

# Guide To Debating

2012/2013



## Roles On The Table

### Opening Government (First Proposition):

#### Prime Minister (1<sup>st</sup> Speaker)

- (a) Set out the problem that you are trying to fix
- (b) Give your mechanism to solve this problem (how will you fix it).  
questions: *Who* is going to be enacting the policy, *What* are they going to do, and Under what *conditions*
- (c) Make one or two substantive points for your side

#### Deputy Prime Minister (2<sup>nd</sup> Speaker)

- (a) Give rebuttal to the Leader of the Opposition's substantive point
- (b) Build on what the Prime Minister said, repairing any damage the Opposition did to your team's case
- (c) Make one or two more substantive points for your side

### Closing Government (Second Proposition):

#### Member of the Government (1<sup>st</sup> Speaker – Extension)

- (a) Give rebuttal to the opposition case (concentrate on the Deputy Leader of the Opposition but also refute anything said by the Leader of the Opposition that has not already been taken down)
- (b) Give anywhere from one to three points of extension  
Extension: "Extending" the debate. You can either
  1. Broaden the debate – move it onto the broad principles which underlie all of the government points
  2. "Extend the debate into a new area". For instance, you might focus on the impact to a specific group (ex. women or ethnic minorities)

\*It is important to add something NEW to the debate

#### Government Whip (2<sup>nd</sup> Speaker – Summation)

- (a) Give rebuttal to the Member of the Opposition's extension speech
- (b) Summary: Tie the debate up into a neat little bow
  - Look at the 2 or 3 main points of contestation throughout the debate and explain the arguments made and why your side wins them
  - You cannot add new information here but you can give further analysis and tie points which were made throughout the debate together in new ways
  - Put emphasis on your partner, explaining why their extensive contribution won the debate for your side.

## Opening Opposition (First Opposition):

### Leader of the Opposition (1<sup>st</sup> Speaker)

- (a) Give rebuttal to the Prime Minister's substantive points
- (b) Build your own opposition case with positive points against the motion – reasons why side opposition is preferable to the proposition

### Deputy Leader of the Opposition (2<sup>nd</sup> Speaker)

- (a) Give rebuttal to the Deputy Prime Minister
- (b) Build on what the Leader of the Opposition said, repairing any damage the Proposition did to your team's case
- (c) Make one or two substantive points for your side

## Closing Opposition (Second Opposition):

### Member of the Opposition (1<sup>st</sup> Speaker – Extension)

- (a) Give rebuttal to the proposition case including Opening Government but concentrate your rebuttal on the extension speech
- (b) Give anywhere from one to three points of extension  
Extension: “Extending” the debate. You can either
  1. Broaden the debate – move it onto the broad principles which underlie all of the government points
  2. “Extend the debate into a new area”. For instance, you might focus on the impact to a specific group (ex. women or ethnic minorities)\*It is important to add something NEW to the debate

### Opposition Whip (2<sup>nd</sup> Speaker – Summation)

- (a) Summary: You will be giving a biased account of what has happened in the debate. What do you want the judge to take away from it?
  - Look at the 2 or 3 main points of contention in the debate and explain the arguments made and why your side wins them
  - You cannot add new information but you can give further analysis and tie points together which were made throughout the debate
  - Put emphasis on your partner, explaining why their extension contribution won the debate for your side.\* All of your rebuttal should be integrated into summation because the speaker preceding you did not bring in new information for you to rebut

## Motions

There are a few different types of motions which lead to different types of debates:

### This House Would (THW)

THW debates usually support a policy so in 1<sup>st</sup> Proposition you will need a mechanism. So if the motion is “THW Legalize Assisted Suicide”, you might want to give a model that you would give legal euthanasia for adults with terminal illness who have undergone 2 mandatory psychological assessments.

### This House Believes That (THBT)

THBT motions do not always require a policy, you might have to debate the merits of a philosophy. For instance, “THBT shock tactics used by animal rights groups like PETA harm animal rights”. It would not make sense to have a model to solve the problem, because it is a discussion about the principles underlying the issue.

The way to know whether to use a model is to think about whether the problem could be easily solved by a bill in Parliament or a resolution in the UN, if not – the debate is about the broader principles.

Some motions will use an “actor”, so This House Supports a NATO backed intervention in Syria. The actor in this debate is NATO, because the motion tells you so. If the motion did not use an actor, in the first proposition you get the choice of which actor you would like to use.

## Analysis

When you make a substantive point, you should make it by using analysis. Analysis is the process of explaining your logic. When a point has analytical leaps it jumps from point A to point J to point K with no explanation in between. The way to create analysis is to ask “Why?” after every point you make. You want to explain the reason why each of your points are true.

