

# WORLD SCHOOLS DEBATE FORMAT MANUAL

*Your dreams are valid; Africa's future will be alive because of you!*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION

Format structure.....	4
Speaker roles.....	4

### CASE CONSTRUCTION

Defining motions and constructing cases.....	10
Introduction to motion interpretation.....	10
Setting up definitional challenges(Intro).....	12
Case construction for different motions.....	14
Types of values.....	15
Characteristics of a good case.....	16
Motion interpretation in detail.....	18
Types of motion definitions and errors.....	30
Constructing models.....	43
Opposition case construction strategies.....	48
Points of information.....	58
Reply speeches.....	67

### REBUTTAL AND REFUTATION

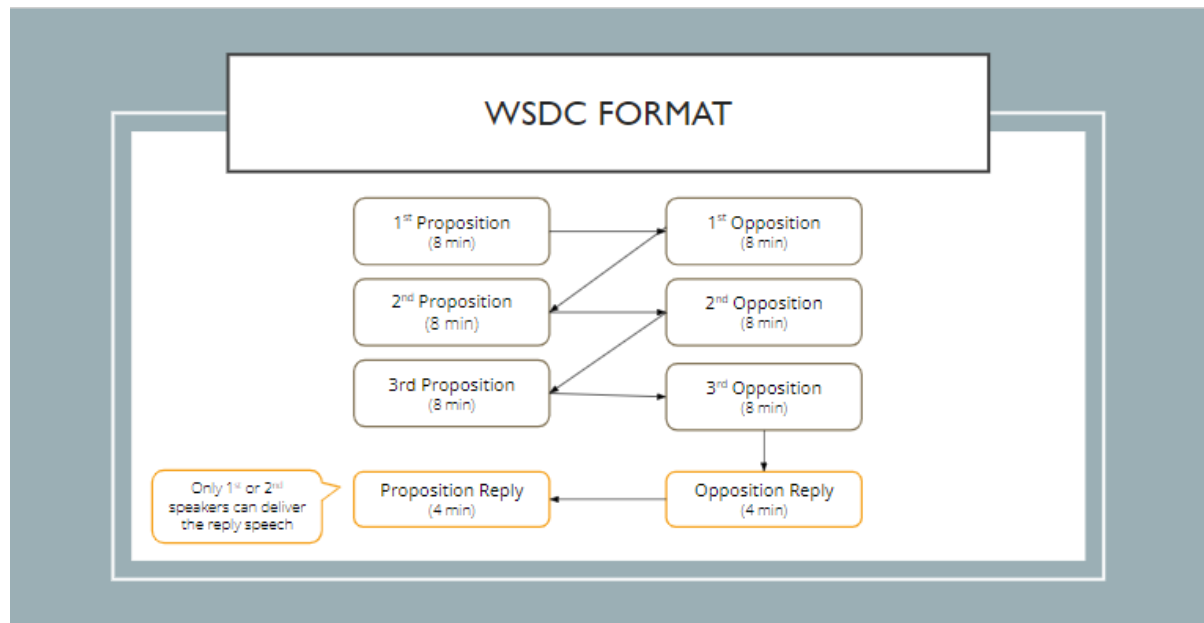
Importance of rebuttal.....	72
Rebutting case themes.....	76
Guidelines for definitional rebuttal.....	76
Definitional even if rebuttal debates.....	83
Dealing with unreasonable defintions.....	85
Dealing with parallel cases.....	86
Internal structure of a rebuttal.....	87
Strategic time allocation for rebuttal.....	87

### KEY GROUNDS FOR REBUTTAL

Logical relevance.....	93
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<b>Factual accuracy.....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Unsubstantiated claims.....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Assumptions.....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Causation and correlation.....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Contradictions.....</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Misinterpretation.....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Cumulative rebuttal.....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Surgical rebuttal.....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Rebuttal from 1<sup>st</sup> principles.....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Thematic rebuttal.....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Even if rebuttal.....</b>	<b>110</b>
 <b>ADJUDICATING THE WORLD SCHOOLS DEBATING FORMAT</b>	
<b>Characteristics of a model judge.....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>The ‘Donts’ of Adjudication.....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Deciding the win.....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Evaluating third speakers .....</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Evaluating reply speeches.....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>The format judging process.....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>Identifying issues.....</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>Weighing issues.....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>Scoring criteria.....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>Scoring margins.....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Effective oral adjudication.....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Adjudication philosophies and standards.....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>140</b>

## Format structure



### Speaker roles

In this section, we examine the basic speaker roles. Specifically, we will look at the essential structure for first and second speakers, which is quite similar.

### First Speakers

The first speakers must introduce their team's understanding of the motion and their team's case. They must also present the first half of their team's arguments.

The first proposition, therefore, has the following duties:

- A formal introduction;
- The definition, and any other definitional clarifications;
- The proposition team's case approach;
- The split;
- An outline of argument;
- The arguments;

- A summary of arguments;
- A conclusion.

The first opposition has the following duties:

- A brief introduction;
- Rebuttal;
- The opposition team's case approach;
- The split;
- An outline of argument;
- The arguments;
- A summary of arguments;
- A conclusion.

The first opposition must also deal with the proposition team's definition. He or she must do this either by agreeing with the proposition's definition, or by disagreeing. Agreeing with the proposition's definition requires only one short sentence, and usually follows rebuttal. Disagreeing with the proposition's definition is more complicated. Such a disagreement should ideally form the first part of rebuttal.

### **Second Speakers (Opposition or Proposition)**

His/her role is to rebut the arguments given by the other side. Eventually, he/she can continue with his team's case and gives more arguments. This is basically the major role of the 2nd speaker but we shall break this down and understand it piece by piece, as explained below;

#### ***1. Continuing to defend their definition (if required)***

This happens when there is a definitional challenge that is to say; if the first opposition speaker comes with a counter definition of the key term in the given resolution, then the second speaker must challenge the definition from the opposition and show the judges why he or she thinks their definition is the correct one and best describes what the resolution seeks to address. For instance;

**THIS HOUSE WILL GIVE MONETARY SUPPORT TO WAR ZONE AREAS.**

The first proposition speaker might have defined war zone area as an area where war WAS fought and the 1st opp. May refute this and define war zone area as an area where war IS BEING fought. Probably the opposition might be advancing the actual meaning of war zone area so as 2nd speaker yours is to affirm the definition as advanced by the first member of your team, show the house why you believe it was well defined by redefining it and giving examples of places that fit in your definition.

NB: It's not about defining, the definition should be either helpful in case construction or destruction.

### ***2. Continuing the argumentation presented by their team.***

This will include defending their previous speaker's points from the rebuttal

the other team has made; That is to say , the opposition will have created loopholes in your team's case so as the second speaker you ought to blow life into your case. Look at the major points that the opposition has attacked and defend them by adding muscle to these points . This muscle could be more examples that verify your argument, statistical facts among others.

### ***3. Offering rebuttal to the other team's case***

Here ,pick the major arguments of the opposition and offer factual rebuttal. Destroy their case showing the house why your proposal remains the only solution to the issues advanced by the resolution.

### ***4. Making new arguments to support your case.***

Above all the 2nd speaker ought to make new arguments to support your case( these might not be new points necessarily) for example:\*This house would take obese children from their parents\*

And the 1st speaker has showed the house the status quo and further identified the problem at hand i.e

- Child Neglect of the parent(s)
- Children's underdeveloped rational capacity.

As the second speaker you could strengthen your case by showing the house the goal (more like emphasis of this) you intend to achieve and the mechanism you propose to solve the problem.

We intend to reduce the number of obese children due to the health problems associated with obesity as discussed by the 1st speaker

**\*Mechanism\***; we shall cooperate with the schools to earn data required in regards to obese children hence every school shall be required to conduct a BMI measurement test to every student .....etc

\* One to four will definitely produce a strong case for the second speaker (second case construction). The second speakers must rebut their opponents' arguments and continue their team's case. Specifically, the second proposition and second opposition have the following duties:

- A brief introduction;
- Rebuttal;
- A brief link to the team's case approach;
- An outline of argument;

## CORE ROLE OF A WHIP SPEAKER

### THREE CORE ROLES;

- **Deconstruction:** Defeating the arguments brought by the other team in detail,
- **Reconstruction:** Defending the case that your team-mates have brought from the attacks that the other team has already made (think of this as rebutting their rebuttal!).

#### **Retrospective framing**

- Responsible for the summary of each side's positions,
- the Whip speakers are charged with recasting the round and the arguments made by each side in a light most favorable to their side.
- As the name implies, retrospective framing involves looking back over the round from a particular perspective.

