

Introducing Parliamentary Debate

A resource for teachers and students



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Parliamentary Debate Guidelines and Conventions

- I. Parliamentary debate is a formal contest featuring critical analysis and rhetorical skill. Participants represent the advocates for and against a motion for debate (also known as a resolution or topic). One or more judges deliberate on the outcome of the contest.
- II. A motion is presented as the subject for debate. A different topic is used for each round of debate. Two teams, each with two persons and designated as “Proposition” (also known as “Government”) and “Opposition”, prepare to debate the topic. The teams have twenty minutes of preparation time from the announcement of the motion to prepare for each debate. Students may consult other students, dictionaries, reference materials, and prepared notes during the preparation period. There is no preparation time once the debate commences. No prepared materials may be brought into the debate round for the debater’s use. Debaters are not permitted to read published material in the speeches of the debate to support their argument claims.
- III. There are two types of formal speeches in each round of debate: constructive speeches and rebuttal speeches. The order, formal titles of the speakers, and time limits for each speech are as follows:

First Proposition	7 minutes
First Opposition	8 minutes
Second Proposition	8 minutes
Second Opposition	8 minutes
Opposition Rebuttal	4 minutes
Proposition Rebuttal	5 minutes

The first speaker for each side speaks twice (a constructive speech and a rebuttal speech). The second speaker for each side delivers a single constructive speech.

- IV. Points of Information: These are common practice in parliamentary debating and serve to make for interactive and challenging debates. A Point of Information is a request by one or more debaters on an opposing team to the speaker holding the floor to yield a portion of her speaking time for a brief statement or clarifying question. To make a point of information, one or both members of the opposing team rise and announce “Information” or “Point of Information”. They may also signal non-verbally that they wish to make a point of information. The speaker then has the discretion to accept or refuse the point. If the point is accepted (“I will take your point,” for example), the opposing team member directs a statement (often an argument or counterexample) or question to the speaker. The speaker is technically yielding time from her own speech for the point of information and the time for the point is deducted from the speaker holding the floor.

Points of Information must be concise statements or questions, lasting no more than fifteen seconds. The speaker accepts a single point; the opposing speaker is not permitted to make following questions or arguments unless again recognized by the speaker holding the floor.

Points of Information can only be offered after the first minute and before the last minute of any speech. The judge, “Speaker of the House”, or designated timekeeper knocks on a desk or table or otherwise announces that one minute of each speech has elapsed and that one minute of each speech remains, so that the participants know when Points of Information may be presented.

- V. New arguments are not permitted in the rebuttal speeches, unless the arguments have a logical foundation established in the constructive speeches. For example, new issues may be presented in the Second Opposition speech. It is appropriate for the Proposition rebuttalist to answer these issues without fear that the arguments will be identified as “new answers or arguments in the final rebuttal” because the rebuttal speech is the *first* opportunity that the proposition team has to answer these arguments and the issues have an *established foundation* in the constructive speeches.

INTRODUCTION TO DEBATE FOR BEGINNING PARLIAMENTARY DEBATERS

OVERVIEW: Parliamentary debate is extemporaneous debating on topics that change from debate to debate. There are two speakers per team, and two teams in a debate. One team is called the **proposition team**. This team supports the motion for debate by making a specific case for the motion. The other team is called the **opposition team**. This team opposes the proposition team's case for the motion.

Contestants debate a wide variety of topics drawn from current events, contemporary culture, domestic and international issues, politics and philosophy. The proposition team has the burden of making and defending a specific case for the motion for debate. The opposition team argues against that case by showing that the case should not be upheld because it is wrong, dangerous, ill-informed, or some combination thereof. Topics are normally announced 20 minutes before the beginning of each debate. Students may consult materials during their designated preparation time, but once the debate has started, students may not use any materials prepared prior to the announcement of the topic.

STRUCTURE: There are four debaters in a debate. The person who opens for a side also closes for that side. This means that on each team, one debater will speak twice while the other will speak once. The order of speeches is as follows:

First Proposition Constructive:	7 minutes
First Opposition Constructive:	7 minutes
Second Proposition Constructive:	7 minutes
Second Opposition Constructive:	7 minutes
Opposition Rebuttal:	5 minutes
Proposition Rebuttal:	5 minutes

POINTS OF INFORMATION: One unique and dynamic feature of parliamentary debating is the use of points of information. A Point of Information is a request by one or more debaters on an opposing team to the speaker holding the floor to yield a portion of her speaking time for a brief statement or clarifying question. To make a point of information, one or both members of the opposing team rise and announce "Information" or "Point of Information". They may also signal non-verbally that they wish to make a point of information, for example, by extending an arm forward in the air.

The speaker then has the discretion to accept or refuse the point. If the point is accepted ("I will take your point," for example), the opposing team member directs a statement (often an argument or counterexample) or question to the speaker. If the speaker refuses the point (for example, they might say "No thank you."), the opposing team member must sit down, as they do not have the floor. The speaker is technically yielding time from her own speech for the point of information and the time for the point is deducted from the speaker holding the floor.

Points of Information must be concise statements or questions, lasting no more than fifteen seconds. The speaker accepts a single point; the opposing speaker is not permitted to

make following questions or arguments unless again recognized by the speaker holding the floor.

Points of Information can only be offered after the first minute and before the last minute of any speech. The judge, “Speaker of the House”, or designated timekeeper knocks on a desk or table or otherwise announces that one minute of each speech has elapsed and that one minute of each speech remains, so that the participants know when Points of Information may be presented.

THE MOTION FOR DEBATE: 20 minutes before the scheduled start time of the debate, the motion for debate will be announced. This is the topic for the upcoming debate, sometimes also known as the “resolution.” The time between the announcement of the topic and the start of the first speech of the debate is preparation time, or *prep time*, for the debaters. Before the topic is announced, debaters will already know whether they will be proposing or opposing the motion. Once the topic is announced, debaters start preparing their notes to defend their side of the motion in the upcoming debate.

The motion for a debate may suggest a change in policy, such as: “The United States should guarantee a free college education for all citizens.” It might make an explicit statement about a value, such as: “Affirmative action is justified to make amends for slavery.” The motion might simply call for debate about something taken to be a fact: “The current president has done more harm than good.”

PROPOSING THE MOTION: To support the motion for debate, the proposition team needs to construct a specific case in support of the motion. Generally, this means that the proposition team provides a proof of the motion for debate using a specific case or a set of cases to present concrete evidence and specific arguments in favor of the motion. It is generally considered to be unpersuasive and difficult at best when debaters claim that they are proving the motion in its “general” case. Debaters should always strive to provide the most concrete evidence and sets of facts, empirical examples, and specific arguments to solidify their proof of the motion.

In the first proposition speech, the speaker should explain how the case as presented provides a proof of the motion for debate. In doing this, the speaker explains how the proposition team is interpreting the motion. The presentation of the case should also include a statement that explains how the proposition team plans to win the debate – in other words, the speaker must show how the case proves the motion and why the case as presented means that the proposition team should win the debate.

OPPOSING THE MOTION: To oppose the motion for debate, the opposition team needs to show that the proposition team’s case for the motion is wrong, dangerous, misguided, ill-informed, or some combination thereof. They may also show that the proposition team’s case does not, in fact, prove the motion for debate. The opposition team will generally accomplish this through a combination of direct and indirect refutation of the proposition team’s case. Direct refutation happens when the opposition team directly clashes with points made by the

proposition team. For example, if the proposition team argues health care reform in the United States by showing that there is a health care crisis in America, the opposition team could clash with this point by showing that no such health care crisis exists.

