

# **CUSID Central Debating Guide**

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# Foreword

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Before jumping into the debating guide itself, it seems best to explain how it came about, what the goals of the guide are, and how it's meant to be used. The original idea for this guide came from Kevin Massie, but the push to create it came from the Central Region Small Schools' forum held at McMaster ProAms in 2005. It was, along with the creation of the CUSID open letters and the suggestion of having more regular seminars at CUSID tournaments, a mechanism which was devised primarily to benefit smaller schools in CUSID Central.

It was hoped that the Debating Guide would provide an additional training resource for smaller schools in Central Region that have less pros experienced debaters available to train novices. Of course, usage of the guide is by no means limited to the aforementioned group of schools, and it is hoped that this Debating Guide—along with the other guides created by the CUSID executive and other debaters—will be used by everyone that is in need of additional training resources.

There may be suggestions from some quarters that, at almost 150 pages, this debating guide is too long and cumbersome to be put to good use. Were it the case that one should simply read the guide from cover, it would indeed be far too long. Although there is likely significant value in doing so, the primary purpose of this guide is not that; there are other equally productive ways of using the material.

The hope is that, because of the wide diversity of articles in this guide, it can be useful to novice, intermediate, and advanced debaters alike, and that debaters can read those articles which deal with aspects of debating where they consider themselves weaker than they would like to be. Novice debaters may find discussions of the basics and on the speaking roles to be the most useful, while intermediate and advanced debaters may find detailed passages on selected topics to be more beneficial.

As a final note, it should be said that readers may occasionally find some contradictions between different articles. These contradictions are intentional and are reflective of the fact that there is no single approach to debating. The goal of this debating guide is to provide articles which reflect the diversity of opinions and approaches to debating in CUSID Central. No single article is *the* definitive work on a topic, and there are always multiple approaches. Hopefully this guide will provide insight into some of those. If it should happen to produce further meta-debates about debating, all the better.

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# Beginning Debating

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## From High School to University Debating

Before joining CUSID, I debated for two years in high school. It was a great introduction to the mechanics of formal debating and speechmaking, but it did not give me the skills necessary to compete at the university level. The difference between the complexity of debate at the high school and university levels is astounding. CUSID debating is an intellectual battlefield like no other. Although this tends to stem from reasons beyond the transitioning debater's control, this does not imply that he or she is powerless or unable to adapt to CUSID debating.

The difference one experiences is primarily due to the fact that the competitive field is much greater after one has graduated high school. Instead of facing 16-18 year olds, you'll often find yourself crossing swords with law students who may be five years older than you and have a wealth of academic experience under their belts. Though this may seem daunting, it is a key reason why CUSID debating is an exceptionally worthwhile experience.

It is not only the depth of knowledge, but also the diversity of it which may seem daunting. Unlike the general uniformity of common knowledge which exists among high school students, university students who hail from every discipline on the academic rainbow enjoy and empower university debating, meaning that many different types of analysis can be brought into a round, often in surprising fashion. This may shock the novice.

These new challenges necessitate an ability to adapt quickly. In order for the transitioning debater to see his or her results improve, he must get to know his competition. Recognizing opponents' strengths and weaknesses, as well as one's own, is essential for the novice wishing to establish oneself in CUSID. As one's skills improve, care must be taken, as wiser opponents will try to evaluate one's own knowledge base.

This improvement necessitates having a realistic and frank view of the intellectual assets of the both the novice and his or her opponents. The novice should not pretend to know more than he or she does, as this arrogance, while it may grant him or her a degree of confidence, could also prove to be a major stumbling block.

In addition to being able to recognize his or her strengths and weakness, it is important that the novice expand his or her knowledge base. This knowledge base is a key component of a university debater's repertoire, in contrast to that of the average high school debater. A high school debater who lives under a rock can succeed, so long as he or she emerges from that rock often enough to read the occasional newspaper. A committed university debater scours books, television, and the internet on a ravenous quest for knowledge. In the pursuit of coveted debating information, many will find themselves incapable of keeping up.

To this end, novices can do much to find out what knowledge is most helpful for a successful CUSID debater. First and foremost, they should speak with pros at their respective clubs to find out what type of knowledge those pros most often utilize in the course of debates and how this has helped them. Similarly, in both rounds in which they debate and out rounds they watch at tournaments, novices should take note of both the facts cited and the analysis employed and assess its effectiveness in the course of the debate.

This is the nature of CUSID. Sophisticated argumentation requires in-depth knowledge of real world situations. Only those with that knowledge will prosper. This means, however, that success feels extremely rewarding when it is ultimately attained. It is this addictive drive for success, and the other personalities that strive for it that ensures I will be coming back to CUSID.

## Beginning Debating in University

There are many things that people are afraid of in this world. It is an often-quoted truth that public speaking is, for many people, a greater fear than the fear of death. Many others are worried about socially awkward settings where they may initially have few or no friends. Others are worried about being thrown into competitive situations where vastly superior competitors will beat them spectacularly. When one is a novice debater with no high school debating background, all of these potential fears can often collide into one seemingly awful experience.

Indeed, if you have never before engaged in any form of competitive debating, your first tournament as a novice might not be the most uplifting experience. If it is a novice tournament, chances are that many (if not most) of the teams that fare extremely well will have had some form of high school debating experience. If, on the other hand, your first tournament is a regular tournament, you may have the lovely experience of debating your first round against a Nationals quarter-finalist while a World champion is judging you. Both these situations may prove somewhat disheartening at first.

Having been to a tournament where you were extremely nervous before competing and were soundly thrashed during the competition, you may be skeptical about going to another one. You may even be asking yourself whether you should continue this whole debating enterprise at all. The answer should be a resounding *yes*. Why?

First and foremost, you will quickly improve as a debater and your thrashings will be much less severe and much less frequent. If you've never debated before, you're definitely starting with a handicap in CUSID circles. High school debaters will have an immediate advantage; this advantage, however, will diminish quickly. High school debaters have been in a debating environment for years, and each additional tournament will provide them with significantly less opportunity for improvement than it will provide the beginning debater. You will quickly learn how to develop your own style and analysis, and you may even have an advantage over many high school debaters. Unlike those debaters that have entrenched high school ways of debating that don't fly in CUSID, you are a *tabula rasa*, ready to develop your analysis and style à la CUSID.

Don't expect to win tournaments immediately. Learning how to debate well can take a long time, and it is for this reason that most of the top debaters in CUSID are those who have either debated since high school or those who are studying in grad school or law school. This may seem discouraging, but it should actually be seen in a positive light. If you initially feel that you cannot or will not improve as a debater or that you have plateaued, keep working at it. There are many examples of debaters that now win major title tournaments that started out in the 2-3 and 1-4 brackets at tournaments. *Everyone can improve.*

Second, debating is an extremely rewarding experience. Not only do you have the chance to develop your public speaking skills and improve your analysis, you also have the opportunity to think critically about pressing issues. You will quickly learn to see both sides of an argument. Despite the fact that debaters' personal opinions may be rather solid and unshakeable, they are nevertheless quite capable of understanding and appreciating other points of view. Debaters are generally able to reasonably construct arguments for almost any tenable position—and often times for many untenable positions. It's therefore not surprising that law schools and graduate schools have such a positive view of debating.

Debating will also make a concrete positive impact on other areas of your life. It may make you more comfortable in tense situations such as job interviews. Depending on your program of study, it may help you with your classes. It's not entirely a joke when debaters talk about developing arguments in their essays as if they were developing arguments for a debate.

And remember, although debating may be an intellectual pursuit, that doesn't mean it isn't a lot of fun. It's still a competitive endeavour with lots of tricks and strategies that you can use to outwit your opponents. It's an intellectual sport where you can use everything available to you to win.

Therefore, don't get discouraged at the start. When you get beaten in a debate round, it doesn't mean that your opponents are any smarter than you. It just means that they debated better in that particular round. Stay in debating long enough to really know whether you like it or not, and don't let a few bad experiences turn you away. Debating is both a rewarding experience and a lot of fun. If you stick with it, you'll get a lot out of it.

# The Basics: Government and Opposition

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## Introduction to Side Government

### *Finding a Topic*

Probably the number one rule for doing well on government is picking topics for your case that you feel really comfortable with. Try to steer away from topics that you have debated a lot before, because your opposition has probably seen them before as well, but also pick something that can be fairly debated if you give them a little bit of information. Also remember that you can't propose something that could be considered:

1. A Truism-e.g "The World is Not Flat"
2. A Tautology-e.g. "All bachelors are unmarried men"-this is true by definition
3. A Tight Case-This is a case with few if any opposition arguments of any real merit
4. Specific Knowledge-These cases concern issues that a well-informed individual would not be expected to know. Cases constructed from material in a 3<sup>rd</sup> year Chemistry textbook qualify here.

Cases can be about anything, from politics, to literature, to bio-medical ethics. If you're stuck, many people:

- read articles in the newspaper (especially those few pages back from the front) or magazine
- keep your eyes open for the quirky or provocative issues in classes and textbooks
- type words that reflect an interest into a search engine (e.g. human rights)
- talk to more senior debaters who may have suggestions from earlier years

## *Defining Your Case*

Good cases—especially at the beginning levels—don't just deal with broad topics, they need:

- a specific person or institution
- in a specific situation
- taking a specific action

It should be very clear within the first minute of your PMC what specifically is being debated. Try not to have complicated definitions or too much unnecessary information in your case construct. Remember here that an unclear case will necessarily lead to a muddled round. In this event, judges will tend to penalize the government team, as it is their responsibility to present a clear (and hopefully contentious) resolution.

In picking cases, keep in mind the following criteria:

- Is it something that both sides can debate well, but you will likely debate better? This is often actually what seems like a harder side because it makes you look gutsy if you can debate it really well.
- Is it something that on first glance seems like a ridiculous idea, but with some well-explained points will appear close to obvious by the end of the round? (e.g. legal appeals for dead people, don't ban land mines, mandatory blood donations). These are the best cases.
- Does it allow for a focused round? Does it tie clearly to the themes you pick and allow for distinct points?
- Does it allow for a round with genuine clash?

It's also a good idea to have *specific themes* in mind before you start writing the case. A good way to come up with these is:

- Imagine your Prime Minister's Rebuttal Speech—What do you want the key issues that you talk about to be?
- Ask yourself why your case is important. What will be its broader effects?
- Think about some basic societal values (e.g. freedom of speech). Along these lines, think of instances where two societal values may clash (e.g. freedom and security). A good case can present a specific instance where the government team contends that one value ought to take precedence over another.

## *Constructing Your Case*

1. Background (approx. 30 seconds of your speech)
  - this is where you give the speaker and situation, and all of the background information that the judges and the Opposition team need to understand it. Try not to be too detailed here as you could lose both the judges and the opposition.
2. Points (usually 3-5, each taking about a minute and a half)
  - These are basically just reasons why your recommended course of action is the best for the speaker or society in general.
  - *Format*
    - title all of your points, so they can be easily referred to
    - give an explanation of them
    - expand them, tie them to broader values, and, especially, give examples
  - *Ordering*
    - Sandwich—start and end with strong points
    - give the Minister of the Crown a strong point that is significantly different, and often offers a different approach to the round. Don't just give the Minister of the Crown a throwaway point you thought about at the last minute.
  - *If you're stuck . . .*
    - think of why you came up with the case in the first place
    - think of different perspectives on the action (e.g. pragmatic, philosophical, political, social, economic, etc.)
    - Ask yourself who are the interests affected by a particular action and how will they benefit from your case

It's very likely that the Opposition may in some way mock your case. They'll do this to try to gain the appearance of being the better team, but it also can shake your confidence somewhat. Do your best to ignore any jokes they make about what you've proposed. Often it's actually a sign that you've done a good job. Even the very best cases will be susceptible to some good-natured ridicule by the Opposition!

That's obviously not all you need to know, but really the most important thing to do at this point is just a lot of practicing!

# Introduction to Side Opposition

## *The Roles of the Members*

### *Member of the Opposition (7 Minutes)*

- Present 1 or 2 constructive points for opposition (explain why your side is *right*, not just what is wrong with government's case).
- Refute each of the points brought by the Prime Minister - challenge the government's plan or definition; question their assumptions

Some people say that the Member of the Opposition is somehow less important than the Leader of the Opposition—this is simply untrue. A good MO can win the round; on the other hand, if the MO gets cut out of the round or brings very little, this can doom a team, since an LO cannot deal with three government speeches themselves. If the MO can deal effectively with everything presented by the PM, it makes the LO's job much easier and puts the Opposition in a great position to win the rounds.

### *Leader of the Opposition (10 Minutes)*

- Present 2-4 constructive arguments (this should depend on how many you feel comfortable with, but too many will take away from your focus and leave you short on time). The Leader of the Opposition's points should build on what the MO introduced. Ideally, at least some should be deeper, more philosophical points. It is perfectly acceptable to take something obvious that the MO talked about and expand on it in greater detail and depth.
- Attack the government's case. You should definitely directly refute the point(s) introduced by the MC. Though you do not necessarily have to deal individually with each of the PM's points, you do have to address the key themes of the Government's case—if you're not sure that you can pick out the main ideas, it might be easier to go through the PM's points individually.
- Rebuild your partner's points. This also does not have to be done directly, but you must make sure that you fit your partners' points into your argumentation. Be careful not to “knife” your partner by contradicting something he or she said in their speech. If it is easier for you, this section can also be done separately.
- Spend the last couple minutes of your speech summing up how your team sees the round and why you think you won. Think of this as a PMR for the

Opposition—lay out the key issues (the ones which make your team look good) and explain how each side addressed them and why they fall on your side. You're laying out to the judge(s) what you think should be their Reason for Decision, and trying to counter the next three minutes that the PM has to close out the round. You can close off if you like by laying out what the PM has to do in the PMR—if you make them address your issues, you stand a great chance of winning. Don't just list off your team's points! The judge already has them written down; explain *why* those points are what matter.

Since the LO has ten minutes to speak, it's not surprising that they have a lot to do and that their speech is very important. If the opposition is not clearly winning the round when the LO sits down, there's a good chance the government will win. Though ten minutes may seem like a long time, it is important to manage your time closely—you are given seven minutes to introduce new information, but you should be finished your constructive points well before that. By the end of the LO, the judge should have a good idea what opposition *stood for* on the key issues—not just that they disagreed with the Government's case.

### ***The Parts of a Speech***

#### ***Constructive***

As I hope is clear by now, it is not enough for the Opposition to just argue that the Government is wrong by refuting the Government's argumentation. The Opposition must argue in favour of something (which is usually more or less the Opposite of what the Government is arguing). You do this by presenting arguments exactly as you would if you were a Government team running the opposite case. If the Government, for instance, is arguing that Canada should have joined the US on Missile Defense, imagine that you are running the case that Canada made the right decision by not joining. Aside from explaining why the Government's individual points are wrong, you might make points about Canadian sovereignty or the destabilizing effects of a missile defense system. It's not necessary to have cute names for your points—just introduce them by briefly previewing what you'll be saying (“Next, I'll be explaining how blindly following the US hurts Canada in the international community...”).

Since the LO has much more time to think of constructive arguments, he or she is usually expected to bring more arguments, and to have the arguments be somewhat deeper, more original, or more philosophical.

It can help to have a separate page of notes where you write down interesting ideas for constructive points (and flesh them out) as they occur to you while listening to other points.

### ***Refutation***

This is the other key part of an Opposition speech. Organization here is important: do everything you can to ensure that the judge knows which point you are addressing at any given time. It can help to write down exactly how the Government introduced the point, and mentioning that to the judge as you introduce your rebuttal (“The Government’s first point was that missile defence is needed to protect us from a nuclear war. Here’s why that’s not true...”)  
You’ll sometimes run across a point that’s just factually true (“The US is Canada’s largest trading partner.”) Don’t run in circles trying to explain why it’s not—concede that it may be true, but consider whether it really matters to the case, whether it might be outweighed by something you’ve argued, or whether their plan actually has any effect on it.

Look for contradictions in the Government’s case. Even if two points are each true in isolation, if they contradict each other the Government’s case is weakened. It is sometimes necessary to take a wider view of the Government’s perspective and see if everything fits together as neatly as they say it does. You can tie your constructive points into your refutation if one of your points deals with a Government point, but it is good to bring as much new and original argumentation as you can into your refutation. This is also a good chance for LO’s to work their partner’s points back into the round - explain why something that the MO said defeats the government’s points.

Watch out for logical fallacies. These can include:

- Slippery Slopes (After A happens, B, C, and D will too, but we won’t tell you why...)
- False Analogies
- Appeals to Tradition (Just because something has always been a certain way doesn’t mean it should be in the future)
- Correlation vs. Causation (Did A cause B or did B just follow it?)
- Straw Man (Misrepresenting an argument in order to make it look weaker than it is)

## ***Organization***

Organization is key to making sure that your judge understands exactly what you mean to say and how your side feels it fits into the rounds. It is therefore important to make sure that you clearly differentiate between the parts of your speech—is your point constructive or refutation? If it’s refutation, what exactly is it responding to? Never jump between parts of a speech—this will only confuse your judge and quite possibly, yourself.

Consider road-mapping—setting out at the beginning of your speech what you intend to do and how you intend to do it. This can keep your plan straight in both the judge’s mind and your own.

## ***But What If...***

### ***The Government’s case is tight/truistic/tautological?***

Point it out at the beginning of the MO, and then “play ball.” Proceed with the round as best you can as if it were a normal case. If you’re right, the judge will notice and penalize the Government. If the judge disagrees, you’ll have a chance to win based on the arguments you present.

### ***You don’t know anything about the subject the Government is talking about?***

If you feel the case is specific knowledge (not something a reasonable university debater would know about), point it out at the beginning of the MO, but, again, “play ball.” If you find the Government’s arguments too technical, try returning to first principles: find the idea underlying the case and work it through logically, using knowledge you have.

Though it won’t help you once you’re in a round, it helps to read as much as you can (even the newspaper helps!) Try to become informed about as much as you can, so you can pull it out on unprepared Government teams. It’s a great feeling when you know more about the case than the Government.

### ***You can’t think of anything at all to say?***

This happens to everyone, especially MOs, who don’t have much time to think before their speech begins. Try questioning any assumptions underlying the government’s case - all cases rely on some assumptions. Ask yourself whether

these are reasonable and substantiated, or whether you can make a point questioning them (Are rights absolute? Is democracy necessarily good in every case?) A good Government team will try to pin you into a corner - try not to think about the case on their terms. Think outside the box.

# The Basics: Learning the Roles

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## The Prime Minister's Constructive

Having a strong, well-constructed case is a necessary condition of having a strong PMC speech; a poorly constructed case can easily result in the round being lost in the PMC. A strong PMC, however, cannot rest solely on a strong case. This article will therefore not focus on case construction—which is discussed at length in the next section—but rather on the basics of the structure and techniques of the PMC.

The PMC is the most important speech in some respects. It sets the tone of the Government team, as well as the tone for the entire round. It should present the case clearly, but not it should be just about opening the debate. The PMC should present information that will remain relevant throughout the round.

### *Presenting the Case*

In most cases, the first words out of the PM's mouth should *not* be the case statement. The first ten seconds of the debate are typically rather light in tone. If you have a lame introduction or joke, get it out now, and get it out quickly. Make sure it's good; inside jokes that the judge will understand about you and the other team will work well. Depending on the tournament and the judge, it may also be a good idea to incorporate the squirreliable resolution (if there is one) into this introduction.

Following this introduction, give the case statement right away, provided that it's not *too* fact specific. Then, give the necessary background for the case. Unless your case is so complicated that it's just impossible to do so (which may be a reason for questioning whether you should be running that case), do not wait until after you give background to present your case statement. Do it right away. This will allow the Opposition team to think about the background information you

provide in the context of the case statement. Although it may seem like a trivial observation, it is absolutely imperative that you present everything clearly. Neither the background you give nor your case statement should confuse your Opposition. To this end, your speech should be structured in such a way as to maximize clarity, and this is generally best accomplished by the ordering stated above.

Once you have finished your background, repeat the case statement; do not simply jump from your background into your arguments. Repeating the case statement will only take a couple of seconds and it will improve clarity immensely.

If the Opposition is trying to give POIs for points of clarification, do not sit them down every single time. You will not be rewarded for having confused them. At the same time, do not let them ask so many points of clarification that the flow of your speech is interrupted or they dig into your time considerably. At this point you should be *at most* a minute into your speech.

### ***Arguing in favour of the Case***

In your next five minutes, give 3-4 points of constructive material. Each point should have a one or two word summary that becomes a sentence argument. Each point should fit the following mould:

[Case statement] because [argument]

State the sentence, how it links to the case, and why it's important. Although it seems to go without saying, points that do not fit this model (i.e. points that do not directly support the case) are not actually reasons in favour of something and thus should not be included in constructive. An argument which does not explain why X is good but rather simply explains why a reason against X is not bad should not be used at this point. Make sure that all your constructive points are both independent and constructive.

Having stated your argument, make sure to support the argument, explain it, and add logic, an example, and/or a philosophical framework. Subpoints are also good. Looking at several different facets of the same issue or reason will help to strengthen your points.

### ***Concluding the Opening***

In the last 30 seconds, make sure to conclude. Don't *just* repeat the points. Maybe also explain that the debate will be based on a certain broad theme. Even though you've just finished the first speech, you should still make the judge think of the broad themes that you believe the round will eventually boil down to. For example, in a given round, one could say "this debate on why we should wiretap all telephone conversations really centres on the tension between security and civil liberties." The theme should be an issue you think will turn in your favour at the end of the debate.

# The Member of the Opposition

As I am sure is obvious with the rest of this guide, this by no means should be taken as the absolute last word on how an MO speech should be done. These are merely my thoughts after four years of doing this speech and letting my partner in LO carry us to victory.

I am going to approach the MO speech in three sections:

1. Philosophy of the MO speech
2. Structure of the speech
3. Some other random thoughts

## ***1. Philosophy of the MO speech.***

I've always approached the MO speech with pretty much the same philosophy: "If I want my team to win, then I need to do two things: present the obvious-in-your-face opposition to the case and then rip apart the PM's speech."

The first item has to do with presenting an opposition to the case (I will go into more depth with this in the structure section), and laying out the basic stance the Opposition will take. Again I will go further into this, but the biggest piece of advice I can offer to this is to keep it simple. When you hear the case statement, something should pop into your head as to why it is wrong; *that* should be the base of your constructive arguments and the stance your side will take. Not everyone is good at this, and so you should pick who will be MO as to who is best suited to this (or who will be the worse LO, whatever). I have found many excellent LO's have difficulty with the MO speech because they are so accustomed to coming up with deep, complex points, and as a result they can overlook the patently obvious ones.

The second part speaks for itself. You will know you have done the second job correctly if the MC is forced to rebuild all their partner's points. If you want to help your team win, then you *have* to deal with—and ideally destroy—all of the PM's points (or at the very least their good ones). If the PM's points are still standing and then the MC gets seven minutes to hammer them home again, plus add new ones, you're going to need to have a hell of an LO to win the round.

Finally, a lot of people think the MO is a throwaway speech that is filler until you get to the LO speech. Bullshit. A good MO speech can win a round not only by presenting a great opposition to the case and deconstructing the arguments side Government brought forward, but also by demoralizing an MC. I

have both outspoken and been outspoken by my partner from the MO position. Treat it like an unimportant speech, or expect your LO to do all the work for you, and you will be seeing lower and lower bracket rooms. That being said, on a personal note, the primary goal for me at least has always been to win the round. I have found that by remembering the aforementioned philosophy and then going out and doing it consistently, every round has allowed me to have success as a team in debating.

## **2. Structure of the MO speech**

Here is where I am going to deal with more of the specifics of how to structure your MO speech. I basically try to divide my speech into three parts and my best speeches have always had all three in the following order: a) Constructive b) Rebuttal and c) Summary. Please remember to roadmap and signpost in all your speeches. The MO needs to be organized as much as anyone else and an organized speech will allow you to better fulfill your role.

### **a) Constructive**

I have found over my time in CUSID that a shift was introduced towards having a coherent opposition between the MO and LO in order to avoid the LO backpacking the MO. I think this has been a positive thing and re-emphasizes the importance of the MO speech. So how do you come up with constructive points?

The first thing I do before the round begins is prepare my paper. I always have two pieces of paper for constructive. One is for myself, and the other is for my partner to write down what they are thinking our opposition should be (I find it is better to have your partner write their ideas down so you can be sure you are getting down everything the PM is saying; I used to miss key points from the PM speech because I would be talking to my partner about possible points). You don't have to do this, but I like to write "WHY???" at the top of my page just as a reminder to question everything the Government team is saying.

So now that you're ready, have heard the Government case statement and the PM is into their speech, you first need to decide on a stance as Opposition. Usually it will simply be the opposite to what the government has proposed, but not always. For example, at Alberta Nationals (2005), a team ran the case that President Bush should have invited all Irish political parties to the annual St. Patrick's day breakfast at the White House following the killing of Robert McCartney, supposedly by IRA members. This is an instant where Opposition has a

choice; you could do the opposite saying all parties in Ireland should not be invited, or that only the Sinn Fein should not be invited because of their association with the IRA. How you decide what stance Opposition will take depends on you and your partner. With some people they may want to be consulted and come to an agreement as a team. Other LO's may give you freedom, and will simply pick up on what you said and prepare their speech accordingly. It varies depending on the situation and your partner. Basically, this comes with experience and debating with different people. Just remember to make it clear in your speech the stance side Opposition is taking.

Now you have a stance and need constructive points. There are a few things I want to say about this. First, your constructive arguments/Opposition stance should **NOT** be direct rebuttal to government points. By this I mean that you should not be using the opposition to the individual points of Government as your constructive matter. There are two reasons for this. The first is that your points will be shallow, and will likely not support a broad, philosophical stance upon which to stand as Opposition. Secondly, it will be a very repetitive speech. This is why I said you should be basing your constructive on the first thing that pops into your head against Government's case after you've heard the case statement. Often your Opposition stance and principles will clash with what Government has said; this is good.

Basically, what I am trying to get at here is that since your constructive points are reasons to pursue your side/stance/plan (which is usually the exact opposite of what Government has proposed, but not always), they should stand as reasons on their own and so should not have to refer to any points made by Government. That being said, if you and your partner cannot come up with any constructive arguments against the case in seven minutes, then use your rebuttal as constructive. It will usually contain the principles you want to get out there at the least anyways.

As to the nature of the points themselves, I like to keep them broad—usually this is a result of having only seven minutes to come up with something and so they can't be deep anyways. But this also allows your LO more flexibility in their speech. Moreover, if I am going to have more specific points they are usually a result of having a broad first point.

I will use the quarterfinal round from Leger 2005 as an example of this. The case run was that the Netherlands should force immigrating Imams to take Dutch culture classes. The first point was that this was going to create more divisions

between the white and Muslim communities in the Netherlands by leading to greater distrust between the two. This is a pretty broad statement, but supported side Opposition's stance, which was basically "don't do this because it will create more problems than it will solve." The second point was about how Imams could use this policy as evidence of anti-Muslim sentiment in Dutch culture and so could be used as fuel for extremist preaching. This was a more specific point that came about as a result of the more broad first point. These were the only two points, but they helped side Opposition win the round because they established a position for Opposition and gave them a solid base from which to work our points and for them to stand on.

Finally, I usually try to limit myself to no more than three points, and generally it's best to have no more than two. Remember, you still have to rebut, so you do not want to waste too much time building your case. I usually try to spend about half my speech on constructive, maybe a bit less than that depending on how many points I can come up with, and how much deconstruction I feel I need to do.

#### b) Rebuttal

Now that you have established the arguments that explain why your side is the better option, you also need to point out why everything the Government said is wrong. I know it can be confusing to differentiate constructive from rebuttal in an MO speech. I try to look at it in the following way. With the constructive, I am establishing arguments that support our Opposition stance and clash with the themes presented in the Government's case. In rebutting, however, I am attacking the analysis and reasoning the PM presented in their speech in an attempt to make them collapse on their own.

