

# A Short Introduction to Debating

Not all of these rules are carved in stone; see it as a proposition to start with.

## Case

There are two types of debates:

- 1.) Problem debates
  - concerned with philosophical questions.
  - The question is : Is something RIGHT or WRONG?
  - You CAN NOT put forward a practical case!
- 2.) Mechanism Debates
  - concerned with practical problems.
  - The question is: HOW should we DO something?
  - You MUST put forward a practical case!

Do not mix up these two types!

Follow the **general structure**:

- 1.) Problem (Harm) that needs to be solved.
- 2.) Outcome (Effect) that you want to achieve.
- 3.) Policy that realises your desired outcome. Do not propose more than one thing at a time!

## Content

In your argumentation say...

- 1.) ...why it is correct as a matter of principle (philosophical arguments)
- 2.) ...why it works (practical arguments)
- 3.) ...where are the benefits (outcome)

**“Because” is one of the most important words in a debate!**

If one side proposes valid arguments (facts) the other side should not question them but concede they are correct; you may, however, raise objections on philosophical grounds or question practical feasibility.

## Structure

- Announcement of structure is helpful but the consistency of the speech itself is most important; you should announce the general thrust of your speech within the first 20 seconds.
- Categorise arguments (extremely important for last speakers of 2<sup>nd</sup> Prop and 2<sup>nd</sup> Opp).
- Identify key arguments (esp. all 2<sup>nd</sup> speakers), clarify arguments and re-assert/confirm what your teammate has said.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Prop

- With open motions you may launch a problem or a mechanism debate somehow related to the motion. You must LINK the motion to the topic you want to debate. Recall that in a mechanism debate you have to put forward a practical proposal (bill e.g.).
- Distinguish between 1<sup>st</sup> order points (very important) and 2<sup>nd</sup> order points (less important); always put forward the 1<sup>st</sup> order points first to create the impression you have a strong case. Weak points at the beginning will make strong points put forward later look weak as well.
- For the same reason, the debater who is more comfortable with the topic/case should be the first speaker.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Opp

You may oppose...

- the problem (there is no problem at all, the status quo is fine);
- the policy (the proposed case will not have the desired effect and will harm elsewhere)
- both the problem and the policy.

You may...

- give a “split speech” (first rebuttal and then your own speech). However, it costs time and you are usually in a rush to get through your speech in 5 minutes. This approach usually is more convenient for novice debaters or if you have many new and qualitatively different arguments.
- adapt the structure of the 1<sup>st</sup> Prop and give an “integrated speech” (Rebuttal and your own arguments point by point).

If the 1<sup>st</sup> Prop puts forward a very strong case and you do not see a chance to rebut it, it is dangerous to try to escape by going further than the 1<sup>st</sup> Prop. (“We oppose your proposal because it is not enough.”)

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Prop and Opp – 1<sup>st</sup> Speaker

- *Expand* or *deepen* the debate rather than to *extend* it with a new case.
- View things from a different angle; in a hitherto philosophical debate you may dwell on practical issues and vice versa. Dwell on the framework, the fundamentals and underpinnings that affect the case.
- If the 1<sup>st</sup> Prop (Opp) has been bad in fulfilling its role, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Prop (Opp) has to provide the arguments that should have been brought by the 1<sup>st</sup> Prop (Opp).

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Prop and Opp – 2<sup>nd</sup> Speaker

Summary

- Sum up the *entire* debate.
- Identify the major clashes and categorise arguments.
- Identify key points, show why your side (especially your team) is right and that you delivered the decisive points.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Prop – 2<sup>nd</sup> speaker: You may (but need not) introduce new (minor not substantial) points.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Opp – 2<sup>nd</sup> speaker: Do NOT introduce new arguments; only provide new examples/reasons to already mentioned points.

## Teamwork

It is preferable not to announce what your partner is going to say.

- With open motions you do not know what will be debated anyway.
- You may not have the time to consult on individual points.

## Points of information (POI)

Taking (1-3 POI):

- Listen to it, do not ask the speaker to sit down immediately.
- Respond to it and reject it.

Offering (not too many):

- Content
  - Bring points that go to the heart of an argument; do not raise peripheral points.
  - Do not attack the policy in a POI.

You may try to lay the groundwork for your own speech or try to move the debate in a direction beneficial to you.

- Manner
  - Be a gentleman trying to be a debater.
  - Do not say “on XYZ”, just say “Point of Information” or “On this point”.