Indirect refutation happens when the opposition team brings up arguments that refute the proposition team's case but do not deal directly with claims made in the proposition team's case as articulated. For example, the proposition team might argue for health care reform in the United States on the grounds that it will improve hospital treatment if the government directly pays for health care for citizens. The opposition team might bring up the argument that such a plan would collapse the economy, putting millions out of work and into poverty. Since the issue of the economy may not have been explicitly addressed in the proposition team's case, this would be an example of indirect refutation. These arguments are sometimes referred to as "off case" arguments because they do not deal directly with the proposition team's case for the motion.

BASIC RULES OF PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

Parliamentary debates occur on many types of topics. Topics change from debate to debate. Sometimes debaters will have as little as 15 minutes to prepare their arguments for an upcoming debate. There are only a few rules for parliamentary debating, which are summarized here. Some states or leagues may have added to or changed these basic rules, so it is always wise to check the rules of a tournament you are about to attend, to make sure you will be in compliance with the rules of the competition.

Rule 1: Speakers should not “go over” the time limits given for each speech, although they may stop before time has run out, if they so choose.

Rule 2: Once the debate has begun, debaters may not consult any material collected or prepared before the announcement of the topic for debate. Debaters may use notes prepared during their designated preparation time, but may not use any other materials in the debate. The use of quoted evidence or printed materials is forbidden in the debate, and such use is grounds for a loss in the debate.

Rule 3: Points of information may be attempted in every speech when the speaker is not speaking during his or her “protected time.” Protected time occurs during the first minute and last minute of every speech. Points of information may be a statement or a question, not to exceed 15 seconds. The speaker has the discretion to accept or refuse points of information attempted by the opposing side. There are no “friendly” points of information (points made by the speaker’s partner).

Rule 4: The proposition team supports the motion for debate by presenting a case for the motion. The opposition team opposes the case made by the proposition team, showing either that there is no reason to vote for the motion or that there are reasons *not* to vote for the motion.

Rule 5: Both sides bear the burden of clash; that is, they should acknowledge and argue the issues raised by their opponent in the debate.

In addition to the stated rules, there are many conventions in parliamentary debate. These conventions vary widely among schools, leagues, states, and nations. Convention means simply the expected practice, performance, and behavior in a round of debating.

SPEAKER RESPONSIBILITIES IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

As in other debate formats, there is no one method to practicing successful parliamentary debate. Coaches teach, and debaters use, widely different methods for proving and opposing different kinds of motions and cases. There is, therefore, no one way to engage in parliamentary debate. However, it is useful for beginning debaters to understand the basic conventions for practicing parliamentary debate. This will help you to learn the format and its vocabulary. When you have understood the basic conventions of the event, then you will be able to experiment with developing your own style and practice in a knowledgeable and effective way.

The pages that follow are designed to help beginning debaters understand what normally happens in each speech of an average parliamentary debate. First, here is a brief overview of the two kinds of speeches that occur in a parliamentary debate.

CONSTRUCTIVE SPEECHES

The debate begins with a set of four **constructive** speeches, so called because the critical arguments in a debate are constructed and refined primarily in these speeches. Each side gives two constructive speeches, and every debater delivers one of these speeches.

The purpose of constructive speeches is to introduce the foundational arguments of the debate. The First Proposition speaker interprets the topic and establishes a case that offers a proof for it. The opposition speakers critically investigate the case and attempt to undermine it. The responsibility of the opposition team is to clash with the proposition's case, using appropriate techniques of refutation, including an assault on the underlying assumptions of the case, an exploration of opportunity costs, the introduction of exclusive, opposing philosophical and/or policy objections, and/or the critical analysis of the major issues and concrete examples of proof, with point-by-point disagreement with the factual and logical claims.

THE REBUTTAL SPEECHES

The debate ends with two **rebuttal** speeches, one for each side in the debate. The debater who starts the debate for the opposition delivers the rebuttal for his or her side; then, the debater who started the debate for the proposition delivers the rebuttal for the proposition side.

The rebuttal speeches provide the final summary positions of each team in the debate. These speeches indicate the important issues that establish a proof for the resolution or undermine that proof. New arguments are not permitted in the rebuttal speeches, unless the arguments have a logical foundation established in the constructive speeches. For example, new issues may be presented in the Second Opposition speech. It is appropriate for the Proposition rebuttalist to answer these issues without fear that the arguments will be identified as "new answers or arguments in the final rebuttal" because the rebuttal speech is the *first* opportunity that the proposition team has to answer these arguments and the issues have *an established foundation* in the constructive speeches.

FIRST PROPOSITION CONSTRUCTIVE SPEECH (7 MINUTES)

The opening speaker for the proposition side has the job of constructing and persuasively presenting a clear, specific, and well-argued case for the motion for debate. Most of your preparation time before the debate will be consumed with preparing this speech so that you and your partner make sure you will be able to make a coherent, well-reasoned case for the topic for debate. Basically, you will want to make sure you fulfill the following objectives:

- ✓ Have a brief introduction that both catches the attention of the judge and introduces the themes or purposes of the case you are about to make for the motion. A good introduction establishes your credibility as a speaker.
- ✓ Interpret the motion at hand, and explain why the case you are about to make is a proof of the motion for debate. All topics for debate, just like all topics for conversation, have multiple possible proofs and meanings. *Interpreting the motion* means that you are showing the judge how you will be proving the motion.
- ✓ Organize your speech in an effective manner. If you are proposing a specific policy change, for example, you should consider using a simple “problem-solution” model for organization, where you show what problems exist, propose a solution, and then show why your proposal will address those problems. If the topic calls for you to make a specific value determination, you should offer a few specific, independent proofs for the motion. The important thing to remember is that you should **have an organizational plan and stick to it**, as this will make your position clear.
- ✓ Offer **evidence** (historical or contemporary examples, generalizable statistical information, analogies, scenarios, and so forth) for your arguments. This will lend them credibility and is necessary to transform your assertions into arguments.
- ✓ Construct arguments with **impacts**. This means that you should explain both the **qualitative** (how much) and **quantitative** (how many) effects of your claims. If your arguments matter, explain *why they matter*. How many people are affected by the issue you are discussing? How big is the effect?
- ✓ Take points of information from the other side. You do not have to take every point of information attempted by the other side, but it is good practice to take as many as you think you can address while still retaining the ability to get through your case for the motion. Taking points of information will allow you to hear in advance the arguments that the opposition will make. This allows you to answer their arguments in advance and incorporate your responses into your case for the motion.
- ✓ Have a conclusion that is convincing and summarizes your position in favor of the motion for debate. Your conclusion should be forceful and persuasive, and should restate your basic position in the debate.
- ✓ Make an energetic and persuasive case through good delivery. This means that you should speak clearly. Look at the judge while you are speaking, not at the other team – after all, you are trying to persuade the judge to vote for you, not the other team. Vary your rate and tone of delivery to make your speech as persuasive as possible.

