the state or individuals.

We allow the government to punish crime on our behalf because it is an agreement that society makes that if people are to harm each other, their property, or their well-being, they are to be brought to justice.

Since the use of drugs does not necessitate harming others, it is incorrectly dubbed a crime as a moral vice, even though it is not the right of the state to punish moral vices.

If we took an analogous situation, we let people use alcohol unless and until it harms someone else, such as with a DUI or public intoxication. However, alcohol use in places where you are neither a danger nor a nuisance is completely normal and permissible, we should extend this right to people using drugs as well.

However, then comes the issue of the sale of drugs, which is similarly not harmful, as this is a transaction of a controlled substance between people. If these people are consenting adults, there is nothing wrong with this transaction (except the moral vice, which the government has no right to police)

PRINCIPLE: This becomes even more concerning when we consider how violent the crackdown on drugs are. Due to the moral righteousness of the war on drugs, police forces have increasingly militarised, and create issues for communities, particularly minority communities, that face the majority of this violent oppression.

Even if we grant that there is some justification to criminalising drugs, we must recognise the broader impact this has on our police forces, where, due to the illegality and high-revenue nature of the market, the oppression of drug sellers does not suppress them, but rather, it makes them see militarisation as an investment. If they do not make this investment, their business would cease to exist, therefore, this is a necessary cost to protect their interests

Further, since law enforcement does not protect their business, they need to further take justice into their own hands. In essence, the violent nature of drug policing is

exactly what creates the violent nature of drug rings and cartels.

A legal drug market is safer as consumers are incentivised not to risk their lives in a low-quality low-health-standards market and sellers are encouraged to legalise their businesses and reduce their risk.

CONCL.: The state has no right to declare the sale or use of drugs a crime, and the violent nature of policing this industry is exactly what makes the drug trade so dangerous and crime-filled.

Although we had to explore a whole argument to understand how ideas are grouped, you can see that you can use two similar ideas to enhance their power and create a compelling argument.

Limiting

You have at best three minutes to make an argument, you will have to decide the scope for the argument. Prioritisation will help you decide what to cut but you must have a mental estimate of whether you will be able to give the argument *well* within the time constraints you have.

"No-Go Areas"

No-Go Areas are commonly believed to be the parts of the debate that are weak for us. This misconception is quite harmful as it prevents you from dealing with ideas that will harm your case. For example, if you are given the motion:

This house would ban works of literature/film/music that glorify criminality

It *seems* like it would be a good strategy as government/proposition to avoid talking about criminal behavior being inspired by these works. However, in many debates, making the mistake of believing this is a no-go area will be fatal to your case and even in the best case it will leave you at the disadvantage of letting opposition frame how glorification influences peoples' behavior.

A better approach is to explain how this glorification influences human behavior, mitigate it, and then compare the value/responsibility of these works. Not only does it make your case more engaging, but it also lets you frame the impact of glorification, making it harder for the opposition to exaggerate the scale of the impact of glorification.

A useful way to think about no-go areas is that they are ideas that knife your side. These can be because they lose you the moral high ground, for example, it is a common mistake to think that if you are in opposition to a feminist motion, you are expected to take the anti-woman route; take the motion:

When it comes to civilian ownership of weapons, this house would allow women and only women to bear arms.

Opposition is not expected to argue that women are incapable of bearing arms. Besides making it highly unlikely that you will win the debate, you will probably sound like the worst team in the room. You will lose the moral high ground and the case will be weakened due to your approach.

Another example is taking a burden you do not have to take. A common kind of motion where this mistake is made is political ones:

> This house, as the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), regrets the vote of no confidence.

Here, you may have plenty of knowledge and passion on why Imran Khan was a great prime minister or vice versa, however, when you are debating, you **must** set aside the burden of proving this because it distracts you from spending time proving the actual motion, which is that the vote of no confidence was regrettable for PDM.

Therefore, in general, no-go areas are ideas that, if included in your case, actively weaken it. It is common to explicitly agree on what the no-go areas are when you start debating, with them becoming quite obvious once you are experienced in making cases.

Case Prioritisation

We have talked about the limited time in debate before, but it is useful to consider this when providing your case. You can understand the importance of prioritisation by asking the question:

"Why does the negative case go before the positive?"

It is because if the ideas we have all **just** heard from the other side are the most urgent ideas in the debate. If you do not address them immediately, or link them to some coming idea, you are conceding the issues to your opponents. This does not mean that every idea they have presented is urgent, but it is near impossible that someone has spoken for 7 or 8 minutes and have not said anything worth addressing.

We can extend this further by making a general rule:

"The most important and urgent ideas come first."

When you are starting out, it may help to actively list out the ideas ordered by priority, even though later you may learn to be able to do this implicitly.

How do you decide if an idea is important? You will just have to learn from experience, but you can use the following questions as a general rule of thumb:

1. Is this idea debate winning/losing? (highest priority)
2. Does this idea take down a big part of our/their case? (second priority)
3. Is this idea relevant, impactful, and engaging? (third priority)
4. Is this idea relevant and impactful? (fourth priority)
5. Is this idea relevant? (Fifth priority)

Generally, you will want to spend most of your time on the first and second priorities. Moving down if you have more time than usual.

However, you must choose to draw a line, which is after which you will refuse to include an idea. If the idea is not even relevant (below fifth), you will drop it altogether but in a good debate you may draw this line even higher, even up to second priority.