## Constructive (Substantive)

These are your substantive points which are made in every speech. It is important to make sure that you headline them at the beginning of your speech because it helps to frame all of your speech. The way to develop constructive points is to ask “Why?” after each and every part of your case. It means that your points will be well developed and follow logically from A-B-C as opposed to A-J-Z.

So instead of: The death penalty is good because it will deter criminals because they don’t want to die. You try: Criminals make a rational calculus when choosing whether or not to commit a crime → This is why many criminals with access to guns do not use them in robberies, because armed robbery gives a longer prison sentence → Right now the maximum cost is life imprisonment → death is worse and more scary than life imprisonment → Potential criminals will take that into account → Less people will commit crimes.

It is the same point, but with the individual steps to make it more detailed and therefore more persuasive and difficult to defeat.

## Destructive (Rebuttal)

Rebuttal is one of the most important parts of your speech. Your rebuttal should be as clear and structured as your substantive points so make sure not to ramble. The easiest way to structure it is in 3 parts.

- 1) State what the other side said in one sentence so the judge knows what you are rebutting
- 2) Explain why what they said is incorrect (the rebuttal part of the process)
- 3) Tie it back to your side, explaining why your side is therefore preferable

Your rebuttal is one of the best times to show that you are engaging with the debate and with other speakers. Therefore, make sure to tackle the underlying premises of your opponent’s arguments and not just base your refutation on their claims or examples which are tangential to their central claim.

## Points of Information (POI)

The first and last minute of any speech are classed as “protected time” where no one may offer a “point of information” but between those periods of time, a speaker from the opposite side of the debate may stand up to offer a POI. A POI is a short interjection which is either a question or a point posed to the speaker.

### If You Are Giving A POI

- 10-15 seconds maximum and sit down if they wave you down
- Flagged only as “Point”, “Point of Information”, “Sir”, or “Madam”

### If You Are Receiving A POI

- Always take at least 1 but no more than 2 POIs
- Wait until you are in between points to take a POI, don’t let them interrupt the flow of your speech or cut off a point before its conclusion
- Wave down speakers standing to offer a POI if you do not want to take them at that point, don’t keep them standing there

### What Kind of POI’s To Ask:

Use this time to point out a logical fallacy or try to gain concession for your side. Do not use POI time to make statements about things that might be remotely analogous, for instance “Would you also permit the torture of animals?” is not a legitimate POI for a motion on capital punishment.

### How To Respond To POIs:

Take 15-30 seconds maximum to respond to a POI. A POI should never throw you off track in your speech. Do not cut a speaker off, feel free to wave them down at 15 seconds but it is for the chair judge to tell them to sit down.

### Point of Clarification

These are special types of POIs which are usually only offered to the 1<sup>st</sup> Proposition team. These are not substantive but only serve to clarify the debate. These should be referred to as “Point of Clarification”. Only ask these when the proposition model is incredibly unclear or confusing.

## Judging

Every debater will judge at some point. While judging is a separate skill, it is very helpful for your own debating ability to be able to critically analyze the points that each team makes and the way that they interact with each other. It is important to be a “holistic” judge, or a judge who views the whole speech within the whole round, taking into account the overall persuasiveness of a speech.

You should try to write down every point that the speakers make and remain engaged in the debate by watching the way that arguments bounce back and forth down the table. A good way to do that is to use two pages of A4 and divide each page into 4 sections with a large + and each speaker is assigned a square where you can take notes.

**Analysis** – Depth and sophistication of argumentation

**Engagement** – Are they responding to the debate as it happens.

**Role Fulfillment** – Are they doing the job of their position in the debate

**Style** – Is their style effective for delivering the material

Speaker Points: We do not award speaker points at workshops, this is purely for competition use.

The scale tends to range from 60-90. A 70 is a poor but alright speech, a 75 is average, an 80 is excellent.

## Style

In BP debating, analysis is much more important than style and so analysis wins debates whereas style can only *add* to the persuasiveness of your points. That means speaking with your feet shoulder width apart, projecting your voice, giving eye contact to your judges, and speaking slow enough to allow your judges to write down your points. The best speeches use rhetoric to further the analysis already given. A joke in a speech or giving a passionate moral appeal might make you more memorable to the judges. It can help to write out your opening line to start your speech in a stylistic way. To see the way rhetoric works in speeches we recommend reading Pericles’ Funeral Oration or JFK’s Inauguration Address.