Three considerations are key to effective retrospective framing.

- First, effective retrospective framing requires the debater to identify the most germane issues in the round. Fundamentally, those issues that are most germane are those material to answering the question the motion posed.
- Identifying those issues requires that you see the whole round—your arguments and those of your opponents—objectively.

- Thinking like an adjudicator is one of the secrets of successful debaters. Unfortunately, beyond time spent “behind the pen” as an adjudicator, there is no secret way to acquire an adjudicator’s eye for arguments. If the holistic, objective assessment of a round doesn’t produce a clear consensus of the most critical issues, you may have to default to other standards of relevance: you may be able to convince the adjudicator that the most critical issues are those that were most hotly contested or those most favorable to your position and strategy.
- In any case, identifying relevant issues demotes other issues to a less relevant status in the round. Consequently you must carefully select those issues that the adjudicators will also believe to be most important.
- Retrospective framing also requires that you consider the organization of the issues you will present. You can use several standards for determining the order in which issues should be addressed: you may prefer to deal with the most critical issues first or last, you may recognize that some issues must be dealt with before other issues are considered, or you may simply want to position issues advantageous to your side or team more prominently in the speech.

#### Special retrospective tactics

- In any case, prioritizing issues requires that you communicate to the adjudicators that not all issues are equal. Finally, once you have selected the issues and organized them properly, you need to demonstrate that your arguments have prevailed in each case or, if they haven’t, to show that the issue is less significant than other issues in which you have prevailed.
- This process requires you to analyze who won each issue and determine how those issues interact to prove the proposition true or false. These recommendations on prospective and retrospective framing are only a starting point to mastering the art of framing.
- Successful framing depends, in large part, on your ability to identify and structure the arguments exchanged in the round within issues.
- As the final two speakers in the round, the Whip speakers must balance a responsibility to contribute to their team’s effort with a responsibility to summarize the round as it has unfolded.
- This balancing act can pull a Whip speaker in two directions; an effective Whip must meet both obligations to be successful.
  1. One important note at the outset: there is no “right” way to summarize a round. Some Whip speakers proceed through the round speaker by-speaker or team-by-team in an effort to recap



each argument. While this may be effective for some, it is certainly not required.

2. Other Whip speakers prefer to summarize all the arguments of one side before addressing the arguments of the other side.
3. Again, while some Whips may be adept at this approach, it is not the only way to summarize the round. The approach described below offers yet another way to approach the summary of a BP round.

### **Construction and Deconstruction**

- Thus, they have little leeway in bringing new constructive material to the round, particularly if that constructive material appears to be substantively different from lines of argument already introduced by their side of the bench.
- The PW must understand the strategic approach of the former speaker's, formulate an effective deconstruction of that approach, and integrate the deconstruction of the extension with the broader summary of the round.
- Retrospective framing uses two basic tactics: the relation of arguments to opposing arguments and the relation of issues to the proposition. Relating arguments to opposing arguments refers to the effort to group individual arguments under broad issue headings.
- This unification of arguments fixes those competing positions in the mind of the judge and makes obvious the points of stasis at which the arguments meet.
- Whip speakers should strive to condense the round into two to four main issues under which all relevant arguments may be grouped. As discussed earlier, this process of organizing competing arguments into issues may start much earlier in the debate, perhaps as early as the first speeches of the round.

### **IDENTIFYING WHICH ISSUE COMES FIRST**

*This standard approach utilizes three questions around which to organize the summary of the round:*

1. What is required to determine the truth of the motion?
2. How does the other side fail to meet this requirement?
3. How do our efforts meet this requirement? These three questions serve as prompts to organize the Whip speakers' thinking about the motion. The first, "What is required to determine the truth of the motion?" asks about how the adjudicators should determine whether to adopt or reject the motion.

- **The most critical issues should come last; the issues that address areas of weakness should be dealt with in the middle of the speech.**
- This process attempts to arrange the issues in a hierarchy that establishes the Whip speaker's issues as those most important to resolving the propositional question while downplaying the significance of issues most powerful for the opposing side.

### **OPPORTUNITIES/TACTICS THAT ARE UNIQUE TO THE WHIP SPEAKER**

- The Whip speaker has a heavy burden: as the final speaker for her side, she has the opportunity to control how the adjudicators will perceive the arguments in the round.
- As third speaker, try and summarise the debate into three main issues.
- At the conclusion of the round, the adjudication panel retires to deliberate; that deliberation is primarily an exercise in comparing and contrasting the issues in the debate.
- Savvy Whip speakers will get a jump on this process by outlining and evaluating those issues for the adjudicators.
- Generally, Whips are prohibited from introducing new lines of argument. Some exceptions are made for offering new evidence to support an existing line of argument .

### **MOTION INTERPRETATION AND CONSTRUCTING CASES**

A Motion is a Topic to be debated in the round and can be phrased in several ways starting with "This House".

#### **Who is "This House"?**

Usually, the state or a collective group of neutral actors (we as a collective):

- This House would ban smoking
- This House believes that judges should be elected rather than appointed

Sometimes a specific actor is defined in the motion, in which case the action is being done by this actor, not an abstract state or society in general

- This House believes that schools should permanently expel bullies

- This House believes that democratic nations should refuse to sell arms to non-democratic nations

- **Information slide:** Sometimes, an 'Information-slide' may be provided to provide clarity and necessary specific knowledge. Any information on this slide is assumed to be true for the debate and should be treated as a part of the motion by teams and judges.
- **Requests for Clarifications:** Once debaters have seen the motion, they may request publicly for clarification of the word(s) in the motion that are unclear to them to the Core Adjudication panel members. Further clarifications may be requested within the first 15 minutes of their preparation time; if one team in a debate requests clarification, their opponents shall also be provided with the same clarification.
- Requests for Clarification must come from the debaters and not from coaches/ team managers / observers on debaters' behalf.

***In The Spirit Of Debating At A Global Competition, And Of Setting Fair Definitions, Teams Cannot Squirrel, Unfairly Narrow, And/OR Place Or Time-Set Debates***

## **CASE STUDY**

- **SQUIRELLING** (*Distorting the topic and defining it in a way that violates the spirit of the motion*) –i.e. “*THW ban gambling*” cannot be defined as banning risky behaviors such as taking hard drugs, as a way of “gambling with one’s life”. Gambling has an obvious meaning, which is the betting or staking of money or something of value, on the outcome of a game, a or an uncertain event whose result is determined by chance.
- **DISALLOWING PROPOSITION FOR THE DEBATE** –i.e. “*TH supports cosmetic surgery*” cannot be defined as supporting it only for burn victims. This would make it impossible for Opposition to do the debate.
- **REFUSING TO DEBATE THE MOTION AT THE LEVEL OF SPECIFICITY OR ABSTRACTION THE DEBATE REQUIRES** –i.e. In “*THW restrict civil liberties in the name of national security*”, a definition that defends exclusively compulsory ID cards is too narrow. Compulsory ID cards may be an example of a national security policy that is defended by

the Proposition team, but the debate extends beyond this example to a more general principle.

- **PLACE SETTING: Narrowing the debate to specific places that are not specified by the motion**-i.e In “*THW ban commercial surrogacy*”, it is not legitimate to set the debate “only in low-income nations”. Examples from these countries may be used, but the debate has a global context. However, in *THW ban non-democratic countries from hosting international sporting events*, Proposition can identify reasonable criteria for what constitutes a democracy?
- **TIME SETTING: Narrowing the debate to a time that is not present when unspecified**-i.e. *THBT citizens should engage in civil disobedience to protest unjust laws*: Proposition cannot define the policy in the context of apartheid in South Africa from 1948 until the 1990s, even though they may use this as an example  
*THBT NATO should not have withdrawn combat troops from Afghanistan*: Proposition can set the context of the debate to the period when they contemplated the withdrawal of troops (2011-2014) as it’s implicit in the motion

## SETTING UP A DEFINITIONAL CHALLENGE

### How to Mount a Definitional Challenge by Cathy Rossouw

On occasion, a Negative team will find themselves presented with a definition that they did not expect. Many young teams default to a definitional challenge in these debates, which usually results in a low-scoring and frustrating debate. Definitional challenges should not be mounted lightly, and should usually only be considered for the following reasons:

1. The debate as established by the First Affirmative is genuinely truistic, or self proving The oft-used example of this is the interpretation of the motion “that we should eat, drink and be merry” as that we (literally) should eat and drink so that we do not die, and be happy because it is better than the alternative. A truistic case is one that there is no believable opposition to.
2. The debate as established by the First Affirmative lacks any link to the motion (is a ‘squirrel’). A team that defines the motion “that we should tax fat” as a debate about punishing the fattest nation on earth and proceeds to argue

for arms sales to China to “punish” America should not be surprised to be met with a definitional challenge. A definitional challenge can be mounted for either of the above reasons. The challenge must be made by the First Negative as the first part of their speech. Challenges cannot be mounted by other speakers. The following steps are important to mounting a definitional challenge:

1. State why the definition is unreasonable This is as easy as saying “...the definition of the Olympics as Australia’s obsession with sport is unreasonable because it has no logical link to the topic.”