FIRST OPPOSITION CONSTRUCTIVE SPEECH (7 MINUTES)

The opening speaker for the opposition should persuasively present major arguments against the case presented for the motion. This speaker should directly and indirectly refute the claims made by the proposition team. Many of the arguments you will present in this speech will be generated in your preparation time before the debate. You should jot down other arguments against the case as the first proposition speaker presents the case. Following these tips will help you learn to present a powerful speech:

- ✓ Have a brief introduction that both catches the attention of the judge and introduces the themes or purposes of the flaws you see in the proposition team's case. A good introduction establishes your credibility as a speaker.
- ✓ Play good defense. A **defensive** argument is an argument that explains why a point or issue brought up by the other team is not a reason for them to win the debate. It is important in this speech to play good defense against the major points of the proposition team's case. For example: Question the evidence they present. Counter with evidence of your own. Undermine the fundamental assumptions of their logic and reasoning. Show why their arguments lack impacts and significance. Show why *your* arguments are more significant.
- ✓ Make offensive arguments. An **offensive** argument is an argument that explains why your side should win the debate. You should always strive to have a balance of offense and defense in this and other speeches. Just as you wouldn't expect to win a sporting event by only playing defense, so too should you not expect to win a debate with defense only. For example, you might show the judge why the proposition's proposed course of action would result in very bad things. You might also show not just that their claims about the world are wrong, but also dangerous. Perhaps you can demonstrate that a vote for the case is the same as a vote for some other, more sinister agenda or consequence.
- ✓ Use direct and indirect refutation. You can directly refute the claims made by the other side as well as bring up issues and arguments of your own which may indirectly refute the proposition team's case. These arguments, sometimes called "off-case" arguments, discuss issues that are not directly discussed by the other side but are nonetheless relevant debate.
- ✓ Offer **evidence** (historical or contemporary examples, generalizable statistical information, analogies, scenarios, and so forth) for your arguments. This will lend them credibility and is necessary to make complete arguments.
- ✓ Construct arguments with **impacts**. This means that you should explain both the **qualitative** (how much) and **quantitative** (how many) effects of your claims. If your arguments matter, explain *why they matter*.
- ✓ Take points of information from the other side. You do not have to take every point of information, but it is good practice to take as many as you think you can address while still getting through your points. Taking points of information will allow you to hear in advance the arguments from the other side. This allows you to answer their arguments in advance.
- ✓ Have a conclusion that is convincing and summarizes your position. Your conclusion should be forceful and persuasive.

SECOND PROPOSITION CONSTRUCTIVE (7 MINUTES)

This speech is your chance to rebuild and reinforce the case your side originally presented for the motion. You will also need to answer all arguments presented by the opposition. In this speech, it is especially important to be organized and thorough. Go through all arguments made by the other side, and extend upon your original case to show why the judge should vote for your side. The following tips will help you deliver your speech:

- ✓ Have a brief introduction that both catches the attention of the judge and reinforces the major themes of the proposition side. This will establish your credibility as a speaker.
- ✓ Answer all arguments made by the opposition side. You should answer them **specifically** and **in order**, using a systematic approach such as 4-step refutation (“They said....”, “but....”, “because...”, “therefore...”). More advanced debaters may change the order in which they answer the opposition’s arguments, but if you are a beginner, you should wait until you have more experience to try this, as it risks confusing the judge.
- ✓ Remember that not all arguments are equally important. If arguments made by the other side are not relevant or do not provide a reason to vote against your side, *say so*.
- ✓ Don’t forget your case! Reinforce, reiterate, and re-establish your case for the motion by presenting new evidence and examples to support your original claims. You may present new arguments in this speech, but be careful not to change the focus too much from your original case.
- ✓ Play good defense. A **defensive** argument is an argument that explains why a point or issue brought up by the other team is not a reason for them to win the debate. It is important in this speech to play good defense against the opposition’s arguments. Question the evidence they present. Counter with evidence of your own. Undermine the fundamental assumptions of their logic and reasoning.
- ✓ Make offensive arguments. An **offensive** argument is an argument that explains why your side should win the debate. You should always strive to have a balance of offense and defense in this and other speeches. Just as you wouldn’t expect to win a sporting event by only playing defense, so too should you not expect to win a debate with only defense. As much as possible, you should try to **turn** arguments made by the opposition team. When you “turn” an argument, you “turn the tables” on the other side by showing that the argument is in fact an argument for *your side*.
- ✓ Make sure that you assess the **impacts** and **significance claims** at play in the debate. Show why their arguments lack impacts and significance. Show why *your* arguments are more significant than theirs. This will help you set up your partner’s rebuttal.
- ✓ Take points of information from the other side. You do not have to take every point of information, but it is good practice to take as many as you can.
- ✓ Have a conclusion that is convincing and summarizes your position. Your conclusion should be forceful and persuasive.

SECOND OPPOSITION CONSTRUCTIVE SPEECH (7 MINUTES)

This is the first speech of two consecutive opposition speeches. These two speeches together are known as the “opposition block,” and together they are the final chance for your side to advance and consolidate your arguments to try and win the debate. The following tips will help you organize and deliver a successful speech:

- ✓ Have a brief introduction that both catches the attention of the judge and reinforces the major themes of your arguments against the case. This will establish your credibility.
- ✓ Extend upon the arguments made in the first opposition constructive. This is your opportunity to rebuild, reinforce, and re-emphasize the arguments you’ve advanced against the proposition’s case.
- ✓ Clash directly with arguments made by the second proposition speaker. It is **not enough** simply to repeat or reinforce your original arguments. You also have the burden of responding to arguments made by the other side. For example, if your partner made an argument that the proposition’s plan of action would cause some bad consequence, and the other side made three answers to that, you now need to **answer** those answers.
- ✓ Respond to proposition arguments **specifically** and **in order**, using a systematic approach such as 4-step refutation (“They said...”, “but...”, “because...”, “therefore...”).
- ✓ Stay organized and stay on task. You will have a lot of material to cover in this speech, and you will need to be conscious of how you are allocating your time.
- ✓ Introduce any remaining new arguments against the case. No new arguments are allowed in the rebuttal speeches, so any brand new lines of attack you wish to present must be presented in this speech. However, this speech **should not** be composed of entirely new material. If you only present new material in this speech, you will put your side at a strategic disadvantage – the proposition will have one speech to answer your new points, and you will have no opportunity to refute their answers. It will serve your side better if you introduce **targeted** new arguments and evidence in response to issues brought up by the other side.
- ✓ Treat the speech as a **rebuttal speech**. This speech is in essence a rebuttal, as it occurs consecutively with the “formal” rebuttal speech for your side. This means that as you extend upon major arguments for your side, you should also explain why winning those arguments will mean that your side wins the debate.
- ✓ Take out or turn the case! Use the opposition block as an opportunity to demolish the proposition team’s case. Show how your arguments take out their major arguments for the motion, and **impact** your arguments by explaining why they mean you win the debate. It’s perfectly okay to say something like “If we win this argument, we win the debate, because...”
- ✓ Remember to have **offense**. Show why voting for the case will be bad.
- ✓ Take points of information from the other side. You do not have to take every point of information, but it is good practice to take as many as you can.
- ✓ Have a conclusion that is convincing and summarizes your position. Your conclusion should be forceful and persuasive.