The key I have found to good rebuttal (and I still have difficulties with this) is taking **GOOD NOTES** of the PM speech. I have cost myself many a round—or at the least speaker points—because I did not fully understand the argument(s) the PM was making in a given point. In most good cases, the arguments will be based on a point, argument, example/evidence structure. Make sure you get each of these for each point. If it is missing these, the Government will be in trouble, but you also need to be ready to point it out. The better you understand the Government arguments, the easier it will be to analyze and rebut. I have no real tips on how to take good notes as I find it differs with pretty much every individual. You just have to find a system that works for you. For a more in depth

discussion of this, see the article on note-taking later in this guide. Once you understand the arguments, you can point out any flaws in them.

There are numerous ways to do this:

- Point out assertions the Government has made to support their argument (i.e. did they simply say something without providing evidence)
- Use a better counter example to prove their argument and example wrong (this is one of the best ways to rebut and you have to be willing to read and put in the effort to get better at this)
- Point out why the example they presented does not apply to situation presented
- Show why their logic/analysis is flawed
- Use their own logic to show why another point of their's is wrong

Also, remember to talk to other debaters that have more experience as MO. They will have more ideas of how to do this.

I hope this has differentiated further how constructive points and rebuttal differ in the MO speech. There are more things you will learn and will instinctively know the more you debate. However, you can bring in the principles of your constructive and show how they further counter the PM's point.

Finally, as an MO rebutting, you will have to make some tactical decisions. What I mean by this is that you will need to spend more time on certain Government arguments than others. Again, this comes with experience, knowing how people run their cases, as well as knowing what judges want to hear. Make sure you are spending more time on the arguments that are key to the Government case as opposed to red herrings. Better teams will be better able to disguise their red herrings, so again it is up to you which points you feel need more time, but do address all points. If you are going to ignore an argument, you **MUST** explain why that point is irrelevant to the round.

### c) Summary

This should be the last thing you do in your speech. If I'm going to do it I try to start it with no less than 45 seconds left in the round (30 seconds at the absolute minimum). It is not always necessary to give a summary in that I have given good MO speeches without a summary, but it really does add to your speech and is an effective tool for reminding the judge the important points of your speech. That said, don't bother if you are just going to say the title of your points and rebuttal; the judge already has this on their paper (or at least they should), so you have just

wasted the last part of your speech. Instead you should be summarizing the key arguments from your constructive, as well as pointing out what the major flaws of government's key arguments were. You don't need to repeat why the point on Saudi Arabian foreign policy was irrelevant to the case you're debating about Run DMC (unless by some miracle this is the crux of the Government case).

### **3. Final Thoughts**

These are just some extra thoughts that I wanted to address individually. These themes are all addressed in later articles in more depth, but I wanted to bring them up here in the context of the MO speech.

#### **a. DON'T PANIC.**

If you have no points (or only a title for one point) and it is your turn to speak, don't worry about it. IT HAPPENS. I have had speeches where I go up, show the judge the one line I have written on my paper and deliver a great speech. This is part of the fun of impromptu debate. It will happen to you at some point. And if you get up and bomb, don't get discouraged, it has happened to all of us.

#### **b. Tautologies/truisms (because there's no such thing as a tight case)**

If you hit a case that you think is one of these two, spend 10-15 seconds at the start of your speech mentioning it and move on to your constructive. Remember a good judge will decide based on who debated better, so debate. It's more fun anyways and makes for better stories in the future when you win the case or at least have fun losing.

#### **c. POIs**

Many MOs offer POIs less than they should. While I realize you only have seven minutes once the PM has started (or sometimes 6), you still need to be heard. Get up at least twice during the PMC, and try and get a POI in to either throw the PM off or introduce one of your own points. Also, just because you don't speak again after your speech, that doesn't mean you can sit back and relax. All the pressure is off you now so you should be peppering (without barracking) the MC with POIs. I always like to either remind the judge of a key point I made, or just try and point out a flaw in what the MC is saying. Go read one of the articles about POIs if you want more info on how to do them well.

d. Counter cases

Again, I'm not going to get into what a good/bad counter case is when it should be used as I think that's a whole other discussion. What I will say, is if you decide as a team to run one make sure you as the MO are completely comfortable with it as you have to present it in the round and so it will be your onus to ensure it is presented clearly.

e. Open Rounds

It is critically important in open rounds for an MO as first speaker to get the crowd and judges on your side (though you should always be doing this anyways), especially if the PM has already done so for their side. Tell a joke, be more animated, deliver your points with a little more "oomph", but get people banging on tables and laughing and it will increase your team's chance at victory.

## The Minister of the Crown

If there is one thing that good (and winning) debaters will tell you about the MC speech, it is not to undervalue it. If you think that the MC speech is an easy speech, then you aren't working hard enough. You can be a lot more dynamic than the PM really gets a chance to be, so take advantage of that to make your team memorable.

### *The MC has three tasks:*

1. Introduce constructive matter that is sufficiently new and worthwhile to present a challenge to the LO
2. Take the MO completely out of the round
3. Clarify and strengthen the case, and create a clear framework for the PMR

### *Constructive Point (2 minutes)*

There is no single point that has to go to the MC, but it should generally be:

- the second strongest point of the case (the first should be the first point of the PMC)
- consistent with the PMC, but a point that is different enough to drive the case forward without being a case shift (think of it like an extension in BP)
- well-defined and prepared (don't write it during the PMC); make sure you take the following basic format:
  - Point (title)
    - analysis (lay out in one to two sentences exactly what you're saying)
    - example (provide a concrete situation which show that your point is true: lawsuits are unfair, here is an unfair lawsuit); and / or . . .
    - evidence (provide an analogous circumstance in which your point was true:)
    - analysis (tie it all together again in one or two sentences)

If you are having trouble thinking of an MC point, here are some suggestions:

1. think about long-term goals or consequences
2. consider a completely different actor (if you've been talking about offenders, think about victims)
3. think paradoxically (if the case seems to be creating inequality, talk about the true nature of equal treatment)

4. ask someone who has never seen the case before if they have any ideas

### ***Refutation (2 minutes)***

MC refutation is similar to MO refutation—be clear and forceful, and make sure you clearly take the MO out of the round.

To do this:

- First address the point superficially. Consider if it is:
  - inconsistent with other points
  - not provable or proven by the examples and evidence that the MO provided
  - silly or irrelevant
  
- Then, if the MO has established an Opposition philosophy, attack it. If they haven't, boil the case down yourself and tell the judges why the direction that the Opposition is taking doesn't properly address your case. This forces the LO either to prove that they did take the right line or to abandon their partner

### ***Rebuilding (2 minutes)***

This is where you try to clarify the case and defend it against Opposition attacks. This is incredibly important and will be easy if the case is well constructed.

- Above all, make sure that you make the case crystal clear and make it look like it has been all along.
- Go point-by-point. Try not to miss any of them. If the Opposition has claimed that two or more of your points are really the same, re-clarify them and keep the original structure.
- Don't just restate each point. Say what your partner said, say what the Opposition said, and then explain how those two interact and why your partner's points is still true
- Make sure that you also rebuild evidence and examples
- Don't be afraid to use your constructive point while you are rebuilding—try to integrate it into the rest of the case.

### ***Summary (1 minute)***

This will bleed into rebuilding the case a bit, but don't skip it.

- Clarify your basic case philosophy (you should be able to boil your case down to one sentence). However, fit your own point into it now.
- Ideally, do so in such a way that the LO feels compelled to deal with both your constructive matter and that of the PM, not just to cut one out of the round.
- Present a challenge to the LO. Generally a question that they may have to answer or point they have to prove. You can then use this to set up the PMR.

### ***Added Challenges***

1. If the MO presents a definitional challenge
  - Laugh at it for a moment
  - Then, spend 1-2 minutes clarifying your original definition and showing why it was fine
  - Try as best as you can to debate normally, according to the above guidelines
2. You realize after the MO that your case is fatally flawed or indefensible
  - Don't admit it—you won't be awarded for your honesty
  - Make it look like the MO didn't understand the case. This doesn't mean you case shift. You may shift the focus of the case at this point, start focusing on a different burden, or just focus on strengthening what you have.

# The Leader of the Opposition I

Leader of the Opposition is probably the most complicated position, with the most variations on strategy and disagreement over what makes a speech effective. I admit that it is my favourite position—ten minutes to talk about complex themes and shifting the paradigm of the debate is, to me, the epitome of skill. I find it a challenge, and I also find I win a lot of rounds as an LO. That being said, this is also the last section I am writing in this guide, because I am not sure if I can actually teach what it means to be an effective LO. The best I can do is offer a few tips to prospective LO speakers.

## *What is the Goal of the LO Speech?*

The LO speech seeks to change or alter the paradigm, perspective or themes of the debate. The MO should have launched a frontal, factual attack against the arguments of the case and the case itself. There are numerous different things that the LO can do in his or her speech. It may be the case that by shifting the terms of the debate (the perspective on the case), the LO attempts to attack the axioms and assumptions of the proposal, thus rendering the Government arguments irrelevant. On the other hand, the LO speech must bring into play all the things that have not yet been considered—which includes everything, even the kitchen sink.

The LO speech is most effective when it causes the issue to appear much more complicated or problematic than the Government has portrayed it to be. The Government wants the case to be simple and clear cut: there is a problem, this is a viable solution, let's do it. The MO is the one who says, it's not a problem (or that's the wrong problem), that solution is no good, let's not do it. Thus the LO must show that there are other problems and issues that impact the whole round which have yet to be considered.

The LO also has a restructuring role. It is the LO who must summarize and rebuild the Opposition case in such a way as to stymie the upcoming PMR. Thus the LO launches a huge volley of attacks and then promptly rebuilds the Opposition defenses. That is a lot to do, even in 10 minutes.

### ***Organize, Organize, Organize***

With the immensity of the task in mind, the primary requirement of a good LO speech is hefty organization. You must know going in what you are going to say, in what order, and how it will be said. Having over 20 minutes to prepare, there is no excuse for a poorly organized LO speech.

In general, the LO speech will proceed in the following order:

1. Introduction
2. Constructive (2 to 3 points)
3. Refutation (MC then PM)
4. Summary of Themes
5. Summary of Round using Opposition's Themes

The refutation of the MC and PM constructive speeches should be done in the context of the themes introduced by the LO in the introduction and the MO earlier in the round. **This is why teamwork is so important.** If the MO introduces the theme of “fear”, that the Government proposal is flawed because it is based on acting out of fear and the assertion that this is a negative thing, the LO cannot then state that the Government is being overly bold, foolishly brave or any other theme which might contradict the MO. The themes do not have to be the same in each speech, and in fact should not be the same, but they must agree.

The summary of themes is different than a simple rebuttal. It is your chance to clash directly the themes of the round. Essentially the LO should use this time to attack the axioms of the Government case explicitly, and show how things would differ if the Opposition axioms were substituted, demonstrating that this is a vast improvement. The LO may refer back to specific points for clarification or evidence purposes, but this is the “sweeping” aspect of the LO speech—the LO needs to talk in broad terms. If this is not accomplished, the PMR will be able to focus in on specifics and tear the Opposition case to shreds. The goal is to make the PMR attempt to defend the very roots of the case and thus not be able to address specific arguments.

### ***Challenging the PMR***

At this point, near the end of the LO speech, it should become clear what the grounds of the debate are. That is, it should be clear which points the Government must win back from the Opposition to win the round (assuming the

Opposition has done a good job and at least provisionally won over most arguments in the round). Some arguments are obviously more critical to the case than others.

As the LO, challenge the PMR to win back these critical points. Explicitly state that in order to win the round, the PM will have to explain points X, Y and Z. Show again why they cannot do this. If you have been smart as the LO, you will have identified these key points during the preceding speeches and directed your themes to win these specific points. The PM must then either give up the critical points or spend the entire PMR trying to challenge your themes and not attacking your actual arguments.

### *Things to Avoid*

- Constructive arguments after about the four minute mark, and ABSOLUTELY after the seven minute mark.
- Giving up the moral high ground in order to introduce a theme or agree with your MO's themes: it's particularly good to make it seem like the ground you are taking is morally higher.
- Not leaving enough time to discuss the case in general under the new themes. You must introduce themes, you must demonstrate the difference between your themes and the Government themes, you must then show how your themes are superior. And you MUST ABSOLUTELY show how this affects the arguments of their case and the arguments of your side.
- Not discussing one of the speakers in the round. The LO should have something to say about everyone.

That is essentially all I can teach about the LO. It is such a massive, organic speech that it is hard to know any more specifics about how it is done without sitting through a specific round. The LO, more than any other speech, is very specific to each round and has the fewest generalities. The best recommendation: do it, and fill your time. If you cannot fill ten minutes, go deeper into the philosophy of the case. There is always enough to fill ten minutes by this point, and if you are having trouble filling your time, you need to work on basic analysis skills to uncover deeper and better themes to discuss. Also, remember to fill out your explanations - as always, you cannot receive marks for things you do not say, whether they seem obvious to you or not. Keep at it, develop your own style and be relentless with it!

## The Leader of the Opposition II

As an Opposition team, your goal is not just to defeat the Government's case; it is to introduce a coherent case and good substantive matter of your own. Focus on defining the round in your own terms, and trying to make the Government debate on those terms as well.

As an LO, your goal is to defeat the Government and outline your case so clearly and decisively, that when you sit down no one wants to bother with the PMR (including the PM). However, you should not try to single-handedly win a round in the LO. You should be providing shape and context to the debate, which includes incorporating the philosophy introduced by the MO. Thus, the article below begins with a discussion of general strategy for side Opposition. I mention this in an LO article, because formulating an Opposition philosophy is something you should do as a team, but this should still come out very clearly in the MO speech.

### *Formulating an Opposition Philosophy*

- Take very careful note of the Government's case statement.
- From the case statement, boil them down to the "ten word answer." What principle are they resting their case on?
- Then, ask yourself very carefully where you fit in.

Write your own case statement, considering . . .

- What is the key issue?
- Who are the key actors?

For example, if the Government case statement is "this house believes that human rights should be a factor in selecting a host country for the Olympics," you may choose to say: "Human rights should not be a factor," or "We should focus on a country's logistical capacity to host the games."

Sometimes there are problems in the Government's case that make this more difficult. If you decide that there is a problem, don't just stand up and whine about it. Maybe make fun of it a bit, and then use it to formulate your own case statement so you don't get caught in a trap.

- If the case is a dichotomy, you don't always need to defend the other side:  
e.g. "This house would try Saddam Hussein before the International Criminal Court" does not mean that you have to defend trying him in an American court or an Iraqi court (even if that's what the Government assumes). You can just focus on showing that there are problems with trying him at the ICC, if you prefer.
- If it is tautological or lends itself to becoming so:  
e.g. "This house believes that gay rights group X should support gay marriage" by pointing out that gay marriage is a gay right so by definition the group must support it. Make sure to address and preempt this problem in your Opposition case statement, by, for example, suggesting that the role of the organization is to advocate for gay rights outside of a political context.
- If it's just silly:  
e.g. "This house would give money to the poor." Not that giving money to the poor is silly, but it probably doesn't make for a good debate. This is where a counter-case can be useful because it makes the issue more contentious. You might propose, for example instead instituting a work for welfare program. This gives you two meaningful alternatives to debate.

### ***Constructive Matter***

More than any other speech, the LO's constructive points tend to lack structure. Although they can be a bit more philosophical and maybe somewhat less formulaic, try to still follow a coherent model for a constructive point:

- ▶ Name your point
  - argument
  - evidence (e.g. analogous situation)
  - example (e.g. time where it has worked)
  - analysis (link evidence and example to argument)

Remember, link your point back to the original case statement. Show why your point matters.

### ***How to sound smart when you've got nothing left to say***

- Identify the key principles, institutions, actors, etc. that are at play (these are often just words in the resolution). Ask yourself what they are, what they do, why they do it, and why they are significant
- This also leads into questioning some basic assumptions of the case or resolution. Are people just approaching it from a Western, idealistic, realistic, etc. framework?
- Analogies and examples become especially important. In other words, just know stuff.
- Try to come up with points that are counterintuitive, unusual, or even paradoxical.

### ***Refutation***

Refuting does *not* mean proving that all of the points are wrong.

Sometimes you also need to consider if a point is:

- Inconsistent with other points
- Not provable
- Not exclusive to the Government's proposal
- Or, as always, not relevant to the key issue of the debate.

Use direct refutation sparingly in an LO. Make sure you address the MC's point(s), because it or they are new. Before you stand up, circle any other Government points that you feel should be directly refuted, but ultimately, your partner should have done most of the direct refutation, and should spend the bulk of the rest of your speech in . . .

### ***Rebuttal and Summary***

The difference is that direct refutation is about looking at each of the Government's points and showing why they are wrong, rebuttal is about looking holistically at what each of you stood for, showing the difference between those two principles, and showing why, on the balance of probabilities you are either right, or have most directly fulfilled the requirements of the round.

- Quite simply, DO IT.
- However works for you, just make sure it gets done and make sure you give it 2-3 minutes at least.
- Write it *before* you stand up.

- Try to aim to ultimately be able to pick out 2-3 main themes and show where Government stood on them, where you stood, and why, on balance, you are right.

***Finally, remember:***

- No one cares what you think. They care what you can prove.
- Be memorable in some way. Being on Opposition is fun because you don't have as high a constructive burden, so you can be funny, deep, and slightly adventurous.
- And, always, do whatever you can to maintain control of the round.

## The Prime Minister's Rebuttal

The PMR is the final opportunity for side Government to emphasize why they won the case; it should be used to refute key Opposition arguments, rebuild key Government arguments, and summarize the round in a way that makes side Government appear undoubtedly victorious. The PMR is perhaps the most difficult speech of the round, especially for new debaters. With only 3 or 4 minutes, the tasks facing the debater may appear daunting; time management is absolutely imperative.

Because there are no hard and fast on rules on how to give a PMR, this article will not attempt to be the definitive word on *how* to give PMRs. It will simply highlight some of the things debaters should keep in mind when learning to give this speech and also explain some common PMR structures and why they are effective. Hopefully this will be useful to debaters as they learn to develop their own individual styles.

### *Common PMR Structures*

Type	Description
Question and Answer	Summarize the debate by asking a series of 2-4 questions. Answer these questions with a combination of rebuttal and refutation (that is, refer to your own constructive arguments, as well as creating new refutation arguments).
Closed Circle	Remind the Speaker of themes you introduced in the PMC (“recall our belief in the importance of individual freedom”). Show how all Opposition arguments are contrary to your themes. Remind the Speaker of challenges you made (“recall that we stated the Opposition would have to justify...”). Show how the Opposition did not meet the challenge.
Smear Campaign	Choose a negative quality, such as fear, impracticality, etc., and show how all Opposition arguments are traits of this quality. Provide a compelling statement on why this invalidates the Opposition.

### *Myths of the PMR*

#### **1: It's just a refutation.**

Not only is the PMR not just a refutation, it's not even mostly refutation. The PMR is primarily a rebuttal wherein refutation occurs as the by-product of rebuilding

the case. The conclusion of themes and challenges allows for en masse refutation rather than point-by-point refutation, which is far too time consuming.

**2: The faster you talk, the better.**

A slow, controlled PMR is much more effective. Again, proper use of tactics like theme building will save you time.

**3: The PMR should address primarily the LO speech.**

The PMR must address the entire round. If the MC did a good job, the LO spent 10 minutes discussing themes and arguments of your choosing. By taking a big overview of the case, you do address the LO, but in a context favourable to you.

**4: There is no set structure.**

This is true, but not in that you can or should throw out a random assortment of arguments. There are a number of very effective structures that you can employ.

**5: The PMR saves the day.**

The PMR cannot stand alone. Specifically, the PMR cannot compensate for a weak MC speech. If the LO is allowed to roam free in terms of subject matter, unfettered by challenges from the MC, the PMR cannot possibly address the full Government case and the full Opposition case; there is simply too much material. The PMR is dependent on a strong MC success.

***General Tips on Style in the PMR***

- Breathe deeply - don't get overwhelmed.
- Pause to help delineate different arguments, otherwise the judge will tune you out.
- Refer to the MC a lot, especially if the MC did an effective job of reigning in the LO.
- Talk as if you have already won - be relaxed, smile, etc., unless the Opposition was particularly harsh, in which case it is okay to act indignant (NOT angry).
- **Begin preparing the PMR before the round; note themes and challenges you intend to use.**

# Building and Running A Good Case

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## How to Construct a Case and Win on Government

I should probably start this article out by recognizing that the bulk of the ideas that appear in this piece are not my own. The majority of the advice that this article contains comes from a post to CUSIDnet made a few years back by Rob Silver. Where appropriate I have put in some new ideas, and tried to give some examples where I could.

### *Debating as Government*

As you progress in debating, you will hear many people talk about “Opp Advantage.” This refers to the fact that the Opposition team will win as much as 70% of their rounds at any given tournament. Many will attribute this to it being easier to oppose a case than to construct a good idea. There is no natural Opposition advantage; there are only teams who don’t take the time and effort to properly construct a well-organized case.

A lot of people think that if they come up with an issue and a few arguments and can talk about them for a while, that’s enough for a good case... and based on this assumption, they ignore senior debaters who try to tell them how to construct cases. This ignores one key rule of debating: “Opposition teams aren’t required to play fair”!

There is no implied good faith clause requiring an Opposition team to engage with your principles and have a good debate. It is just as easy, if not easier for an Opposition team to simply beat you by hammering your model, nit-picking the construction of your case, or stating that your case is not mutually exclusive from a less controversial alternative. The ONLY way to force an Opposition team to engage in the debate you want to have is to construct your

case properly so as to remove these technical and structural arguments from the round. When you hear senior debaters talk about “debate mechanics” this is precisely what they’re talking about; focusing on technical flaws in case construction as opposed to the substantive issues in the debate. We quite often make fun of certain American debate styles for their reliance on this method of argument, but we use it too. The only difference is that they have developed a whole language around that sort of argument, while we prefer to hide and deny our reliance on it. Either way, the only way to avoid having those sorts of arguments used against your cases is to construct cases free from technical flaws.

### ***How to Construct a Proper Case***

#### *Pick a topic you know*

This seems simple enough as an idea but you would be astounded at the number of first year political science students that will run stem cell cloning cases and Supreme Court references and get beaten down by medical students and law students. This is not High School debating; the knowledge base for these rounds is by no means level. Rather than complaining about this, learn to use it as an advantage. We accept a minimum standard of knowledge for any round, but you will win far more rounds in your specialty area than in all other areas combined. The flip side of this is deliberately picking cases that your opponents know nothing about. A lot of people will tell you that doing that is “dirty” or “unethical”. While I personally think that such comments are complete nonsense, I won’t get into the “strategic case” debate. Suffice it to say, that picking a topic you know a lot about is just a good idea regardless of how much knowledge your opponents have about it (of course bearing in mind the prohibition on “specific knowledge”).

#### ***Once you have picked a topic, pick an issue***

The Israel/Palestine conflict is NOT a debate case. It is 500+ debating cases. Large issues lead to confusing debates that lack clear and direct arguments which in turn lead to landslide Opposition wins. Pick a clear and easily defined issue to argue and pick a clear line of argumentation to defend it. If you find the need to define each word of your case statement, the area you have chosen to debate is too broad. Try again. If you can’t state your case clearly in one or two sentences your case is terrible, and you will lose.

***Example***

Subject Matter - Criminal Law and Punishment

Sub-Topic - Treatment of the mentally handicapped in the justice system.

Case Statement - This house believes that persons with mental handicaps should be punished the same as other people in the criminal justice system.

This is decent case statement, but I'm going to spend the majority of my time getting bogged down in debates about intent and the levels of mental handicap that we are talking about. This debate could go the way I want it to, but a good Opposition team will move this to Opposition strong ground very quickly.

Revised Case Statement - This house would execute mentally handicapped persons who are found guilty of capital offenses.

This new statement removes the idea of forming intent from the debate since it only applies to those who have been found guilty of capital offenses, so the requisite criminal intent is already established. The only issue is the issue of understanding the consequences of the action and understanding of the penalty. This debate is still hotly contested, but is sufficiently narrow that as a Government team, I can at least ensure that I know where the debate will go.

***Once you have picked an issue, pick your battles***

Every issue that makes for a good debate can be argued from a number of sides. Bad government teams try to cover all this ground. Good government teams realize that 2 or 3 of these sides are significantly stronger than the others. They will then focus the debate on these issues. This puts the Opposition team to a choice; they either argue a case on Government strong territory or they bring in the other sides of the issue which are inherently weak and can be smacked around by the MC. Either way the Opposition is already on the run.

Know that your case has 2 or 3 main issues that you are focusing on and keep them relevant throughout the round. Make sure the PMR can still focus on these issues. This brings me to my next point.

***Make sure you have a point/purpose/reason/need etc.***

A great number of cases fall simply on the fact that they attempt to solve a problem that either isn't real, or that no one cares about. The following 6

questions are ones that you ABSOLUTELY MUST go through before knowing if your case can win.

- 1 - What is the Problem?
- 2 - What is your Solution?
- 3 - Does your solution solve the problem, and is there a better way to solve it?
- 4 - What are the benefits of your plan?
- 5 - What are the costs of your plan?
- 6 - Is the Juice worth the Squeeze?

***Write your PMR before the round begins***

If you can't tell before the round begins what 2 or 3 main arguments will be important and relevant by the end of the round, then you have already given the debate to the Opposition and are hoping they give it back. This is not a strategy conducive to winning. I am not suggesting that you run tight cases or that you play dirty; I am merely suggesting it is necessary to control the round. Know what your Opposition will say, know the grounds of the debate and know the central questions and how to answer them. All of this should be in your head long before you start thinking about your 4 or 5 constructive arguments.

***There is no such thing as a tight case; there are only bad Opposition teams***

Some people will tell you that there are cases out there that are too tight. This is nonsense. I will bet a large amount of money that people who tell you there is such a thing as a tight case either lose a lot of Government rounds or spend a lot of time dropping in semis or quarters to teams they really should beat.

If a case has enough merit to be opposed in any meaningful sense it is fair game. If it cannot be opposed it is not because it is tight... it is because somewhere in it there is a truism or a tautology. There *are* such things as truisms and tautologies and they do guarantee a very quick loss if you run them. Look closely at your cases: tautologies are everywhere and are hard to spot. Running "balls up" cases (cases that are very open and contentious) is as a general rule, a good idea. It makes debating more fun, and will earn you a great deal of respect with the judge. That being said, the bubble round is not the place to earn respect.

***Treat the two government speakers as you would treat 1st prop and 2nd prop in a BP round***

Give the MC an extension to the case to bring in some new and interesting perspective.

Be very careful not to case shift. The fundamental idea of the case must be the same and the arguments must mesh perfectly, but the MC cannot just restate the PM's points in new words. There must be something real and something different that brings the MC into the round and that gives the LO something big to deal with. This puts the LO to a choice as to what they deal with and gives the PMR the opportunity to point out what the LO missed.

### ***How to Win as Government***

#### ***Think about cases before a tournament***

This sounds simple, but you would be surprised at how often I see case preparation happening on a plane or in a car on the way to a tournament. If you are preparing cases in the car on the way to a tournament or even worse in the bar on Saturday night after you found out you're in quarters, you have already lost.