2. Explain why the definition is unreasonable

Usually the best way to do this is to show that the average, reasonable person would believe the topic to be about something else – e.g. the Olympics are a major international sporting competition.

3. The ‘Even If’ . Just because you’re challenging their definition doesn’t mean you don’t have to rebut their arguments. This is done by saying “...but even if we accept their definition of the Olympics, their arguments are still flawed because...”

4. Propose an alternative definition Make it short and simple because by now everyone has a pretty good idea of what your case is.

If proposition sets up an unfair debate, opposition may choose to

- Broaden the debate,
- Explicitly challenge the definition, but still provide even if arguments, or
- Explicitly challenge the definition and debate only on those grounds

**NB: *If Opposition team explicitly challenges the definition, they have to do so in their first speech, explain why the definition is illegitimate, and provide an alternative reasonable definition.***

- Even in cases of bad definitions, there is no obligation on Opposition to challenge - they are allowed to choose to proceed with the faulty definition.
- If you are persuaded that a definitional challenge is valid, this should reflect on your assessment of Proposition’s strategy (their understanding of the debate);

- Debates are not automatically won or lost by definitional challenge

## **TYPES OF MOTIONS AND THEIR RESPECTIVE CASE CONSTRUCTION MODELS:**

### **This House Believes That (THBT)**

This type of motion does not require a policy set up; however, it is helpful when teams illustrate how they envision this new world to look like.

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### *General Speech and Debate Terms*

- **A case** - collection of arguments organized in a chronological fashion in order to convince an audience about a motion or position\*
- **Resolution** - the proposition or subject offered to debate
- **Spirit of the Resolution** – refers to the reasonable interpretation and limits of the resolution
- **Topicality** – the argument presented is pertinent to the resolution in spirit or literally, it is topical
- **Status Quo** – the current state of affairs, the present system
- **Affirmative** – arguing in favor of the resolution
- **Negative** – the side that opposes the resolution
- **Value** – a concept, standard, or ideal that makes a judgment

## Types of Values

In a Debate you will need to be able to explain not only which values you are defending but what type of value you are using. There are several methods to use to categorize the values. These are the four most common categories that values are put into.

**Universal Values:** These are values that there is nearly unanimous agreement as to the importance of them. These would include Sanctity of human life, Peace, and human dignity.

**Instrumental Values:** These are values that can be used to get something else. In other words the value is an instrument which allows you to get some other things. Examples of these would include Progress (which allows leisure time), Freedom (Through which we can get dignity and/or self actualization), and Knowledge(which helps us get economic prosperity, and progress).

**Intrinsic Values:** Something has intrinsic worth simply because of what it is and not necessarily what it will lead to or because of its acceptance. Some possible examples of intrinsic values would include beauty, artistic expression, and happiness. We value them because they are an important aspect of life.

**Prerequisite Values:** These are values that are necessary before you can get to some bigger goal. It is similar to the prerequisite course that you must take in order to get to the more advanced course. Some good examples of this type of value include safety (which is needed before people can even think about having anything else), Justice (which is needed before we can move onto equality), or the common good (which must be honored if we can ever get to a state of peace).

**Paramount Values:** Think of this type of value like you think of Paramount Studios with the large mountain. It is the value which is above all other things. Some examples of this might include freedom (which many people have given up their lives for and see as essential to a

decent life) or sanctity of life (which if we do not value or have renders everything else worthless).

**Operative Values:** This type of values are the ways that we make judgments on how to live the rest of our lives. We use these values as the overarching and guiding principles which tell us what is always right and wrong. These are things such as Integrity, Honesty, and Loyalty.

*Please note that values can fit into any number of these categories. It is up to the debaters to define them and their importance.*

- **Constructive Speech** – the first speech given by each debater (both sides) in a round; used to build a case
- **Contention** – a debate case is organized into contentions – claims made for or against the resolution – usually stated in one declarative sentence
- **Cross Examination** – questioning period
- **Refutation** – directly attacking the opposing debaters' arguments
- **Rebuttal speech** – rebuilds arguments after attacks, refutes arguments of the opposing team, and summarizes the debate
- **Voting Issues** – the key points in a debate that are crucial to the outcome, reasons why the judge should give the decision to a team

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD CASE (Atchison, 2017)

### IT MUST BE WELL RESEARCHED

According to (Atchison, 2017) , there are two metrics or standards which determine whether a supporting research for case arguments is valid or ideal;

- Where the research is published, peer reviewed journals tend to have more credible information since experts in the field have verified whether the information in the source of information is credible or not\* If one plans on making a case that can have extensive impact even beyond the debate rooms, then they must ground their arguments in academic research\*

There are so many social media gurus on blogs with every argument about anything, that is why it's vital for an individual to make their academically grounded research in a peer reviewed journal\*



- Determine whether the person you are quoting is a valuable source of information as an academic figure, This can be done by exploring some of other works they have done and the credibility he has in the field, You would be better highly placed if you received information from the best experts on the subjects of your research interest,

Aristotle said that ethos, or credibility, is the most important variable in persuasion. If the audience doesn't trust the speaker, or in this case the author, the quality of the argument is greatly diminished.

### *SOUND CLAIMS or NUANCE*

Nuance is a sign to the audience, judges, and decision makers that you are well prepared and bringing forward a thoughtful proposal. (Atchison, 2017)

The foundational parts of strong arguments are good claims which are then supported with analysis; having poor claims means that the case is grounded on the best foundation

For example, the statement "debt is evil" is a broad claim with very little nuance. An opponent could reply that several instances occur wherein debt can be used for positive good, such as when the government uses debt to provide social services it otherwise couldn't afford. Debt can be crucial for families in times of emergency

or to buy a house. Additionally, debt may not be monetary at all: It could be a sense of being in debt to the people who went before you and were willing to serve as your mentors. (Atchison, 2017)

### **THE CASE SHOULD CONSIDER POSSIBLE OPPOSITION**

Good case development is only as strong to the extent that the case considers alternative or opposing arguments, What this means is that most arguments in the case should be comparative in nature even to possible opposition or alternative arguments for this to be strong\*

Building successful arguments requires first that the debater discovers the potential arguments for or against the proposition. Once a debater has collected a variety of potential arguments, he or she must think carefully about how those arguments will be assembled into a holistic effort to prove (or disprove) a proposition. Constructive argumentation refers both to the development of individual arguments and the coordination of those arguments

into a coherent case; more broadly, these efforts are known as analysis and synthesis.(Johnson, 2010)

### **MOTION INTERPRETATION**

1. Criteria case formats as used in value debates
2. 'This house would, will, should, shall do X' motions
3. 'This house believes that X' motions
4. 'This house supports, opposes X' motions
5. 'This house prefers a world in which X' motions
6. 'This house regrets X' motions
7. 'This house , as A, would do X' , "Actor" motions

### **CRITERIA CASES AS USED IN VALUE AND POLICY DEBATES**

In this format, the affirmative outlines a number of specific criteria, or goals, that must be met; invariably, the affirmative plan meets these goals and emerges as the best possible alternatives:

***The criteria or goals case begins with an explicit statement of the objective to be sought and a defense of its value. It then proceeds to argue why affirming the resolution is the best way to achieve the objective" (Patterson & Zarefsky, 1983).***

Affirmatives must be able to defend the merit of the identified criteria, as well as the recommended plan option. *In criteria cases, negative teams are advised to make synchronized rebuttals where arguments are refuted, rebutted using comparative metrics that outweigh the other argument . In this case, they first make the argument which they will use to weigh, rebut, refute and then IMPACT that argument on the debate through weighing and providing her relevance to the debate*

So in any debate, the affirmative, negative team tells the house that they will be proving these issues or providing answers to these questions or they think that the following are the four most fundamental issues of the debate. More like in order to achieve the objective of the debate, I will prove the following;

- A. Context to the issue of the debate(history)
- B. Provide a comparative analysis of X and Y
- C. Show how our side of the house is principally justified
- D. Show how all stakeholders are catered for in the round
- E. Show how our side provides for efficiency than the other side
- F. Show how other alternatives are not as good as our proposition
- G. Show further the core benefits you get from our proposition

## **POLICY DEBATES**

### **This House Would (THW)...**

In motions that call for the implementation of an action/policy/change, teams may use ‘models’ or ‘policies’ to explain how they want to carry out that action.

