

USU 2011 Debaters' Briefing

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Good debating is persuasive speech of the sort that would persuade a normal, well-informed citizen of the merits of a particular position. It arises out of a synthesis of reasoned argumentation, sound structure, and appealing style. There is no single way to debate well, nor can any briefing offer exhaustive instructions as to how to debate well in every conceivable circumstance. The guidelines below are an attempt to sketch, broadly, a number of important principles that should help you deliver the best possible speeches.

The average, intelligent citizen regularly reads quality newspapers and has a general awareness of major political and social movements. Like most debaters who pretend otherwise, she is not an expert on existentialist philosophy, feminist hermeneutical techniques, or Tigrean nationalism. That is not to say that complex argumentation is out of bounds, but merely that such arguments have to be explained in ordinary English. Heavily-jargonised references to specialist knowledge will not be rewarded, even if the judge happens to understand what you mean by dint of their own specialist knowledge. Furthermore, complex arguments are not, themselves, persuasive by dint of being complex or demonstrating a great deal of knowledge, unless the knowledge and complexity serves to provide a more persuasive reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with the motion.

The Basic Structure

Eight speakers from four teams will each deliver a speech of seven minutes in length, with the first and last minute 'protected', meaning that no points of information are allowed during that time. Speakers are members of a team and should be expected to support their colleague's arguments, but they should also show solidarity with (and certain never directly contradict or 'knife' the other team on their side of the motion, while at the same time attempting to offer a contribution that is distinct (and better) than that which is presented by the other team on their side. Like political parties in a coalition, teams on the same side of a motion both want to see a particular bill advanced or defeated but also want to outclass their coalition partners and win the votes of voters in subsequent elections.

Each speaker has a particular role to fulfill in creating the conditions necessary for a good debate; speakers that fail to do so will be penalized. Generally speaking, speakers should offer a combination of both 'positive' and 'negative' material, designed both to build up arguments for their side and defeat those of their opponents. Positive arguments are usually numbered and named and often somewhere between one and five will be offered in any given speech; rebuttal points can come at any point during a speech or can be woven in with substantive arguments. Thus, a speaker may choose to talk about topics in the debate e.g. ('the rights of parents'; 'the boundaries of sovereignty') in such a way that allows them to simultaneously refute existing arguments and make new ones.

It is not necessary for a speaker to individually refute all arguments made by the other teams, but they are obliged to attack the main thrusts of opposing speeches. Further to that, arguments that are either asserted or delivered so quickly as to be near-incomprehensible will not be credited. Good debaters will prioritize their arguments and properly explain them. Even one argument, if explained very well, may win a debate on its own.

Nor are speakers obliged to specifically call out exactly when they are refuting individual arguments by other teams. Thus, if prop argue that policy X will protect animals rights and opp argues extensively that animals have no rights at all during their substantive case, this will be taken as rebuttal. **Nevertheless, the burden is always on the speaker to ensure that the judge can see how points are interacting with one another.** When in doubt, spell it out.

Points of Information

Speakers should accept 1-2 points of information at some point during the unprotected time in their speech. Taking more than 2 POIs should not be penalized in and of itself, but is likely to use up substantial time which could be better spent making constructive arguments, and may signify a lack of material.

Points of information should not last longer than fifteen seconds at an absolute maximum. If at any point during a POI the speaker offering the point is waved down or otherwise dismissed by the speaker who accepted the point, the offering speaker must IMMEDIATELY take their seat, whether or not they have finished saying what they wanted to say. If the judge believes that the speaker offering the point was cut off prematurely (e.g. before their fifteen seconds had expired) and the offering speaker was not babbling or trying to burn up time, the speaker receiving ought to be penalized. The offering speaker must immediately take their seat, regardless.

Points of information must be given by standing, though the speaker offering one need not say anything. If they do wish to announce their presence, they must say something to the effect of 'on that point, sir/madam' and must not 'headline' or announce the topic of their prospective question.

First Proposition (Opening Government).

First proposition has a special burden to create the environment in which a good debate can happen. They discharge this responsibility by defining the motion in a manner, which is clear, fair, and within the spirit of the motion. In brief, every first proposition team must demonstrate two things: *what they are doing* (the mechanism) and *why they are doing it*.