Before every tournament I brainstorm 15-20 cases. I construct all of them going through the steps I outlined above. (There are Internet databases if you get really stumped). I then start the case building, and figuring out the Opposition to each case. Eventually I will have figured out that most of them are losers, but I will usually have 8 good ones left. I will set 3 of them aside for Sunday where I will need good cases, and I will build them into open round cases (we'll discuss open round case construction some other time). The remaining good cases get refined and ranked. I will usually put my more open and contentious cases near the beginning of any tournament (These are usually enjoyable debates that lend themselves to high speaker points which is good for bracket position in the early rounds. Also, if you happen to hit a team that you are not very evenly matched with, open cases will generally result in a more enjoyable round for all). The higher in the bracket I go and the closer to the bubble I get, the narrower and more focused the case that I will run. No one has ever said "sure he dropped in the bubble, but it was a really interesting and open case." (People OFTEN say this about teams in Semis, so keep those cases around).

#### ***Win the Round in the PMC***

It sounds crazy, but it isn't. The old rule of thumb is that you can't win the

round in the PMC but you sure can lose it. That is silly; if you can lose it, then of course you can win it. Most PMC's are dry and formulaic. They introduce a case and set the grounds for a debate. All of this is necessary, but it isn't even close to doing enough. You must also convince the judge. This should be the most impressive speech in the round. You have been given infinite time to compose this speech. You got to pick the topic. There is no reason that the LO should have a more impressive speech than you. Don't buy that the PMC should be formulaic. If the judge isn't at least leaning your way after the PMC you will most surely lose. Here are three things to remember

### ***The PMC should be the most compelling speech of the round***

You should use the PMC to set traps for the Opposition

Use the PMC to force the other team to accept false premises, argue on Government strong territory and keep the debate where you want it the whole time. If you do this right, the MO should never surprise you. Remember, the MO only has 7 minutes to respond, creativity is not all that easy. If you give them the path, they will always fall for it; then you hit them with the responses.

### ***Set up the PMR***

What I said earlier about writing the PMR before you start the case comes into play here. If you have already selected 2 or 3 main issues for the round, use the PMC to set up those issues. You are the quarterback of the round; you call the plays. If you get to pick the themes of the round you can pick the ones that fall on your side and you will have won before you are even out of the gate; this is effective case construction.

### ***The MC speech***

How do teams expect to win when they treat the MC as the idiot cousin to the PM? Most teams treat the MC as the place for the debater not good enough to PM; this is very poor strategy. The MC usually gets the worst constructive argument that the LO gets to smack around for a few minutes and other than that they usually just restate the PM's points in new words. I used to love being MC because if I did three things right, we almost always won the round.

### ***Take the MO out of the round***

If at the end of the MC speech, you aren't winning the round, you have lost the round. Simple as that. If the Opposition is ahead after the MC and the Opposition still has the LO to go, it's over. Sometimes as MC you will be called upon to refocus the case... this does not mean case shifting, but rather it means pointing out why the MO's speech didn't address YOUR case. Other rounds require you to just beat the crap out of him or her head on. Either way, the MC must be better than the MO, if you can't do this, you deserve to lose the round.

### ***Set up the LO***

There are a lot of ways to do this. Some rounds, I used to make a few throw-away red herring arguments that I was sure the LO would go after. Having the LO spend 3-4 minutes on points that were of no consequence to the round suddenly turned a 10 minute speech into a 6 or 7 minute speech

You can also frame the LO's speech for him or her by saying things like "Mr. Speaker, the LO has to do a, b and c to win this round of debate". You will be amazed at how many top debaters will follow this lead and debate what you tell them to debate rather than what they think should be debated. Needless to say when you do this you are either steering them to the wrong fights or you are setting them up to make arguments that the PM already has answers for.

### ***Set up the PMR, Part II***

This all flows from my previous comments. If you have run the case well, this is just icing on the cake.

### ***The PMR***

I can't teach anyone how to give great PMR's. Everybody has their own style and different things work for different people in different rounds. If you've given a great PMC and a great MC, then this is just a formality and the round is already over. If you have screwed up, then you may need to do something bigger. Here are two suggestions in that case.

1. Every second of the PMR is valuable. Don't thank people in the round or engage in needless formalities. Don't make cute but unfunny jokes that waste time (funny ones are okay). Don't refute throw away points made by the LO or force yourself to answer questions the LO asked. You know what

the 3 main issues are in this debate, you knew them before the round started. Get right to them.

2. If you find yourself repeating the same 4 points you made in your PMC, using the exact same words you did the first time, you have probably already lost the round.

If you apply these rules diligently, you may still not win every round, but you will win more Government rounds than before. But if you win the coin toss, it is still a good idea to pick Opposition, unless the other team got a hold of this manual.

# Case Building: The Seminar

## *The Point of Debating*

Before getting down to the nitty-gritty of how to build a case to win a particular round, it is worth noting that there is a reason why we all got involved with debating in the first place. We enjoy actively engaging with one another's arguments and options. The point of debating is, I take it, to engage in a sort of dialogue over an issue, the government and opposition team(s) bounce off and directly clash with one-another. It follows then that constructing a government case also has a 'point' as it were; you are trying to present an issue in such a way so as to foster that clash and contention in the round.

Most people get very shy around this particular role. It seems so much easier to run something well within your area of expertise, with a narrow focus, and one or two very solid and obvious arguments. It seems like running open, interesting cases will lead to Government losses. The reality of the situation is quite the opposite; by making bold arguments about tough subjects, you automatically force your Opposition to follow suit, and by virtue of being the Government team, you will have had much more time to think about these tough issues. Building cases this way is more challenging and more rewarding, and it leads to better rounds, higher scores, and a better likelihood of a good and winning case.

Perhaps more importantly, building cases this way leads to more interesting and more satisfying rounds. You'll learn more from the round and get more out of debating if you try to win rounds by making better arguments, not by running obscure cases which you found in a back issue of the Far East Economic Review from the mid-'80s. Don't be afraid of ordinary topics. Don't be afraid of your Opposition's knowledge. Don't be afraid of debating outside of your comfort zone.

**There are three factors which lead to a good debating case:**

### *Interesting*

By this I do not mean that talk about this subject would make you the life of any party, win friends and woo lovers, but rather that the average person has some sort of baseline understanding of the topic, and that it is the type of thing which the average person might listen to for forty minutes. This is desirable for two reasons. First, if your opponents have some understanding of the issue they

are able to actively engage with your arguments. This leads to better rounds, higher speaker scores, and you look very clever for running that particular topic. Second, if your judges understand and are interested in the topic, they will be able to discount stupid and irrelevant objections offered by the opposition. For instance the topic “The IAEA should alter its nuclear transport regulations” may be an intensely interesting subject on which to write a term paper, but likely neither the judges nor your opponents will have any idea what you’re talking about. The debate will likely get muddy and confusing, and the Government team will lose.

### ***Internally Decidable***

This is the criterion which most people new to case selection miss. In order to win a round, the judges must be able to make a decision at the end of the round. Nine times out of ten in a very muddled debate in which neither side is able to prove their case, the Opposition team will be declared winners. Think about it this way: can you present the information necessary to decide this case in just a few minutes? If no, you should not run the case.

For instance, consider the case “be it resolved that Canada double its military budget”. In order to reasonably decide what Canada should do financially, a judge will need to be able to see the federal budget, see where the money for such a venture would come from, etc. These are not resources which an average university debating judge possesses. Almost all topics involving cost fail to fulfill this criterion. People first starting out looking for cases see possible topics everywhere: the Canadian government should do x, we should recycle ‘more’, the UN should give more aid to Africa, etc. Almost all of the cases that new debaters dream up are not the type of thing which is internally decidable.

Imagine you were having a conversation with your best friend, do you think that the two of you would (theoretically) be able to figure the solution to the problem? Or would you have to look it up in a book? If the latter, don’t run the case.

### ***Broad***

This is the most important feature of winning debating topics. There is more than one way to argue your side of the topic. Most debating cases end up as one central Government contention, and a lot of fluff. Ideally, you should be able to prove your case in three or four separate and independent ways. When you can manage to do this, you force your Opposition to disprove each and every thing

which you've brought up. If they fail to adequately deal with any one line of argumentation, then you can prove your case that way. The important thing is that you don't have just the one important argument or idea; everything you say, every argument you bring to the table should demand a response. To do that, your topics need breadth. A good way of thinking about this, is to imagine you were to just present each argument, or way of approaching the issue individually. If all you had was that one tactic would you still be able to win? If you can think of three or four such tactics or approaches to a case then the topic is a good one. The difference between great cases and crappy cases is more often than not that the former has four important arguments, while the latter has one.

### ***Arguments: The Chicken of the Sea***

Debating is all about time. You have 17 minutes, your opponent has 17 minutes, at the end of that time you will win or lose based on how you used those 17 minutes. It's not a lot of time so do not waste it. The important thing is to have arguments. This is a simple point but most debaters ignore completely it. Most people get caught up in tangents, make baseless assertions, and spend almost all of that 17 minutes talking about things which are of no consequence to the decision at the end of the round. Whenever this happens you may as well be on mute, you are treading water and wasting the precious time you have.

### ***Case lines***

Arguments are meant to prove your case. The first step in constructing arguments then is to have some idea of what it is that you are proposing. What exactly do you have to prove in order to win the round? For instance, in the case "this house believes in mandatory organ donation", likely what the government needs to show is not that organ donation has some benefits, but that the individual right to determine what happens with their body either doesn't exist, isn't absolute, or doesn't apply after death. Have a firm idea of what you are required to prove and what you are not required to prove. It often helps to write what is required of you at the top of your notes; this is known as a case line. So in our example it would read "Because body rights do not exist after death." Or something like that.

Obviously it doesn't have to be so formal. It is, however, vital that you have an idea of what you are trying to do in the round. This brings us to the first test for a good argument.

### ***1. A Good Argument is an independent reason to do something.***

People tend to get quite fancy in constructing arguments. They often call them “the nature of this” or the “post-colonial context of that;” the reality is that an argument is nothing more than a reason to do something, ideally the thing which you proposed at the beginning of the round. Think about an individual argument this way: if a judge were to hear nothing else in the round but this one argument, would that be a good enough reason to adopt your position? If yes, then the argument should be included and developed. If not then the argument is a waste of your time and should be abandoned. Remember, time is the only resource you are working with in a debating round. Arguments which do not matter will not make you win, so don't worry about them.

By way of example, take the semifinal round of the 2003 North American Championships. The topic was “be it resolved that hate crimes should have no special status”. James Renihan and Gordon Shotwell were the Government team and had come up with three good arguments, and a case line which was something like 'mental states are not the type of thing which ought be prosecuted'. They got it into their heads that they needed a fourth argument and so thought of: “hate is a tremendously difficult thing to establish in court”. In the context of the round this is not a great argument, not because it is untrue, but because it didn't do a terribly good job of establishing that you shouldn't punish people for their thoughts. It didn't 'point towards' the thing which the round had to be about. If it doesn't matter, throw it out.

### ***2. Arguments are not statements.***

Almost everyone has trouble filling their time when they start debating. Part of this is nervousness, part of it is not knowing what to say, but for most people the problem is treating arguments as statements. When saying something about why we should invade Iran they give their reason “Iran has nuclear weapons” and then move on. For most new debaters, the part of their speech in which they explain their arguments looks eerily similar to the part of their speech where they outlined their arguments. They treat arguments like statements. This is reinforced by the way we talk about arguments; we tend to call them 'points' as if they were dimensionless brief entities.

Good arguments have depth. They start with some assumptions or a piece of information, and then through some logical process lead to a conclusion. The conclusion, if you're following the first piece of argument advice, should be the

case line which you presented at the beginning of the round. The important thing is that you can't just leave it with a statement and assume everyone sees how this fits into the round. You have to start from a premise and *show* the judge the thought process which led you to the conclusion. Lead them from the argument to the case which you are trying to prove. Thinking about arguments as a process also helps to make sure that they do in fact point back to your case.

### ***3. Good Arguments Are Essential Arguments***

Essential arguments are scary. They are at the very core of every issue, they are hard to think about, hard to prove, and hard to explain in seven minutes. But you should if at all possible seek them out and use them. Think about your topic, not as a debater but just as a person. Think about what you would say the topic is about if you didn't have to beat any Opposition team. Surely if you were to think about mandatory organ donation you'd say that it was essentially about organ donation. If you were to think about land redistribution, you'd say that there was probably an essential point about ownership. So often when we start building debating cases, we lose sight of these essential issues, we want to sweep them under the rug, hide them, and talk about things which are easier and more superficial. Don't do that. The reason is quite simple, when you present the issues essential to a round, and address them in an honest, authentic manner, you force your Opposition to follow suit. They have to present analysis which is on your level, this is just as hard for your Opposition as it is for you; however, you have much more time to think about these issues and therein lies your advantage.

More importantly talking about essentials better serves the general purpose of debating. If you stretch your mind and work with the hard issues, the difficult arguments, you will become a better debater, and your rounds will be more interesting and satisfying, which is why we are all involved in this thing.

### ***Case Studies***

I'd like to conclude by taking a look at two cases, one not so great and one relatively good. The first was run in an in-round at the 2004 McMaster Pro-am tournament. The case was "be it resolved that the International Atomic Energy Agency should legislate that if one country is transporting nuclear waste through the coastal waters of another country, they should notify that country." In terms of the aforementioned principles of case selection, this case is very problematic. First of all, it is not interesting, it is not something that anyone in the round knows anything about. The result was that the Opposition team could make statements

about the IAEA or about the danger of nuclear waste and the judges had no idea whether they were right or wrong. Secondly, it is not an internally decidable case. In order to make a judgment about the issue you must know exactly how dangerous it is to ship nuclear waste through a country's coastal waters. The debate degraded into a discussion of fact, which no one in the room had the resources to decide. Thirdly it is a narrow topic. There really isn't a lot to say beyond 'it's real dangerous to ship waste through coastal waters'. This was really the good reason for the IAEA to intervene in this manner. The Government team lost not because they were worse debaters but because the case wasn't properly constructed.

The second example was run at the 2005 National Championships. The case was "be it resolved that land taken during apartheid should be redistributed to black farmers in South Africa." This case was much more promising. First it's interesting, generally people have some knowledge about South Africa and about redistribution more generally. Second it can be decided with only the information presented in the round, the judges don't require external information to decide who won. Finally there are a number of ways to independently approach the issue. You can talk about the practical benefits to South Africa's poor, you can talk about the moral obligation to return things which were wrongfully taken, and you can talk about what land means in the African context. Each of these arguments is an independent, essential reason to redistribute land in South Africa. In order to win the round the Opposition must refute each of these issues.

This is a harder way of approaching case construction. There are no tricks in this approach, no places to hide. It is the only way to consistently beat good Opposition teams. More importantly it is what debating should be about: winning rounds on strength of argument and analysis.

## Figuring Out What to Talk About: How to Find Engaging and Debatable Case Ideas

Coming up with good case ideas is difficult for experienced and beginning debaters alike. A significant number of responsibilities are placed on Government teams in case selection:

- A well-chosen case must have clear and simple parameters, limits and focus to ensure a clean debate with an accessible opposition.
- A well-chosen case must be balanced in argumentative strength on both sides to make the debate fair for both teams.
- A well-chosen case must be accessible, not requiring a level of background knowledge unreasonable to expect of opponents, judges or spectators, and not so reliant on knowledge that the debate becomes about which team knows more rather than which team can make stronger arguments.
- A well-chosen case must enable deep analysis that allows competitors to show their skill level and make the round enjoyable for judges and spectators.
- A well-chosen case must be enjoyable, as debaters are more likely to be persuasive when talking about topics they enjoy, and because judges are more likely to score higher on rounds that they enjoy being a part of.

Understandably, finding topics that satisfy all of these requirements can be tough. As a result, beginning debaters sometimes fall back on common, well-known cases, cases based on issues commonly known to facilitate debate, or cases written by others. While this is enough for a debate, it is far from an ideal strategy. A Government team that invests time and energy into creating distinctive, original and well-thought cases gains a number of advantages:

- The ability to identify topics that can be debated well and argued effectively is a debating skill, as a good debater can distinguish between issues that can be argued effectively in a debate setting and those that cannot (for reasons such as complexity, informational density, or superficiality).
- Unique, well done cases allow judges to better distinguish top debaters and, as a result, create an opportunity for rounds to be higher scoring overall. Such cases allow debaters on both teams to display their ingenuity and originality in a way that cases everyone has heard before do not. In

- addition, a judge that is enjoying a round is likely to want to reward participants for making his/her job pleasant.
- For better or for worse, the ability to choose the topic is a positional advantage given to the Government team. Case choice allows Government debaters to ensure that they feel comfortable with the topic being discussed. The structure of debates gives both sides advantages and disadvantages; as a result, debaters on either side should use the tools at their disposal, as a strong opponent will use all the tools at his or hers. (Whether or not squirrelability and the advantage it gives to Government teams is fair and desirable is a constant source of controversy in CUSID. However, in debates where the advantage is given, it only makes sense to take it regardless of one's position on the principle of the issue.)

Given all of this, this article hopes to help you find interesting, original and debatable case ideas. Though the task of finding such case ideas cannot be made easy per se, it can be made easier by looking in the right places and approaching the task with the right mindset.

### *Where to look for case ideas*

The best way to find good cases is to always be on the lookout. Cases can be found pretty much everywhere, including the morning newspaper, the weekly news magazine, class, work, casual discussion with others, or hobby enjoyment, including sports, arts, or anything else. These kinds of in-passing “hey, that could be a case!” moments will not give you polished case gems, nor are they certain to put you on paths that will invariably lead you to debatable cases. Often such spontaneous case moments will have to be discarded after reflection, more often than not for superficiality. However, such constant case awareness will allow you to spot issues and ideas to get you started, and when successful, these cases make for very interesting debates. As a result, top case constructors always have case searching in the back of their minds.

A few signs of contentiousness are worth keeping in mind when looking for cases in everyday situations. Issues that instantly evoke in you strong opinion or outrage are good places to start. Controversy and uncertainty are definite signs that a situation may lead to a good case. Any moment where actions or decisions are questionable can be worth thinking about as a subject for debate.

Spur-of-the-moment case ideas can be gold when they come to you, but are certainly not a dependable, steady source of top tournament cases. A second

valuable source of case ideas is issues that you personally feel strongly about. Everyone with university-level intelligence has topics of interest, be they political, historical, corporate, historical, athletic, philosophical, scientific or otherwise. In many instances, the construction of such cases flows logical from your personal opinions on a given subject following reflection on parameters and structures. Asking yourself, “What do I care about these days?” is always a good place to start to find cases worth talking about, because you obviously care about such issues for a reason.

In many cases, debates over issues you feel strongly about can be boiled down to a principle you feel strongly about that can create many debates by being placed in different contexts. For example, you may feel strongly about health care privatization, believing that market solutions improve performance, and having strong arguments to that effect. Taking that principle, one you’ve established the topic as one you know and enjoy arguing, and thinking about different contexts in which it can be applied (such as telecommunications, for example), allows you to take one case and turn it into many, all with originality based on the uniqueness of the new situations. The relative ease of this method of case construction is why debaters can often be associated with a particular style of case.

Sometimes, of course, especially leading up to a tournament, you need more cases than personal interests or moments found in passing will give you. In those moments, you need to actively look for cases. Newspapers and magazines are the obvious place to start. Also worthwhile is becoming familiar with websites that promote controversial issues, be those sites issue-driven or ideology-driven. When reading such materials in a case construction perspective, look for controversies based on ideological differences, paying careful attention dissenting opinions described in articles. Informational articles can also be used for general case thought; when reading such articles, ask yourself what people might disagree over in the given context.

A final, fun way to come up with cases is to look up controversies within a given subject you particularly want to debate. A given debater, could, for example, decide that he/she wants to find a case about professional golf. Such a debater could browse golf websites, flip through golf magazines, or maybe google search the words professional golf with words such as controversy or issues. More than likely a situation premised on understandable disagreement will be found. Such a method can be used with pretty much any topic one might decide one wants to debate; in most cases, the fundamental issue of the found debate will turn out to be much more general than the topic initially chosen (for example,

starting with golf and ending with gender issues in a given golf context, using arguments that could be applied to a range of gender issues.)

### ***Distinguishing good and bad case ideas***

Once you've developed a list of possible cases, the next step is to filter out the ones that will make for good debates, as the vast majority of issues that debaters instinctively see as potential cases will be discarded after review. The most obvious sign of a bad case idea is not being able to construct a complete, strong case from it, a question other articles in this guide will help you gauge. A few questions to be asked about the idea, however, can help you filter out some bad cases before investing time into attempting a full case construction:

- *Is this issue contentious enough to be discussed in a debate of the given length?*

A sure sign of a bad debate is one where the issues underlying the position of one side (or both) is so superficial that that side is left to repeat itself continuously by the middle or late stages of the debate. Alternatively, the controversy underlying a debate may not be as important to debaters talking for fun as it seems in the real world (for example, changes in magnitude/percentage of a given action rather than overarching changes). To prevent these problems, make sure that someone hearing the topic for the first time will recognize its importance, that the issue can be analyzed from a variety of perspectives, and, looking ahead to the end of the round, that the topic has enough depth to remain worth talking about after forty minutes.

- *Do you understand the topic?*

If you're not comfortable with the topic you've chosen, you won't sound as persuasive. More importantly, you risk falling on an opponent with the familiarity needed to expose your discomfort, making you look foolish in a way that's entirely your fault.

- *Will the Opposition feel comfortable with the topic?*

A few sub-questions can be used to establish this: Is the topic accessible in terms of information? Is the point of the debate clear? Does the Opposition have material to work with? Would you object to opposing the case yourself?

Any "no" answers reflect an unfair case. If necessary, ask others around you whether they would feel comfortable opposing the case.

- *Are there structural factors inhibiting victory on a given topic?*

Double burdens (having to successfully argue more than one issue to win), informational uncertainty/contestability, excessive controversy to the point of possible judge bias, and other similar factors are possible signs that a case should not be run. These types of cases are not necessarily unrunnable, but given their comparatively high difficulty, should generally be avoided.

### ***Conclusion***

This article does not pretend to make case construction simple; finding original topics worth discussing, similar to the beginnings of any creative work, will always take effort. A systematic approach, however, as outlined here, can help focus thoughts and identify good topics when they can be seen. It is the hope of the author that these tips will help you create fun, innovative debate topics that make for better rounds and help you develop your ability to identify topics that can be effectively argued, a crucial skill as much in debate as in life.

# Analysis: Individual Points & the Entire Round

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## How to Construct Points

One of the key components to a case is a set of “points.” Every participant in a debate introduces points and refutes points. To do this effectively, it is important to understand what exactly points are, and how they should be constructed.

### *What Are Points?*

Although I will continue to use it in this article, I don’t really like the term ‘points’- I prefer calling them ‘reasons,’ because that is what they are. Each point in a case should be a reason why your side of the debate is superior. Every one of your points should act as an argument that leads to the conclusion that your proposal is a good one. To do this, each point needs to have two premises: a fact or observation coupled with analysis or a principle of some sort.

### *Facts and Observations*

Since a point is an argument in itself, it cannot simply be a fact, as a bare fact contains no normative value. Facts and observations act simply as the first premise to the argument that makes up a point. For an example, let’s pretend that I am running a case about banning pitbulls. I am probably going to want to talk about how dangerous they are. However, if my first argument is “pitbulls are very dangerous, so we should ban them”, I am not going to do very well in this debate. All I have done here is make an observation, but I have not fleshed it out with any analysis. As the point stands, there is no logical connection between the pitbull being dangerous and it being banned. After all, there are many dangerous things that we do not ban, such as cars and guns. While this point has provided the audience with an observation that is important to the round, it has not ultimately given any reason to ban pitbulls.

I don't mean to suggest any significant difference between facts and observations. When using the terms, I simply think of facts as containing more robust or detailed information—'pitbulls kill 10 people a year,' or something similar. For the purposes of this article, hard facts and observations (or even assertions) or fact play the same role.

### *Principles and Analysis*

To turn the above observation into an argument, we need to introduce a principle or analysis of some sort into the round. A principle is a judgment that explains why the observation that you are pointing out is something bad or something good. For example, I may rely on the principle that the government should use its powers to ban harmful items, as the primary responsibility of government is to protect its citizens. If I couple this principle with my observation that pitbulls are dangerous, I now have a complete argument (it may not be any good, but that's not the point- yet). Other principles I may employ are things like "causing death is morally impermissible" or "these dangerous pets violate the obligation to be a good neighbour." I dare anybody to use that last one in a round of debate.

Philosophical principles like the above do not *always* have to be introduced in each point, but they should always at least be implicit. For instance, I may analyze the meaning of my observation, and explain how it has an effect that can be agreed to be detrimental. For instance: "Pitbulls kill ten people every week. At this rate, our workforce will soon be depleted, and our economy will fall into a terrible spiral, lowering the GDP of our nation and forcing everybody into poverty." I have not outlined any principle in this argument, but I have (against all odds) analyzed my fact to show why it gives reason for the judge to support my proposition. Though I have used an absurd example, this approach is not always absurd; "we should not fund reformist student groups in Iran because it will encourage the Iranian government to kill them" does not (explicitly) state any principle, but it does analyze a course of action to the point where we are presented with a consequence that may be understood by the judge as clearly undesirable, thus providing him or her with reason to agree with your side.

It should be noted that even in the above two cases, where no explicit principle is outlined, the arguments still derive their normative force from implicit principles: 'poverty is bad' and 'dead students is bad.' These principles sound fairly uncontroversial and obvious, and so one may be safe in not elucidating them.

However, you should always be careful when choosing not to explain the underlying principle behind your analysis, for two reasons.

First, it may be that there is more than one principle that could be motivating your argument. Perhaps you believe that killing students is simply wrong in itself, but it could also be that you don't wish the students to be killed because it will make it harder to cause a revolution in Iran, rather than out of any concern for the lives of these individuals. Explaining what the basis (or bases) of your argument is gives it more depth, makes it more interesting, and encourages people to engage with your material- all things that judges want to see.

Second, if you do not engage in a principled discussion at all, then you leave yourself open to an attack from the opposition, and allow them to set the terrain of the debate. Your opposition may state "yes, students will die, but those deaths are worth the price of overthrowing the Iranian government, because....". At this point, your argument is dead in the water - it has been entirely accepted, but denied to have any force. The fact that you never explained why those deaths were unacceptable means that you do not yet even have a stance in this argument. By getting in the game early, and explaining why you think that those deaths are bad, you keep your point relevant and interesting, no matter what the response is.

### ***Point Logic***

Once you have properly constructed a point, by making a factual observation coupled with some combination of principle and analysis, you have not necessarily made a good argument. The logic of your point needs to support the proposition that you are making. The conclusion of the argument encapsulated within your point *should be your case statement*, no less and (usually) no more. There are two main ways in which your argument may fail to point toward your proposal.

First, your argument may simply have a different target altogether. For instance, in the pitbull case, I may claim the following: "pitbulls can be trained to be violent, and since anybody can buy a dog, and criminals may buy them, it is not safe to allow them." This argument isn't totally off-target, but it seems to be coming closer to arguing for *regulating* the sale of pitbulls, rather than banning it. If the Opposition claims that they will set up a pitbull registry, and refuse to sell to criminals, the problem that this point is highlighting is dealt with, without ceding the Government case.

Similarly, in the funding Iranian student groups case, I may make the following point: “sanctions will not get the government overthrown, and we need the government overthrown because it is bad.” I have not argued in favour of funding student groups - I have argued *against* sanctions. If the world was such that we *had* to either fund student groups or impose sanctions, this *might* work as an argument to fund student groups, but that is certainly not the case in this scenario, and it almost never is in any other one either. You will see this kind of mistake often coming in the constructive matter of an opposition speaker: “You shouldn’t ban the pitbull, because the Siberian tiger is way more dangerous.” This has nothing to do with banning pitbulls, only banning Siberian tigers.