OPPOSITION REBUTTAL (5 MINUTES)

Because this is the last stand on the floor for your side, you need to do everything you can to use your speech to persuade the judge to vote for your side. The opposition's rebuttal should continue the process started by the second opposition constructive speech and assess the balance of arguments in favor of your side of the motion. These tips will help you maximize your speech's effectiveness:

- ✓ Have a brief introduction that both catches the attention of the judge and reinforces the major themes of your arguments against the case. This will establish your credibility as a speaker.
- ✓ Use “**even if**” language to assess the major arguments made by the proposition. For example, you might say (when referring to a specific argument): “Even if they win this argument, we still win the debate because...” This kind of “worst case scenario” analysis will help you pre-empt the coming proposition rebuttal.
- ✓ Explain **why your side wins the debate**. It is okay to say something like: “In this debate, the opposition wins because...” This kind of clear analysis of the issues communicates confidence and will help you as you try to get the judge to see the issues your way at the end of the debate.
- ✓ Don't just repeat arguments already made by your partner, but don't make entirely new arguments against the case. New arguments are not permitted in the rebuttals, but you may present additional evidence and arguments to bolster your existing arguments or to answer points made by the other side.
- ✓ Extend upon the arguments made in the first opposition constructive. You share this responsibility with your partner in the opposition block.
- ✓ Clash directly with arguments made by the second proposition speaker. It is **not enough** simply to repeat or reinforce your original arguments. You also have the burden of responding to arguments made by the other side. Again, this is a responsibility you share with your partner in the opposition block.
- ✓ Take out or turn the case! Use the opposition block as an opportunity to demolish the proposition team's case. Show how your arguments take out their major arguments for the motion, and **impact** your arguments by explaining why they mean you win the debate.
- ✓ Remember to have **offense**. Show why voting for the case will be bad.
- ✓ Use the language of the original motion in your speech. If the motion were, for example, “The United States should ban the death penalty,” use the language of the motion to justify a vote for your side. For example, you might say: “And this is why the United States should **not** ban the death penalty.”
- ✓ Take a few points of information from the other side. You do not have to take every point of information, but it is good practice to take a few. Rebuttal time is precious, however -- use your responses to these points to **close off** avenues of argument for the other side.
- ✓ Have a conclusion that is convincing and explains why the opposition should win the debate. Your conclusion should be forceful and persuasive.

PROPOSITION REBUTTAL (5 MINUTES)

This is the last speech in the debate and the last stand for your side on the floor. You'll have five minutes to answer the opposition's arguments, rebuild arguments for your side, and explain why the proposition should win the debate. It's a tough speech, but can be made easier by following these tips:

- ✓ Have a brief introduction that catches the attention of the judge and explains why the proposition side should win the debate. Resist the temptation to summarize your whole position at the beginning of your speech, as you will find that time will get away from you.
- ✓ Be **organized** and **efficient**. To get the most out of your five minutes, you'll need to move through a lot of material. **Identify the critical arguments** in play from both sides and work your way through them. Stay with the order of arguments on your flow sheet – now is not the time to confuse the judge by mixing up the order of arguments.
- ✓ Don't feel like you need to address every argument in play in the debate. Your five-minute speech follows twelve minutes of opposition argument. If you tried to summarize all of their arguments, you'd never have time to make arguments of your own!
- ✓ Take each major issue in the debate and explain to the judge why the issue is won by the proposition. If it is not an issue your side is winning, at least explain why the issue does not mean you should lose the debate.
- ✓ Use **“even if”** language to assess the major arguments made by the other side. For example, you might say (when referring to a specific argument): “Even if they win this argument, we still win the debate because...”
- ✓ Explain **why your side wins the debate**. It is okay to say something like: “In this debate, the proposition wins because...” This kind of clear analysis of the issues communicates confidence and will help you as you try to get the judge to see the issues your way at the end of the debate.
- ✓ **Don't forget about your case!** It may be tempting simply to respond to arguments made by the other side, but this strategy often results in a proposition rebuttal that does not mention the original case made for the motion. Remember: your case for the motion is normally how you will win the debate. Reinforce your original case whenever possible. If the opposition has conceded parts of your case, show the judge why those parts are important.
- ✓ Remember to have **offense**. Show why voting for the opposition would be bad.
- ✓ Use the language of the original motion in your speech. If the motion were, for example, “The United States should ban the death penalty,” use the language of the motion to justify a vote for your side. For example, you might say: “And this is why the United States should ban the death penalty.”
- ✓ Take a few points of information from the other side. You do not have to take every point of information, but it is good practice to take a few. Rebuttal time is precious, however -- use your responses to these points to **close off** avenues of argument for the other side.
- ✓ Have a conclusion that is convincing and explains why the proposition team should win the debate. Your conclusion should be forceful and persuasive.

TYPES OF MOTIONS

A debate begins about 20 minutes after a motion is made for debate. The motion usually deals with some issue in controversy – an issue that demands debate. Here are some sample motions for debate that you might encounter:

- The United States should ban the death penalty.
- Individual liberty is more important than homeland security.
- The United States should open its borders.
- Colleges and universities should not consider SAT scores for admissions decisions.
- Free trade hurts the poor.
- In this case, freedom of speech should be substantially restricted.
- Violence is a just response to social oppression.

The motion starts the debate. The proposition team *proposes* the motion by making a specific case to prove the motion. The opposition opposes the motion by opposing the specific case made for the motion by the proposition team.

There are several ways to understand the different types of motions you will encounter in debate. Much is made of the differences between kinds of motions, although their similarities in function are perhaps more important than their differences in form, wording, and subject matter.

It is important not to get “hung up” on typing a motion you are given for debate. It is more important that you think seriously about the issues the motion deals with and use your preparation time before a debate to craft evidence and arguments to prove your side of the motion. As you gain more experience in debate, you will find that types of motions do not really matter.

Relatively Open and Closed

It is useful to understand the different kinds of motions, as this will give you some hints about how to prove and disprove them. There are two basic ways to understand the types of motions for debate. First, we can understand motions as **relatively open** or **relatively closed**. A relatively open motion suggests a rough subject for debate but is not particularly specific about how that subject could be proven. For example, the motion “The United States should open its borders” is a relatively open motion. There are many examples that could be used to prove the general proposition of the motion. Many questions are left unanswered by the motion as presented: Which borders? How to open them? How much to open them? To whom should these borders be opened? And so forth. The motion is relatively “open” to interpretation by the proposition team.

A relatively closed motion, on the other hand, suggests a more specific direction for the debate and is relatively less open to interpretation. For example, the motion “Colleges and universities should not consider SAT scores for admissions decisions” is relatively closed. Although there are certainly some issues for interpretation, the motion is certainly more closed than the previous example.

You will encounter all kinds of motions as you debate. Some will be very open: “Criminalize it,” for example. Others will be very closed. But all motions, not matter how open or closed, demand interpretation by the proposition team. In this way, all motions are relatively open because all language demands interpretation.

Fact, Value, and Policy

Another way to think about motions is as questions of **fact**, **value**, or **policy**. Motions that call for a change in policy are probably the most common kind of motion you will encounter. These motions often contain the word “should,” and call for a specific course of action to be taken: “The United States should adopt a policy to reduce air pollution,” or “Agricultural subsidies should be reduced.” Other policy topics might begin with the phrase “This House would...” So, for example, you might debate topics like “This House would increase gun control,” or “This House would negotiate a new trade agreement.” (For more on debating what “This House” means, see the section on interpreting motions and constructing cases.) To prove a policy motion, you need to make specific arguments to show that the motion is more likely to be true than false – in other words, that the course of action “should” be done.

Another kind of motion, one that makes an explicit value judgment or comparison, is called a value motion. These kinds of topics are, in essence, the same as policy topics. The only real difference is that a policy topic has an *implicit* value judgment (“should”), while a value topic has an *explicit* value judgment. Here are some examples of value topics:

- Violence is a just response to social oppression.
- When in conflict, the needs of national security should take precedence over individual rights.
- The death penalty is morally justified.
- In this case, inequality promotes fairness.