This House would ban smoking: If Proposition teams do so, the debate is then between the action in the way Proposition implements it and Opposition’s stance. Here, that would translate into banning smoking with the punishment Proposition suggests, rather than any punishment.

THW legalize all recreational drugs: the Proposition team in this debate would be proposing a new law and has the authority of the literal government. Prop teams should explain in their speech how they envision this new law and why it is something necessary/beneficial.

This type of motion presumes that the Prop team has the authority to implement such policies.

However, this is not to say that they automatically can say their policy is perfect. It is legitimate for the Opp team to question the efficacy of the Gov’s policy and if this will do any good for the public. Opposition teams should work to prove the opposite, that such a law is not only unnecessary but that it will create more harms.

### **This House, as X, ... (actor motion)**

This means that the debate happens from the specific perspective of the actor in the motion. All arguments must be linked to why actor X would care to do action Y.

This does not mean that actor X is always selfish and that principled arguments cannot be made in this debate. Instead, debaters have to go the

extra mile in explaining why actor X would hold on to such principles or point of views.

*TH, as a parent, would not send their children to a private school.*

Debate speaks from the perspective of the parent, not from the perspective of broader society.

THBT X Should is **not** an actor Motion: ***THBT parents should not send their children to private schools*** (can still claim that the interest of the parent are prioritized, but this time a neutral observer)

- *TH, as the US, would invade Myanmar vs THW invade Myanmar*

## **“THIS HOUSE AS A WOULD DO X” MOTIONS,ACTOR MOTIONS**

**These motions invite the close examination of the perspective of A with all teams arguing from the perspective of A**

Teams in debates of the like ought to consider what actor A’s knowledge, values and interests and explain why Actor A would feel obliged to do X, or why X is in their best interest .These debates are not usually about whether or not X is best for the world; they are largely about whether X would pursue or not pursue X

### **EXAMPLE: THIS HOUSE AS UGANDA WOULD WITHDRAW FROM THE HAGUE**

Affirmative would be required to

- Provide context to the debate through citing the relevant history and describing the major problem of the debate
- Provide a comparative analysis of a world where Uganda has left the Hague and a world where Uganda remains in the Hague
- Show how the proposition is principally justified for Uganda speaking to their interests, values and history
- Show how all stakeholders are catered for in the round in a better way
- Show how our side provides for efficiency than the other side about the problems at hand
- Show how other alternatives are not as good as our proposition
- Show further the core benefits you get from our proposition

## NEGATIVE CASE

- A. Refute the gravity of the problem and give new context to the debate
  - B. Provide a comparative analysis of a world where Uganda has left the Hague and a world where Uganda remains in the Hague
  - C. Show how remaining apart of he Hague is principally justified for Uganda speaking to their interests, values and history
  - D. Show how all stakeholders are catered for in the round in a better way
  - E. Show how your side provides for efficiency than the other side about the problems at hand
  - F. Show how other alternatives are not as good as our proposition
- Show further the core benefits you get from our proposition

## “THIS HOUSE WOULD, WILL ,SHOULD,SHALL DO X” MOTIONS

Motions of the like will involve affirmative teams arguing that they should be enacting policy X

***A policy is a concrete course of action usually intended to prove the harms, significance, efficiency, stakeholder analysis, legitimacy of the issues at hand***

Such debates are about the entity in question not necessarily the state, government .

## OPPOSITION APPROACHES FOR POLICY DEBATES

Opposition teams can;

- A. Defend the status quo
- B. Propose an alternative in form of a counter policy
- C. Refute the justification for the policy and propose new grounds of justification
- D. Refute the need for the policy especially when the affirmative team did not paint the right picture of a need for the debate

**EXAMPLE: THIS HOUSE WILL BAN GAMBLING THIS DEBATE REQUIRES AFFIRMATIVE TEAM TO DO THE FOLLOWING’**

- A. Provide context to the gambling citing its legislation history, effects, harms, and significance on that society
- B. Provide a comparative analysis of a world with and without gambling
- C. Show how banning gambling is principally justified
- D. Show how all stakeholders to gambling are affected, catered for in the round
- E. Show the ban would solve the problem that was contextualized
- F. Show how other alternatives to banning are not as good as banning the act
- G. Show further the core benefits you get from our proposition

### **NEGATIVE CASE**

- A. Provide, if necessary, a refutation about the gravity of the problem that has been contextualized or accepting that the problem exists
- B. Provide a comparative analysis of a world without gambling
- C. Show how banning gambling is principally unjustified, wrong
- D. Show how certain key stakeholders to gambling will be affected and how bad this is to the people and economy
- E. Show the ban would not solve the problem that was contextualized
- F. Show how other alternatives to banning are better than banning the act
- G. Show further the core benefits maintaining the status quo

### **PRINCIPLE/VALUE JUDGEMENT MOTIONS**

#### **'THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT X' MOTIONS**

#### **This House Believes That (THBT)**

This type of motion does not require a policy set up; however, it is helpful when teams illustrate how they envision this new world to look like.

- *This House believes that parents should have access to their children's social media accounts*
- *This House believes that schools should permanently expel bullies*

## **This House believes that X does more harm than good**

*‘THBT Homeschooling does more harm than good’*, Prop teams do not need to propose a policy of how they will ban homeschooling. Instead, this motion expects Prop to make a comparison of why they think homeschool has more cons than pros. Opp should respond by explaining why they believe the opposite, which is homeschooling has more pros than cons.

*This House believes that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has done more harm than good:* In this debate, the BRI is not being scrapped; debaters are expected to recognize that it has both benefits and harms, and then argue about whether it is more beneficial or harmful on balance, which will often require a comparison to a world without the BRI.

These are usually value debates. They often require teams to do a lot of comparison of many factors that are important in the debate while qualifying the comparison to their side of their house

In such debates, for teams to be successful, they must conduct effective comparative argumentation between both sides of the debate.

In case the opposition teams argue for policy, the affirmative team has a moral obligation to politely remind them that the debate is a value judgement debate.

Affirmative teams often develop metrics, burdens of proof that prove the fundamental question that the debate puts on their side.

### **EXAMPLE: THBT PARLIAMENTS OF DEVELOPOING COUNTRIES SHOULD ONLY APPROVE LOANS FROMTHE WORLD BANK**

Affirmative teams will be required to provide;

- A. Context to the problem(s) of the debate; its history and effects
- B. Provide a comparative analysis of loans from the world bank and loans from else where
- C. Show how taking loans from the world bank is principally justified for LDCs
- D. Show how all stakeholders are catered by the proposition
- E. Show how world bank loans provide more efficiency than the others
- F. Show how other alternatives are not as good as our proposition
- G. Show further the core benefits you get from our proposition

### **NEGATIVE CASE**

- A. Refute if necessary the gravity or existence of the problem. If not, accept the context and move on to other matters of the debate
- B. Provide a comparative analysis of world bank loans vis a vis other lenders
- C. Show how your side of the house is principally justified
- D. Show how your side caters for stakeholders better.
- E. Show how your side provides for efficiency than the other side in solving the problem of the debate
- F. Show how other alternatives are not as good as our proposition
- G. Show further the core benefits you get from your proposition

**EXAMPLE: THIS HOUSE BELIVES THAT AFRICAN LEADERS SHOULD HAVE LISTENED TO KWAME NKRUMAH**

Affirmative Team would be required to;

- A. Provide context to the what Kwame said and why it will be important in this debate citing any problems or key positions that need debate
- B. Provide a comparative analysis of a world where they maybe cold have listened and the status quo
- C. Show how your side of the house is principally justified
- D. Show how all stakeholders are catered for in the round
- E. Show how our side provides for efficiency than the other side
- F. Show how other alternatives are not as good as our proposition
- G. Show further the core benefits you get from your proposition

**“THIS HOUSE SUPPORTS, OPPOSES X” MOTIONS**

These usually do not involve the government proposing a policy Teams should argue why they would support, oppose X for the value it brings on society. It is desirable to dig deep into comparative analysis of why amidst the harms that your side brings on the table, your proposition still remains strong enough.