Second, your argument may indeed point toward your case, but it may not do so very accurately. Go back to my argument about pitbulls being dangerous, and how it is wrong for the government to allow dangerous things. This is a very broad argument, which, as mentioned already, captures cars, guns and Siberian tigers within its claim. Unless I am prepared to argue for banning all of these things, my argument is poorly tailored for my case. It needs some form of refining so I can explain why it specifically deals with pitbulls—some form of cost/benefit analysis may work here (“a government can only allow dangerous things if they serve a sufficient public good; pitbulls don’t”).

Instead of being overly broad, an argument can also be too narrow in scope. If I am arguing that we should invade China, and my first argument is that we need to stop them flooding Canadian markets with cheap clothing, then I am making a big mistake. We may indeed want to stop our markets being flooded with cheap clothing, but we can do that without invading; we can place an embargo on the clothes. While it is true that invasion *will* achieve our aim (just like banning all dangerous things *would* catch pitbulls), it isn’t a very good reason to go ‘above and beyond the call of duty’ and dust off some Canadian rifles.

### ***Opposing Cases***

Remembering what a point needs—facts/observations coupled with principles/analysis and accurate logic—will not only help you build much stronger cases. It also allows you to be an excellent Opposition debater, even (especially) in rounds where the Government has proposed a case that you do not know anything about. Pay attention to how your opponents construct their points. What are their principles? Do they lead to the conclusions that they think that they do? If not, point it out; they might have more knowledge than you, but they can’t win without any valid arguments.

A lot of the examples I have used have been pretty obvious, but sometimes they are not. An example that comes up a lot is when one team claims, as an argument, that their opponent's proposal "doesn't work." The fact that something does not work, *on its own*, is NOT a reason not to do it. Unless they also display a harm in trying, then the fact that it doesn't work is no reason not to do it, unless we are very lazy. On its own, the fact that a plan is highly unlikely to work is not a reason not to do it.

### ***Conclusion***

Despite their immense importance in debating, people don't often pay a lot of attention to how they construct their points. All of your points should be a reason why the judge should agree with your side. By keeping this in mind, both building cases and tearing them apart becomes much easier.

## Deepening your Analysis

For successful debating, *what* you argue is often less important than *how* you argue. While it is important to pick fair and interesting topics, it is the substance of the debate, how arguments are presented, and how they are supported, that make the difference between acceptable debates and exciting debates. There are no great topics, only great cases. By the same token, it is important not only to pick good arguments to support your case, but to develop those arguments so that they are clear, concrete, and defensible. To show how to develop arguments that can make a great, and hopefully winning case, we will consider a specific topic.

The topic we will be using for this discussion relates to a practice that has been considered by Belgium. Belgium is considering a law against war crimes and genocide that have a universal jurisdiction. This means that a Belgian court can prosecute people accused of genocide or war crimes anywhere in the world, and that the accused and the alleged victim need have no tie to Belgium whatsoever. For the sake of this discussion, we will be developing arguments against such a law being passed.

One argument that comes up in a great many cases relating to questionable government action is the so-called social contract argument. We will consider this first. In this context, one might expect to see an argument that goes as follows: “Criminal laws are based on the idea of a social contract between citizens and their government. Punishment is only legitimate if a social contract exists between the accused and the government. This law allows people outside of the social contract to be punished, and therefore this law is illegitimate.” This argument, as it stands, is problematic. It is problematic first because it is vague. Many different scholars have used the notion of the social contract to express different ideas. Second, this argument has an obvious problem. We punish people typically understood to be outside the social contract all of the time: visitors to a country, and non-citizen immigrants. To develop the argument further, and make it as strong as possible, we will do two things. First, we will analyze the argument, to make sure it is stated in the most concrete and clear terms possible, and develop the argument in such a direction. Second, we will criticize the argument, and develop the argument in order to make it more resistant to criticism.

To begin with: what does it mean to say that “criminal laws are based on the idea of a social contract?” Well, why does a criminal law need to be based on anything? Because it involves the use of force. Most people think that coercion is

the kind of thing that needs to be justified. Chances are, your judge will believe this pretty strongly, and your opponents won't question this. Also, everybody knows what you are talking about when you say that coercion needs to be justified: it means that it's not okay to arbitrarily use force to get what you want. It can only be defended under specific circumstances. So, this principle, that coercion must be justified, is a good, concrete, clear principle. Our argument justifies the coercion involved in criminal law through the "social contract." What does this mean? Well, the social contract can mean a lot of things, and so the term can get confusing. However, in this context it is pretty clear that what is meant is that government use of force is justified when used on the governed because there is some sort of implied consent to government action. We probably want to get more specific than this, so we can say that because the Belgian government is a parliamentary democracy, people have the opportunity to vote in elections and speak out about issues that concern them. There is access to the political process, and ultimately, if people don't like the outcomes of the Belgian political process, they can denounce their citizenship and leave. The fact that a person chooses to stay in a Belgium, and participate in the democratic process, and enjoy the benefits and protections of Belgian laws, implies consent to the Belgian system. The price that is paid for the privilege of being part of the Belgian system, and reaping all of the benefits offered, is the consent to accept the coercive power of criminal law.

So, instead of claiming that criminal laws are based on the social contract, we come to the argument that the coercive power of criminal laws have to be justified consent that can be inferred from government participation. This argument is far more clear, concrete, and specific than our original argument. So, what about our obvious objection, that this argument doesn't allow punishment of non-citizens who reside within the borders of Belgium? Well, that can be justified on the basis of the fact that traveling to and residing in a country implies a temporary consent to live by Belgian law for the duration of one's stay. The law we are considering would have us punish people who never, in any way, consented to government by Belgian law.

By criticizing our own arguments, and bolstering our arguments against obvious criticism, we develop a stronger argument. Now, instead of a poorly elaborated point, we have a central idea, that consent is needed to justify the coercive power of government, that is supported by substantial analysis. It should be emphasized that it is not enough just to have a clear central idea, but it is also important to include in an actual debate, analysis, elaboration, and justification. It is important not only to state one's central idea, but to elaborate, as we did in

the previous two paragraphs, why the central idea is a good one. The discussion of parliamentary processes implying consent, the observation that people can leave Belgium if they don't like it, as well as the rest of what was discussed, is useful in elaborating what is meant by our central idea, and why it is important.

Is there anything else we should be worried about? Well, one obvious thing to do when your opponent says that x is justified by y (which is what we did) is to say that x can be justified by z too. Our opponents can argue that laws and coercion can be justified (or are justified) by the need to preserve universal human rights. Murder violates human rights, so the government has the right to ban murder. Genocide violates human rights, wherever it happens, and so we ban genocide. Of course, we don't prosecute murders all over the world, but that is because most of the time, other governments take care of it. Genocide and other war crimes usually only happen if a state is in general is a failed one, and so it is necessary to step in.

It is undoubtedly useful to think up as many oppositions to your argument as possible, so that hopefully your opponents won't take you by surprise, it is not a good idea to try to anticipate every response to your argument when you present it for the first time. After all, there are a great many responses to every point you can make, and it would take far more time than can be allotted to try to pre-empt every response you can. Also, since your opponent probably won't offer most of the oppositions you discuss, you could end up wasting a lot of time. However, it often happens, in the course of thinking of how you would respond to various objections to your point, that you come up with an idea that carries your point further. In this case there is something useful to be observed. The opposition we discussed, that the enforcement of basic human rights justifies government use of force, implies that it is the job of Belgium to ensure that other countries maintain some sort of minimum standard of decency. The problem with this is that many different countries have different notions of what is decent. Cuba thinks that Belgium's capitalism is indecent. Saudi Arabia thinks that Belgium's secularism is indecent. Serbia thinks that Bosnia's treatment of ethnic Serbs is indecent. Perhaps France will decide that Canada's treatment of the Quebecois is indecent. If the solution to perceived bad behavior in other countries is criminal prosecution, we would be foolish to think that only Belgium would avail itself of such a solution. If Belgium can enforce its minimum standards of decency on people of a foreign country, than any country can do the same. They will not, however, all hold the same types of conduct to be criminal. The end result of the popularization of this practice of universal jurisdiction will inevitably be chaos. Furthermore, there are reasons to believe this won't end merely with criminal prosecution. If coercion in

the form of criminal justice is to be justified in this way, why would war not be? The notion that consent is a precursor to force is important not only as a moral principle, but as a practical one. It is only by developing consent based government that we are able to have peace. Consent limits government action to spheres of legitimacy. If legitimacy is decided according to who it is appropriate to coerce, peace is possible. If the question is only what it is appropriate to coerce, peace becomes impossible. To deal with those failures of governments to behave decently, we have multilateral institutions such as the UN criminal tribunals. These institutions are fundamentally different because they receive their consent from the governments of the world.

In the previous paragraph, we found in considering our response to an opposition to our point, that we have developed analysis that strengthens our point. We have developed reasons why consent not only justifies government action, but have shown why it can be the only justification for government action. This comes much closer to proving our case than our original point did.

So, by examining an argument, analyzing it to make it clear and concrete, and furthering and strengthening the argument by considering potential oppositions to our case, we were able to develop an argument that not only can win a round, but enrich it.

## Picking the Important Points in a Round

The PMR and LOR are often explained as being summary speeches, where a debate should be “crystallized” into its “main points.” This instruction raises an important question; how does one determine what the important points actually are? Although it is sometimes quite clear, it can often be difficult to determine what those deciding issues are. In this article I will suggest two basic ways of approaching this evaluation, and talk about some ways that an individual might make such a determination.

Since the person(s) who will, in the end, decide what issues were crucial in a round is the judge, debaters need to be able to try and determine what he or she thinks is important in the round. There are, as far as I can tell, two basic ways that a judge might make this determination—one quite objective, and the other predominantly subjective. The two approaches are not mutually exclusive (since there can be more than one important point) and are likely employed by the same judge in the same round quite often.

### *The Two Approaches*

In the objective approach, a judge allows the debaters to determine amongst themselves what the key issues in the round are. This doesn’t mean that anything a debater claims is important is indeed important. Instead, it means that whatever the debaters spend the most time talking about *is* the important matter in that round, regardless of whether the judge thinks that it should have been. For example, if in a round about the headscarf ban in France, the two teams primarily talk about the risk of sunburn to an uncovered head, the objective approach would lead a judge to evaluate the round on who was more convincing on that issue, regardless of how inane he or she thought it was. This is obviously an extreme example, but there are plenty of good reasons why it is legitimate to use this approach, as will be looked at later.

The subjective approach involves a judge determining what the important issues in the round are by employing his or her own knowledge and opinions. For this judge, certain topics have crucial issues inherent to them, regardless of whether they are brought up in the round (although they may only learn of them *from* the round). Under this approach, two sentences about religious freedoms in the context of the headscarves round may be more important than 20 minutes on sunburns, even if those two sentences are never referred to by any other speaker in the round.

### ***What a Debater Can Do***

There are two basic questions worth looking at after recognizing these two different approaches a judge might take to determine the important issues in the round- how can a debater determine what the judge might deem them to be, and which approach *should* a judge take when evaluating a round?

As a debater, it is fairly easy to determine what points are important under the objective model, as you are (hopefully) just as capable of listening to a round as a judge is. If a certain issue(s) has been discussed a great deal in the round, then anybody who allows the debaters to determine amongst themselves what the crucial issues in the round are will need to see it discussed in the LOR/PMR. Under the subjective approach, where the judge has determined what is important on his or her own (with input from the debaters, of course), how can a debater pick the same important issues that the judge has?

We have to assume our judges are evaluating the round on reasonable, logical grounds. It might not always be true, but it is impossible to guess what a total yahoo thinks of a round. How do we determine what a reasonable person would think is important?

First, look for issues that ‘go to the heart of the matter,’ issues where it would be nonsensical to have the debate without it. For instance, in a debate about using torture to extract information from people, the reliability of that information is essential to the topic. Nobody in their right mind can say “the issue of whether the information is any good has little bearing on whether we should torture people for it.” This issue goes right to the heart of the debate. Similarly, women’s rights are inseparable from any debate about abortion. Whether you feel that it is the *most* important point or not, it would be quite implausible to say that women’s rights are *not* a very important part of the abortion debate. When looking at points in a round, ask yourself whether you could reasonably claim that the decision should be made without considering that issue. If the answer is no, then it is a point that you should be dealing with in your summary.

Second, look for points that claim to have the greatest impact. If I am arguing that we should pass a certain piece of legislation, and I argue both that it will save a million lives and that it will provide a springboard to allow us to aesthetically improve our cities, it is a good bet that the first argument is much more important, *even if* the latter was the primary aim of the legislation. This is

obviously a very extreme example, but any issue which touches on very important benefits/detriments has a prima facie claim to importance, which would tend to only be offset if the claim was outlandish and/or unsupported.

Third, on a totally different tact, remember to look at your judge(s) while you speak. While many judges like to remain stone-faced while they adjudicate a round, there are also many who will betray what they feel to be interesting or important. This approach is much less reliable than the above two, but I have yet to hear of any judge who tried to mislead the debaters into going down useless paths.

### ***What Judges Should Do***

The final issue to examine is which approach judges *should* take when evaluating a round, keeping in mind that one does not exclude the other. A similar discussion can be had over how a judge should evaluate the accuracy of facts and arguments in a round, but there are also differences between that debate and one concerning solely issue-choosing.

Each approach has its benefits. The objective approach allows individuals to structure a debate in the way that they want, focus on the issues that they find interesting, and prevents judges from giving possibly undue weight to a single sentence in one debater's speech simply because they deemed it to be important or interesting. The subjective approach, on the other hand, allows a judge to ignore frivolities such as sunburns when looking at a round. If the headscarf debate deals with sunburns and fashion for 21 minutes, and religious freedoms and discrimination for 7, should the judge truly see sunburns as being three times more important than religious freedoms when deciding this round? If the Government decisively proved that headscarves prevent sunburns, but the Opposition showed that they subjugate women and incite religious hatred, should this round be awarded to Government? The subjective approach allows the judge to evaluate each issue in the round in terms above and beyond the amount of time spent on them, and also allows him or her to penalize (in scores) four debaters who, in a round about same-sex marriage, neglect to mention equality or religion.

Although there is a great deal of merit in the subjective approach, I personally prefer the objective method. Scenarios like the one listed above only occur if all debaters in the round allow them to. While it may seem unfair for the side who won the sunburn argument to take the debate along with it, the other team did allow the discussion to be taken up with that issue, instead of labeling it as foolish from the outset and focusing on what they deemed to be more important.

Although the most explicit issue-choosing occurs in the summary speeches, all speeches should allocate their time so that the important issues get most of it.

Despite my general preference for the objective method, it is probably much more reasonable (and necessary) that some element of subjectivity enter the judging process along with it. For instance, if two teams refuse to agree on what is important, and one side spends all of their time on sunburns while the other discusses religious freedom, the objective method seems to be at a loss for what to settle on as the crucial issue in the round. In a scenario like this, a judge would have little recourse but to employ a subjective, though hopefully fully reasonable, method of determining what issue(s) the round should be decided on. Such scenarios, however, tend to be rare.

It is very unlikely that there is much consensus over which of these approaches is superior, and they each have their problems. It is also very possible that the best judging approach lies somewhere in the middle- judges can employ notions of 'reasonability' as discussed above when evaluating a round, but not their own specialized knowledge and research. Or, judges can generally use the subjective approach, but must give sufficient importance to any topic that the round focuses on for a substantial amount of time, no matter how foolish they deem it to be. In any event, it is important for all participants in a debate, and members of the debating community in general, to think about such an issue, if only to make their own judging decisions all the more thought-out and legitimate.

### *Conclusion*

Given that consensus is unlikely to emerge as to how a judge should determine what is important in a round, the safest bet for a debater is to determine subjectively what they believe to be important from the beginning, and then focus their speeches on those issues, so to try and meet both the subjective and objective criteria for importance in one go. This also allows substantial planning of the summaries ahead of time (which is not to say a debater should not be ready to alter these decisions if need be). In the event that such pre-planning is not possible, the best approach is probably to use tactics for evaluating subjective importance noted above, but to be sure to mention any alternative issues that took up a lot of time in the debate, even if just to explain why you do not feel them to be sufficiently important. By keeping both approaches in mind, and by thinking of what makes a point important in a subjective analysis, it is unlikely that a debater would miss something that a judge deemed to be crucial. After that, all you have to do is actually win the arguments!

## More than Refutation: Opposition Constructive Arguments

Although many of the issues discussed in this article relate to all constructive arguments as opposed to just those made by the Opposition, the primary focus of this article is on the latter. It may seem strange to devote an entire article to a consideration of this topic, but in fact, understanding why and how to create Opposition constructive arguments is extremely important and something often misunderstood by inexperienced debaters.

### *What are Opposition Constructives and Why Should You Bother Making Them?*

Although the Opposition of a case can technically be won on pure refutation—though in practice this almost never happens—there are many benefits to building up an Opposition case. These should be reflected in both your speaker scores and number of wins.

First, when the Opposition makes constructive arguments, it improves the clash of the debate, as it gives the Government something completely new to attack. This leads to an all around improvement in the level of debate in the round, and thus a more enjoyable round to watch, judge and participate in.

Second, constructive Opposition points allow the Opposition the chance to take the debate in new directions; this has the effect of making it more difficult for the Government to address everything that is said on side Opposite, and gives the Opposition the chance to steal superior positions such as the moral high ground.

Third, at the time of writing, there is a movement within CUSID to place an increased burden on the Opposition, in the form of requiring some sort of unified theory or thrust within the Opposition argument. This is being pushed specifically to combat the fact that Opposition teams have a huge advantage in CUSID at present, winning 65-75% of the decisions at an average tournament. Essentially, it is too easy to simply contradict everything said by a Government team. Improving the quality of Opposition constructive points may soon be required to win on Opposition in CUSID.

### ***What is the Difference Between an Opposition Constructive and Refutation?***

In order to bring refutation points, you need to listen carefully to the arguments made by the opposing team, and find logical, factual or other flaws in those arguments. In order to make an Opposition Constructive, you DO NOT need to hear the arguments being made. You should, in fact, be able to make your Opposition constructives directly from the resolution and case description. This is the primary and most important difference between an Opposition constructive and a refutation: Opposition constructive arguments are not dependent on flaws in logic or presentation; they are inherent to the case and you need only find which constructives exist in the situation you are presented with.

### ***Teamwork***

Clearly, the MO is the most difficult position in which to develop compelling constructive argumentation. The time crunch becomes very difficult to deal with unless you have solid teamwork. The preferred method for going about developing MO constructives is for the MO to begin developing these constructive arguments as soon as the case is introduced. Meanwhile, the LO should be keeping track of the PM arguments and providing refutation ideas. The reason for this ordering is two-fold. First, it is essential that the MO be comfortable with the constructive points they will be presenting, otherwise they can sound awkward and leave gaping holes in the argumentation. If the LO develops the main idea of the argument, there is the risk that the MO may not understand or be able to properly fill in the argument in the short amount of time before they must actually present it. Second, the MO should have a much easier time of reviewing the arguments presented by the Government and filling in the “blanks” of the refutation because each of the separate refutations need not be as long or involved as the constructive points.

The LO should be sure to take note of the constructive arguments used by the MO and incorporate them into the LO speech. As well, the LO can be working on their own constructive arguments during the MO speech and be ready to continue taking down refutation during the MC speech. If the LO needs more time to complete the constructive points, the MO should keep track of the MC constructive points and work on refutation. As well, the LO should attempt to ask POIs primarily in the PM speech to give the MO time to work, and the MO should ask POIs primarily in the MC speech. Be sure to share the basis of those POIs with each other as they are often useful for refutation. Communication and teamwork are the key to a successful Opposition.

### ***Five Techniques for Developing Successful Opposition Constructive Points***

1. *If the Government is proposing a change in plan/policy, ask the question “Why was the original plan/policy instituted?”* There must have been problems that these plans/policies were meant to address, and more than likely, changing the plan/policy will result in ignoring those particular problems. This approach is most effective against cases on government policy or law, or international relations, the type of case that is currently most common in CUSID.
2. *Ask the “Big Questions”, the kind that are asked by serious investigative journalists or inquiry papers, then answer those questions in a manner favourable to your side.* This is a method of getting at the fundamental assumptions of the case. Questions such as “Who really benefits from this proposal?” and “What are the values of the people in question?” can really help your case.
3. *Generate unfavourable possible outcomes.* Quite often a Government will present a plan and propose that it will result in specific outcomes. It is a great constructive point to generate ways in which the plan can go horribly, horribly wrong. Avoid the slippery slope; instead just shed doubt on the steps between their proposal and their intended outcome.
4. *Philosophy 101 - the “Complete B.S.” approach.* Sometimes you will be faced with a case that, while not necessarily specific knowledge, you know nothing about. Reduce the case to first principles. Identify the underlying philosophy of the case and then attack it philosophically - if they are taking a capitalist approach, attack Adam Smith and develop Marxian socialist responses. Be sure to develop the philosophy and then give a real world example of your philosophy in action (successfully).
5. *Examine whether or not the proposal is even possible.* Quite often a case sounds fantastic, but the Government has overlooked the little fact that it is impossible. Remember, the most fantastic case in the world would be a reality if it were not for something preventing it. Think about why it is utterly impossible for this to come to pass in terms of operational and logistical features.

Underlying every technique you use to formulate a constructive Opposition argument is the goal of identifying basic assumptions about the case and addressing them. If you can do this without the use of one of these techniques, all the better.

### ***Structure and Strategy of Opposition Constructive Points***

The structure of an Opposition constructive is almost identical to the structure of a Government constructive. The difficult part is to keep the structure in mind as a priority when creating and presenting the point. By following the structure that you intend to use while presenting during the actual creation process, the points will remain clearer in your mind and thus be portrayed as such to your audience and judges.

1. Choose your approach from the five listed strategies or choose your argument if one is apparent to you.
2. Sketch out your point, moving from general to specific. Begin with broad philosophy or historical introduction or something similar. Show how this broad view connects to the case at hand. Show how the broad view in the context of the case supports your side.
3. Give grounding, that is some sort of concrete example or evidence that backs up your point. If you are discussing political theory, cite an example of a nation, historically or contemporary that fits your contention.
4. Summarize.

One of the greatest strategies you can employ is to diversify. Attack the Government on as many fronts as possible and force them to respond to multiple types of arguments. Make arguments that are political, economic, moral and so forth. Keep this in mind when you are choosing your arguments. If you use three different techniques of identifying arguments and all three yield arguments about politics, you do not likely have three separate arguments.

Some people choose to approach the Opposition as if they are running a case—one that is contrary to (though not necessarily opposite to) the Government case. This can help you focus your arguments and bring some unity to your presentation. This tactic is not always appropriate—for example, if the

Government runs a case about replacing a certain law, you can choose to oppose them on the value of their proposed replacement, conceding that the law needs to go. In this case, you are generally going to talk about why their proposal is bad, and why other proposals are potentially better; however, attempting to structure this as a “case” would necessitate the choosing of one specific alternative, which is not always the best option.

*E.g., The Government presents the following case - “This House Believes that Russia should cede independence to Chechnya.”*

The Opposition can structure their side of the debate as “Russia should NOT cede independence to Chechnya” quite easily. However, if the Government presents the case that “This House Believes that a racist law X is bad and should be replaced with a better law, Y”, and it is clear that law X is racist, the Opposition becomes more difficult. Essentially the Opposition will claim that yes, law X is bad, but law Y is not the right law to replace it and run the Opposition on those grounds, which is difficult to form into a coherent case. However, if you encounter this kind of case, your method of Opposition should be clear to you regardless.

If your constructive begins to tread into refutation that you wish to make later, that is okay, so long as they are not the exact same point. Remember, your constructive points should stem from the basis of the case, and refutation points should be directly referencing constructive points made by your opponents. There will likely be overlap especially if your constructive points go to underlying assumptions. However, you must make sure to clearly separate your constructive points from your address of what your opponents proposed.

A word on “stock Opposition arguments”: I have formerly championed the use of these. However, from observing some very good debaters over the past while, I have come to the conclusion that “stock Opps”, while useful for new debaters that are still having trouble thinking of constructive Opposition points, are generally brutally beaten at higher levels. A “stock Opp” by the nature of being a prefabricated point that is designed to be used against many different cases tends to be too nebulous. They tend to lack the grounding and specific examples required to successfully complete a constructive argument because they are often “kind of good” arguments - they are not perfectly accurate for the situation, but they are close. It is far better, if you can do so, to build your argument from the ground up so that your discussion always sticks close to the case. Remember, you want to have lots of clash or your speaker scores will definitely drop.

E.g., One of the most popular stock Opposition arguments is moral or societal relativism, that is, that you cannot make a value judgment about a particular societal action because from another perspective it is/is not moral, contrary to what you believe in your perspective. However, it is far more effective to actually go inside that other perspective and argue from that stand point. So, if the Government proposes dismantling the security fence that Israel has built around settlements in the Gaza Strip, it is not sufficient to oppose by saying, “From an Israeli perspective, maintaining the fence might seem like the moral thing to do”. Rather, argue specifically WHY the Israeli people want and need those fences and declare that you are showing the Israeli cultural and societal perspectives.

## Judging: What is It and How is it Done?

A lot of people get apprehensive about judging rounds because they are worried that they will make the wrong decision. Many of these fears stem from the fact that we rarely attempt to comprehensively determine what it takes to win a round of debate, and how a judge should adjudicate a round. Canadian Parliamentary style continually evolves, and with that the criteria for winning a round alter, which makes it difficult to authoritatively state what a judge needs to do to determine who won. This article is an attempt to highlight some of the things that, at least at this point in CUSID debating, a judge should take into consideration when evaluating a round. There are a lot of issues that it does not touch on which still need to be discussed, but it provides a good foundation for people to start to think about how they should judge rounds of debating.

### *What Does it Mean to Win a Round?*

Although it may pretend to simulate it, rounds of debating are not the same as parliamentary debates. A round of debate is not won on the strength of the team's position in the round, but on the strength of their arguments. Winning a debate means doing a better job arguing for your side, not having a superior side. This means that the judge needs to evaluate the arguments of each team to determine who won. It also explains why arguments that were not present in a round have no bearing on the outcome of that round. If a judge decides that the Government team should lose the round because there are lots of problems with their case that the Opposition never brought up, then this decision is illegitimate, because the judge is deciding based on the strength of the case rather than the arguments.

### *What Makes an Argument Strong?*

The point of an argument is to be convincing. To determine which team had stronger arguments, a judge should be inquiring which team was more convincing. It goes without saying that this evaluation should, as much as possible, be performed from an objective standpoint. To be convincing, an argument should be three things: logical, intact, and important.

#### *i) Logical*

An argument that does not make sense cannot be convincing. If a Government team proposes that the US should assassinate Macho Man Randy

Savage, and they argue that this will increase tax revenue, it is not clear how this argument follows from their case. Unless the government provides a link between the death of everybody's favourite wrestler-turned-rapper and taxation, this argument is totally illogical and thoroughly unconvincing. Similarly, if an Opposition is opposing the amendment of Japan's constitution to allow it to act militarily, and they argue that this will cause China to invade, the Opposition has a duty to connect all the dots to show how this invasion is a plausible consequence of the Government's proposal. If this link is not made, the argument cannot be said to be logical.

Arguments that are not sufficiently logically connected to a position, either because they are inane *or* not properly developed, obviously cannot be convincing, because they don't really make any sense. These arguments are internally problematic, and do not help a team to win a round.

### *ii) Intact*

Illogical arguments fall apart due to their own internal problems. Arguments can also be rendered unconvincing for external reasons- rebuttal from the opposing team. At the end of a round, if a team has failed to rebuild an argument that was rebutted by their opponents, then that argument is not intact, and cannot be convincing. A judge is obliged to determine whether the rebuttal itself is convincing, of course, and this can be done in the same manner as evaluating an initial argument.

It is important to recognize that rebuttals do not always destroy an argument- sometimes they simply weaken it. Convincingness is not a binary quality, but exists in degrees. An argument may be *less* convincing due to a rebuttal without being *unconvincing*. The same may be said for the issue of logic- the link between a proposal and an argument may be clear or nonexistent, but it can also be weak, strong, or anything in between.