The key words that make these topics “value” topics are “just response,” “take precedence,” “morally justified,” and “fairness.” These are “evaluative terms” because they evaluate the relative rightness or wrongness of an action or policy. In each case, to prove the motion you will need to use specific arguments to show that the motion is more likely to be true than false – in other words, that the value statement should be endorsed.

A third kind of motion states a fact to be debated. These topics are sometimes hard for debaters to grasp – after all, if it’s a fact, then how can it be debated? But many assertions that are called facts are or have been the subject of great controversy: “The Earth is flat;” “The Sun revolves around the Earth,” and so on. From a certain point of view, *all* motions for debate state a supposed “fact,” the relative truth of which is then debated out. So “fact” motions are just like any other motion in that your job, as the proposition team, will be to show that the motion is more probably true than false. Here are some examples of fact motions:

- Free trade hurts the poor.
- Tax cuts create economic growth.
- Greenhouse gas is producing global warming.
- Standardized testing improves student academic performance.

In each case, the proposition team will present specific arguments, evidence, and examples to show that the motion should be judged true based on arguments made in the debate.

CONSTRUCTING A CASE FOR THE MOTION

In general, to prove a motion you must show that it is more likely to be true than false. This holds with all kinds of motions, no matter what their subject area (fact, value, or policy), and whether they are open or closed. This kind of proof is best accomplished with specific examples and arguments. It is, actually, quite difficult to prove that anything is true in general.

For example, if you were to suggest to your family: “We should go out to dinner,” it is unlikely that they would agree with you in the abstract case. What if “going out” to dinner meant going next door and eating out of the neighbor’s trash can? What if “going out” meant going to a very expensive restaurant which the family could not afford? What if “going out” would mean eating at a restaurant that would not be as good as what you might eat at home? In all of these cases, your proposal would surely be rejected. And rightfully so. To make your case, you will need to have a specific proposal. The specific proposal will then prove your general point.

Specific examples and case studies are necessary when talking about all kinds of topics. When you propose fact, value, and policy topics, you should make a specific case for the motion. Do not try to defend the motion in the abstract. This strategy is unlikely to work, and may backfire. For example, if you say in a debate that you should always uphold liberty, what will you say when the other side asks you if that includes the liberty to murder children?

CHOOSING YOUR CASE

If you are on the proposition side in an upcoming debate, you will use much of your preparation time coming up with a case for the motion. This process should include brainstorming and anticipating potential arguments that could be made by the other side. Do not pick the first case that comes to mind. Genuine brainstorming will help you assess your options in an informed and patient way. See the section on “Using your preparation time” for more tips on this front.

Let’s say that the motion has been announced for debate. It is “The United States should ban the death penalty.” You have 20 minutes to prepare your case for debate. How should you begin? First, you will need to *interpret* the topic by giving it some meaning. There are actually many things that are called “the death penalty.” Most obviously, there is capital punishment as a form of sentencing for crimes. However, many other issues are commonly referred to as the death penalty. The tax on the estates of persons who have died is routinely called “the death penalty,” as it is often understood as a penalty for dying. Additionally, the use of animals in factory farms is also called a “death penalty” for animals unfortunate enough to be raised in such farms. All of these interpretations of what the death penalty means are, in turn, possible interpretations of the motion for debate. They are also possible case areas.

Given this array of possible interpretations of “the death penalty,” you must choose one. It is almost always in your interest to choose an interpretation for which there is a conservative defense. You should choose a *conservative* interpretation of the motion. This means that you should pick an interpretation that will connect with the experience and knowledge base of the judge. You don’t want the judge to think that you aren’t talking about the topic, in other words. This can make the judge hostile or dismissive towards your arguments in the debate. You should also pick an interpretation that will give you an issue set you will be able to discuss in an informed way. Few things will make you feel more foolish than having to defend a position about which you are uninformed.

In this case, the most conservative interpretation is probably the one that interprets “the death penalty” to mean capital punishment as criminal sentencing. Now that you’ve chosen your interpretation of the motion, it’s time to think about the substantive arguments you will be making in favor of a ban on capital punishment.

To make this case, you will probably want to use a simple and intuitive **problem-solution** structure. This means that you will show that there is a problem and then present a solution (making sure to show that your solution will actually work to solve the problem). A simple outlining process will help you through this process.

Once you have picked the specific themes, examples, and areas for the case you will make for the motion, it is time to begin the process of writing your speech. A simple outlining process will help. You should begin by identifying some of the problems with the death penalty. You can flesh these out later with evidence and examples. Then, you’ll need to present your solution to these problems. In this case, you might simply want to suggest that the United States should ban the death penalty. Finally, you should explain why banning the death penalty will address the problems you’ve laid out.

Once you’ve outlined your case, you’re ready to flesh it out into a more sophisticated presentation. The following steps will help you make sure you organize your case presentation in an orderly and sophisticated manner.

STEP 1: HAVE AN INTRODUCTION

You’ll need to begin your speech with an introduction that catches the attention of the judge and introduces the themes you will address in your speech.

STEP 2: INTRODUCE AND INTERPRET THE MOTION

In this part of the speech, you should remind the judge of the motion for debate and explain how you will be interpreting the motion. You should say something that follows these lines:

“In this debate, we will offer a conservative interpretation of the motion, ‘The United States should ban the death penalty.’ The key identifying terms of the motion are ‘ban,’ and ‘the death penalty.’ For the purposes of this debate, we understand these and other terms to mean that the United States should completely eliminate capital punishment as a form of criminal sentencing. All terms not specifically addressed will be clearly understood in the context of the case proper. We will entertain any questions regarding our interpretation.”

STEP 3: FRAME THE DEBATE

After you interpret the motion, you should explain to the judge how it is you plan to win the debate. Here, you are trying to “frame” the debate for the judge, showing the judge how it is you think they should evaluate the debate. You might say something like this:

“We believe that this debate will ultimately be determined on the preponderance of evidence, namely, the balance of qualified and significant argumentation, just as so many like decisions are considered in civil courts. In other words, if the balance of the best evidence proves that the death penalty should be eliminated, you should vote to propose the motion.”

STEP 4: MAKE YOUR CASE

This is the bulk of your speech, where you will present the major arguments in favor of the motion using whatever structure you have chosen for presentation. If you did choose the problem-solution structure, you would probably spend a several minutes discussing the reasons to reject the death penalty, including: its inconsistent application, the execution of innocent people, the immorality of state-sponsored murder, and so forth. You will want to make sure that all arguments you offer are complete (that is, they include **reasoning** and **evidence**) and well organized.

Also, it will not be enough simply to ramble on about the death penalty and related issues! Fortunately, this is why you have prepared an outline. Your outline will allow you to effectively organize your speech. You might say something like this:

“I will present three major problems with the use of the death penalty. First, the death penalty is immoral, because murder is always wrong...”

Then, after you have completed this argument, you can smoothly move on to your next point. And so forth. After you have talked about the problems, you will want to present your proposal and show that it will address the problems you have laid out for the judge.

STEP 5: CONCLUSION

At the end of your speech, you should offer a convincing and persuasive conclusion that summarizes your points and drives home your message to the judge. Don’t just trail off... Instead, take this opportunity to reinforce your speech with a final, powerful conclusion.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR PREPARATION TIME

One of the unique features of parliamentary debate is that it is a limited preparation event. You will probably prepare a great deal before you get to an actual competition – by preparing casebooks, for example, or making issue briefs and notes on various current events. However, once the topic is announced for a round of debate, you will need to make the best possible use of your time and notes. Here are a few tips for making the most of your preparation time.