**EXAMPLE**

*This House opposes the Belt & Road Initiative:* In this debate, the BRI is not being scrapped; the debate is about whether we have reasons to support or oppose the BRI. Teams should define and characterise the subject that is being supported or opposed.

**EXAMPLE: THIS HOUSE SUPPORTS, OPPOSES THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE AFRICA STANDBY FORCE**



Affirmative case would need to provide;

- A. Context to the history of the matter and problem of the debate
- B. Provide a comparative analysis of a world with the ASF and a world without the ASF
- C. Show how our side of the house is principally justified
- D. Show how all stakeholders are catered for in the round
- E. Show how our side provides for efficiency than the other side
- F. Show how other alternatives are not as good as our proposition
- G. Show further the core benefits you get from our proposition

### **NEGATIVE CASE**

- A. Refute the gravity of the matter described in the context and maybe give a new context. If the team didn't contextualize the round, opposition can contextualize the round
- B. Provide a comparative analysis of a world with the ASF and a world without the ASF
- C. Show how your side of the house is principally justified
- D. Show how all stakeholders are catered for in the round
- E. Show how our side provides for efficiency than the other side
- F. Show how other alternatives are not as good as our proposition
- G. Show further the core benefits you get from our proposition

## **5. "THIS HOUSE PREFERS " MOTIONS (THP)**

### **This House prefers X to Y –**

*This House prefers benevolent dictatorships to weak democracies:* In this debate, the teams are comparing two political systems. No one is proposing an action. It is an assessment debate that evaluates which system is better overall.

### **This House prefers a world where X (or prefers a world where X happens rather than Y) –**

*THP a world where all sports clubs were owned by their communities through non-profit trusts.* In this debate, Proposition should describe and define what this world looks like, but they do not need to defend how we arrive at this world.

If it were worded as *THW turn all sports clubs into non-profits*, proposition teams may propose a model for how they'd compensate existing owners, and how the non-profits would make decisions.

The comparative is the broad status quo/or one with some plausible changes, not another imaginary world. Opposition cannot say that they too, prefer a world in which communities own sports clubs, but that these communities have an equal capacity to fund them. In *TH prefers a world in which people have superpowers*, Opposition has to defend a world where no people have superpowers, not a 'world where only good people have superpowers.

So usually X usually has an opposite Y and so the debate should be about comparing a world which has X as the flag, main idea and a world which has Y as a flag, main idea. There is no need for any team to propose a policy

Usually the opposition's burden is to defend the status quo not to create another world which has limitation to either parameter X or Y

I'll give an example; on a motion like THP a world in which all people have super powers; affirmative teams must argue in favor of the motion in comparison to the status quo (i.e. a world in which no one has super powers) while the negative team can argue in favor of the status quo and not argue for any modifications of the affirmative plan say only good people should have super powers

**EXAMPLE: THIS HOUSE PREFERS A WORLD WHERE PEOPLE HAD THE SAME COLOR**

Affirmative team would be required to;

- A. Provide context to the history of the matter and problem of the debate
- B. Provide a comparative analysis of a world where people have same color and the status quo
- C. Show how our side of the house is principally justified
- D. Show your world serves all, majority of the stakeholders for the debate
- E. Show how our side provides for efficiency for problems at hand than the other side
- F. Show further the core benefits you get from our proposition

**NEGATIVE CASE**

- A. Refute the context or gravity of the problem and provide new analysis if necessary. In case team didn't do this contextualization, do it and notify the adjudication bench that you did
- B. Provide a comparative analysis of a world where people have same color and the status quo
- C. Show how our side of the house is principally justified
- D. Show how your world serves all, majority of the stakeholders for the debate better
- E. Show how our side provides for efficiency for problems at hand than the other side
- F. Show further the core benefits you get from our proposition

### **“THIS HOUSE REGRETS X” MOTIONS**

#### *EXAMPLE*

*This House regrets the Belt and Road Initiative:* This is a retrospective debate. Basically, Proposition must say that the world without this X will have been better off. Both teams need to provide a realistic depiction of **what a world without X might look like**.

They may or may not agree on this counter-factual world. What would have existed instead of the BRI? Why is that better than the BRI? Proposition may say without the BRI, alternatives to Western financial institutions would still have arisen, but they would not have been solely controlled by China and explain why those were better. Opposition may accept this and argue that China is a more sustainable lender, or they may suggest a different ‘counter-factual’, which is that the only option would have been Western lending institutions, which would have been more predatory.

These motions ask whether the world would be a better place without the existence of X. Teams ought to describe how a world without X would look like. Teams should not just debate the merits and demerits of X; the debate should go further into the comparison of how the world look like without X and see to it that a comparison is made of how World Y or X is more desirable for people or the world or any stakeholders at play

Affirmative teams can proceed to provide an alternative to X while negative at this level of analysis can provide an alternative to the proposition alternative

**EXAMPLE; THIS HOUSE REGRETS THE IDOLISATION OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ACHIVED SUCCESS WITHOUT COMPLETING THE TRADITONAL EDUCATION LANE**

Affirmative teams are required to;

- A. Provide context to the debate (facts and history) and clearly describe the problem in the debate. Also, key definitions of terms in the debate must be correctly defined
- B. Provide a comparative analysis between a world where we don't idolize such individuals and a world where we idolize them
- C. Show how your side of the house is principally justified
- D. Show how all stakeholders are catered for by your world in a better way
- E. Show how our side provides for efficiency than the other side
- F. Show how other alternatives are not as good as our proposition
- G. Show further the core benefits you get from our proposition

**NEGATIVE CASE**

- A. Refute any unclear definitions, gravity of the problem if necessary while providing new context to the debate or accept the context. If affirmative team did not provide context to the round, they can give debate context and notify the judges that they did
- B. Provide a comparative analysis between a world where we don't idolize such individuals and a world where we idolize them
- C. Show how your side of the house is principally justified
- D. Show how all stakeholders are catered for by your world in a better way
- E. Show how our side provides for efficiency than the other side
- F. Show how other alternatives are not as good as our proposition
- G. Show further the core benefits you get from our proposition

**This House believes that X does more harm than good**

*'THBT Homeschooling does more harm than good'*, Prop teams do not need to propose a policy of how they will ban homeschooling. Instead, this motion expects Prop to make a comparison of why they think homeschool has more cons than pros. Opp should respond by explaining why they believe the opposite, which is homeschooling has more pros than cons.

## PROPOSITION FIAT

**Once you read a motion, the debate rests on the assumption that the action specified in the motion can be taken – this is ‘Proposition fiat’**

**THW reserve a third of the seats for women in parliament**

x ‘Male parliamentarians will not let this bill in parliament pass’ - This is a criticism that explains why this will be a hard policy to pass, but does not make a comment on the policy’s merits or demerits. It is not a legitimate opposition line.

The criticisms around the harms and legitimacy of the policy itself are legitimate opposition responses:

- The policy is unfair and illegitimate
- The women who are elected will not represent women’s causes adequately
- The women elected will not be seen as credible. However, they must assume that the motion will happen

## OPPOSITION STRATEGY

- **Opposition can propose a counter-model too**, and if they do, the motion becomes Proposition model v. Opposition model. **Opposition is NOT required to have a counter-model.**

*This House would ban smoking:* In this debate, Opposition can regulate access to smoking, tax cigarettes and even restrict it to smoking zones. In this case, the debate is between this model, and Proposition’s model.

- **Some motions make what opposition has to implement clear in the motion itself:**

*THW require non-violent criminals to perform community service rather than go to prison.* Here opposition cannot choose to model it only as house arrest, or fines.

- A motion being phrased in a different way to “This House would...” can also be an action motion. For example:

*TH supports the ‘right to secede’:* It is useful for Proposition to identify the manner by which secession will happen (what criteria makes a territory eligible, and the process that will be followed, such as conducting a referendum)

*THBT the US should increase its military presence in Asia:* It is useful for Proposition to explain what they mean by military presence and in which specific locations

*This House believes that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has done more harm than good:* In this debate, the BRI is not being scrapped; debaters are expected to recognize that it has both benefits and harms, and then argue about whether it is more beneficial or harmful on balance, which will often require a comparison to a world without the BRI.