### *iii) Important*

For a detailed discussion of what makes a point important, there is another article in this collection that deals with that specific issue. Although it is written from the standpoint of a debater, the issues are entirely applicable to judging a round as well. Just like an argument can be more or less logical or intact, it can have varying degrees of importance.

### ***Putting the Requirements Together***

Each argument should thus be evaluated for its logic, intactness and importance. An argument that totally fails any of these three requirements can be discarded outright, as each of them is a necessary condition to having a convincing argument. In an exceptionally bad round, it is possible that a logical and intact argument that is incredibly unimportant may become relevant in the judging decision, but this is unlikely to be the case. Conversely, any argument that fully meets these three requirements is a major plus for that team, and goes a long way toward winning the round for them.

There is no clear way to calculate the arguments at the end of the round. A few logical, intact, semi-important points may carry more weight than one logical, intact, very important point, but they also may not. It also cannot be definitively said that a logical, intact argument of moderate importance is more convincing than a very important argument that is logical but only mildly intact. It really depends on the content of the round. However, recognizing the three requirements of a convincing argument does make such comparisons easier to perform in each case. Overall, the judge should be asking: has the Government successfully argued that the benefits of their proposal outweigh the harms, as elucidated by the Opposition? By evaluating each of the arguments that the two sides have made in the manner described above, it can become easier to determine the answer to this question.

### ***Other Considerations***

#### *i) Consistency*

There are other factors that come into play when judging a round of debate, which can effect how well the teams have argued. One of these factors is consistency. While each argument should be analyzed on its own to determine its strength, it must be remembered that each argument is only a part of a larger whole. This means that a team's arguments must be consistent with each other. For instance, if I am opposing a Government proposal, I cannot argue both that (a) it will have no effect and (b) that it will have seriously detrimental effects (I may be able to claim that *a* is the case, but *even if a* is not the case, then *b* is the case, but that is another issue). Unless I phrase these two claims in such a way that they are rendered consistent with each other, I seriously diminish the overall convincingness of my case by contradicting myself, and thereby rendering each argument almost worthless, even if individually they are quite strong.

A team may be inconsistent in philosophy as well as in factual claims. If I arguing against invading Turkmenistan, I have a variety of arguments I could make. I may argue that war is always wrong, because killing is always impermissible. Instead, I might argue that killing is only permissible if it is done to help people. I can make either of these arguments, but if I make them together, then I have ceased to be consistent, since I have claimed both that killing is always wrong and that killing is fine if it is done to help people. These claims are not consistent, and no matter how well I constructed each argument, my team cannot be convincing with such an inconsistency- I would, in effect, by acting as my own Opposition.

### *ii) Burdens*

There has been a lot of talk about “burdens” in the past couple of years. The basic idea goes like this: if a Government team proposes a relatively uncontentious case (eg, anachronistic, sexist law *b* should be curtailed), then they will have to be really amazing to win, and the Opposition will be expected to do relatively little. Conversely, if the Government proposes a fairly ‘ballsy’ case (e.g., we should shoot unarmed Brazilian civilians just in case they are terrorists), the Opposition would be expected to go a little bit “above and beyond the call of duty” to win the round. This approach has been justly criticized by various debaters who have pointed out that under this approach, a government could run “make murder legal”, or something similarly insane, and be guaranteed a win. Obviously, we could use the burden approach with the caveat that absurd cases are exempt from such consideration, but the problem still remains in that it allows a Government team to run a case where the judge will expect *more* from the Opposition simply because the government ran an ‘opp-heavy’ case.

That is not to say that the ‘relative burdens’ approach is a totally bad one. After all, it does provide a disincentive for Government teams to run slimy or “gov-heavy” cases, and encourages open rounds of debate. Its problem is that it is based on forming expectations for teams based on their positions in the round, meaning that the debate is no longer solely about who makes better arguments.

There is a different way to evaluate teams in the debate that I find to be preferable, which is the ‘who pushed the ball further?’ approach. In this model, the judge asks which team advanced the debate more by making the more interesting, meaty arguments. In my view, the central question in this approach is “who did more with what they had?” In the “legalize murder” pseudo-example, a judge would be asking which team made their side more interesting and compelling. If the Government team makes very interesting and thoughtful

arguments in favour of legalizing murder, and the Opposition simply states that ending somebody else's life is wrong, then the Government should win that round. The key point is that under this approach, the Government is not helped by the fact that their case is 'ballsy'- they didn't have lesser expectations placed on them.

The main reason why I prefer the 'who did more with what they had' approach to the 'burdens' approach is that it orients the judge's evaluations to the *arguments* and not the *case*. As stated above, debates are won and lost on their arguments, and not on the objective strengths of their case statements. The ball-pushing approach reminds the judge to focus on how a team contributed to a round, allowing each team in the round an equal opportunity to win the round no matter what position they were placed in. Instead of deciding what to expect from a team in an easy or difficult position, it is much better to focus on what they *did* with the side they were given. Since the debate is won by the team who makes the better arguments, and not the team who has the better side, it shouldn't matter how 'tight' or 'open' the case is when determining who won the round. There are interesting arguments to be made for almost any position.

There are, of course, scenarios in which the case itself might alter how a round is judged, but this would only happen if the case is one that is deemed invalid, either because it is offensive, nonsensical, unreasonably vague or 'tight.' As long as the case is *legitimate*, there should not be any need to consider whether it is gutsy or not.

### *iii) Facts*

Facts can create a very problematic scenario for judges to deal with. Consider the following scenario: the Prime Minister introduces a case which is partly premised on facts which you know to be untrue. The Opposition, for whatever reason, accepts these premises as true, and proceeds with the debate. The Government 'wins.' Should the judge take into consideration the fact that the Government used inaccuracies in their case, which they may not have won without? Should it matter whether or not the Government knowingly told untruths?

Another problematic scenario can arise if the factual inaccuracies are introduced at a different time in the debate. If, in her PMR, the Prime Minister rebuts a key opposition argument with a claim that is not true, should the judge take this into consideration? Again, does it matter if the PM was actively lying or honestly mistaken?

There are a lot of issues that this question deals with. It will always be problematic to assign to the judge the duty of determining whether speakers in the round are lying or not, and such an obligation would be carried out with differing degrees of accuracy depending on how well the judge knew the debater in question, meaning that some speakers in a room might have more or less leeway to lie (it would also reward stupidity). Asking a judge to filter out lies also assumes that the judge is correct in his or her knowledge. It may be that judges mistakenly label as lies claims which are in fact true, and this may also mean that two judges on the same panel could decide the round differently because of different amounts of knowledge.

The most significant question concerns the role of the judge in the round. If a judge is meant to solely act as a conduit for information, and then compute who argued better, then a judge should always ignore lies. However, this would allow knowledgeable teams to take advantage of teams that did have the same knowledge in a certain area, by altering facts to suit their purposes.

The role that a judge should play when evaluating factual claims (and, in a similar problem, *competing* factual claims) is very hard to determine. I would likely suggest that a judge ignore factual inaccuracies during the constructive speeches, allowing it to fall on the opposing team to deal with them, but take a more active role when it comes to claims made in the PMR, when no response is possible. There are, of course, a variety of concerns that are either ignored or created under this approach, but at least it can be consistently applied. Overall, it would be best if debaters in general thought about the issue of facts and judging, and tried to determine with each other what the best approach was. However, in the (likely) absence of any consensus, judges should at least be aware of the tension that exists when determining what to do with factual inaccuracies, and attempt to judge rounds in a manner that seems most fair in the circumstances of those rounds.

### ***Conclusion***

- The approach outlined in this article can be summarized as such:
1. Evaluate each argument in the round for its logic, intactness and importance.
  2. Ensure that each side's arguments are consistent with each other.

3. After determining how strong each team's arguments are at the end of the round, determine whether the government has successfully argued that the goods of their proposal outweigh the bads.
4. Examine what each team did with what they had, and whether one team contributed in a much greater way than the other.
5. Consider any issues that factual inaccuracies may give rise to.
6. Unless steps 5&6 give good reason to revise your original estimate, your answer to step 3 should tell you who won the debate.

As stated at the beginning, there are a lot of different issues that come up when trying to outline an approach to judging. This article is in no way meant to be definitive, but is instead meant to act as the foundation for discussion on the matter, and to introduce some approaches that may be used.

# More than Just Content: Style, Organization, and POIs

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## Style: The Basics

*It is easy for me to put on a show, and be cocky; and be flooded with a cocky feeling and feel pretty cool and all that... Or I can make all kinds of phony things, be blinded by it, or I can show you some really fancy movements. But to express oneself honestly—not lying to oneself—now that, my friend, is very hard to do.*

-Bruce Lee, demonstrating a pretty good understanding of debating style

During the process of maturing as a debater, a common step seems to be the conscious or unconscious emulation of another debater's style—usually a very successful and/or charismatic person on the circuit. This is nigh-universal, seemingly very natural, and exceptionally detrimental to all involved—especially the fledgling debater in question.

Good style in debating grows organically, like marijuana. Unlike marijuana, it ought not to draw attention to itself via noxious or intoxicating odours. Like marijuana, it ought to be sought-after by many and attract attention, though unlike marijuana it probably wouldn't be appreciated by brain-dead potheads. Above all, though, good style—like marijuana—does not employ bad metaphors, and it certainly wouldn't drive those bad metaphors into the ground (nor would it mix metaphors, which would just be beating a dead horse into the ground).

The above paragraph isn't funny largely because it is forced. If you emulate another person's style, your own style will become similarly forced. You won't pull off those mannerisms, turns of phrase, or rhetorical flourishes of voice modulation nearly as well as the originator, and all you'll manage to accomplish is to stunt whatever evolution your actual style might have undergone in the meantime. If you think otherwise, then let me tell you that the only way to pull such mimicry off is a natural genius for impersonation—in which case you ought to abandon

university altogether and take up your destined (and far more lucrative) future as a confidence trickster.

So, having taken Bruce Lee's advice to heart, what are you left with? While it is true that consciously emulating another is bad, and it is equally true that everyone will develop their own personal style, it is not true that there isn't anything to be done consciously. First of all, here is a simple list of things not to do:

- Don't carry anything in your hands as you speak.
- Don't fiddle with you clothing, hair, etc. while speaking.
- Don't address your remarks to your opponents; address the judges.
- Don't move around too much, either in gesticulation or wandering.
- Don't remain ramrod-still, either.
- Don't put all your weight on one leg or stand in any other manner which might be distracting.
- Don't speak too quickly. Give your judge time to write down all the gold you're spewing.
- Don't ever let "style" interfere with clarity—90%+ of good style is being clear.

There are more, but you get the idea. Those are the true basics, but even those can take years to iron out. So don't feel like a tool if your judge/coach/mom tells you not to twirl your pen about after a full year of debating; trust me, coaches love to have obvious stuff to point out, it makes them feel validated and useful. The other stuff that can help you out is more nuanced, but often easier to regulate given that it is less pathological or reflexive.

Overall, understand that you must be flexible and modulate your style. Righteous indignation (for example) is often good and useful in a debating round, but never for ten full minutes—often not even for a mere three. Judges don't want to be yelled at for the entirety of your speech, and the law of diminishing returns for bluster and passion kicks in sooner than you might expect in a debating round. No one digs your fiery rants *nearly* as much as you do. After a few minutes of theatrics—be it in terms of fury, or humour, or whatever—cool down and pretend once again to be the most rational individual in the room. Then after a few minutes of that, it's often good to be more entertaining again.

There are two kinds of stylistic tricks that are often overused by beginning debaters: vicious mockery and self-deprecation, though rarely by the same people, and almost never at the same time. Both of these tools are useful and fun, but use

them at the wrong time or too much, and you're in trouble. No one likes a bully or a weakling, so strike a balance between pride and humility. You may think you're losing, for example—but say so during your speech and you can be sure that your hypothesis will become fact. And never resort to ad hominem attacks; at least *pretend* to be better than that.

This leads to my final bit of advice: know your room. Modulate and adjust your style based on the people and the setups you encounter. If your opponents look two feet shorter than you do, and/or it looks like you were shaving your face or your legs before they could read, don't ever make fun of them at all if you can help it. Don't bellow in a small classroom, don't whisper in a large auditorium. Move less the closer your judge is to you. Little things like that can really help, and they become second nature after a while.

Above all, practice, and let your style find you. Avoid the common early mistakes outlined above, and as you debate more and more, you will find that you have developed your own style. Using that style to its fullest extent will come with time.

## Style Strategies

Style is the most difficult skill to develop in competitive debate, and it is also the most individualized. Though you will see many stylistic similarities across debaters, no two debaters have exactly the same style. This also makes style and rhetoric particularly difficult to teach.

This article will attempt to give you a basic introduction into three main archetypal styles used in CUSID debate, along with the pros and cons of each style and examples of when they may be used effectively. The goal is not, however, to provide a cookie cutter style for you to emulate in all your future debates. Instead, the goal is to open your eyes to different stylistic possibilities and start you on a path to developing your own unique style.

### ***Funny/Irreverent***

Funny debaters will attempt to weave humour into their speech as much as possible. This does not mean that the speech turns into a stand-up comedy routine, but rather than the debater will have some fun with the topic and make an effort to be entertaining for the judges and audience. The obvious positive of a funny style is that you will keep the attention of everyone in the room, and keep them entertained at the same time. Humour is also an excellent way to shoot down and ridicule opposing arguments, although you have to be mindful of not being too flippant while you do so.

The negative aspect of a funny style is that it may seem like you aren't taking the topic particularly seriously. Even the most hilarious debaters have to pick their spots, and not pepper their speech on Chechen genocide with puns and witticisms. Another problem with humour is that it automatically reduces the level of formality in the room. For certain judges, this is a plus, because they will not be sticklers on maintaining a formal atmosphere. For other judges, however, the lack of formality will be seen as annoying, or worse, disrespectful. Be mindful of who your judge is and what level of decorum they expect in the room before you pop off on the MC's momma.

### ***Serious/Methodical***

On the other end of the spectrum are very serious debaters, who are generally methodical and straightforward in their approach to the topic. Serious debaters are most effective in serious rounds, when the topic does not call for

jokes or fun. Serious, methodical debaters are also generally better organized than funny or goofy debaters, who are too busy making jokes to address the actual issues in the round. A serious approach to the topic can also give you a knowledgeable *ethos* in the minds of the judges, as many people confuse a serious speaker with a well-informed speaker. For confirmation, look no further than Dick Cheney.

The problem with serious speeches is mainly the glazed eyes and pained expressions they cause in judges, or the fact that your partner will be attempting hang him/herself with a makeshift noose to avoid listening to the rest of your speech. If you are in debating to wow strangers and dazzle them until they want to sleep with you, this is not the stylistic choice for you.

### ***Deeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep***

One of the newest trends in CUSID is to reward debaters who delve deeper into the topic than the average debater, and make a limited amount of well-crafted intelligent points rather than a slew of slightly more shallow points. This is both an organizational choice and stylistic choice. Deep debaters work hard to create a cerebral and intellectual *ethos*, so judges will automatically give more credence to things that they say in rounds. This work extends beyond debate rounds, and includes social events and musings on CUSIDnet. If you choose to be a deep debater, expect it to be a lifelong commitment.

This is a joke, of course, but the idea of a cerebral *ethos* is very important to presenting yourself as a “deep” debater. The benefits of presenting yourself as deep and highly intellectual is obviously that your points will seem much more convincing. Unfortunately, “deep” debaters often miss the boat in rounds and find themselves glossing over incredibly important points. It is very difficult to limit yourself to one or two quality points and still engage with all of the major issues of the round.

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Regardless of which style you prefer from this list, the most important thing to remember is that your style must **match your personality**. If you are not by nature a funny or witty person, do not expect to be tossing out one-liners in debates that will have your judges convulsing in fits of laughter. If you have trouble keeping a straight face at funerals, perhaps the serious approach is not for you. The most effective style is one which, ironically, takes very little effort to

develop. Be yourself. Enjoy yourself. Do what comes naturally, and you will be much more effective and convincing in front of the judges.

“Be yourself” is slightly pithy advice, because the average debater will actually spend a lot of time honing their personal style. To work on your style, try to put yourself in as many situations as possible where you are receiving feedback from others. This includes formal, competitive rounds in front of real judges, but also includes in-house rounds where other members of your club will be watching. When you are receiving comments, be active. Ask pointed questions to the judges/observers about what stylistic elements of your speech worked, and what didn't work.

The second way to work on your style is to observe other debaters and note what you find particularly effective about their speaking style or mannerisms. Most people will take great pains to watch debaters in the top brackets and emulate their style, but this is not necessarily the best course of action. You can find a debater with an effective style that fits your personality in any bracket or any competition.

Ultimately, despite all the advice you will hear and all the different articles in this manual, debating breaks down to one thing: **say smart things convincingly**. With an effective personal style, you will have the second half of the equation mastered. Now you just need to think of smart things to say!

# Organization in Debating

## *What is 'organization'?*

Before I proceed to tell you how to be organized in debating, I will define what I am talking about when I use the word organization. An organized speech is clear, easy to follow, and has a definite plan or roadmap. In short, an organized speech seems like a well-formatted essay, with logically ordered component parts that compose a constituent whole.

## *Why is organization important in debating?*

Organization is important in debating for three major reasons. First, having a well-organized speech makes your job as a debater much easier on several levels. If you plan a speech with several delineated component parts, it is much easier to know what to say when you get up to speak, thereby avoiding every first-time debater's nightmare—having absolutely no idea what to say! If you think of your speech as an essay, with a thesis paragraph, three argument paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph, it suddenly seems like a much less daunting task. This will help you fill your time when you are just starting out. Being well-organized also helps you to analyze the debate more effectively; if you are thinking in terms of numbered points, case lines, etc, you will be less likely to miss arguments in the round, and will be better able to recognize the most important points.

Second, being well-organized makes the round easier to follow for the judges, which makes judges' jobs easier (and thus makes them love you, which is always good); more importantly, it makes them recognize your brilliant arguments and analysis. If your fabulous argumentation is buried underneath your lack of organization, you're not going to get credit for the brilliant things you say. Make things very easy for judges to write down and recognize; your organization should be painfully obvious.

Finally, being well-organized make the round easier for the other team to follow. This seems counterintuitive, because why would making the job of the other team easier be a good idea? If the other team has a really good idea of what you are saying, this will let them address your arguments directly. This has three positive effects. First, this makes for a better debate, which is more fun and fulfilling for everyone involved. Second, this points your arguments front and centre; the more time the other team takes addressing your points, the less time they have to make their own constructive arguments, and the better you do.

Finally, a better debate leads to higher scores all round. If a less experienced debater is in a good debate, his or her score will inevitably be higher than if he or her had been in a round with less experienced debaters. This effect occurs because of a) ballot math, by which the judge has to boost the speaker scores of the winning team to be higher than that of the losing team, even if the losing team were better speakers individually, and b) when a judge sees a good round, they're in a good mood, and even if you're the weakest link in a bad round, you won't get punished the way you would if the round had been the most boring thing the judge had ever seen.

### ***How does one remain organized?***

There are several techniques you can use to ensure that you will give a well-organized speech, three of which I will discuss here. In my opinion, the first and most essential way to stay organized is through good note-taking. Without clear, concise, well-organized notes it is practically impossible to give a clear, well-organized speech. (Please see the article on note-taking in this volume for details on how to have excellent notes.) Your notes are your road-map, and your speech will follow the direction they set for you; if they're disorganized, get ready for a disorganized speech.

Second, number and label everything. Number and label your own points before you get up to speak. This makes your arguments clear and easy to remember for you, the other team, and the judges, which we've just established is the most important aspect of debating. Number and label the points of the other team while they are speaking, *even if they don't label them themselves*. This will help you to remember what they said, and will make you appear doubly smart and capable to the judges (always a good thing).

Finally, plan your speech before you stand up to give it. Know the format your speech is going to take, which should be reflected in and evident from your notes, and stick with it. This will give you confidence and help you fill your time. Go through your plan one component at a time, and don't jump back and forth between sections of your speech, even if you remember something you forgot to say.

### ***What is a well-organized speech like?***

Generally a well-organized speech follows a pattern. Regardless of which speech you are giving in the round you should: *say what you're going to say, say it, and say what you said*. Every speech has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

### ***How do you give a well-organized Prime Minister's Constructive speech?***

The introduction component in a Prime Minister's speech is unique to other speeches in the round because of the unique role of the Prime Minister in introducing the round. The very first thing a Prime Minister must do is to provide a link from the resolution at hand to the case the Government team is running. This should be done immediately. After describing the case and plan the Government is running, the Prime Minister should then 'roadmap' their speech. To roadmap is to *say what you're going to say*, to (very briefly) describe the constituent elements of the speech and the order in which the listener is going to hear them. This is as easy as saying, "My first point is x, my second point is y, and my third point is z." It is very short, but essential to keeping your speech organized and clear.

Next, the Prime Minister should go through each of their three points in the order in which he or she introduces them. Be absolutely explicit when you are moving from one point to the next, and continually refer to them by the titles that you gave them in the introductory section of the speech. This is the *say it* section of the speech. There should never be any question for yourself, the judges, or the other team as to which argument you are discussing at any given moment. Explicitly transition from point to point by saying, "Therefore, I have demonstrated that point x is valid. Now, I will explain point y."

The concluding 'paragraph' of the Prime Minister's speech should *say what you said*. Briefly recap the case you introduced and each of the arguments that you made. This should solidify the case and the major points of the Government in the minds of the judges and the other team.

The Prime Minister's Constructive speech is arguably the easiest speech in which to be organized because there are so few constituent parts (i.e. only a case introduction and three points on average; no rebuttal). As we will see, as the round progresses, organization becomes more and more of a challenge.

### *How do you give a well-organized Member of the Opposition speech?*

The Member of the Opposition speech is arguably the hardest speech in which to be organized, because there is so little time in which to prepare your points and come up with rebuttals to the Prime Minister's speech. Ironically, staying organized will actually make this challenging speech easier, because you will sound more prepared and polished than you may actually be.

The MO speech, like every other, should start by *saying what you're going to say*. Again, be very explicit about this by saying, "In this speech I will present two constructive points, a and b, and then I will deconstruct each of the three points that the Prime Minister has presented."

In the *say it* section of your speech, carefully go through each of the parts you outlined in your introduction. Present your points, referring to them by the labels and numbers you did in your introduction, and make it very clear when you are transitioning from one point to another.

Next, it is very important to have a clear and explicit transition from your constructive material to your deconstructive material.<sup>1</sup> State, "Now that I have thoroughly explored the Opposition's first two constructive points, I will now move on to deconstruct the points of the Government team."

Go through and deconstruct each of the PM's points in the order in which they were presented. Reference each of the points before you rebut them so the judges know what you're referring to. Again, be explicit when you move from point to point; don't try and rebut their whole case all at once in one big jumble.

Finally, *say what you said*. Remind the judges of your constructive arguments, and that you successfully deconstructed all the points of the Government. This, like the introduction, should be brief, but is important.

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<sup>1</sup> I recognize that it is still contested whether one should present constructive or deconstructive material first, especially in the tradition of certain provinces' high school debating. However, in my experience, presenting constructive material first is always a more effective choice. It permits you to use your constructive material in rebutting the points of the other team, it makes your arguments the focus of your speech, and it makes for more interesting rounds. Thus, for the purposes of this article, I'm going to describe speeches as if they all had constructive material first.

### ***How do you give a well-organized Minister of the Crown speech?***

Organization is an increasingly important part of a debate; since the MC has a more complicated role than the MO, shifting between constructive and rebuttal, he or she must pay close attention to staying organized.

Like all other speeches, begin by *saying what you're going to say*. In the case of the MC, this should be something like, "In this speech, I will present point w for the Government; next, I will deconstruct the two points offered by the Opposition; finally, I will return to the Government's case and reconstruct points x, y, and z offered by my partner."

Because the MC shifts from constructive to deconstructive to constructive material, it is essential to be road-mapping as you go through your speech. Make it painfully obvious which argument you are talking about at all times. Make it extremely explicit when you transition from team to team. Also, when reconstructing the PM's points, it's important to give a one-sentence description of the original point, then state how the MO tried to rebut the point, and finally rebuild the point. Be very clear about who you are referring to in each aspect of this rebuilding process, because it can be very confusing. Stay organized within each point as well.

In conclusion, be sure to *say what you said*. Remind the judges of your new point, state that you rebutted all the points of the opposition, and restate the Prime Minister's points - all very briefly.

### ***How do you give a well-organized Leader of the Opposition speech?***

In order for the Leader of the Opposition to address all of the points in the round, organization is essential. Start out by stating that you will, "Be adding two new points to the round, d and e; then I will be deconstructing all of the points offered by the Government, starting with the point given by the MC; then finally returning to the points of the MO."

Then *say it*. Add a couple new points to the round, deconstruct the Government's arguments, and reconstruct what your partner had to say. It is essential the LO be clear on who said what, because otherwise it will be extremely confusing.

Finally, *say what you said*. An effective way for an LO to do this is to boil the round down into its most basic themes, and say that the Opposition won on all the important issues. This is optional, however; many effective LO's simply restate what they said in their speech at the end of it.

### ***How do you give a well-organized Prime Minister's Rebuttal speech?***

Because of the time restrictions of the PMR, the *say what you're going to say, say it, and say what you said*, formula of the other speeches is thrown out the window. You simply don't have time to say each of those. More importantly, you don't have time to go through all the points of the round as the LO could. So our simple method of organization, point-by-point analysis, doesn't work for the PMR.

So what do you do? Do you not have constituent parts to your speech, and just have one big monologue? Absolutely not. Just because you can't use the method of organization the other speeches do doesn't mean you can't be organized.

There are a variety of ways to organize a PMR. However, the most effective and common is to choose the three major contentions in the round—the three main issues over which the two sides disagree—and show why the Government won each of these disputes. As with any other speech, give these issues labels and numbers, and proceed from one to the next explicitly and obviously. Make it easy for the judges to write down your brilliant points and follow what you're saying. This organizational strategy gives the appearance of having brilliantly synthesized and analyzed the round.

### ***Final Suggestions***

There are two topics I would like to discuss in conclusion. First, how do you stay organized while taking POIs? There are several ways not to let POIs disrupt your carefully organized speech. The best is to take POIs after you've finished explaining a point and are about to move on to another one. Instead of letting the other team control of your speech by interrupting your argumentation, take a POI at a natural break in your speech. Also remember to never let a POI make you reorganize your speech, i.e. give a point in a different order, do rebuttal when you mean to be doing construction, etc. imply take two or three sentences to address the POI, and then get back to your planned speech. Not only does throwing your original organization out the window usually make your speech less focused and

coherent, but it also makes the other team look like they are in charge of the direction of your speech, which is very poor stylistically.

Second, as alluded to above, a sophisticated debate should have points which are *internally* organized. You should have a clear direction and organization in each of your points, with premises organized correctly such that the conclusion follows logically, and examples to support your conclusion. This is important for the same reason that structural organization is important. It provides clarity, analysis, and improves the caliber of the debate.

# The Importance and Technique Of Note Taking

## *The Forgotten Art*

When most people are taught how to debate, they learn about what a case is, how to build one, how to deconstruct an argument, and how to fill their time. But watch any first time debater, and you'll see a common feature emerge, one that coaches and other debaters rarely focus on correcting - they will have no idea what to write down before they speak. Some will try and write out their entire speech and rebuttal, and thus will only be able to fill thirty seconds of time, will sound deadly boring, and will miss the other team's points altogether. Some will not write anything, and will have no idea what to say when they stand up.