1. Be prepared to go directly to your debate after preparation time has expired. This means that before the topic is announced, you will need to consult the **pairing sheet** to find out which side you will be on and where your debate will be held.

2. Have an inexpensive digital timer. This is CRITICAL to helping you manage your preparation time. It will also help you keep track of speech time in your debates, improving your time management skills. Don't forget to start the timer after the topic has been announced!

3. Write the topic down exactly as it is announced. You and your partner should both write the topic down as it is announced. It is important to get the exact wording.

4. Begin your preparation time by working separately from your partner. Spend the first minute of preparation time working separately from your partner. Brainstorm arguments for your side of the motion during this time. If you will be on the proposition side, think about:

- How you will interpret the motion;
- What kind of case you could make for the motion; and
- What examples or arguments you could use to prove your case.

If you will be on the opposition side of the motion, you should think about:

- What major arguments might be made against the motion;
- What proposition teams are likely to say in support of the motion; and
- What examples, arguments, or analogies you might use to answer these cases.

As you get more experience with parliamentary debate, you will develop a better sense of how to maximize your preparation time.

5. After working separately, come together to share ideas and make decisions. The next three minutes or so of your preparation time should be used to share ideas from the previous brainstorming period. Use this time to decide on a case idea and construct a basic outline or, if you will be on the opposition, to decide which major arguments against the motion you will prepare prior to the debate.

6. Then, work individually again. During the next five minutes, you should work individually on different arguments. For example, if you will be defending the proposition side, the debater who will speak first should continue to prepare her or his speech. Meanwhile, the second proposition speaker should brainstorm answers to possible opposition arguments to prepare her speech. If you will be on the opposition, both partners should work on preparing different arguments to be made in the first opposition speech.

7. Finally, come together to coordinate your arguments and ideas. At the end of your prep time, you should work with your partner to make sure you have all your bases covered for the upcoming debate. This will allow you to check for mistakes in each others' work and still get to the debate on time! But if you need to, you should also use this time to finish your individual speech preparation.

Remember: Working apart as well as individually will help you make the most of your prep time. Don't forget to anticipate arguments that will be made by the other side and include preparation for answering those arguments into your overall preparation strategy.

POINTS OF INFORMATION

One of the unique features of parliamentary debate is its use of points of information. In high school parliamentary debate, points of information occur during all speeches. However, the **first** and **last** minute of each speech is known as **protected time**. During this time, the speaker is “protected” from attempts for points of information. However, once protected time has expired, the opposing side may try to make points of information. Here are a few things to remember about points of information:

- **They may be statements or questions.** The person making the point may make an argument or ask a question of the speaker. Usually, it is more powerful and more effective to phrase your point as a statement rather than as a question.
- **They should only be 15 seconds long.** This may seem short, but in reality 15 seconds is quite a long time, and should be more than long enough for making an effective point of information.
- **There are no “follow-up” questions.** If you wish to ask the speaker something about the response to your point, you must be recognized for an additional point. If you try to ask a follow-up question without being recognized by the speaker, you will be **out of order**.
- **You should make points of information.** They are a most effective way of getting your points across and interrupting the flow of the speaker. They also highlight important issues for the judge in an immediate way.
- **You should take points of information.** If you don’t take points, how will you get other speakers to take yours? In addition, it is in your interest to take many points of information. This will allow you to hear the other side’s arguments and answer them in advance, i.e.: “I’m very glad you asked that question...”
- **You should be brief when answering points of information.** Otherwise, you will use up all your speech time answering the other side.
- **You should look at the judge when making and answering points of information.** Don’t look at the other side during this process or while speaking. Otherwise, you will incite them to further interactions. Plus, you are not trying to convince the other side – you’re trying to convince the judge. It’s unlikely that the other team will suddenly concede the debate to you, so look at the decision-maker – the judge.

TAKING NOTES IN DEBATES

In debate, students and judges learn to take notes in a specialized format designed just for debate. This method of taking notes is known as “flowing.” You will need to take good notes in this format to succeed in debate. For beginners, a horizontal flowsheet that is divided into five columns will be easiest. As you get more experience, you can switch to using pages vertically. Most debaters will track a debate on multiple pieces of paper to keep track of different arguments – but again, for beginners, start with one flowsheet. The columns are labeled on a flowsheet like this:

1PC	1OC	2PC	2OC/OR	PR

Each column is labeled for a speech (or speeches- more on that in just a second) – “1PC” is the first proposition constructive, “1OC” is the first opposition constructive, “2PC” is the second proposition constructive, “2OC” is the second opposition constructive, “OR” is the opposition rebuttal, and “PR” is the proposition rebuttal. “2OC” and “OR” are in the same column because the speeches are back to back and function as a kind of unified front for the opposition.

Use each column to keep track of arguments made in that speech. Let’s say that the proposition team makes a brief case for student uniforms. They might advance three basic arguments:

- Cost. Many students can’t afford to look sharp every day for school, and students get embarrassed if they don’t have the latest fashions.
- Uniforms aren’t as distracting, and will help students focus on their classwork, not their clothes.
- Uniforms reduce violence, because students can’t wear gang clothes or gang symbols.

As the first proposition speaker makes their case, everyone else should take notes on their flowsheet.

Then the first opposition speaker refutes the case. She might begin by bringing up the issue of freedom of expression. She could say that uniforms are a bad idea because students need to be able to express their individuality in schools. Then she would move on to answer the arguments made in the proposition’s case. On the “cost” point, she might say that uniforms are expensive, too, particularly since people have to buy a bunch of them at once. On the “distraction” point, she could say that there are always things to distract students, and that districts have dress codes in place to deal with distracting clothing. Finally, on the “violence” point, she could say that dress codes already prevent gang clothing, and that uniforms won’t reduce the gang problem

because students who want to be in gangs will be in them whether or not they wear uniforms.

Then the second proposition speaker has to answer the opposition’s arguments while rebuilding and extending on the proposition’s case. The flowsheet will help her do this, as she knows what arguments she has to answer and extend upon. She should begin by answering the freedom of expression argument by saying, for example, that students have many ways to express themselves, and that clothes are a shallow and unimportant method of expression. Then she can move on to rebuild her team’s case. To extend on the “cost” argument, she should probably reiterate it briefly before beginning her refutation: “We said that many students can’t afford to keep up with the latest trends, and that’s embarrassing. Now, they said that uniforms are expensive to buy, but they’re cheap compared to the latest pair of Nikes or Hilfigers, and that means that poorer students won’t be made fun of for their clothes.” She could repeat this process by moving through the other opposition arguments and rebuilding her case. Arguments are refuted, extended, and compared through the debate. Every speech, therefore, has a rebuttal component. There should be new arguments as well, but only in the constructive speeches.