## **DEFINING MOTIONS**

**By Andrew Stockley (New Zealand)**

For a debate to proceed, both teams need a clear understanding of what the motion means. This requires the motion to be ‘defined’ so that everyone (audience and adjudicators included) knows what is being debated. Problems arise if the two teams present different understandings of the meaning of the motion. This can result in a ‘definition debate’, where the focus of the debate becomes the meaning of the words in the motion, rather than the motion itself. Interaction and clash between the two teams concentrates on whose definition is correct, rather than the issues raised by the motion. Definition debates should be avoided wherever possible. They make a mockery of what debating seeks to achieve.

### **1. REASONABLE DEFINITIONS**

The Proposition must present a reasonable definition of the motion. This means:

- (a) On receiving a motion, both teams should ask: ‘What is the issue that the two teams are expected to debate? What would an ordinary intelligent person reading the motion think that it is about?’
- (b) If the motion poses a clear issue for debate (i.e. it has an obvious meaning), the Proposition must define the motion accordingly. When the motion has an obvious meaning (one which the ordinary intelligent person would realise), any other definition would not be reasonable.
- (c) If there is no obvious meaning to the motion, the range of possible meanings is limited to those that allow for a reasonable debate. Choosing a meaning that does not allow the

- 1 -

Opposition room for debate would not be a reasonable definition. Truisms and tautologies leave the Opposition no room for debate and are clearly illegitimate. Defining absolute words literally may prevent a reasonable debate, and they can therefore be read down.

- (d) When defining the words in the motion so as
  - (i) to allow the obvious meaning to be debated or
  - (ii) (when there is no obvious meaning) to give effect to a possible meaning which would allow for a reasonable debate, the Proposition must ensure that the definition is one the ordinary intelligent person would accept.

**(a) Is there a clear issue to be debated?**

Teams at the World Schools Championships are expected to debate the topic set (‘the motion’). The Proposition team advances arguments supporting the motion and the Opposition team opposes it. Team members may not necessarily agree with the side of the motion they are arguing, but their task is to try to persuade the audience that their side of the motion is to be preferred.

It may seem obvious, but in order to prove their side of the motion, *teams must debate the motion*– not a subset or some bizarre or unusual variant of it.

‘Squirreling’ is banned at the World Schools Championships. The Judging Schedule to the Rules notes that ‘squirreling is the distortion of the definition to enable a team to argue a pre-prepared argument that it wishes to debate regardless of the motion actually set’. Squirreling does not attempt to find a reasonable definition of the motion as a whole; it just asserts some sort of ‘link’ between the words of the motion and the case the Proposition wishes to run.

An example of squirreling is defining ‘This House would legalise performance-enhancing drugs in sport’ to mean that marijuana should be legalised (asserting a link by saying sport is fun; life is fun; and soft drugs enhance people’s ability to have fun in the sport of life). This sort of debating quickly becomes artificial and pedantic.

Debates work best when everyone understands what is going to be debated. Both teams can go away and prepare their cases, knowing they will be talking about the same subject. The audience and adjudicators can predict the broad subject matter that will be debated.

The sorts of motions set at the World Schools Championships lend themselves to this occurring. Typical motions might include ‘This House believes that we should break unjust laws in democracies’ and ‘This House believes that the media serves us well.’ Both motions raise specific issues. One involves the merits of civil disobedience (one side will talk about the dangers of majority oppression; the other about ways of seeking to change the law without needing to break it); the second requires analysis of the positive and negative attributes of the media today.

The organisers of World Schools Championships avoid setting vague or metaphorical motions such as ‘This House believes there is light at the end of the tunnel’ or ‘This House believes life is a bowl of cherries’. Such motions lack a clear or obvious issue. They give the Proposition enormous scope to say ‘this is what the topic is about’, without the Opposition or audience having been able to predict this. They place a heavy burden on the Opposition, which is forced to prepare any number of cases on the off chance that one of them may prove relevant and can end up having to face the Proposition effectively unprepared. Such motions invite the Proposition to try to catch the Opposition out by putting the most unexpected spin possible on the motion.



The people who set motions for World Schools Championships have an obligation to ensure that each poses a clear issue to be debated. This being so, the teams have an obligation to take the obvious meaning of the motion and to debate the issue posed. A Proposition that avoids doing so deserves criticism. Refusing to engage with the plain meaning of a motion deprives the Opposition of its preparation time and results in debates on unduly narrow or bizarre subjects, or disputes over the definition. Audiences, who anticipated a certain subject being debated, see something substantially more limited or unexpected, and come to regard debating as overly technical and confusing.

On receiving a motion, both teams must ask: ‘What is the issue that the two teams are expected to debate? What would an ordinary intelligent person reading the motion think that it is about?’ This should give a good idea as to what the audience, adjudicators and people setting the motion expect to see debated.

### **(b) Taking the obvious meaning**

If the motion poses a clear issue for debate (i.e. it has an obvious meaning), the Proposition must define the motion accordingly. When the motion has an obvious meaning (one which the ordinary intelligent person would realise), any other definition would not be reasonable.

The motion ‘This House believes that governments should subsidise the arts’ can be used by way of illustration. The motion poses the issue of whether government money should be spent on cultural activities such as art exhibitions, music and drama performances, and building and operating museums. Not much more needs to be said by way of definition. None of the words in the motion cause any real problems; ‘subsidise’ simply means ‘pay some of the costs of’.

### **Finding the correct level of abstraction**

Debating the obvious meaning of a motion means that if the motion poses a very specific issue, the debate will itself be specific and must focus on the narrow, particular question posed. If, on the other hand, the motion expresses a very general principle, the debate will be much broader in scope and will include a correspondingly greater range of material. *The definition must match*

*the level of abstraction (or specificity) of the motion, so that the debate is as specific or general as the motion itself.*

'This House would maintain United States military bases in Asia' was debated as one of the prepared rounds at the 2002 World Schools Championships in Singapore. The motion posed a clear issue and required to be defined accordingly. The Proposition would be defining the motion too generally if it ignored the words 'United States' and 'in Asia' and took the debate to mean that countries should have off shore military bases (and spent much of its time on examples from the Roman and British empires and their alleged benefits). The motion is more specific than this and requires the teams to focus on American bases in Asia today. The Proposition could validly use the more general principle in support of its specific argument (saying that American bases should remain in Asia because there are benefits to countries having off shore military bases, and the sorts of benefits derived during the time of the Roman and British empires show, by analogy, the sorts of benefits gained from having American bases in Asia today). However, the focus must remain on American bases in Asia, meaning that material directly related to this will be much more relevant. The Opposition would be at liberty to argue that the Roman and British empire examples are not that analogous and fail to assist the Proposition case.

The Proposition would be equally at fault if it defined the motion too specifically. The motion is framed in terms of maintaining 'United States military bases in Asia' and a proposition that said it would only talk about American bases in Japan (while ignoring those in Korea) would be giving a definition more specific than the motion itself. Arguing that the existence of bases in Japan is more controversial is unlikely to justify limiting the words of the motion. The organisers have set the debate on 'United States military bases in Asia' not on 'United States military bases in Japan', and the issues that apply to bases in Japan also arise, even if less acutely, with respect to bases in Korea and other parts of Asia. The Proposition might be entitled to use Japan as the major example supporting its case, but cannot claim it is the only one able to be raised in the debate.

As at other World Schools Championships, the motions at the 2002 contest in Singapore ranged from the very specific ('This House supports

missile defence’, ‘This House supports the international trading of pollution permits’) to the more general (‘This House believes that low taxes are preferable to extensive government services’, ‘This House would compromise civil liberties in the interest of security’). The organisers sought to test the debaters’ ability to argue both specific cases and general principles.

A Proposition team in the semi-finals defined the last-mentioned motion (‘This House would compromise civil liberties in the interest of security’) to mean that all countries should adopt a system of national identification cards (this compromise of civil liberties being warranted by the security benefits that would result). The problem with this definition is that it took a motion expressed as a general principle and tried to confine it to a single example. The organisers had not set the motion ‘This House supports national identification cards’ and the Proposition team, by defining the motion to mean this, was turning a topic of general application into something extremely specific. The plain meaning of the motion was whether, as a general principle, civil liberties should be reduced when this would benefit security, and national identification cards comprised but a single example which might or might not be contested in the course of this debate. By trying to make national identification cards the entire debate, the Proposition pitched the motion at a much more specific level than had been set and, as such, failed to provide the reasonable definition required.

### **Proving motions expressed as general principles**

The Notes for Adjudicators at the World Schools Championships stress that when teams debate general issues, the emphasis ‘is upon the principle, not the specifics’. The Proposition has the onus of proving the motion is *generally* true. In other words, it must prove the motion correct *as a general proposition*. This means showing it is true more often than not– that it is true in *the majority of cases*.