First proposition must offer an argument for a particular policy or standpoint. They must make clear, in broad terms what sort of world they are constructing. They need not be overly concerned with the technical detail of their proposition, but should answer as many relevant questions as is necessary to reveal the subject matter of the debate. Thus, the motion *THW: Use military force against Iran* obliges first proposition to tell us who is doing the attacking and, very broadly, what form the attack will take (Is it a total invasion with the aim of regime change? An air strike against nuclear facilities?), but naming the precise military technology to be employed in the operation is entirely unnecessary. In an analysis debate, first proposition are asked to affirm the validity of a particular statement. Thus, they will not be 'doing' anything, per se, but they will be expected to offer any necessary clarity as to what affirming the statement obliges them to defend. If answering the question of what is being done takes longer than a minute, that is almost certainly far too long.

Fair Definitions

Definitions must be also be fair and in the spirit of the motion. Generally speaking, the motions that we will be setting will be fairly unambiguous about the debate that we want you to have; we will be cross if you decide to have a different debate instead. There is no golden rule for deciding when a definition is fair or unfair, but you should only attempt to limit the scope of the debate when you have reason to believe that it helps us to better consider the *central instances*, where the motion's principles most directly apply. For example, if the motion was *THB: That the state should help healthy adults commit suicide*, a mechanism that provided an exception for children would be fair, but a definition that restricted the debate to prisoners on death row would be unfair. Both definitions narrow the scope of the model, but the first instance does so in a manner that allows us to better focus on the proper subject matter of the debate, while the second transforms the debate entirely into something that it was not really intended to be.

Furthermore, there is **no status quo** for motions at an international tournament (such as this one) regarding the internal conduct of states. If the motion is *THW: Decriminalize marijuana*, it is not valid to say, 'In the Netherlands we have already done this.' The debate must concern the merits of the policy and must not be set in time other than the present (ever!) or a particular place, unless such a setting warranted by the motion. **Debates should not be set in America, or any other country, unless there is a specific reason to do so.** Where possible, you should run motions 'on principle' in a range of states e.g. "Western liberal democracies ought to..." Obviously, the conduct of international bodies and some non- governmental organizations (e.g the Roman Catholic Church) carries with it its own status quo, which you will be expected to change if you are proposing a motion. Thus, if the motion is *THW: Give Asia a stronger voice on the UN Security Council*, proposing the inclusion of China on the UNSC would not be a valid definition.

Non-State Actor Debates

If the proposition refers to a specific actor, you must assume the mindset of that actor when debating, and you may assume the value set of that actor when making your arguments. Nonetheless, you are not bound only to arguments that touch upon the unique nature of the actor but can make arguments that are universally applicable, provided that they do not expressly contradict the value set of the actor in question¹. Thus, consider the following example:

THB: That the Roman Catholic Church should openly embrace socialism. Valid proposition argument: Socialism creates a society that is fair and just (obviously, this needs to be analyzed!).

Valid proposition argument: The Bible speaks of property being shared in common amongst the members of the early Church, and Catholics place value in the teachings of Scripture.

Invalid proposition argument: Socialism means that people do away with ideas about religion and concentrate on their own material conditions.

One final point, first proposition has *minimally effective fiat* with regard to their policy. That is, they may assert that the minimum conditions necessary for implementing their policy will come pass, but they may

NOT construct an alternative reality which stacks the deck in their favor. If the motion is *THB: That Taiwan should immediately declare independence*, opposition is not allowed to argue that the Taiwanese legislature will never vote for this, but neither is proposition allowed to say that Taiwan should declare independence, having received the unanimous consent of all mainland Chinese citizens for such a decision.

Opposition

If Proposition's job is to show that their policy leads to a particular end and that this end is desirable, then Opposition's job is to show that:

1) The policy does not effect the ends that first proposition are aiming at. OR 2) The ends that proposition are aiming at is undesirable. OR

3) The policy has undesirable side effects, which outweigh its benefits.

Of course, it is possible (and often even desirable) for teams in opposition to chose to pursue a number of these strategies simultaneously.