1 st Prop Constr.	1 st Opp Const.	2 nd Prop Constr.	2 nd Opp/Opp Rebuttal	Prop Rebuttal
<p>There should be school uniforms.</p> <p>1. Cost. Many can't afford, and students are embarrassed if Ø have "right" clothes.</p> <p>2. Not as distracting; increases school focus.</p> <p>3. Decreases violence: can't wear gang clothes.</p>	<p>Uniforms violate freedom of expression, hurting student choice.</p> <p>Uniforms expensive too- have to buy a lot at once.</p> <p>Other things distract too.</p> <p>And, school dress codes stop this now.</p> <p>Dress codes stop this too.</p> <p>Uniforms won't decrease gangs. Students join anyway.</p>	<p>Can express in other ways.</p> <p>And, clothes not that important.</p> <p>Uniforms are cheaper than Nikes.</p> <p>Also, mean poor students won't be made fun of for clothes.</p>		

Web Sites for learning about parliamentary debate

International Debate Education Association (IDEA)

www.idebate.org

IDEA is the premier organization for international debate promotion. Of particular interest on this site are the topic database and the Debateabase, which is an interactive database with information on hundreds of topics for debate.

Debate Central

<http://debate.uvm.edu>

Maintained by the Lawrence Debate Union at the University of Vermont, this site has many instructional materials, lectures, and debates archived for instructional use. Of particular interest are the parliamentary debates and lectures archived at <http://debate.uvm.edu/parlivid.html>. Also, there are some essays and a topic list at the bottom of this page:

<http://debate.uvm.edu/learndebate.html>.

Newfoundland and Labrador Speech & Debate Union

www.nlsdu.com

The official website of the Newfoundland and Labrador Speech and Debate Union. The format is different, but many of the concepts remain the same.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS FROM THIS AND OTHER DEBATE FORMATS

(adapted from On That Point! An Introduction to Parliamentary Debate)

advantage The claimed benefits of a plan of action.

affirmative The side in a debate that supports the resolution.

agent of action The persons or institutions responsible for implementation of policy directives.

assertion An unsupported statement; a conclusion that lacks evidence for support.

brief The outline of an argument, including claims, supportive reasoning, and evidence.

brink An element of a disadvantage which claims that the policy action of a proposed plan is a sufficient condition to alter current institutions in a way to produce a dangerous or counterproductive consequence. A *brink* is the point at which a disadvantage begins to happen: It may be said that the plan would push us “over the brink” into the abyss of the *impact*.

burden of proof The responsibility of the person, upon introducing an argument, to provide sufficient reasoning and detail for the argument that the opponent is obliged to take the issue into consideration.

case The proposition team’s argument for the motion; usually a reference to the arguments presented in the opening constructive speech by the proposition team.

clash The direct and indirect opposition of the arguments of another person or side in a debate.

comparative advantage An argument, usually employed by the proposition team, that says that even if their proposal does not completely solve the stated problem, it is still advantageous compared to the present system.

competitiveness An argument for evaluating the legitimacy of a counterplan in formal debate. The presence of the counterplan should force a choice for the decision maker between the policies advocated by the affirmative plan and the counterplan. Competition is the quality of a policy that makes it a reason to reject another policy. Classically, competition was measured solely by means of *mutual exclusivity*. Now, however, competition is largely defined in terms of *net benefits* so that when we say a counterplan is *competitive* or *net beneficial*, we mean that it is better alone than the plan or any combination of the whole plan and all or part of the counterplan. (See also *permutations, net benefits, counterplan, mutual exclusivity*.)

consequentialism A doctrine that the moral rightness of an act or policy depends entirely on its outcome or consequences.

constructive speeches The foundational, opening speeches of a formal debate, in which the participants establish the major arguments that will be subject to analysis, refutation, and revision in the debate’s subsequent stages.

counterplan: A policy proposed by the opposition. The policy must offer a reason to reject the proposition team’s proposed course of action. Generally, the counterplan will either try to solve the proposition team’s proposed harms in a more beneficial way, e.g., by “avoiding” (not linking to) disadvantages accrued by the proposition team’s plan of action. Traditionally, it was thought that counterplans had to be both non-topical and competitive. These days, topical counterplans are more accepted as the emphasis shifts to *net benefits* and policy comparison and away from abstract theoretical concerns. Counterplans may also have *advantages*, which are similar to the proposition team’s advantages in that they are benefits accrued by the counterplan.

critiquing A method of criticism in formal debate that focuses on the language, reasoning, underlying assumptions, expert testimony, interpretations, and proofs of the opponent. The argument form is often referred to as a “critique” or “kritik”, meaning a type of argument that uncovers the fundamental assumptions of a team, case, word, or argument, and uses criticism of those fundamental assumptions to win the debate.

cross-examination The question-and-answer period following constructive speeches in some formal policy debates.

deontology The view that duty is a primary moral notion and that at least some of our duties do not depend on any value that may result in fulfilling them. In some circumstances, the justification of duties is an appeal to absolute rule, e.g., an opposition to the taking of life.

disadvantage (also known as a “DA” or “dis-ad”) The bad thing that will happen when a plan goes into effect. In formal debates, opposition teams run disadvantages when they want to show that adoption of the proposition team’s plan will lead to far greater undesirable than desirable consequences. To win a debate on a disadvantage, the opposition team must generally prove at least three basic things: that the disadvantage *links* to the proposed plan; that it is *unique* to the proposed plan; and that the *impact* of the disadvantage is sufficiently undesirable to *outweigh* the advantages of the proposed plan.

double turn In answering an argument, a double turn takes place when a team argues a *link turn* (“We solve that problem”) AND an *impact turn* (“That problem is actually a benefit”) on the same disadvantage. When this happens, a team is saying that they stop a good thing from happening; in essence, running a new disadvantage against themselves.

effects topicality A type of topicality standard that contends that the proposition’s case is only topical by *effect* rather than by mandate. In these debates, it is often said that the proposition has failed to present a *prima facie* case or that they have *mixed burdens* – in this case, the burdens of solvency and topicality.

empirical evidence Evidence or proof that is based on past examples or statistical studies.

extensions Arguments that occur in response to opponents’ arguments that extend and develop the original arguments.

extra-topicality Proposition plans that contain planks or actions not specifically called for by the resolution.

fallacy A mistaken inference or an erroneous conclusion based on faulty reasoning.

fiat A term used to describe the process that allows debate of a proposed plan as if it were already adopted.

flow A system of note taking for debates that includes systematized guides for multiple speakers and tracking multiple issues.

flow sheet Also known as *flow*, the transcription of a debate; the notes used by debate participants to track arguments from speech to speech.

grant out of To concede some of the other team’s arguments in order to back off of a position a debater had previously taken. For example, an opposition speaker might concede the proposition team’s “no link” argument to render their own disadvantage irrelevant.

impact Most generally, the consequence of an idea that is presented in a debate. The consequence may be expressed in terms of the qualitative or quantitative significance of an issue or the role that an idea will play in the outcome of the debate. Typically, impacts are the bad or good events that happen as a result of a case, counterplan, or disadvantages.

inherency 1) An explanation of the reason or reasons for the failure of current decision makers to make policy moves in the direction of implementation of the affirmative plan. In formal debates, the issue of inherency

functions to establish the probability of unique advantages for the affirmative. 2) The thing or reason why someone is not doing something about a plan right now; the cause of a problem's existence.

jargon Specialized or technical language. In formal debate, jargon describes the use of terms not readily discernible to a lay audience, e.g., "fiat," "competitiveness," "effects topicality," "off-case," "permutation," etc.

judging philosophy A method or practice a judge uses to decide the outcome of a round. Although few judges have explicit philosophies or ironclad *paradigms* anymore, it is possible to guess their judging philosophy through careful observation and experience.