There will always be examples for and against any motion expressed as a general principle. This places a premium upon logical argument. As mentioned in the Notes for Adjudicators, the Proposition ‘has to present a generalised case and prove it logically, rather than relying on large numbers of examples in the hope that these will do the job instead.’ Just as a single example will

not prove a generalised motion, nor will a welter of examples. What becomes important is not the number of examples, but the analysis of them, finding how they are linked, and the reasons and arguments they point to and that prove the team's case.

The construction of team cases is discussed below. The point to note here is that motions expressed as general principles must be proven true as general principles. A single example will neither prove nor disprove a general principle. Finding arguments that explain the majority of examples will be more important.

### **(c) Allowing for a reasonable debate**

Because the definition must be reasonable, if there is no obvious meaning to the motion, the range of possible meanings is limited to those that allow for a reasonable debate. In other words, if the person setting the motion has failed to frame a clear issue for debate, the Proposition must define the motion in such a way as to provide an issue for debate.

As mentioned, the organisers of World Schools Championships endeavour to set motions which pose clear issues for debate. Proposition teams that fail to take the obvious meanings of such motions often do so with a view to reducing the Opposition's room for debate.

The dangers were illustrated in a national final on the motion 'This House believes that we need a world government'. The wording appeared specific enough, as did the issue involved. The United Nations is not a world government. Did the state of the world today require a governing body with a lot more power and could this be made to work? What would the dangers be and could these be surmounted? The Proposition team chose to take an unexpected definition of the motion and ended up arguing that there should be a new body that was similar to but more effective than the International Criminal Court then being established, and that it should have the ability to deal with the most terrible crimes against humanity, such as genocide. Such a body could hardly be what was meant by the concept of a 'world government', yet the Proposition proceeded to run its debate on this basis. Presumably the intent was to make the Opposition's preparation redundant and, by changing the issue to be debated, to frame the debate in such a way that this

significantly increased the burden on the Opposition (witnessed by members of the Proposition issuing challenges such as ‘do you want people to be able to commit genocide without being punished?’ throughout the debate). The Proposition’s definition can be condemned as (i) having ignored the obvious meaning of the motion (which provided a clear issue for debate) and (ii) having set up an alternative meaning of the motion designed to be one-sided.

The Rules of the World Schools Championships outlaw definitions that are truistic or tautological. Such definitions do not leave the Opposition *any* room for debate.

## **Truisms**

A truism is something that is obviously true.

It would be a truism to define the motion ‘This House believes that the sun is rising in the East’ literally. The Opposition would have nothing to say to three speeches that discussed the manner in which the earth revolved around the sun. In terms of the questions posed above, the Opposition should be asking whether there is a clear issue to be debated. There is no issue as to whether the sun actually rises in the East.

On the other hand, what might the ordinary intelligent person believe the motion means? Taking it as a metaphor for Asia (‘the East’) becoming much more important in the world (‘the sun is rising’) seems eminently sensible: this poses a very real issue for both sides to debate. (China’s/ Asia’s importance in the world militarily/ economically/ politically.) While the motion is not so specific that the issue is immediately apparent, other possible meanings (e.g. that Eastern Europe is prospering) seem much more strained and artificial—and correspondingly less reasonable.

## **Tautologies**

A tautology is something that is true by definition.

The motion for the semi-finals of the 1995 World Schools Debating Championships in Cardiff was 'This House believes that extremism is the catalyst for progress'. One of the proposition teams was concerned that it might have to defend 'bad extremists' (e.g. the IRA), so tried to limit the debate to 'good extremists' (e.g. the South African anti-apartheid movement) by defining 'extremism' in terms of positive change. The Proposition defined 'extremism' as radical groups that contribute to the advancement of society, so ended up arguing that radical groups that contribute to the advancement of society help cause the advancement of society (progress). A tautology becomes a circular argument and leaves the Opposition nothing to debate. In this case, the Opposition first speaker pointed out that the definition was tautological, and her team won the debate unanimously.

Another example of a tautology would be defining the word 'best' in the motion 'This House believes that government is best when it governs least' to mean 'least intrusive into the lives of ordinary people'.

Truistic and tautological definitions are clearly unreasonable. They leave the Opposition no room for debate.

### **Absolute Words**

Motions with absolute words such as 'all', 'everyone', 'always' and 'never' need to be approached with caution because, while their plain meaning might suggest taking such words literally, doing so might prevent a reasonable debate. People setting motions generally avoid using absolute words unless there is good reason to the contrary.

A motion such as 'This House believes that all politicians are incompetent' seems on its face much more difficult to prove than 'This House believes that politicians are incompetent'. If a single competent politician can be found, this seems to have disproved that 'all politicians are incompetent', whereas 'This House believes that politicians are incompetent' only requires this to be shown in the majority of cases.

The Judging Schedule to the Rules of the World Schools Debating Championships provides that when a topic is expressed as an absolute, the

Proposition ‘must prove the topic true in the significant majority of cases, but not in every conceivable instance’. ‘All’ can therefore be defined as ‘in the significant majority of cases’.

As with the prohibition on truisms and tautologies, the reading down of absolute words is designed to ensure there is a reasonable debate. This after all is why six debaters show up. To debate. Not for one side to use the words in the motion to claim victory from the outset.

**(d) Would the ordinary intelligent person accept the definition?**

Once the Proposition has decided upon a definition following the above guidelines, it should check this is a reasonable definition by asking whether it is one the ordinary intelligent person would accept.

The phrase ‘ordinary intelligent person’ has no particular magic. It is just a means of trying to express the idea that motions and the words in motions should be defined in accordance with what the average member of the audience would expect (‘ordinary intelligent person’ being used instead of ‘average member of the audience’ to cover the fact that an adequate level of education and general knowledge must be assumed).

The reason for this last provision is to reinforce the point that a reasonable definition involves doing what is expected; it is not about trying to win by playing tricks with words. It is not reasonable to take the obvious meaning of the motion and set up a debate which addresses the anticipated issue, but at the same time to define one word in the motion in quite an unexpected way, so as to give the Proposition a much easier burden of proof than the Opposition when debating this issue.

In one debate on the motion ‘This House would break unjust laws in democracies’, the Proposition team correctly discerned the issue for debate, whether civil disobedience was justified when living in a democracy. The Proposition quite rightly made much of the fact that majorities might oppress minorities and that, even although the United States was a democracy in the 1950s, black Americans faced immense difficulty enforcing civil rights through legal means. Nevertheless, the Proposition in this debate made a critical mistake when it defined the word ‘democracies’. The Proposition wanted to talk about South Africa and to say that people like Nelson Mandela were quite justified in

breaking the laws of the apartheid regime there. Quite clearly those laws were ‘unjust’, but was apartheid South Africa a ‘democracy’? The Proposition argued yes, by saying there was a democracy if there were elections, no matter if some people were ineligible to vote in them.

The Proposition’s desire to use a strong example which the Opposition would have difficulty answering led it into the trap of distorting the definition to do so. As the Opposition correctly pointed out, no reasonable person would have considered apartheid South Africa a democracy when ninety percent of its populace was not allowed to vote in free elections. The Proposition had got the right issue in one sense (civil disobedience) but had missed it in another (the exact issue was civil disobedience *in democracies*). Its unreasonable definition of one word meant it was not in fact debating the motion set.

### **Dictionaries and Common Usage**

The Proposition’s task is to define the motion, not every word in it. Individual words need not be defined if their meaning is obvious. But when words do need to be defined (such as ‘democracies’ in the above example), the question is what would the ordinary intelligent person expect those words to mean. Dictionary definitions may assist in finding a commonly accepted meaning and can provide speakers with quick, concise explanations. But a dictionary has no particular authority; it is nothing more than an aid to determining the commonly accepted meaning of a word.

Taking an obscure dictionary definition and claiming that this is what the motion must mean is clearly illegitimate. Some time ago, a Proposition team defined ‘rape’ in the motion ‘This House believes that rape is a problem for us all’ to mean the oil-producing seed called rape. While this is one of the dictionary definitions of that word, it ignores the clear issue (is the crime of rape a problem men should be addressing as well as women?) and is not what the ordinary intelligent person would expect ‘rape’ to mean in this sentence.