From these observations alone, we begin to see why note taking is essential to debate. Among many other benefits, excellent note taking is important because:

- It is *key* to remaining organized during a debate—if you don't have organized notes, you won't sound organized. If your notes are organized correctly, the organization of your speech should be clear and correct.
- Your memory isn't as good as you think it is. You're *not* going to remember the opposition's third point, let alone your response to it, if you don't write it down. Even though this isn't APDA - the American league where not addressing an argument raised by the other team may cause you to lose the round - you need to be able to know the other team's major points in order to demonstrate to the judges that you can rebut most of the material that they bring up.
- Taking proper notes during a round forces you to distill the issues of the debate into the most essential points and arguments. This greatly influences your ability to analyze a round, which is an indispensable skill.
- If you are worried about filling the entire time allotted for you to speak, having proper notes will definitely give you material to fall back on, an 'itinerary' for you to follow, and the confidence you need to use that entire ten-minute Leader of the Opposition speech.

So with all of these benefits, why are novices so rarely taught how to take notes? Well, your guess is as good as mine, and I'm about to give you some tips that are extremely intuitive but very helpful.

### ***A Few Basic Pointers***

Before I begin a discussion of the various systems of note taking which I have discovered over the years, I want to provide you with a very few basic tips which are essential to any system. Even if you choose not to use one of the methods of note taking I will advocate, please remember that these tips are useful regardless of the strategy you adopt.

- ***Don't try and right everything down!!!***: As mentioned above, this is a classic novice mistake. Many people when they begin debating attempt to write out, word-for-word, the entirety of the speech they are about to give and the arguments of the opposing team. This is absolutely *unnecessary* to give an effective speech, and in fact has a variety of negative effects. First, you won't succeed at this endeavor - it's an impossible task. Writing out the points you are able to give takes way too much time, and you will discover that time is of the essence when you are preparing for an impromptu debate. Second, even if by some miracle you could write out everything you were going to say during your speech, this technique will cause you to have a terrible speaking style. During a debate, you never want to be reading off a page - you're in a lively, combative debate, not giving the speech from the Crown. You need to get your eyes off your page to look at and engage with the judges and audience, your hands away from the podium and your notes so you can gesticulate, and your feet moving around (within reason). Finally, if you are busy writing down word-for-word what you are going to say and what the other team says, you will miss the debate entirely. The best debaters spend most of their time in a debate listening to what their partner and the other team is saying, and writing down only as much as is necessary to remember the main gist of each argument. Remember: you're not taking notes in a class where the notes are going to help you remember what your hideously boring political theory professor said about Hegel eight months ago - you're trying to remember the main arguments of a speech you heard within the last half an hour and the responses you are going to make.
- ***Don't use full sentences***: If you are writing in sentences, you're writing too much. If you're writing in paragraphs, you're writing too much. If you look down and discovered you've written a sequel to *Moby Dick*, you're writing too much.
- ***Write something down***: While you're not aiming to record the arguments you want to present in Dickensian detail, you need to write down something for each argument you want to present, each argument the other team makes,

and each response you want to make to the arguments of the other team. As mentioned above, your memory, while not requiring word-for-word transcriptions of the speech, does need a reminder - a key word about each argument - in order to remember it accurately (or at all). This is a skill you are going to have to work on developing, but practice hearing a long and complicated argument and coming up with a key word that accurately captures the meaning of the argument. Think Hemingway, not Tolstoy - you want to eliminate description and detail, and cut to the heart of the argument. See below on point labeling and the section on various systems for more information on how this works.

- **Use abbreviations:** An excellent technique to avoid taking time away from listening to the debate and your preparation time is to use abbreviations. This sounds trite, but if you're spending your time writing out "government", "weapons of mass destruction", "economics of scale", and "supranational constitutionalism", you're in trouble.
- **Label and number your points and the other team's points:** This technique provides innumerable benefits. First, it automatically makes you look organized, prepared, and analytical, even if none of those things are true - it's a very good move stylistically. Second, it provides structure and organization to your notes and thus to your speech. If you number the three points that you are going to say, then go through them one-by-one, then number the oppositions points and deconstruct them one by one, you will likely have presented a reasonably strong case and done a nice job of undermining the case of the other team. Third, labels and numbers help judges and the other team to better record your arguments and thus the debate, an excellent technique because your arguments appear front and centre on the judge's sheet and in the mind of the other team. If your arguments are the focus of the debate, you're in good shape.
- **Find *some* method of discerning between what your team says and what the other team says in your notes:** One of the toughest things to do when taking notes is to find a method of distinguishing what you say from what the other team says. Getting these things confused is disastrous, and yet it seems difficult to disassociate the two. Thus, you will observe that in each of the note taking systems I suggest, there is *some* method for making this distinction. Once you're able to glance at your notes and clearly see what each team is saying and how they interact, you've discovered an effective note taking strategy. So whether you're able to make this distinction through highlighters, different coloured pens, a dividing line on your paper, or whatever, it is a necessary component to good note taking.

- **Use notes to communicate with your partner:** One of the most annoying things as a debater or a judge is to have one team ignoring the speaker and chatting away as they try and figure out a way to address the arguments of the other team. It's rude and distracting, and being thought of as rude and distracting by the judges isn't what you're going for. An excellent idea is to use notes to communicate with your partner - write out arguments they could use, thoughts you are having, and caricatures of the other team instead of talking. This is also helpful for your poor partner who just wants to listen to the arguments of the other team instead of you telling him or her that you "just have the perfect opp to that point." If you write down what you're trying to tell them, they can look at your brilliant point when they get the chance.

### ***Note Taking Systems***

These basic strategies will help a ton in your note taking. But they still don't provide a systematic method. This section will describe what I think are the two most effective methods. Obviously there are many others, and what is most important is that you find a system that works for you.

#### ***(a) Different Coloured Pens***

Note: Statements in *italics* should be thought of in one colour; statements which are underlined represent another. For individuals viewing this document on their computer or as a colour printout, this formatting will be redundant.

Before the debate begins, the government should have the debate recorded as follows:

<p><i>Government:</i>  <i>BIRT: this house would mind the gap.</i>  <i>Link: gap we should focus on is the one between EU &amp; T.</i>  <i>Case: The EU should admit Turkey.</i></p> <p><i>Points: PM</i></p> <p><i>1. Economic benefits</i>  <i>- access to raw materials and markets</i></p> <p><i>2. Greater potential for democratic reform</i>  <i>- if T. is in EU → greater leverage to encourage change in T.</i></p> <p><i>3. Positive effect on effort to create EU constitution</i>  <i>- including countries that really want to be in EU helps effort to create constitution</i></p> <p><i>Point: MC</i></p> <p><i>4. Diminishing Racism in Europe</i>  <i>- gesture of inclusion</i></p>	<p><u>Opposition:</u></p> <p><u>Points: MO</u></p>
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There are a number of things to note about the way this is set up:

- The original resolution, the link, and the new case are recorded.
- There is a large space left after each point.
- Each point has a clear but short title, with only a very brief description of the argument.
- The government and the opposition cases are on separate pages.

After the Prime Minister's speech, the opposition should have recorded something very similar to the government page (without the MC argument, obviously). However, then they must create their own case and figure out how to respond to the PM. Before the MO stands up to speak, their sheets should look like this:

*Government:**BIRT: this house would mind the gap.**Link: gap we should focus on is the one between EU & T.**Case: The EU should admit Turkey.**Points: PM**1. Economic benefits**- access to raw materials and markets**what eco. benefits? t. would be drain – very poor; requiring assistance**2. Greater potential for democratic reform**- if T. is in EU → greater leverage to encourage change in T.**best able to bargain if you don't let them in – you have something they want.**Is it necessarily good to encourage reform? (assumption)**3. Positive effect on effect to create EU constitution**- including countries that really want to be in EU helps effort to create constitution**why is this a good thing? Constitution is contrary to the best good of EU – trade benefits.**Plus, won't happen – T. just wants \$\$ not constitution*Opposition:Points: MO1. Cultural barriers to T. participation in EU*- EU is trying to cultivate nationalism – T. is different*2. Importance of domestic democracy*- supranational constitutionalism can't work if local government is not democratic*

Notice that it's extremely clear with the different pen colours who said what and when. Also observe that the numbering helps everyone to stay organized and the debate can focus on all of the arguments presented.

While the MO was speaking, the MC will have recorded the MO's points and responds to the PM. Before the MC speaks, their sheets should look like this:

<p><i>Government:</i>  <i>BIRT: this house would mind the gap.</i>  <i>Link: gap we should focus on is the one between EU &amp; T.</i>  <i>Case: The EU should admit Turkey.</i></p> <p><i>Points: PM</i></p> <p><i>1. Economic benefits</i>  - access to raw materials and markets  <u>what eco. benefits? t. would be drain – very poor; requiring assistance</u>  valuable resources which EU lacks are in t.</p> <p><i>2. Greater potential for democratic reform</i>  - if T. is in EU → greater leverage to encourage change in T.  <u>best able to bargain if you don't let them in – you have something they want.</u>  <u>Is it necessarily good to encourage reform? (assumption)</u>  EU has policy influence if T. is in. Def. a good thing!</p> <p><i>3. Positive effect on effort to create EU constitution</i>  - including countries that really want to be in EU helps effort to create constitution  <u>why is this a good thing? Constitution is contrary to the best good of EU – trade benefits.</u>  <u>Plus, won't happen – T. just wants \$\$ not constitution</u>  No – T. is interested in political involvement_</p> <p><i>Point: MC</i></p> <p><i>4. Diminishing Racism in Europe</i>  - gesture of inclusion</p>	<p><u>Opposition:</u></p> <p><u>Points: MO</u></p> <p><u>1. Cultural barriers to T. participation in EU</u>  - EU is trying to cultivate nationalism – T. is different  Wasn't a barrier for Eastern Europe. Shouldn't be a problem. Economics are biggest thing.</p> <p><u>2. Importance of domestic democracy</u>  - supranational constitutionalism can't work if local government is not democratic  There have been significant democratic reforms; getting there!</p>
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Hopefully this gives you the general idea. The different colours permit the speakers to distinguish who said what, and the organized, number points with short titles and minimal description keep everyone organized and makes sure that no arguments are lost.

While the MC was speaking, the LO would have recorded his/her responses to the government arguments under the appropriate point and in the appropriate colour, his/her rebuilding of the MO's points under the appropriate point, and his/her own points on the "opposition page."

Then while the LO is speaking, the PM would record all his/her remarks in the appropriate places.

I would suggest that the PM create a separate sheet to write down the three themes he/she will focus on during the PMR; however, seeing the whole flow of the debate through the colour method is very helpful.

**(b) Them/Us**

The next system of note taking is just as easy as the colour method, and many top debaters have used it with excellent results. The basic principle in this method is that you are able to keep what your team and the other team separate by drawing a line down the middle of each page:

<p>Government: BIRT: this house would mind the gap. Link: gap we should focus on is the one between EU &amp; T. Case: The EU should admit Turkey.</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left; width: 50%;">US</th> <th style="text-align: left; width: 50%;">THEM</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1. Economic benefit - access to raw materials and markets</td> <td>→ no benefit; T. is drain on EU resources</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2. Greater potential for democratic reform - if T. is in EU → greater leverage to encourage change in T.</td> <td>→ no; better potential when not in EU</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3. Positive effect on effort to create EU constitution - including countries that really want to be in EU helps effort to create constitution</td> <td>→ ??</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4. Diminishing Racism</td> <td>→ will only heighten tension</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	US	THEM	1. Economic benefit - access to raw materials and markets	→ no benefit; T. is drain on EU resources	2. Greater potential for democratic reform - if T. is in EU → greater leverage to encourage change in T.	→ no; better potential when not in EU	3. Positive effect on effort to create EU constitution - including countries that really want to be in EU helps effort to create constitution	→ ??	4. Diminishing Racism	→ will only heighten tension	<p>Opposition:</p> <p>Points: MO</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tbody> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">1. Cultural barriers to T. participation in EU - EU is trying to cultivate nationalism – T. is different</td> <td style="width: 5%; text-align: center;">→</td> <td style="width: 25%;">not a problem for integration</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2. Importance of domestic democracy - supranational constitutionalism can't work if local government is not democratic</td> <td style="text-align: center;">→</td> <td>T. is reforming</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	1. Cultural barriers to T. participation in EU - EU is trying to cultivate nationalism – T. is different	→	not a problem for integration	2. Importance of domestic democracy - supranational constitutionalism can't work if local government is not democratic	→	T. is reforming
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This also keep the debate organized, and you are able to follow the flow of each argument. The disadvantage to this system, unlike the coloured pens system, is that it is more difficult to record rebuttals and rebuilding of points. Thus, I would advise the use of the coloured system for speakers later in the round and the Them/Us method for the MO especially.

**Advanced Tips:**

With either of these two systems and the use of the basic tips above, your note taking should drastically improve. For those who feel that they have mastered these basics, I will suggest a few other pointers:

- **Use a ‘Points Sheet’ to Brainstorm:** When you are debating on the opposition side of a debate in Canadian style, the biggest challenge is coming up with arguments quickly enough for the MO to be able to give a couple during his/her speech. I suggest putting a sheet of paper on the table between the LO and the MO, and whenever either of you come up with an argument, just write it out (very briefly) on the sheet. This should help the MO enormously.
- **Trying writing less and less:** As you get more and more experienced with debating in general and note taking in particular, I would advise trying to take fewer and fewer notes. It will give you more time to listen and think during the round, which is always good!
- **Give your points sharp, witty, and brief names:** We’re all sick of point names that are all the same (“The Nature of x”; “The Economic Point”; “The Socioeconomic Analysis”, etc). If you can give your points names that accurately reflect their content while being snappy and funny, you’re definitely adding to the debate and getting away from tired clichés.

## Points of Information

The significance of points of information is often overlooked during debate training, as POIs can seem unimportant in comparison to bigger issues such as case construction, positional strategy, and effective refutation. Of course, this is understandable. A poor case, for example, will hurt a team much more than a poor POI. Despite this comparatively lower importance, however, POIs are certainly not ignorable; they are valuable tools that, if used and dealt with effectively, can greatly influence a team's persuasiveness. A good POI can do many things:

- It can force an opponent to concede an argument in your favour, either explicitly or implicitly through a poor response.
- It can throw an opponent off his or her rhythm, reducing the persuasiveness of arguments to come.
- It can force an opponent to discuss issues he or she would otherwise avoid, focusing the round onto your preferred terms.
- It can immediately diffuse a powerful opponent argument.
- It can lighten up a round through humour.
- It gives the Opposition the opportunity to challenge a case's structure and parameters at the outset of the round, possibly inducing the Government to accept parameters unfavourable to their cause.
- Most importantly, it gives a team presence in the round, allowing a team to gain power in the eyes of the judge.

Given all these valuable benefits, it is important for early and experienced debaters who wish to perfect their skills in offering and addressing Points of Information. This article will offer POI advice on both sides.

### *What to put in POIs*

The custom of giving two POIs during opponents' speech should not be seen as a burden. Instead, view the fact that you are expected to give only two POIs as a constraint forcing you to use your POI opportunities effectively. In looking for POIs worth asking, consider the following possibilities:

- *Foreshadow arguments you intend to make in your next speech*, either by trying to get your opponent to make concessions strengthening the upcoming argument or by superficially introducing your argument to get an impulse opponent response that can be discussed following your full forthcoming discussion. This can increase the persuasiveness of your argument through your opponent's demonstrated inability to address it as

- effectively as you or, should your opponent respond to the POI effectively, allow you to readjust your speech to downplay an issue you see your opponent is not weakened by. (Keep in mind, though, that doing this with very large points risks leaving large holes in your speeches to come should the arguments be effectively dealt with by your opponent to the point where additional discussion of them becomes unwarranted.)
- *Respond to arguments being made by your opponent.* POIs allow you to immediately address strong opponent points in a manner that provides both immediacy and certainty that your response will not be overlooked by judges among all points made in a long address.
  - *Make points you neglected to make in an earlier address.* Every debater has moments where he or she sits down following a speech realizing that something valuable and/or powerful. Such moments should provide immediate impetus for a POI to come.
  - *On Opposition, clarify the case if needed.* Be cautious about using POIs for clarification, as such POIs often come at the cost of argumentative POIs. If a logical assumption flowing from the case presentation can be stated at the beginning of the first Opposition speech to clarify the issue, then such a strategy should be prioritized. However, if you don't understand the case at all, if you need a concession from the Government to make the case debatable, or if you believe the Government will accept one of your terms and, in so doing, give you an advantage you wouldn't have otherwise, then such a POI use could prove worthwhile.
  - *Get your opponent to waste his or her time discussing unimportant issues.* This is always somewhat dangerous, as a strong opponent can respond to such attempts by simply dismissing the proposed issues as irrelevant, and use the opportunity to make fun of you for bringing them up. However, if you believe you can induce your opponent into a tangential rant (possibly because you know an issue will set your particular opponent off), or if you can create a logical conundrum that will take your opponent a while to address, then such POIs help you by reducing the amount of important material you have to deal with.

### ***Types of POIs***

Having discussed above individual techniques associated with POIs, we can now group POIs into a several broad categories. Hopefully the discussion below will serve as a useful illustration of the points above. The following four types of POIs are standard.

### 1) Clarification:

#### Example

“Sorry, I don’t understand. Are you proposing to *criminalize* X, or just make it illegal?”

OR

[after long-winded intro] “I’m sorry, what’s your case?”

#### Purpose

Makes the debate better, so that there’s clash.

#### When to Give

Right at the gavel, or as soon as the case becomes reeeeeally confusing.

#### How to Give

Stand up with “Point of Clarification”?

### 2) Fact Question:

#### Example

“But isn’t it true that there is no chance that missile defense will work?”

“That never happened.”

#### Purpose

Direct clash with their arguments.

Interrupt debaters’ rhythm.

#### When to Give

When there’s a conclusion/set of facts that your opponent relies on.

Don’t use for petty details.

#### How to Give

Doesn’t have to be in the form of a question.

### 3) Burden:

#### Example

“Can you give me one example of when that has happened?”

“What is your model for development?”

#### Purpose

Taking a risk to expose opponent’s incompetence.

#### When to Give

When opponent gives unsubstantiated assertion, and you figure they won’t be able to support it.

When you have a model.

#### 4) *Constructive/Rebuttal POIs:*

Aside from these three types of POIs, POIs can also simply be rebuttal points or constructive points. These will help to further the clash of the debate by forcing your opponent to answer your questions. Strong points you presented in your speech might be ignored by your opponent if he or she does not feel capable of addressing them, but if you bring them up again in a POI, your opponent will either be forced to address them or appear extremely foolish.

These POIs may be presented either before or after you actually address a certain point in a speech. Although there are far too many potential strategies to present in a brief article, the debater must keep in mind the effects that choices in timing can have. A constructive POI may be presented, for example, by the MO during the PMC speech in order to get an argument into the debate that can further be developed in the MO speech. On the other hand, the MO may decide to give a constructive POI during the MC speech in order to reintroduce and reinforce a point that was brought up during the MO speech. Similar strategies can be concocted for all speakers for both constructive and rebuttal POIs.

#### ***When to Ask POIs***

- First and foremost, remember to not give POIs during protected time. This is obvious, but it is worth mentioning.
- When the opposing team is presenting an argument, do not jump up on a POI the second they start outlining their argument. Wait until the argument has been *at least* partially developed. People won't and shouldn't take you when they're in the middle of explaining their argument.
- Do not barrack (i.e. stand up and down incessantly).
- Don't look super triumphant when you stand up for a POI. Chances are, they won't take you. Just stand up.

#### ***How to give POIs***

The most important thing to remember when giving POIs is to be confident. Stand confidently while waiting and, when recognized, speak with the eloquence and POIse you use in your speeches. Remember that you have just as much a right to speak as the person giving their speech. Do not be intimidated; take the floor and recognize that the time is yours.

To plan ahead for future POIs, a good idea is always to have a sheet of notes devoted to possible POIs. Some such POIs can be foreseen before the round, either based on logical questions flowing from your arguments or questions you want to use to direct the round as you want it to go. As the round evolves, of course, such a list should get updated with important issues that you want to keep emphasized, powerfully phrased questions that come to mind, opportunities for humour, and the like. This will ensure that you always have a good POI to give when your opponent yields you the floor. Many teams have a single POI sheet that partners share, though individual sheets work as well.

Opponents will, as described in the next section, grant you POIs during the moments that suit them, not the moments that suit you. Thus, it is important to always have a POI in mind and ready to be asked should the urge to take one strike your opponent. In a similar vein, it is crucially important to be offering *enough* POIs so that your opponent can take your questions at his/her leisure; a speaker who is being offered very few POIs can be forgiven by judges for not taking points at the inopportune moments he/she does get them. Try to have one person on your team standing to offer a POI every 30 seconds or so; less offerings than this may harm the judge's perception of your presence in the round, while more may be seen as badgering. Pay particular attention to offering points at moments of transition between your opponent's arguments, as such moments may be preferred by speakers who want to take your questions at times that don't interrupt their train of thought.

A crucial caution must be made against standing on impulsive POIs. Remembering that the opportunity to give POIs is a scarce resource, a good debater must make sure not to waste any chances. Though a powerful question may immediately come to mind following an opponent's comment, always take a few moments to reflect on the importance of the point for your side, as well as to make sure your question is well-phrased. Remember that a good opponent will sometimes make a provocative statement to inspire a POI he/she knows how to deal with; don't allow yourself to fall into this trap.

Many customs exist as to what to do when standing to offer a point; some are acceptable, some are intrusive, but none are required. It is enough to simply stand and wait to be recognized. Some debaters will extend their hand towards the speaker, place their other hand on their head, or make a similar gesture. You may do these things if they make you comfortable. It is acceptable to make a brief heckle to introduce your presence, usually phrased as "On that point." Introducing yourself with the subject of the question, saying something like "On England", can

be acceptable only if your introduction remains no more than about three words long. Something like “On the fiscal imbalance between the federal and provincial governments,” on the other hand, would not be well received as a POI introduction. Simplicity is generally best and most courteous, but small personalized methods like those described here can be used if respectfully done.

Be concise when giving your point. Take the time you need to present your question effectively but do not waste your opponent’s time. Speak until you’ve said your piece and take your seat when your point has been understood. Repeat the question should your opponent request clarification. As a general frame of reference, POIs should not take more than 15 seconds, although the most effective ones are often short single lines.

### ***When to Take POIs***

- Always take bona fide “clarification” POIs; it will only make the debate better.
- *Do not* take them when you’re in the middle of explaining your argument. This can only serve to throw you off and waste your time. If you’re about to finish your argument and want to take their POI, keep them standing. Otherwise, sit them down.
- Only take POIs when you know you’ll be able to answer it. For example, if you have a rather weak argument, what’s the point in taking the POI? You should take POIs at the time when you will best be able to handle them. Ideally, answering a POI should make you look good. A well-given POI can score a major victory for the other team, but if you manages to address the POI successfully and make your opponent look foolish for asking it, this will strength your speech tremendously.
- You should take *at least* one POI and preferably two, especially for the MC, MO, and LO speeches.

### ***How to answer POIs***

Dealing with POIs well is just as important as giving them well. As worst, a poor POI response gives your opponent argumentative strength by showing inability to deal with the issue in question. A better response will see a speaker quickly address the raised issue and subsequently revert the debate’s focus away from the question back to issues favourable to his or her side, confident that he or she now has one fewer POI to deal with later. Finally, an ideal POI response will diffuse the power of the argument suggested by the offerer, taking away issues valuable to the other team, and possibly using humour to make the opponent look foolish for

having asked the question in the first place. The difference in impact of good and bad POI responses is thus quite significant.

The following are worth keeping in mind when accepting POIs and preparing responses:

- *Choose your moments when taking points.* You have no responsibility to take POIs simply because your opponent is offering them, especially if they are being offered at inconvenient times in your speech. Do not hesitate to waive your opponents down or to ask that they wait, no matter how many have stood up, what looks they may be giving you or how belligerent they may be acting. Maintain control of your speech at all times. (Avoid, however, leaving your opponents waiting too long, as this is disrespectful.)
- *Do not let your opponent waste your time in question delivery.* The questioner has the right to make his or her point, but not to monopolize your speaking time. Once the point of the question is clear to all, if the speaker is continuing his or her dialogue needlessly, do not hesitate to sit the speaker down by saying that you understand the question. As with delivery, 15 seconds is a good upper bound for question length.
- *Think about your answer.* It is not a sign of weakness to take a few moments to wrap your head around a question if doing so will improve the strength of your response. Either let the questioner speak longer than you would otherwise or simply accept a few moments of silence as the cost of a strong answer. Taking the time you need to produce an effective POI response will invariably leave you better off.
- *Deal with both the question and its underlying assumptions.* Be sure not to make implicit concessions in your response, as these can be as damaging to your case as an outright concession. When receiving a POI be sure to understand both the question itself and why the question is being asked.
- *Be humorous.* In addition to the general value of levity, a flippant POI response can provide a quick exit from the question back to the meat of your speech. If a question is ridiculous, feel free to ridicule it.
- *If you must, be evasive.* If you can't think of a good response, it's better to avoid making damaging concessions.

### **Role Playing (Who should POI?)**

It's important to use POIs in order to be involved during the entire round. There are, however, certain times when it makes more sense for certain

individuals to offer POIs. While there are no hard and fast rules, there should be coordination between the two partners in order to manage time most effectively.

During the PMC speech:

- MO can give impulse rebuttal POIs or POIs that introduce points that the MO plans on raising. POIs should not be the MO's main concern, however, as he or she will have a speech to prepare.
- Thus, the LO should be doing most of the work in terms of delivering POI's.

During the MO speech:

- During this speech, both the PM and the MC can equally attack the MO.
- The PM, having just spoken, will have plenty of time to work on the PMR later.
- The MC, on the other hand, should be able to anticipate most of the arguments the MO will present and will already have his or her point constructed. This should give lots of time for the MC to offer POIs as well.

During MC speech:

- Having already spoken, the bulk of the POI work should fall upon the MO. If he or she wants to stay involved in the rest of the round, this is the MO'S only place to do it.
- The LO, however, despite having to speak next, should not be silent—after all, he or she will have already had 13-14 minutes to prepare before the MC even starts speaking. The LO's POIs should be more thematic in nature.

During LO:

- At this point, the MC should be doing most of the work.
- The PM will have to work on the PMR speech, but POIs that will ultimately support the PMR will be effective.

# Advanced Topics

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## Preparing For a Tournament

Once you know that you are going to a tournament, and with whom you are debating, there are various goals to be accomplished before you ever set foot in the briefing room at the tournament. These tasks range from the basics of preparation to advanced strategic thinking about the tournament attendees and environment. Your round will be won or lost in just 34 minutes of debating, but your performance during those 34 minutes will largely be determined by your preparation beforehand. Do not leave this preparation until the day before the tournament.

### *Becoming a Strong Team*

The key to a successful team is a strong bond between the individual members, not just two strong speakers put together. Make sure to get familiar with each others' specialties in knowledge and position comforts. It is important that both members understand the cases and that they are constructed so that both can argue for it and defend it in their own ways. You'll also need to discuss your preferred strategy to deal with confusing Opposition cases or unexpected rebuttals to your case. Another method to becoming a strong team is to get in some in-house practice rounds together and bond via reaffirmation and support. This way, you will both be invested in your cases and in supporting each other through reconstructions and POIs. For more detailed tips, see the articles on partner dynamics and troubleshooting later in this guide.

### *What to Read and Know*

It is good to have a strong general knowledge-base when debating in CUSID and abroad. You should try to keep up with current events and the philosophical issues of the day. This can be accomplished by reading newspapers and magazines, reading news articles on the Internet, or watching the news on television.

Oftentimes, as well, people forget to recycle class material into debate material. Many debaters take philosophy, politics, business, economics, or science courses which feature topics or discussions that could easily be turned into debate cases or used to attack others' arguments. You should always be thinking critically about what you are reading or learning and trying to store important and interesting concepts. If you encounter a neat topic in a class, and it can be made into a contentious case free of specific knowledge, then you will get kudos for originality and also raise the interest of the opposition and judge.

