

Parliamentary Debate Basics*

Parliamentary Debate

- ▶ Based loosely on the deliberative discussions of the British House of Commons
- ▶ No speeches, briefs, or quotations are read in parliamentary debates
- ▶ Use only the notes you make during the debate and preparation period
- ▶ more oratorical, witty, and accessible to general audiences

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Debate Format

- ▶ Proposition will be announced
- ▶ You will have 15 minutes of preparation time
 - ▶ analyze the proposition and outline your major arguments
- ▶ Ask yourselves the following
 - ▶ What does this proposition mean?
 - ▶ What important issues are raised by it?
 - ▶ How may it be affirmed or denied?
 - ▶ What examples and events are relevant to its discussion?
- ▶ The Speaker of the House manages the debate, recognizes the speakers, and rules upon any disputes that arise in the course of the round.
- ▶ The Speaker introduces each debater in turn.

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Format, cont.

- **First proposition constructive speech-- 7 minutes**
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- **First opposition constructive speech-- 8 minutes**
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- **Second proposition constructive speech-- 8 minutes**
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- **Second opposition constructive speech-- 8 minutes**
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- **Opposition rebuttal-- 4 minutes**
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- **Proposition rebuttal-- 5 minutes**

Topics

- Most propositions in parliamentary debate begin with either the phrase "Be it resolved that. ." often abbreviated as "B.I.R.T." or "This House believes. . ." or "This House would
- The "House," unless otherwise specified by the first proposition speaker, refers to the judge(s) and audience attending the debate, who serve as a deliberative parliament.
- The proposition or topic in a parliamentary debate is usually referred to as the motion.
- There are two types of motions commonly used: straight motions and linkable motions.

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Straight Motions

- Straight motions are meant to be debated literally
- drawn from current events
 - Ex: "Be it resolved that the United States should lift its economic sanctions against Cuba";
- may be broader statements of historical judgment or philosophy
 - "Be it resolved that the American dream has become an American nightmare"
- value comparison
 - "This House despises flattery more than slander"
- First propositions get to decide which side they will defend.

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Linkable motions

- ▶ Linkable motions need not be debated literally, but may instead be linked to specific policy proposals selected by the government team and not known by the opposition until the first constructive speech is heard.
- ▶ The proposition team may define the terms of the motion in most any way they choose, generally linking the abstract motion to some specific controversy through the use of metaphors.
- ▶ ex: "B.I.R.T. freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose".
 - ▶ linked to a case statement in favor of restoring the eligibility of legal immigrants (who came here seeking "freedom") for welfare benefits (without which, they have "nothin' left to lose")

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First Proposition/Government

- ▶ The first speaker uses preparation time to arrange the essential elements of the case into a brief outline
- ▶ The outline should show the major elements of the case and their relation to each other and constitute a complete case on behalf of the motion
- ▶ First proposition opens and closes the debate in defense of the motion

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First Proposition/Government

- ▶ define any distinguishing, technical or ambiguous terms of the resolution
- ▶ interpret the motion through a clear case statement
 - ▶ carefully transcribed this statement
 - ▶ This should advance a controversial claim, capable of affirmation and denial, susceptible to proof and disproof
- ▶ offer a history of the issue in controversy
- ▶ disclose any limitations for the discussion.
- ▶ state and support the main arguments of the case.
 - ▶ 2 to 4 points
- ▶ case must not require specific knowledge to debate
- ▶ Burden of Proof

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First Opposition

- ▶ should make clear why the motion before the house should be defeated.
- ▶ can contest the definitions or case statement
- ▶ Better--weaken or nullify the case by refuting the main points of the case
 - ▶ point out logical fallacies
 - ▶ factual inaccuracies
 - ▶ inconsistencies in the main lines of proof
 - ▶ ignored exceptions to case examples
 - ▶ the improper combination of arguments
 - ▶ overdrawn conclusions.
- ▶ Can present a counter case

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Second Speakers

- ▶ refute the important arguments of the opposing side
 - ▶ amplify the strong arguments initiated by their colleagues.
 - ▶ last chance for each side in the debate to present new arguments and issues.
 - ▶ the second proposition speaker should refute all important objections presented by the preceding opposition speaker and provide new examples or other support for the main points of their case.
 - ▶ The second speaker for the opposition may support the objections of the first Opposition speaker, present additional objections, defend and expand the opposition's counter case if one has been presented, and evaluate inconsistencies between the arguments of the first and
- ▷ second proposition speakers

Rebuttals

- ▶ summary speeches for each side of the debate
- ▶ this is the last opportunity each side will have to explain why they should win.
- ▶ Rebuttals are a final opportunity to contrast the major positions and philosophies of the proposition and opposition
- ▶ New arguments may not be introduced in the rebuttal
- ▶ proposition rebuttal can answer new arguments made in the second opposition speech
- ▶ Opposition goes first. Proposition last

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Points of Information

- A brief rejoinder (fifteen seconds or less) to the point then being made by the person speaking.
- It may be a concise statement or a pointed question.
- A point of information is also sometimes used for purposes of clarification.
- The point of information is directed to the person speaking rather than to the Speaker of the House.
- The person seeks a Pol must rise and be recognized. If the speaker does not acknowledge, you must sit down.
- If a Pol is allowed the speaker must deal with it before moving on.
- No Pol during rebuttals

Cases

- **Current national or international policy controversies**
 - Russia should be admitted to N.A.T.O.
 - The U.S. should end its embargo of Iran.
 - Nepal should close Mt. Everest to climbing.
- **Local controversies of broader interest**
 - Dade County, Florida should permit concerts by Cuban musicians.

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Cases

- **Sports and popular culture disputes**
 - Baseball should eliminate the designated hitter.
 - Vinyl records are better than compact disks.
- **Literary cases**
 - You're Cinderella. Don't marry the prince.
 - You're Dorothy. Don't go back to Kansas
- **Personal decisions**
 - You should not eat meat.
 - Don't buy toy guns for your child.

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Cases

► Time-space cases

- It's August 6, 1945, and you're Harry Truman. Don't drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.
- It's June 1936 and you're Franklin Roosevelt (or, alternatively, the U.S. Olympic Committee). Boycott the Berlin Olympics.
- Can't use info that was not available at the time.

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*Source

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