## Competitions

As a member of the Debates Union you will be given the opportunity to compete for the University of Edinburgh at a number of different competitions throughout the year. There are competitions around the UK and Ireland almost every weekend of the academic year. If you are curious about competitions, look at the Union’s website for more details. Competitions have from 3 to 9 “in-rounds”, or rounds where everyone competes, and then there is elimination to semi-finals or finals, depending on the competition. There are competitions for levels of ability from novice competitions for new debaters to advanced competitions like the European or Worlds Universities Debating Championships (Euros and Worlds, respectively).

### What To Bring

Sleeping Bag and Overnight Things

Paper and Pens

### How To Prepare

The way to prepare for competitions is to read up on current affairs because you will be expected to have the knowledge of “an average person who reads the newspaper”.

Most competitions will have at least one round on social policy, international relations, and economics and so reading publications like The Economist, Foreign Affairs, or even just the BBC website can be helpful. That said, everything is fair game in a debate and so if there is a motion that seems surprising or counter intuitive, it is a good idea to sit with your partner and think it all the way through until you find the proposition or opposition line. A good way to do that is by thinking, “When the CA team set this motion, what kind of debate were they expecting to see?”

## Debate Jargon

**Break:** The act of going through to an elimination round.

**Break-Room:** A room in the last round of the competition where the competitors could break. These rooms are also called “live rooms”.

**CA – Chief Adjudicator:** This is the person who selects the motions and acts as the “head honcho” of the competition. They are usually a very experienced and well-regarded debater and so their feedback is likely to be very good. The DCA is the Deputy CA and their job is to assist the CA. They are also very experienced.

**Closed Room:** The last or last two debate rounds (depending on the tournament) where the result is not given after the debate.

**Convenor:** This is the person from the host university who is running the behind-the-scene aspect of the tournament. If you have questions about food, schedule, or rooms, they are the one to go to.

**Crash:** When you stay with debaters from the host institution.

**Feedback:** Constructive critique judges give you after the result.

Feedback should always be taken with grace and desire to improve.

**IV:** Inter-Varsity competition. These are only for people still attending University.

**Open:** In contrast to an IV, anyone can enter into an Open.

**“Points”:** A simple algorithm to see where you are in the competition.

A 1<sup>st</sup> is 3 points, a 2<sup>nd</sup> is 2 points, a 3<sup>rd</sup> is 1 point, and a 4<sup>th</sup> is 0 points.

You add up your scores with those substitutions to know “What points you are on”

**Power-Pairing:** All competitions in Europe use a system called “power-pairing” whereby you are matched with other teams on the same number of points as you.

**Pro-Am:** When a more experienced speaker (Pro) teams up with an amateur speaker (Am) for the benefit of the novice debater.

**Speaker Points:** These are points allocated to individual speakers in every round where the judge ranks your speech from 60-85 (approximately). 60 is a really poor speech, 70 is below average, 75 is average, 80 is excellent, 85 is near perfect.

**Tab:** The tab is the computer program, which allocates room placement, position placement, and runs the whole competition. At the end of the tournament the “Tab” will be released which is a document that shows everyone what speaker points they were awarded in each round.

## Dos And Don'ts of Debating

### Do!

1. **Role Fulfilment** – If you are in 1<sup>st</sup> Proposition, set up the debate and give a model, if you are a summary speaker, give a summary, etc.
2. **Analysis** – Give the reasons behind all of your points or else they are just assertion. Don't just tell us that Page 3 Girls are bad for self-confidence of teenage girls, explain why!
3. **Clash** – Give rebuttal to your opponents and make sure you are engaging with the debate by giving POI's and responding to their points appropriately.
4. **Structure** – Headline your points and indicate when you are doing rebuttal and manage your time so you can get through everything effectively.
5. **Visualize Your Case** – In prep time think, “What does the proposition world look like?” and “What does the opposition world look like?” Visualization gives you new extension material if the opening half teams have not looked at the way this would actually impact individuals and also helps you to be comparative and relevant throughout the round.
6. **Have Fun!** – This is all a game, if you're not having fun, you aren't playing it right!

### Don't!

1. **Ad Hominem** (*Attacking the person instead of the idea*) – This is basically the “Be Nice!” rule. You should never make any comment which would make someone feel personally demeaned or excluded from the debate.
2. **Heckle Or Curse Excessively** – Please use parliamentary language.
3. **“This Costs Too Much”** – Except for in debates *about* economics, there are usually better points to make.
4. **Mention Hitler** – Except if the debate is literally about Nazism or the Holocaust.
5. **Make Slippery Slope Arguments** – They are lazy and are fallacies.