### ***The Value of Pre-Preparing Cases***

Many debaters understand how important it is to have cases prepared before the Friday of a tournament, and yet so many still leave it to the last minute to throw cases together. Pulling some cases out of a newspaper in a car enroute to the tournament can only be a recipe for under-development and thus lost rounds. You want to meet with your partner and develop ideas at least a week before the tournament. This way, you can think them over a few times, and hopefully try them out in-house.

### ***Secret Cases***

It is not impossible for two teams from the same school to hit each other. For this reason, try to have at least one case that your team keeps secret, and does not practice in-house with people going to the tournament. If your opposition already knows your case, they have an advantage over you.

### ***Knowing Your Opponent***

Advanced debaters don't just show up to a tournament with exactly enough cases and then use them randomly. They determine which club is dominant in presence at that tournament, which often happens in practice when one school sends a couple of van loads to a smaller tournament. As certain schools have patterned styles and judging preferences, this knowledge helps a strong debater better prepare for his or rounds. Targeting cases is a technique used by determining which teams are the ones to beat in order to do well and advance to the out rounds. Be careful with targeted cases, though, because you have no control over who your judge will be. A round where all four members are super excited about a topic and know each other very well may leave a judge in the dark. Watch for tournament rules on what is a fair case, and make sure not to unfairly target a case to someone, such as bringing up an issue they are known to

have significant difficulty with. This makes for a bad debate and can paint you in a negative light. The most effective targeted cases are those which bring about an excited and passionate round of debate while keeping the material open (not specific knowledge). In these debates, the arguments delve deeper than normal due to personal comforts with the topics and debaters.

What if you have a case prepared that you want to run, but you hear the pairings or walk into the room and realize that your Opposition knows way more than you and will likely clean the floor with you? Well, change the case you were planning on running. But what if that is your last case left? A case thrown together in ten minutes will not produce a better debate. Don't get too scared here; just walk in confident in your abilities. You can still do very well. Debates in which all the members are engaged produce better and more passionate arguments, and thus better speaker scores for everyone. Examine the way in which your case is worded, and see if you can make it, for example, more philosophical or principle-based than one based on a particular event or policy. The debate now comes down to who can present their principle best, and this can be less threatening than a case against a team with insurmountable knowledge. These teams often assume they will win based on that upper hand, or they forget to explain the basis of their principles. You can take the debate by being clear and strong on your end.

### ***Knowing the Intricacies of the Style Rules at the Tournament***

Make sure to read the style guide before attending a tournament, so that your cases comply with it. Some tournaments allow time-place sets while others don't, and some tournaments also permit certain permutations of style, such as Prime Minister's Rebuttal Extension or Split Opposition. Other style issues—either allowed or prohibited—will be mentioned, and you really want to avoid issues at the tournament by being aware of these rules beforehand.

A note on time-place sets: many can be turned into normal cases, simply by saying “event X should have happened ‘this’ way” or “person X should have been dealt with ‘this’ way.” Most of them can also be extended to principles and become issue debates instead of event debates. This is ideal most of the time.

## Teamwork Dynamics

You're signed up for a tournament and have just found out who your partner will be. There should be a few questions going through your head. What do you do now? What cases do you run? What positions do you take? How well can you do together?

The first and most important thing to remember is that debating is a TEAM effort, not just an individual one. To place highly at a tournament and make it to break rounds, you advance on team wins, not individual scores. A strong team can pull through an upset, but a weak team will fall down in the face of challenge. It takes work, though; there are various factors in becoming a strong team.

First of all, when you know someone will be your partner, you should try to bond as a team. Find out each others' specialties in knowledge and comfort in various positions. You should get to know each other on a level other than debating, as this comfort and camaraderie will make communication easier during rounds. Once you know what sorts of cases each member is comfortable arguing, you should conduct some individual brainstorming and then get together to discuss your ideas. This will produce a larger number and variety of cases, from which you can choose some that work for both of you and then prepare them together. You should also try to get some in-house rounds in together to practice combining your styles and see how your cases pan out.

Debaters with similar educational backgrounds tend to team up, but it doesn't have to (and probably shouldn't) be that way. You just need to know how to mitigate differences in knowledge and use them to your advantage.

### ***Structuring Cases and Arguments as a Team***

On side Government, you should define a strategy for dealing with cases that are thought of by one member with certain knowledge, which is not shared by the other team member. You must make sure both people understand the case thoroughly. Can the second member be the Prime Minister and construct the case so that the knowledgeable member can rebuild as the MC? Or can the first member brief the second one so that he or she is armed with enough knowledge to give a final 'holistic view' point as the MC? That way, the knowledgeable member can set up the case and deal with the initial POIs and the final rebuttal. Either format can

work, depending on with which positions and constructive burdens each member is comfortable with.

If the two members see the case differently, then it may work to organize it by themes, or prongs. For example, the PM will argue the social and educational impacts of a policy (which may include 2-4 points), and the MC will examine the economic impacts (which may involve 1-2 points). This way, you don't get into conflict over different views of the same arguments, allowing each member to specialize in a sector of the debate with some separated rebuilding of their partners' points by trying to echo their words.

### ***Achieving a Coherent Strategy on Opposition***

What if the lack of knowledge comes into play on Opposition when hit with a tricky case? How will the MO set up the case if it is the LO who knows a lot more? This is a situation that happens time and again. Often, a strong Opposition team can lose the round because an uneasy MO fails to set up a case properly or understand the Government case, forcing the LO to try to pick up the pieces. The blame for this result is not to be placed on the MO; rather, it is to be placed on a lack of communication. As soon as the full case is out, a confused MO should alert the LO about his or her confusion. At this point, the LO should do what he or she can to explain the base of the case to the MO quickly, but should be careful not to distract the MO from listening to the PM for important case details. The LO can help the MO get down a strong general point—a principle on which the Opposition will base its case—and can help the MO relate the case to something else he or she knows, so that he or she can develop some logical arguments.

Both members of the team need to be comfortable with the direction of the general attack. This way, the beginning of the Opposition case construction will do the trick to bring doubt to the PM speech. By doing his or her best to refute the PM, the MO will open up room for a constructive blow via the LO speech. In this situation, the MO needs to be careful, to refer a lot to the LO's upcoming material without pushing him or her into the wrong hole. Be mindful, though: the MO does need to bring some strong constructive material to the round. This can be accomplished with some general theoretical points if the MO really has no direct knowledge with which to argue.

If it is the LO who does not understand the case, the MO can whisper a few sentences of explanation or write it down, but can also afford to tell the LO to listen to his or her speech to get a better understanding. Note that this requires a

great deal of trust between the two, since the LO forfeits a lot of the directional definition to the MO. The MO should write down any LO points he or she can think of and should immediately find out if LO knows what's going on when he or she sits down. In this case, the MO might want to preface each point/refutation in his or her speech with "the Government has told you that..." to help the LO follow. This is actually a strategy that is good to use in most debates for the sake of the judges, but often gets left out when the debaters all know what's going on.

### ***Supporting Each Other's Arguments***

It is also important to keep each other in the round and remind the judges that you are a strong team. After all, judges are looking for an entire case to win, not just two good speeches separate from each other. This can be accomplished by referencing your partner's points. If you speak first, it may do you well to mention what your partner will say in the next speech, unless it is strategic to not do so. Be careful, though. If the case is tricky, not mentioning even an argument's title leads to a situation where the MC may be accused of using refutation to create a point, since there was no mention that it was a planned point. The PM may want to mention the prong or point the MC will bring.

The MO naturally cannot preface the LO's arguments, since they probably aren't fully developed yet. For this reason, there is more reference strategy in the second half on Opposition. The LO must remember to rebuild the MO's point after it has been refuted by the MC, so that the MO does not get forgotten in the round. The Opposition then becomes stronger because the judges see the link between the individual speeches and the overall case.

The MC must rebuild the PM's points for a few minutes in order to have a strong case. By going over each point's refutation from the MO speech and rebuilding in new or renewed words, the MC can re-strengthen the case after extending it with the final point. This builds credibility in the judges' eyes.

You can also use POIs to bring up your partners' points or remind the other team that those points were previously brought forth. This is not required, but does wonders for the image of teamwork, and allows a partner who is about to speak to continue to prepare their notes while someone speaks on their behalf.

Finally, it is important to remember to always be aware of conflict on a team. Some potentially dynamite teams have fallen apart due to personal clashes. Remember that this person is your partner, your other half. If they make a mistake

in a round, or if you lose a round, remember that you lost together. Do not take out the stress on your partner, as it will only cause personal distaste and distance. Talk to each other about what went wrong and what can be done to improve. Support each other. Socialize with lots of other people as well, so as to not spend too much time with only one person. Most importantly, remind yourself how important it is to stick together as a team. You win as a team and face challenges as a team. If you want to do well in individual scores, you need to have a strong team, which leads to a strong round, which thus leads to good speaker scores.

# Opposition Split Rebuttal

## *What Is Split Rebuttal?*

At the majority of Canadian Parliamentary tournaments, speaking times follow a standard order:

Prime Minister's Constructive—7 minutes  
 Member of Opposition—7 minutes  
 Minister of the Crown—7 minutes  
 Leader of the Opposition—10 minutes  
 Prime Minister's Rebuttal—3 minutes

American Parliamentary tournaments follow a similar pattern, although all speeches are slightly longer, but they also include one major difference: the Opposition Split Rebuttal. To accommodate the American style, some Canadian tournaments (North Americans and Winter Carnival) offer the option of this split rebuttal, which has the following breakdown of speeches:

Prime Minister's Constructive- 7 minutes  
 Leader of the Opposition's Constructive- 7 minutes  
 Minister of the Crown- 7 minutes  
 Member of Opposition- 7 minutes  
 Leader of the Opposition's Rebuttal- 3 minutes  
 Prime Minister's Rebuttal- 3 minutes

## *When to Use It*

Unless you are attending an American tournament, you will always have the option of using the traditional breakdown of Opposition speeches. If you are a less experienced debater, it is probably advisable for you to avoid using this option, and instead stick to the timing you are already familiar with. The 10 minute LO speech offers several advantages, including the ability to explore more complex and lengthy constructive arguments and the opportunity for a powerful speaker to have the longest uninterrupted period in front of the judges (after which a 3 minute PMR is often unable to fully recover side Government's case). It is for these reasons that most Canadian debaters choose to forgo this option at tournaments where it is offered.

That being said, there are a few situations in which using the split rebuttal can be a good strategic move for a team. The first is when a seasoned debater is on a team with someone much less experienced. In a tournament with squirrely resolutions, where there is no advance warning of the topic to be debated, it is often beneficial if the more proficient debater speaks first because they will be better equipped to quickly find opposition arguments to unfamiliar material. However, giving a 10 minute speech (and the last word for your side) to a newer debater is often a good way to overwhelm them and give the Prime Minister a chance to recover in their rebuttal. By using the split rebuttal, Opposition can have their better speaker lead the attack on Government's case and also be able to have the last word, summing up the most important material from both Opposition speeches. The less experienced member of the team then benefits from being able to follow the line their partner has set out for them, and can even fall back on their partner's argument for rebuttal to Government points, but does not have the burden of choosing which material is important enough to merit summary and which is better off not revisited.

A second scenario where split rebuttal can be helpful to an Opposition team is one in which it contains a person who is an excellent LO speaker in terms of constructive material but who struggles with time management. Many LO speakers in CUSID have become almost too good at coming up with interesting and in-depth constructive material, and they often spend so much time on it that refutation can suffer and summary in the LO speech becomes almost non-existent. By using the split rebuttal, the Opposition team is given speech times that force them to stop making constructive arguments and spend at least the last three minutes on refutation and summary of the round.

### ***How to Use It***

While the function of the LOR is very similar to that of the PMR in a round, it can substantially alter the structure of the Opposition's approach as a whole. Over the past few years in CUSID, there has been increasing importance put on side Opposition having a consistent case line similar to that which the Government must present, and not just throwing out many, often conflicting, rebuttal points. This approach to Opposition is even more important when using the split rebuttal; if the LOR is to effectively summarize the round in light of the Opposition's contribution, there must be a consistent Opposition case line on which it can draw.

Thus, the LO's Constructive speech should begin with a statement of the Opposition's stance. That can be as simple as a direct disagreement with the Government's case statement (i.e. They propose legalizing prostitution, and the LOC begins by stating that the Opposition will argue that any Government sanctioned allowance of prostitution should not occur), or as complex as a counter case. This means that the Opposition team must quickly agree upon a firm stance for their side to take while the PMC is being made, and they must remain committed to it throughout the round. If the MC makes some solid attacks on this stance, the MO should not abandon it in favour of something entirely different, or it will become very different for the LO to coherently summarize the Opposition's position.

The LOC must also include some of the big arguments that side will be making. Some Opposition teams use the strategy of a first speaker with small amounts of constructive and a heavy emphasis on refutation, and then dump a huge amount of important argumentation in the second speech while counting on the PMR to be too short for an effective response. This approach requires that the judges not notice or not care that the bulk of the important arguments came from a single speaker and did not contribute to the first two-thirds of the round. The split rebuttal timing puts more emphasis on equal partnership between the two speakers, as it is the only way the LOR will be able to draw upon material from both prior Opposition speeches to show that there has been a coordinated attack upon the Government's case. In APDA, too much constructive material in the second Opposition speech is referred to as an "MO dump", and the tactic is quite obvious as the LO ends up summarizing only their partner's material.

An effective MO speech in the split rebuttal times is one that can remain consistent with the line the LO set out for the team, adds new and effective argumentation, and leaves enough time for refutation. The presence of the LOR does not mean that the MO is absolved of that responsibility, as a good MO will want to neutralize any Government arguments the LOC was not able to fully address or which have only come up during the MC speech. Ideally, the LOR should begin with no outstanding Government constructive to deal with, so that refutation is limited to a few important arguments and the real focus can be on summary.

The LOR itself, as noted above, is quite similar to the PMR. It can be structured in a myriad of different ways according to the preferences of the speaker, and the emphasis on rebuttal/rebuilding constructive/summary will vary according to the way the round has gone. However, it is unlike the PMR in that it is

not the last word in the round, and so there are a few things it needs to accomplish to make sure that it is as effective as possible. The first is to force the PM to revisit some of their arguments by rebuilding attacks the Opposition has made against them. If the most crucial Government arguments are targeted, the PM will be forced to use valuable time in the PMR acting defensively rather than attacking the Opposition. The second is to clarify the Opposition's stance in the round, and its most important arguments, as the last word is all too often used to misconstrue an Opposition rather than go through the longer process of rebutting them. By summarizing exactly where the Opposition stands and the most important reasons why, the judge will be left with a fresh impression of Opposition's position in the round and the Government will have a much more difficult time persuading them you really meant something else.

## Style Rounds

Style cases are a rare though notorious part of Canadian Parliamentary debating. Whether you love them or hate them, chances are you'll run across one eventually. This article aims to ameliorate your style round experiences, both by providing tips and advice on how to deal with a style case if you ever have to oppose one, and giving some pointers and suggested guidelines to those who are interested in running them.

### *Identifying Style Cases*

There is no quick and easy definition of a style case. Many cases tread the line between the serious and the silly; hard criteria to distinguish whether a given case is a style case or not simply do not exist. The case statement alone is not enough to determine whether or not one is dealing with a style case. Cases that seem silly or trivial are oft times meant to be taken seriously and argued as such; cases that seem serious can be argued in a primarily humorous manner.

For instance, a case such as 'this house would remove the restriction requiring that one be born in the United States in order to run for President' sounds like it probably isn't a style case—indeed, if the first argument is about citizenship in a democracy or the importance of immigrants, it probably isn't. However, if the first argument is titled 'Robots are never born', and the PMC is about how cool it would be to have a robot as President, then you probably are dealing with a style case.

The best identifier of a style case is the use of arguments that are primarily intended to be humorous, witty or outright zany. If the tone and apparent aim of the round is humour, you're probably dealing with a style case; if the round is primarily serious discussion about relatively serious issues, you're probably not. The best that can really be said is this: You'll probably recognize one when you see it.

### *When to run them*

Style cases are not run very often in competitive debates. Many people do not believe that it is appropriate to decide the results of a debating tournament based on a round that has such an emphasis on wit and humour. Some do not even believe that it is possible to adjudicate a style round in any way that would be preferable to flipping a coin. Yet others believe that style rounds are appropriate

in tournaments in certain situations, and are indeed proper, decidable rounds of debate.

There is one thing that is fairly unanimously agreed upon, however; that is that style rounds should, if they are to be run at all, make up a very small percentage of all debates. *The present author would strongly advise against commonly showing up to debating tournaments expecting to run a number of style cases.*

If you are interested in running a style case, try to run it at an appropriate time. Generally people find style cases to be less appropriate the more important that a given round of debate is. For instance, it's generally not a good idea to run a style case in the finals of a tournament; it's more appropriate to run one in an in-round, particularly if the round isn't very important (i.e. both teams know they definitely won't / definitely will be breaking).

It is strongly recommended that you make sure that your opponents are okay with debating a style case before you decide to run one. Ask the other team before the round; if they're uncomfortable or unwilling to debate a style case, you probably shouldn't run one. Not only is this the nice thing to do, it's the smart thing to do. There are few things that are worse than a style round where the opposing team refuses to play ball; if the round is atrocious, it is unlikely that the judge will reward you for what you have just made them suffer through, even if you are somewhat humorous.

In particular, don't try to run a style case to gain an advantage over a team who you consider to be 'less funny' than you, or who you simply think would not play ball. Judges tend to be very sympathetic towards Opposition teams in style rounds; most of the time, choosing to run a style case will make it more difficult to win your round of debate.

Keep in mind that even if you're really interested in running style cases, it's not necessary that you run them in "serious" debating tournaments. You can often have more fun running a style round in-house, against members of your club who you are certain will play ball and who you think will enjoy the experience. Moreover, CUSID tends to host an annual summer tournament, where style rounds are the norm rather than the exception; this is an excellent opportunity to try out all the wacky cases that you've come up with over the year.

### *Tips for Running Styles*

The first thing you need do if you're interested in running a style case is to come up with a topic. Topics for style cases are incredibly varied and often very creative; moreover, oft times two different teams might take the exact same topic in an entirely different yet equally hilarious direction. The present author will not pretend to be able to instruct you on how to choose an appropriately humorous topic or how to make your case funny; these things are up to you, gentle reader, and to try to formalize them would likely take the fun and variety out of style cases.

What must be stressed, though, is that before running a given style case, you should hold it up to the highest scrutiny. Make sure it's actually as funny as you think it will be. Many people come up with ideas for style cases that sound funny at first, but do not lend themselves well to a 34-minute debate. You have to be certain that you have enough material when running a style case. Think of jokes and funny arguments in advance. Unlike a in a normal debate, don't count on your Opposition team to hold up their end; you have to have a good 17 minutes of material to fill your time with in case the Opposition team completely drops the ball. Depending on how the Opposition reacts, you won't always be able to make as much time out of rebuttal in a style round as you would in a regular debate. Ideally, the Government side of the style case should be funny or interesting enough to make the round worthwhile even if the Opposition just plain sucks.

Keep in mind that when you're running a style case, you're still running a case. The round should still look like a debate. A good style round isn't just a collection of public speeches; it still has arguments and structure holding it together. Make sure that your style case isn't just you and your partner standing up and being zany for 17 minutes with no regard to the formal structure of a debate. A style case with structured arguments, rebuttals, etc. will come off better than one which tries to be nothing more than an act of stand up comedy. Moreover, by keeping to the structure of a debate you make it easier for your Opposition to engage with your case; even if they have absolutely nothing humorous to say they can probably still keep the momentum going by rebutting your arguments and trying to pick apart whatever twisted logic your case may have.

Remember, in debating in general, and in style rounds in particular, you *want* your Opposition team to be able to engage your case; this gives you more material to work off of and makes the entire round funnier, much more enjoyable, and it makes the judge more likely to reward you for having run the case. Do what

you can to try to ensure that this will happen, whether it be by warning the Opposition team beforehand that you're planning on running a style case, or by making sure to keep to the structure and format of a debate so that the case is more easily approached. Very good and very funny style is often rewarded with high speaker scores—your goal should be to make your style round one of those, and for that full Opposition participation is necessary. If the round goes poorly because you've run something that's seems to be unapproachable for the Opposition, it's unlikely that a judge will be willing to give you particularly high speaker scores. Keeping the formal structure of a debate is key for maintaining some outs in case the humour doesn't come off as you've planned; in the worst case scenario you'll have a regular debate about a silly topic, rather than five bad public speeches.

### *Tips for Opposing Style Cases*

Often when people run up against a style case they're unsure how to oppose it. Many people think that they're unsuited to oppose a style case, frequently because they consider themselves to be 'not funny enough'. Oft times what might have been a fun (or at least bearable) style round goes sour because the Opposition team just plain doesn't know what to do. There are a few pieces of advice that can be very useful in helping you avoid this situation, so that you might be able to effectively oppose style cases.

The first and most important rule when opposing a style case can be summed up in two words: play ball. Style rounds go particularly poorly when the Opposition team just isn't willing to try to engage the case. Even if the last thing that you want is to be in a style round, don't spend your speech whining about the topic or being very resigned about the debate. Throw yourself into it like you would any other debate; give it some thought and enthusiasm. Many people think they're unable to oppose style cases and simply don't try; you'll often be surprised at how effective you can be, and how much more fun such rounds will be, if you just convince yourself to go ahead and give it a shot. It may mean that you'll have to say some silly things, or discuss an incredibly trivial issue. Just put your airs of seriousness aside for a moment and engage the case; you'll be rewarded by a better round of debate as well as by judges who will give you points just for trying.

Many people are worried that they simply aren't funny enough to oppose a style case. If you think this applies to you, then don't fret. You can do a very good job of opposing a style round by simply trying to be creative. In style cases, you're open to using incredibly trivial or ridiculous responses that you wouldn't be able to

use in a normal debate; by trying to think of *all* the possible responses to the Government's arguments, including incredibly silly ones, you're likely to find something entertaining to say. For instance, if the Government team wants to allow robots to run for President, you're quite welcome to have a case study of the Terminator movies as one of your Opposition points. A lot of the humour in style cases comes from people saying things that no one really expected to be in the round; by being creative you can make up for any 'natural lack of humour' that you may think you have.

Even if all you can think of are serious debating responses, keep in mind that in many situations applying serious concepts to silly cases gives hilarious results. An analysis of international relations and principles of criminal justice applied to a case about whether a Teletubby should be punished for spilling custard is surprisingly funny, just as an argument about enfranchising disenfranchised political groups so as to allow them to peacefully take part in the political process rather than becoming radical and militant may be amusing in a case about allowing robots to run for office. You can often apply your 'serious' debate logic as you would in a normal case; the only difference is that you're applying it to a fairly ridiculous situation, which will likely cause hilarious results.

When opposing a style case, keep in mind that you should try to stay within the parameters of the round. Style rounds frequently involve fictional settings; one might run into a case about the Simpsons or the Teletubbies. If you're debating a case about what Homer should do on the Simpsons, you probably shouldn't bring in arguments about the show's producers or its viewing audience. Many fictional style cases (which generally take the form of time-place sets) are meant to be debated within their fictional setting; bringing in arguments which could not belong within that setting will often lead to a messy round. Such style cases aren't without logic or reason; they simply adopt a different sort of internal logic, one which you should take note of on Opposition and use to your advantage as you reply to the government case.

If you're looking to win a style case on Opposition, keep in mind that most judges will be very sympathetic to your position. They'll understand that you're coming up with jokes on bizarre arguments on the spot while the other team has had a lot of time to thoroughly think through their case, and they'll know that you're probably in a more difficult position than in a regular round of debate. The best approach is to simply not give them any excuse to make you lose. Play ball with the case, engage your opponents' arguments, and try to be as creative and humorous as you can muster. Chances are that if you make a good show of trying

to put up a fight, the judges will reward you. Many style cases end up being not as good as the Government originally thought they would be; Opposition teams frequently walk away with a win simply for playing ball and being reasonable. Now and then you'll run into a Government style case that is hilarious and brilliant—in these cases, play off their humour and try to come back with more of your own. Even if you don't end up winning, if the judge is enjoying the round you'll probably end up with some rather good scores.

### *In Closing*

Style cases can be a very fun part of debating; they can also be atrocious disasters that will leave you wishing for the past 34 minutes of your life back. Realize that running a style case is always risky, and do what you can to minimize the risk that it will be a poor round. Be well prepared, and make sure the other team is willing to play ball. If you do run into a style case on Opposition, don't fret—give it your best shot, and you'll probably do better than you'd have thought. Above all else, whatever side of the floor you may be on, try to have fun; after all, that is the point of debating in general, and style rounds in particular.

## Troubleshooting: What to do when Things go Wrong

The question pros are most frequently asked during seminars (other than “where do I find cases?” to which the answer is inevitably “none of us know”) is what to do when some type of disaster happens during a round. Knowing the basics of each position is obviously important, but when things go wrong in a round, you also have to know how to make adjustments and deal with the problems that crop up.

The main thing that you want to keep in mind is that your job is to make the round as good as possible, even when things start to go wrong. It’s not fun to win rounds because everyone was awful and the judge decided it was slightly less your fault than the other team. It’s even less fun to lose rounds in the same situation. And ultimately, your job as a debater is to make the round enjoyable for the judge—when you are interesting, informative, or entertaining, especially when everyone else in the round seems determined to screw it up, they appreciate it and tend to reward you accordingly.

I’ve chosen six of the problems that crop up most frequently during rounds, and which are asked about most frequently in training seminars. Included with each is a description of the problem, and some suggestions for how to salvage the best possible round when they occur.

### *I don’t know anything about the case the PM just presented.*

With the variety of topics that are debated in CUSID (politics, economics, pop culture, sports, abstract philosophical questions, joke rounds), there’s no way that you’ll have a broad enough knowledge base to be prepared for every case you hit. Although it can be scary to have a PM get up and introduce a case on which you have absolutely no knowledge, it’s a situation that everyone finds themselves in sometimes and it doesn’t necessarily mean that you’ll lose the round.

In some instances, the other team will have purposely chosen an obscure topic and then bombarded you with facts in an attempt to win the round through sheer volume of knowledge. This is generally frowned upon, and there are in fact penalties against “specific knowledge” cases (the standard is whether or not the average, newspaper-reading university student could be expected to know enough about the subject to debate it). If the case is about an obscure topic, but enough

information is provided that you aren't left in the dark, that's generally considered fair game. If you feel a case is within the specific knowledge realm, you can mention it briefly to the judges at the beginning of the MO speech, but you then need to drop the complaints and make the best attempt you can at debating it anyway- whining about it, especially since the judges may not agree with you, only makes a difficult round worse.

So whether a case is purposely obscure or just something you don't know much about, you need to focus on making the best of the situation and clashing with it as much as possible. One method is to find constructive arguments in the common sense refutation that you have for their material- their arguments will involve facts and opinions, and you can use those facts to create conflicting opinions. For example, if Government runs a case about banning Hindu nationalist political parties in India, and one of their arguments is that these parties are bent on destroying the religious tolerance that the state has always supported, you could surmise that India's long history of supporting religious tolerance is inconsistent with politically disenfranchising a significant voice in the debate.

Another method is to use stock arguments, tweaked a little depending on the round. There are a number of debating arguments out there that can be used on a variety of different topics, one of the more common being the idea that political disenfranchisement leads to violence. So in the India example from above, you could argue that when you take away the ability for a group to express itself democratically, that often leads to the movement being pushed underground and finding more violent outlets, as with the Basques/Zapatistas/an example from another country that you know enough about to discuss comfortably. Including examples from other places, with reference to how they are similar to the situation in question based on what you know of it/what you learned from the PMC, are a good way to make reasonably convincing arguments on a topic you know nothing about.