If the motion was *THW: Ban all private schools* and proposition argue that banning all private schools would be a good idea because it would make educational opportunity more equal between students, it would be open for opposition to simultaneously argue that: Educational opportunities will not be rendered equal because rich parents will live in rich neighborhoods with good public schools; even if equality of opportunity was achieved, it is not necessarily a desirable end as we ought only to be concerned with improving the absolute state of education, even if that means allowing for inequalities; and that this policy will reduce the overall quality of education.

Furthermore, it is important to note that rebuttals which merely point out that a motion is unlikely to work much of the time or may not totally achieve their desired ends are not fully effective- they still concede some ground to the other side. Such arguments either need to be teamed up with additional, compelling reasons as to why a particular policy is a net evil in order to win the debate.

One final word: opposition MAY offer a counter-prop (though they usually will not), or an alternative policy; this can only be offered by the leader of opposition. To be effective, counter-props must be *mutually exclusive* with the proposition if they are to be effective. If the motion is *THW: Offer contraception to children*, and opp says, 'Instead we'll educate children about the dangers of AIDS', proposition are perfectly entitled to point out that the counter-prop is not mutually exclusive with their case. It is nearly always a bad tactical decision for opp to offer a counter-prop. Far more effective is normally to point out that an alternative system would better achieve prop's own goals, necessitating a vote against them, while maintaining a principled opposition to both policies. (eg in a universal healthcare debate, opp can argue that giving only poor people free healthcare would achieve prop's goals, while still maintaining a libertarian opposition to both policies).

Opposition should always debate the proposition put before them no matter how unfair or outside the spirit of the motion, unless the definition offered is simply not debatable (either logically or morally), in which case they should oppose the motion as properly defined.

Extensions

The third speaker on each side of the debate is expected to contribute an extension, or some new development to the debate. This can either take the form of new positive matter, new negative matter, a better explanation of an existing argument, better evidence for an existing argument or some combination of the above. Several things should be observed.

Firstly, it is NOT necessary to name one of your points an 'extension' or only to extend on one point. It is perfectly sensible to offer a number of new arguments, analysis, evidences, details, examples, etc. if they are all effective in proving the merits of your side.

Secondly, merely 'having an extension' does not guarantee that you will beat the team in front of you on the table. Most teams will have some sort of extension- it's nearly impossible to say *nothing* at all that is new and meaningful. Judges will assess how well you fulfil your role of extending the debate against how well other teams have done their job and determine which teams have offered the most persuasive argumentation.

Thirdly, extensions should neither be entirely derivative from nor entirely removed from what has already been said. Merely extrapolating obvious conclusions from what has already been said or adding minor details to previously well-made arguments is not an effective extension strategy. Nor is explaining in great detail an entirely abstract philosophical take on the debate (e.g. 'the importance of

rights'; 'the role of the state'¹) that in no way illuminates the superiority of your own side. The best extensions identify and resolve pre-existing questions with new and creative arguments.

Summary Speeches

Summaries should summarize the debate. They should be a comparison of the two sides, showing why the speaker's side's points win. Prop summaries may introduce new material as rebuttal, but it would always be better for such material to come out in the extension speech if possible. Opposition summaries may not contain any completely new arguments, though they may rebut any new material from the proposition summation and, obviously, should explain pre-existing arguments in a fresh and compelling way.

If summary speakers entirely drop the material of the first team on their side, this means they are not summarizing the debate. Obviously, it is crucially important that summaries (and rebuttal generally) do not drop the best or most important points made by the other side. Furthermore, summary speakers should bear in mind that they are trying to argue both for the soundness of the policy in question as well as argue that their team was the best on their bench. As a result, a good summary speech will accentuate the role of their partner's extension and paint a narrative of the debate that highlights the role of the extension in bringing to light the most important arguments of the debate. A summation that excludes the top half's best arguments altogether or fails to show how the other side's arguments interact with one's own should be penalized for not capturing the full texture of the debate.

A good summation, where necessary, will 'weigh' the two sides, not simply listing the costs and benefits to each side but making comparisons, proving why the goods that their side effects are better or more desirable than the ends effected.

¹ Both of these CAN be worthwhile extensions, but make sure that they actually highlight a point of departure between both sides. Telling the judge that the role of the state is to protect and care for its people when both sides have accepted that this is true (implicitly or explicitly) isn't terribly helpful