Lincoln-Douglas debate A debate format in which two individuals debate each other, using a time format of 6-3-7-3-4-6-3 (six minute opening affirmative constructive speech, three minute cross-examination, seven minute negative constructive speech, three minute cross-examination, four minute affirmative rebuttal, six minute negative rebuttal, three minute closing affirmative rebuttal).

link A causal relationship. In formal debates, the relationship of one's argument to the opponent's position and the internal chain of reasoning in a complex argument. More specifically, links are how disadvantages or advantages apply to a proposition team's case. Note: Since disadvantages often employ chains of causal reasoning, we may speak of different levels of link. An "initial link" is the one that applies directly to the proposition team's plan or advantages, while the "internal links" are links in reasoning or causality that bridge the gap between the initial link and the impact.

mixing burdens A term from the concept of stock issues that describes when a proposition team uses one stock issue to prove another. This tactic is said to be unfair because the proposition team has to prove each issue independently. The only way this term is currently used is in debates about *effects topicality*, where the opposition may argue that a proposition team is using their solvency to prove they are topical. This is said to be bad because the proposition's case should have to be a topical example in order to allow the opposition a fair chance to *clash* with the proposition.

net benefits One standard of counterplan competition. A counterplan is said to be "net beneficial" when it alone is a policy option superior to the whole plan and all or any part of the counterplan; in other words, the counterplan forces a choice between the policies advanced by the affirmative and negative teams in the debate.

negative The side of an LD or cross-examination/policy debate that opposes the affirmative's proofs for the resolution.

net benefits One standard of counterplan competition. A counterplan is said to be "net beneficial" when it alone is a policy option superior to the whole plan and all or any part of the counterplan; in other words, the counterplan forces a choice between the policies advanced by the proposition and opposition teams in the debate.

off-case In a formal debate, the opposition argumentation (in limited circumstances, supplemental proposition team argumentation) that does not directly refute the foundational arguments of the case proper, i.e., the first proposition constructive arguments. "Off-case" generally refers to the forms of indirect refutation by the opposition, e.g., topicality arguments, counterplans, disadvantages, and critiques. This term used to mean the arguments made in a debate that linked to the *plan*, as opposed to those that linked to the *case*.

on-case In a formal debate, the argumentation by the proposition and opposition sides that is directed to the foundational or key issues of the proposition team's case.

opportunity cost The sacrifice made when selecting one policy over another.

permutation A test of the competitiveness of a counterplan or counterposition, it is an argument that explains how the functions of the plan and counterplan are complementary and mutually supportive. More practically, a permutation is a type of argument used by proposition teams to illustrate the noncompetitiveness of counterplans. Proposition teams argue that if it is possible to imagine the coexistence of the plan and the counterplan, and if such

an imagined example would be net beneficial, then the counterplan does not provide a reason to reject the proposition team's plan. (See also *net beneficial*.)

policy debate Also known as *cross-examination* debate, this is a format of formal debate that calls for implementation of a policy directive or course of action. The common format for policy debate involves team debate with constructive speeches of eight or nine minutes and rebuttal speeches of five or six minutes for each of the participants. There is usually a three-minute cross-examination period following each of the constructive speeches.

preemption or **preempt** An argument designed to respond to another argument that has not been made, but which is anticipated.

present system A description of current governmental, corporate, educational, and cultural institutions or policies.

presumption A corollary of burden of proof, the argument that accords an advantage to the attitudes, institutions, and practices that currently exist. In other words, "presumption" is the assumption that a system should be kept unless there is a clear reason to change it. Although this term comes from law, in debate it is usually understood to mean that the judge should presume for the status quo unless the proposition team provides a clear and convincing reason to change. (See also *burden of proof*, *status quo*.)

prima facie Literally, "on its face," the responsibility of the advocate of a debate resolution to offer a proof for the proposition in the opening presentation, such that an opponent is obliged to answer the major elements of the case proper.

proof That which reduces uncertainty and increases the probable truth of a claim. Evidence is transformed into proof through the use of reasoning, which demonstrates how and to what extent the claim is believable. Proof is, of course, a relative concept, ranging from probability to certainty.

proposition Also known as a "topic" or a "resolution," a subject to be discussed or a statement to be upheld. Usually, a proposition is of fact, value, or policy that the proposition is obligated to support. The resolution is generally understood to focus debate by dividing argument ground on any given topic.

rebuttal Refutation of an opponent's argument; also, the summary speeches of a debate.

refutation The overthrowing of an argument, opinion, testimony, etc. Refutation is a direct and specific response to an opponent's argument.

resolution See *proposition*.

scenario An outline of a real or imagined case study of a proposed course of action. Usually, a scenario is a picture, explained through specific examples, of what would occur if an advantage or disadvantage were to happen.

significance An expression of qualitative or quantitative dimension of a problem or condition; often listed as a "stock issue" in formal debate. Traditionally used as a measure of the need claimed by the affirmative or proposition team.

solvency Often called a "stock issue," solvency expresses the ability to successfully implement a suggested policy directive. Solvency is also the ability of the proposition team's plan or the opposition team's counterplan to solve the problem.

status quo Literally, "the way things are." An understanding of current institutions and policies; the current state of affairs. Usually, the proposition team tries to prove that a world with their plan would be better than the status quo.

stock issues The core elements of a logical proof of an affirmative case in some theories of policy debate, the stock issues include the key elements inherency, significance, topicality, and solvency.

take out Any argument in refutation that undermines, or “takes out,” an opponent’s position; usually refers to an argument that eliminates the link or relevance of an opponent’s argument.

threshold The degree of change necessary to precipitate a particular outcome; usually, the degree of change of an plan from current policy that will trigger undesirable consequences (disadvantages).

time frame The amount of time it takes for something, usually an impact, to occur.

topicality The issue that establishes the relation of the proposition team’s plan to the language of the topic; the proof that the affirmative argument is a representation of the resolution. Also known as “T.”

turn An argument that reverses the position of an opponent. Turns usually come in two kinds: *link turns* and *impact turns*. Link turns are arguments that attempt to reverse a link established by the other team. For example, an opposition team might run a disadvantage that said the plan hurt economic growth. The proposition team might argue a *link turn* by saying that their proposal will actually help economic growth. An impact turn is an argument that tries to reverse an established impact. In this same example, the proposition team might argue that economic growth is actually bad, thereby *turning* the impact of the disadvantage. Also known as a “turnaround,” or, historically, as “turning the tables.”

uniqueness The claim that any benefit or cost is relevant to the advocacy of one side of a debate and can be used to decide favorably for that side or unfavorably against the other side. Uniqueness is the part of a disadvantage that proves that the proposition’s plan and only the proposition’s plan could trigger the impacts. The proposition team’s advantages can also have a burden of uniqueness: If their harm is being solved now, then there is no unique need for the plan.

utilitarianism Any of a variety of consequentialist views that claim to maximize good or minimize evil.

values Principles, acts, customs, and qualities regarded as desirable by individuals or groups.

voting issues The arguments in a formal debate that are used to decide the ultimate outcome of the debate.

weighing the issues A comparative analysis of all the issues in a debate; an evaluation of their relative probability and impact conducted in order to determine which are most important, and thus, who wins. Rebuttalists usually weigh the issues, saying things like “Well, the plan may increase crime a little bit, but that’s a small price to pay to safeguard our constitutional rights,” thereby comparing the impact of the negative’s crime disadvantage to the impact of their racial profiling advantage.

zero-sum Circumstances in which the interests of one or more parties are advanced at the direct and reciprocal expense of the interests of one or more other parties.