***The case is tight/the case isn't debatable.***

Sometimes the PM will get up to outline a case, and it will be presented in a way that is entirely undebatable. This may mean that it is tight (obviously slanted heavily towards the Government side, as in "This house believes that gender inequality is present in some parts of the world") or just completely confused and not really something you can make arguments for or against (for example, "This house believes that America is in a haze of confusion"). In these cases, while it's tempting to spend your seven minutes pointing out how ]Government has done

something very stupid and deserves to lose the round, what you should actually do is briefly mention why it's an undebatable case and then go ahead and debate it anyway.

There are a few different strategies you can employ to make arguments where there don't appear to be any. One is to reshape the ground you have been given, or to clarify the case for side Government and make it into something debatable. This is particularly useful where a muddled case is presented, and it's not clear what exactly Government is standing for. For example, if they argue that the United States should negotiate with terrorists, but then progressively redefine their stance by specifying that the U.S. should really only negotiate with groups that it doesn't believe are terrorists but which have been labeled as such by another country, and that by negotiate they don't mean make concessions but rather just ask if they are terrorists, the best thing side Opposition can do to salvage the round is to choose to interpret the case as something workable and then refute that. In this case, that interpretation might be that side Government is arguing for the United States to disregard the labels which other countries put on rogue elements within their borders and rather employ only their own standards to decide who to negotiate with or not. That redefinition leaves both sides with plenty of ground to argue, and is still within the spirit of what Government seemed to be trying to propose.

Similarly, if a case is obviously tight, it may help to clarify what you feel is fair for you to be asked to argue and then create clash there instead of allowing side Government to box you into unfairly narrow ground. An example of this scenario is where side Government argues that public schools in the United States should not have religious education classes where children attend a Christian church for a few hours of each week, regardless of their own religion, and those who choose not to sit in the classroom and do nothing, and no other religion is ever taught. In this case, the Opposition might instead choose to argue that while mandatory education in one particular religion in a public school is not a good policy, they think that this system could be beneficial if changed to include the teachings of other faiths, instead of scrapping it altogether. The debate then shifts to the question of religious education generally in schools, rather than forced education in a particular religion. Both clarifying and redefining the case are useful strategies because they improve the quality of the entire round; the Government team, if smart, will accept your changes and have better speeches as a result, while your team will have enough ground to be able to create a reasonable opposition stance in the round.

Another strategy you can employ is humour, making the really weak arguments your side has entertaining to watch while also ridiculing the position you have been put in. This can be difficult to do well, because some government teams in this situation will continue to push their serious arguments, and the round will become confused, lack clash, and generally be very little fun to watch. However, if you think you can use humour cleverly, and especially if you can also include serious arguments and refutation, then it can successfully salvage an enjoyable round out of a very bad case.

***The opposition hasn't done any refutation of our case.***

While it may seem like you've been handed an easy win if the Opposition chooses not to engage with your material, it can actually make your role in the round a lot more difficult. Speakers in a round have the job of arguing against their opponents, and if you follow your Opposition's example of avoiding clash, the round is going to degenerate quickly. Additionally, without attacks on your case to respond to, you're going to have difficulty filling your time. Both of these lead to boring, repetitive rounds, and low speaker points for all involved. Thus, when the Opposition has inadequate refutation of your case, you should spend your speech striving to create clash between your case and their constructive arguments.

As an MC speaker, there are three things you are expected to do in your speech: add some constructive material, refute the MO's arguments, and rebuild Government's case by responding to the refutation the MO did. If the MO made an attempt at refutation, but it was very brief or very weak, you can simply go through each and every objection they raised, no matter how small, and make several replies to them all. Even if their arguments don't seem to merit a reply, or could be defeated by any one of the many possible responses, a really good deconstruction of all their various flaws creates clash and makes you seem very thorough in your responses.

If, on the other hand, the MO didn't refute the case at all, your job is somewhat more difficult. You should still follow the same structure for your speech as you regularly would. Then, during the rebuilding phase, you can use the constructive material from the MO speech to hypothesize the objections that side Opposition has to your case. For example, if you ran a case about legalizing prostitution and the MO spent their 7 minutes rambling about children needing good values, you can spend the refutation portion of your speech discussing why prostitution is not an inherently negative activity. Then, during your rebuilding portion, you can use Opposition's speech as a response to a PMC argument that the

government should not legislate morality, and you can go on to rebuild this argument by discussing why it is not the government's job to decide which values children are exposed to.

***The Opposition has demolished our case.***

Sometimes an MO speaker will be very knowledgeable about your case (or just a very good debater) and will absolutely rip it apart during their speech, leaving you feeling like you've already lost the round. As an MC speaker, you then have the task of trying to salvage it so that there is enough material left to get through the rest of the round without it being terribly one-sided. There is very little that is more painful for a judge to watch than a debater who knows they have lost a round and has given up, so it is your job to keep the round going by continuing to try to advance your case. Most of the time, this means that you should do the best you can to refute Opposition's arguments and rebuild your partner's speech.

Sometimes, however, the MO speech will point out glaring problems that you hadn't realized about your case, and it will be pretty much impossible to counter them. In order to remain consistent with your partner while dealing with the damage that has been dealt to their speech, you can try to refocus the round on the principles behind the specific arguments your partner made. For example, you could run a case about the European Union expanding to include North Africa, giving these countries all the privileges that the other members enjoy including freedom of movement. The MO might then demolish it, arguing that Africa's porous borders will give terrorists free rein to enter any EU country, and that there is not enough political will to take on the financial strain of supporting these countries. Instead of spending the bulk of your time directly countering those arguments, which expose some pretty big problems with the case, you could instead choose to take a principled approach. In this situation, that might mean focusing your speech on the necessity of the European Union expanding its influence in the world, and comparing the two methods by which it can do so: more integration among current member countries, or branching out into surrounding regions. You can then use the latter to rebuild your partner's arguments with emphasis on their philosophical justification rather than their practical effects. However, you should also bear in mind that simply coming up with a "philosophy" does not mean that you can ignore Opposition arguments, and that an attempt should be made to refute them at face value.

***My partner argued something disastrous.***

Although we all say stupid things in rounds sometimes, having your partner make an unnecessary concession, confuse one of your arguments, or just take the completely wrong approach to a case leaves you in a particularly difficult position when you are speaking after them. However, as disastrous as those moments may sound, it's important to note that things rarely appear as bad to your judge as they do to you; they don't know what you were planning on saying, so they won't know that the changes your partner made were a mistake unless you communicate that to them. Your most important job in these situations is to act as a consistent team- it is never okay to completely cut your partner loose and admit that they screwed things up. If the mistake they made was something as simple as a slip of the tongue, it's okay to point that out and continue as though it didn't happen. If, however, they based their entire speech around a stance you consider flawed, you aren't going to be able to pretend that didn't happen. Instead, the way to salvage the round as much as possible is to minimize the damage without completely ignoring the intent of their arguments—even if you wish you could.

This may mean, at times, that you have to give up the approach you were planning on taking in the round and instead find ways to strengthen the route your partner chose to take. At no point should it appear that you are anything less than 100% committed to the stance your partner has taken for the team- showing your reluctance to argue it only weakens it in the judge's eyes. Instead, you should continue the argumentation already presented for your side as best you can. However, if there are ways that you think you can minimize the damage by subtly downplaying what they said, you should attempt to do so. Take, for example, a case about the Ontario government becoming more lenient regarding strip clubs, where one of your arguments has to do with Ottawa's entertainment industry struggling in competition with a more lenient Quebec one. A "disaster" type situation might occur if your partner is asked a question about organized crime being more prevalent in conjunction with strip clubs, and they choose to respond that anything that puts more money into the economy is something government stands for. Instead of forcefully defending the contribution of organized crime to the economy, you can try to minimize this statement in a later speech by spinning it a little. You could argue that what your partner actually meant was that the benefits to the economy of strip clubs outweigh the harm of organized crime potentially increasing- something a lot more easily defended, since it also leaves you room to attack the probability of organized crime increasing in a meaningful way.

*The judge appears to be reacting badly to my speech.*

While a lot of judges prefer to remain as impassive as they can during a round, there will be rounds in which the judge has obvious and seemingly negative reactions to your speech. These can include making faces, looking bored, frowning, even gesturing for you to move on. While it is usually advisable to take note of your judge's reaction and make adjustments to your speech where possible, it's important to realize that some people make faces during most speeches they watch, and it may not reflect what they actually think of what you're saying. The more time you spend debating in CUSID, the more familiar you'll become with those who judge frequently and their typical demeanor while doing so. If you are ever uncertain as to what a judge's reaction means, or are not sure how to adjust your speech, the safest route is to continue on as planned. Attempting to make changes when you aren't comfortable with them can sometimes just cause you to become more flustered and harder to understand.

That being said, there are times where a judge is obviously reacting to something you are saying, and if you are comfortable enough to adjust to their preferences it will help you to deliver a speech that better appeals to them. If a judge is making faces at a particular argument, you have two options: you can try to explain your point better, or you can drop it and move on to different material. If the point you are trying to make isn't that important to your position, or if it's something incredibly complex and difficult to explain, it's probably best to cut your losses and spend your limited time on something else. If, on the other hand, it's one of those arguments that's absolutely essential to the position you're trying to establish in the round, then you should make the effort of explaining it more thoroughly or in a different way (with an example or analogy, with more background information, with different phrasing, etc).

Similarly, if an opponent asks a point of information during the round and the judge nods or otherwise seems to agree with the issue they are raising, you may want to spend more time responding to it than if the judge looks confused or disgusted by their question. The arguments that you think are most compelling may not necessarily be the same as the ones your judge prefers, and it's important to be able to look at the round from outside your own perspective.

## Becoming a Better Debater: A Realistic Assessment

So, you want to get better at debating?

This article is for those of us who have been around the block a couple times and seem to be stalled in the 2-3, 3-2 bracket. This article is *not* for those who have just started debating. In fact, I would go so far as to say that you should *not* read it. Basically, I was asked to write this article because I used to be there and now I'm not. If this at all feels familiar, then this article is for you.

Before we go any further though, we have to deal with some hard truths. The first thing, and I have to say this right off the bat, is that learning to debate well is very hard. Really, really hard. Sure, there are people that pick it up in a year of university, but the truth is that for many of us it takes years. In fact, most of the people who regularly break at tournaments did their embarrassing learning in the safe confines of high school. So, for the rest of us, it can get a little discouraging. No coaches, rare feedback, and the feeling that every tournament is the same, in which you may only get the occasional chance to prove yourself.

This can sometimes lead to people feeling negative about themselves. Many people, myself included, have at one point or another used their status on the tab as a proxy for self-worth. If you are one of the people that get those few shots against better debaters and seem to always lose, it can be *very* discouraging. One of the hardest things to do, but the most important, is to separate how you feel about debating from how you feel about yourself. You should not take it personally or conflate debating prowess with self-worth.

This first step is necessary, because the second step is to be realistic. The somewhat harsh way to say this is "stop making excuses," but there's more to it than that. If you continually don't break, it's probably not just a random occurrence. Sure, the judging at debate tournaments is imperfect and it can sometimes get worse if you are in the lower brackets, but your debating life is still in your control. It's impossible to improve unless you recognize your weaknesses.

Although it may not seem like it, the above can actually be quite positive. We don't get a lot of opportunities for harsh, honest evaluation in our lives, and I think that this is part of the reason people tend to have such strong reactions to failure in debating. So, if you can approach debating as something not completely

tied up in how you feel about yourself, then you may be ready for some of the harsh feedback that it is going to take to get to the next level.

One of the most helpful departure points from which to learn how to improve your debating is to look at what makes a good debater. Here we meet my pet theory, in which I break down debating into separate, component skill categories: style, information and analysis. Generally, you can evaluate any debater in terms of these three areas, and once you figure out where your weaknesses lie, you know where to focus your efforts in order to improve.

## 1. Style

The traditional use of the word style in debating conjures up images of bad debates we had in our first year that we thought would be funny. I would like to expand our use of the word ‘style’ into a two-part definition:

1. Style measures the clarity of the presentation of your ideas. This encompasses not just your speaking style, but how you structure your speech and even how you structure your arguments. This is the absolute foundation of your speech: can you communicate complex ideas to other human beings? Without this, nothing matters. If people do not understand the words coming out of your mouth, you don’t even get out of the gate.

If your clarity is poor, then you have to throw all your efforts into fixing this. Slow down, work on what note-taking style leads to well structured speeches, and a little secret of mine, stay away from areas you know too much about until you can handle presenting them. Often, a person’s own knowledge makes them implode when they try to put real expertise into a debating context. So, hear me: if your clarity isn’t great, stay away from areas of strong personal expertise; you will get overwhelmed with the real-world complexity of the issue.

2. Style is also all of the things that get judges to buy what you’re saying. It has been said that debating often just comes down to competing assertions. As a result, it is of paramount importance to get the benefit of the doubt. Partially it just comes down to being reasonable, but it also has to do with how you sound. Although they may vary in style, all successful debaters have found a way of speaking that makes them sound smart. Remember debates where you got your best speaker points and try to bring that style

of speaking into rounds where it doesn't come naturally. Focus on saying things clearly and in a way that makes people trust you. That's it.

So, how does one improve style? You absolutely have to get feedback from qualified judges and debaters. You have to find out when you are not being clear and when your arguments land flat. Then, take any steps you can to improve. To be honest, this one's tough; it takes a lot of work and there is no fast fix.

## 2. Information

Information as a category is relatively self-explanatory. Do you know stuff that is relevant to the debate? This is by far the easiest way to improve your debating. Nothing else is as cut and dried or as easily identifiable. If you want to compete on Sunday, you have to know stuff. At the very least, you have to be paired with someone who knows stuff (although that only goes so far). If speaking unintelligibly is the first way debaters shoot themselves in the foot, then not knowing the goods is a close second. As a piece of general advice on Government: never run an international relations case when you are debating against someone who you know is just better informed than you.

A lot of people knock *The Economist*, but if you are serious about catching up with the political science-types that always break, this is the way to do it. Your chosen periodical does not have to be *The Economist*, but I don't know another place where you get as good an overview of so many important areas in such a concise form. If you actually read *The Economist* every week, you will immediately jump to the top 5% of CUSID in terms of knowledge base. If not *The Economist*, fine, just find something that will give you the requisite important 3-4 pieces of information about common debate topics. The great thing about information is that it provides instant credibility, and that it is all relative. You don't have to know everything—just more than the people across the table.

To sum up, if you aren't on your game with the information, this is your first area of attack. Read read read.

## 3. Analysis

Analysis is the skill to see the structure of arguments and the ability to evaluate what makes a good argument and why. Your ability in this regard will generally be a function of three areas: natural ability, what you are studying in school, and debating experience. The first is obviously a given, and while certain

academic degrees definitely seem to make good debaters, it is hard to tell whether it is a selection effect (i.e. whether people who think analytically tend towards certain majors).

Experience is probably the only one under your control at the moment, and for this I can simply say that if you want to get better at analysis, you have to debate a lot. If you have seen the case before, you know what is coming; a lot of the difference between the top debaters and the rest of CUSID is that they have already seen this debate like 5 times. Also, the more you think in terms of arguments the better you become at analyzing them.

Here is where reading comes in again. Once you are 'up' in general information, try to find articles that don't just have information, but make arguments. This is where *The Economist* fails, as it generally presents issues as statement of fact and, if ever it offers policy recommendations, the editors take certain things for granted. There are a lot of good places to find a good mixture of analysis and information; some of the more political blogs are great for this. Also, [aldaily.com](http://aldaily.com) is a fantastic source of good articles that make complex arguments.

Like everything else I have recommended, find the path that works for you. There is no set path; the only constant is that debating is hard, and it takes work to get better. This is why I think there are relatively few people who are really really good debaters. It takes a lot of time and effort and it takes a special kind of person to put all that emotional and mental energy into something that the rest of the world doesn't care that much about. In spite of this, all of the advice I give here is applicable to outside the debating world. Presentation and speaking in public will always be important, analyzing arguments is extremely useful in certain contexts, and being knowledgeable about the world means people listen to you when you talk.

Debating is probably the most rewarding single undertaken I did in university. It teaches skills that are applicable across fields and you meet a great caliber of people that you can't assemble anywhere else at school. The key to getting the most out of it is to approach it from the right perspective. Putting effort into speaking with greater clarity, or being more knowledgeable, these are great goals in debating because they are tangible and you can see real results by working on them. In my opinion, the best way to look at it is that you want to be the best debater you can be, and if winning tournaments is a result of that so be it. Good Luck.

## Winning Bubbles and Break Rounds

There are a lot of good debaters who ride the one-down bracket with ease and then choke upon reaching a bubble or break round. This is partly because it's often the first time in a tournament that teams will hit another really strong team, partly it's the sheer pressure of being in such an important round, but more than anything it's because teams are so concerned about just being in the round that they often don't focus on winning it. Here's what we mean.

### *Winning Bubbles*

You don't need to debate dirty to win a bubble, but you do need to make sure that you're in control of the round.

### *On Government:*

The first piece of advice is quite simply, run a case you know that you can win. No one has ever said, "Gee, they dropped in the bubble, but they ran a really interesting and contentious case." Your focus in this round should be winning, above getting high speaks even.

Before the tournament, select a case that you think might be bubble round material and run it in-house to make sure that you can win it. You want the case to be clear, predictable, and to be easily summed up in 1 sentence so that the case statement cannot be screwed up.

A good bubble round case might be something like "This house would allow posthumous appeals." In a sense this is a "tight" case, but not tight because there are no Opposition arguments, "tight" in the sense that the scope of the debate is limited: there are Opposition arguments, so there will still be a reasonable debate, but you can anticipate and ultimately defeat them.

### *On Opposition:*

Focus less on philosophical Opposition arguments, and attack the case more in terms of debate mechanics. Especially in the MO, focus on picking apart the very construct of the case to show that it simply cannot be true. Go for stuff like false dichotomies, practical impossibilities, or plain lack of clarity.

## *Quarters*

Assuming that you still don't have much of an audience, a quarter final is still fairly similar to a bubble round, obviously with some elements of an open round thrown in. At the same time, try to drag people out of bed for moral support—even your mom if that's the best you can muster. It sounds simple, but it definitely makes you look and feel more confident to have people backing you up even when your points are rather silly.

## *Government*

First off, the general feeling goes that you shouldn't ever willingly be the Government team. Conventional wisdom is that Opposition has an advantage in open rounds. Whether or not it's true, people tend to see picking Government as a sign that you are cocky or have a tight case. If you do choose Government, then at least make sure that that isn't actually the case.

Also, it's become very popular to run what are called targeted cases. Because people know the night before who they are hitting in quarters, they will pick a case that they know that their Opposition is really uncomfortable with. Obviously, use the time that you have to find a case that is strong, clear, and may catch them off guard a bit, but be careful about obviously targeted cases. Judges will generally recognize them and award the other team accordingly.

Other than that, just don't get too theatrical with your case at this point. Generally, this is a good point to run a solid case with a straightforward construct on an issue that you feel really comfortable with.

## *Opposition*

This is often when people start thinking about mock-o-sition. It can be an effective technique in a round with an audience where two teams are fairly evenly matched, it because it makes the judges feel that you are clearly the stronger team. Especially because judges do tend to default to Opposition if the round is close, it will make them feel that they have to justify giving it to Government. You don't have to be mean or even necessarily funny, but try to be openly confident so it is clear to the judge who is in control of the round.

### *Semis and Finals*

These are tricky because they don't come around very often and it takes time and practice to get used to debating in front of a bigger crowd of people. Try to be funny, but don't feel that you have to be if that's really not your style. Focus on content, and slip jokes in along with serious points so that if no one laughs it looks less awkward.

At this point, case choice should largely rest on what will make you feel comfortable. Particularly for the Final, try to focus on a case that will make for an interesting and challenging round of debate. Ideally, show people something that they have never seen before or couldn't do themselves. That said, people often run their best case in semi's and have nothing left for the final, so try to have a Finals case set aside and don't let yourself use it.

Really, the advice here is in some ways the opposite of bubbles and quarters. Be really considerate of the other team. Strive to ensure a really good round of debate. A lot of people are watching you, and will form an impression of you as a debater based on how you conduct yourself in these rounds. If you just enjoy how far you've come and the chance to debate in front of an audience, these rounds are generally a lot of fun.

# Seminars

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## Guide to Training Beginning Debaters

While this article has nothing to do specifically with debating, it is nevertheless an important part of this debating guide. A written guide may be useful, but the vast majority of a novice's training will still come from seminars given by a club's pros. Thus, it is important that those pros know how to give clear and informative seminars. This article will hopefully prove extremely useful for those pros who will be required to give (a) seminar(s) but are not entirely with the idea of it.

### *How to Give the First Seminar*

Designate a specific, highly visible club member (such as the President) to give the Introduction to Debate seminar. Have them prepare a seminar and give it every meeting for the first few weeks. Then, ask every meeting for the rest of the year if someone needs an introductory seminar and have the person take them aside for a bit and give it. New people will not stay if you don't at least explain the basics to them.

Don't give people too much information at first (a sample introductory seminar follows). There is plenty of time for them to learn the nuances of debate. I tend to leave out things like the PMRE, BP, definitional challenges, etc. I find that people just get confused by them and most people usually pick them up as they go along. Think of your goal at this point as really to give them enough skills to do one round of debate.

Try to provide accessible examples from law, politics, TV, etc., and use concrete examples of cases.

This seminar should not last for any more than 15 minutes with 5 minutes or so for questions.

## *Sample Seminar*

### **Introduction**

1. Introduce yourself, and briefly outline your level of experience.
2. Ask for the level of experience of the people in the room (high school debating, have they seen a round before, etc.)
3. Try to clarify from the beginning that the seminar may seem confusing. I find that it generally works better if you ask people to wait for the end for questions.

### **What is a debate?**

This can be the most difficult part—just explaining what a debate actually is.

### *Clarify key terms*

- A round of debate occurs between two teams, the two Government speakers speak in favour of a motion, the Opposition members against it. It is very formal with a specific structure and order.
- There is a speaker in the centre of the room who introduces the debaters and to whom all debaters address their comments. Usually he or she will also be one of the judges.
- There are generally between 1 and 5 judges. They will award the win to the team who identifies a couple of key issues correctly and proves that their proposal addresses them the most thoroughly.
- One round usually lasts around half an hour.

I usually stop after this section and ask for questions.

### **Prime Minister's Speech (7 minutes)**

1. Begin your speech by addressing the speaker (Thank you, Madam Speaker)

2. There will be a motion. It will probably be nonsense. The Prime Minister generally states it and provides a loose link to the case at hand (e.g. This house would ride into the sunset; we're going to talk about moving forward and moving on).
3. A simple case usually involves a specific situation, and a specific action that an actor should take in that situation
  - e.g. George Bush should invade Iraq if Saddam Hussein does not comply with the Security Council resolutions
- If you're stuck, check newspapers, class notes, or try Googling words that interest you (e.g. human rights)
4. The Prime Minister presents 3-4 points (reasons why the Government's proposal is right).
  - e.g. Iraq may present a security threat if it is harbouring weapons of mass destruction
- If you're stuck, consider different relevant actors (e.g. the United States, Iraqis, the international community)
- try to give examples

### **Minister of the Opposition's Speech (7 minutes)**

Try to have a specific case in mind when you build your speech (like the Government, have a one sentence statement of what you are trying to prove)

1. Introduce 1-2 constructive points. These are the same as the PM's; they are reasons why your proposal is correct. (2-3 minutes)

If you're stuck, you can look at the Government's points, and turn your responses into points (be careful that they are still clear, stand-alone points)

2. Refute the Prime Minister's points. You can show that the point is wrong, inconsistent with other points, inconsistent with the case, not mutually exclusive of other proposals, or just silly. State which of these you intend to prove, and then deal closely with the point to show why this is true.

### **Minister of the Crown's Speech (7 minutes)**

1. Introduce one constructive point. It should be slightly different or more advanced than the PM's points (2 minutes)
2. Refute the MO's points using the same strategy provided above
3. Rebuild your partner's points. Don't just restate a point. Make sure you focus first on what the MO said about it and why it was wrong, and then restate and clarify the original point.

### **Leader of the Opposition's Speech (10 minutes)**

1. Introduce 1-3 constructive points. Like the MC, they should not contradict your partner but they should also offer something new and interesting to the round. Because you have had a while to think about them, judges will have higher expectations. (2-3 minutes)

If you're stuck, try to think about some key issues in the debate (e.g. the Security Council) and try show knowledge of underlying issues and actors apply it to the case.

2. Refute the MC constructive point, and then the rest of the Government case (3 minutes).
3. Rebuild your partners point(s) (2 minutes).
4. You should try to provide some kind of summary and rebuttal (2-3 minutes).

I then generally talk about the LOR and PMR together since they should be very similar (even though LOR's, in practice, tend to be much sloppier).

### **Prime Minister's Rebuttal (3 minutes)**

This is a fast-moving speech, but don't let that make you seem disorganized or panicked.

The difference between rebuttal and refutation is that rebuttal focuses at least as much on your own points as it does on the Opposition's. You pick an issue and

integrate two perspectives on it, and then show why yours is better or more important.

There are several ways to accomplish this in a PMR:

### 1. Summarize Point-by-Point

- This doesn't mean you summarize every point—you pick a couple of key points for their side and a couple for yours and discuss each of them
- Make sure to end with your points
- Even though this isn't a thematic analysis, you should still have themes in mind when picking the points so they seem to have some flow. It is then a good idea to talk about what those are for at least 30 seconds at the end.

### 2. Thematic or Three Questions Analysis

- With this strategy you either pick three themes or ask three questions, outline what each of your teams said about them, and show why your analysis is more compelling.
- If organization is a challenge, try to write each theme on a separate piece of paper, and write out exactly what you want to say (don't expect yourself to be able to pick out what you want to say from all of the notes you've taken in the round)

### 3. Dichotomy Analysis

- Sometimes an easier version of the three themes is just to pick a dichotomy (freedom vs. equality), outline what each team brought to each side of that dichotomy (often one team will focus more on one side), and show why your case incorporates both perspectives more effectively than the Opposition.

If you struggle with PMR's or LOR's, try writing them out before your other speeches and working backwards. This will help you make the case focused enough that summarizing it is easy.

## **After the Round**

Cross the floor and shake your opponents' hands.

Sometimes the judges will give comments.

## **Signposting and Flagging**

If there is one thing that judges will reward novice debaters for, it is clarity and organization.

Everything that I have just talked about (constructive points, refutation, etc.), state explicitly that that is what you are doing. This is called signposting, and it is as important as it is awkward.

Flagging just consists of giving every point a name. Do that and keep using that name the entire time to make it clear to the judges that that point is still in the round.

## **POIs**

Demonstrate POI posture.

Standing in this manner indicates that you would like to ask the person speaking a question. It can be to clarify something or is often designed to trip the other member up or reveal a flaw in their case.

POIs should not be any more than 15 seconds at an absolute maximum.

You always have the right to refuse a POI verbally or with a wave of your hand. The general rule is give two, take two, but don't feel bound to this when you first start.

## **Questions and Show Round**

- Ask people if they have any questions.
- If possible, have a show debate accompany the seminar. Move people directly into a show round. As terrible as this sounds, a lot of down time gives them a chance to leave, which they may want to do after all the information you've given them.

- When choosing debaters for show debates we don't necessarily pick our "best" debaters. We try to pick people who have easygoing accessible styles and will run a fair case and give technically good speeches even if that means not destroying their opponents. It's also a good idea for beginners to watch people who they feel they can reasonably aspire to be.
- If you don't have a show debate or if most people in the room have already seen one, it's a really good idea to set up rounds between beginner debaters with an experienced speaker to give feedback.