A dictionary often lists a number of meanings for each word; some of these may be specialised, archaic or obscure meanings. Words must always be defined in



context, and debaters should look to work out the meaning of the motion first. If any particular word is difficult to understand or is especially important for the debate, a dictionary might be consulted for a quick, concise explanation of its meaning, provided the dictionary definition chosen is one the ordinary intelligent person would accept in the context of the motion as a whole. When a dictionary is used, it makes no difference what dictionary it is; what matters is if it helps explain the proper use of the word in question.

The motion 'This House supports missile defence' was debated as one of the prepared rounds at the 2002 World Schools Debating Championships in Singapore. At that time, the phrase 'missile defence' was commonly used to refer to United States President George W. Bush's controversial proposal to develop a missile system that could intercept and destroy incoming ballistic missiles. It would have been inappropriate to resort to dictionary definitions of 'missile' and 'defence' to support any other more general definition. In the context of the times, there was an obvious meaning to the motion and a clear issue that was already being debated internationally.

There can sometimes be genuine ambiguity. The word 'Asia' in the motion 'This House would maintain United States military bases in Asia' might be interpreted as including the Middle East (dictionaries define the continent of Asia as doing so) or as excluding this region (common usage of 'Asia' and 'Asian' often fails to include the Middle East). It is unclear whether the framers of the motion intended American military bases in the Middle East to be included in the debate. In view of the genuine ambiguity of the word 'Asia' in this context, the Proposition might reasonably define the motion to include or not include bases in the Middle East and the Opposition would have to be prepared for either eventuality. This example can, however, be distinguished from the one mentioned earlier, namely a proposition excluding discussion of bases in Korea, which would clearly be illegitimate, given that any reasonable definition of 'Asia' must encompass Korea.

## **2.PARAMETERS, MODELS AND CRITERIA**

In some national debating competitions the Proposition has a much greater right of definition than at the World Schools Championships. There are American university tournaments where the teams only have 15 minutes preparation time and it is accepted that the Proposition can define the motion as it wishes, so long as there some sort of a 'link' between the motion and the Proposition's case. Motions often end up being 'squirreled' so that proposing teams can argue pre-prepared cases. There are other competitions where it is usual for the Proposition to present a detailed 'policy' or 'model' for achieving the broad object of the motion, and debates focus on the merits of different models proposed. The World Schools Debating Championships are quite different from these sorts of competitions in that the Proposition has neither an absolute right of definition nor the ability to transform a broad philosophical motion into a detailed policy debate.

Because of longer preparation times, the belief that both teams have the right to employ that time gainfully, and an emphasis upon debating to an audience, the World Schools Championships are suffused by the principle of reasonableness. The Proposition must provide a reasonable definition. It must be one that the ordinary intelligent person would accept. When suggesting parameters to the debate, or proposing particular models or criteria to judge it by, the Proposition must ensure such

- 8 -

parameters, models or criteria are themselves reasonable. They must be ones that the ordinary intelligent person would accept as applicable to the debate.

### **(a) Parameters for Debate**

On occasion there may be an implicit context to a debate, which gives the Proposition reasonable grounds to set parameters or boundaries to what is included.

The motion 'This House believes that gay couples should be allowed to adopt children' was debated as one of the prepared rounds at the 2001 World Schools Championships in Johannesburg. While normally general motions at a world competition must be taken as applicable to the whole world, doing so in this instance would have allowed the Opposition to argue that gay adoption should not proceed because there were many

countries that outlawed homosexuality and persecuted gay men and women. The implicit context of the motion did not include situations where gay couples were not allowed to exist. The issue to be debated was the merits of gay couples adopting children, and this was an issue that could only arise in societies where gay relationships were not illegal. Proposition teams were thus entitled to confine the debate to such societies. Such parameters were reasonable in view of the implicit context of the motion.

The Proposition's ability to set reasonable parameters to a debate does not provide a licence to restrict the motion arbitrarily.

'This House believes that private schools should be subsidised by the state' could not be defined as relating only to private schools in the United States. This would be altering the motion to read 'This House believes that private schools in the United States should be subsidised by the state', which is not what has been set. No matter that the Proposition knows a lot about American private schools or believes state subsidies to be particularly controversial there as a result of 'school voucher' proposals. While the motion may implicitly be limited to areas of the world where there are private schools, there is nothing to limit it to the United States given there are well-known examples of private schools in Britain, Australia and many other countries which could be used.

Motions that state general principles can normally be debated as such. 'This House believes that low taxes are preferable to extensive government services', debated at the 2002 World Schools Championships in Singapore, poses the issue of the extent to which society or the consumer should pay for services such as health care, education and public transport. The motion can be debated with reference to examples from all these areas and from a variety of different countries. Restricting the debate to just one country or to just health care would amount to rewriting the motion without cause. The Proposition would be attempting through its definition (rather than its debating) to gain an advantage over the Opposition, by making many of its examples redundant.

While the Proposition may on some occasions be required to set parameters to a debate, this will normally have been done by the person setting the motion. When there is a genuine ambiguity that needs to be resolved or an implicit context that needs to be stated for the debate to proceed, the Proposition must remember its over-arching responsibility to debate the issue posed: what the ordinary intelligent person would expect, not a subset thereof.

### **(b) Models**

The word 'model' needs to be used with care at the World Schools Championships.

As mentioned, there are some competitions where teams are expected to propose specific plans or models. In American 'policy debating', the Proposition will often outline a specific plan for achieving the goal of the motion, and the Opposition will defend the status quo (present situation), attack the Proposition's plan, and/ or present an allegedly better plan. At the World Schools Championships, teams are expected to take the motion as it stands. If it proposes a specific policy, to argue for or against this. If it puts forward a more general principle, to debate whether or not it is valid.

The closest the World Schools Championships come to 'policy debating' is when the motion involves a 'change debate'. This requires the Proposition to propose a change in the status quo (present situation) and will often have the word 'should' in the motion. In order to propose a change, the Proposition will need to suggest there is a major problem and that the change will alleviate it.

The motion 'This House believes that smoking should be banned' is an example of a change debate. The Proposition must first identify the problem that exists (e.g. the health effects of smoking and the costs these impose on society). The Proposition must then propose banning as the solution to this problem and argue that this will be effective (i.e. the solution will in fact solve the problem).

In a change debate, the Opposition may argue one or all of the following:

- (a) the problem is not as bad as the Proposition suggests (costs are borne by individuals who know the risks, and are similar to other legal activities, such as drinking alcohol or driving cars);

- (b) the Proposition's solution will not solve the problem (prohibition only leads to a black market, which causes more problems);
- (c) there are better solutions for the problem (raising taxes, education programmes).

Sometimes it is necessary for the Proposition to set out its proposed solution in a fair amount of detail in order to prove it will be effective. When this occurs, the proposed solution is called a 'model' or 'plan'. As with the definition and any parameters, the Proposition must ensure that its model is a reasonable one if it is to serve as a basis for the debate.

The motion 'This House believes that voluntary euthanasia should be legalised' may require the Proposition to spell out what exactly it means by 'voluntary euthanasia', given that there have been different proposals before different legislatures around the world. So long as the Proposition's model is a reasonable one (looking to common features of these proposals, such as the person being terminally ill and suffering from severe and untreatable pain, the person making the decision by free choice, certified by at least two medical experts), this will be the model to be debated. If the Proposition left out an important part of any scheme for voluntary euthanasia, it would be open for the Opposition to argue that this must also be included.

Debaters at the World Schools Championships can 'use a model' in the sense they are entitled to set out the details of a proposed solution required by the motion, provided that they do so reasonably (detailing what is meant by 'voluntary euthanasia' in the example given above; explaining what is accepted as 'international trading of pollution permits' in a debate proposing such a scheme). What debaters cannot do is use the word 'model' as some sort of link between the motion and what is in fact a different or much more limited case. A team proposing 'This House believes that low taxes are preferable to extensive government services' cannot say 'our model involves only providing free healthcare upon means-testing' any more than it could say it was only going to debate the motion with respect to means tested healthcare. This would be arbitrarily restricting the motion and little different to 'squirreling' or 'policy debating'. The same would be true of a team that said 'our model is the United States presidential

election in 2000' when proposing "this House would break unjust laws in democracies' or that said 'our model is setting up a worldwide system of national identification cards' when proposing 'This House would compromise civil liberties in the interest of security'. Models cannot justify failing to debate the issue posed; they are best used to flesh out a proposed solution in a 'change debate' and, even then, must be reasonable if they are to form a basis for the debate.

### **(c) Criteria**

The standard of reasonableness is no less important when the Proposition puts forward criteria for assessing the truth of a motion. This often occurs in 'judgement debates', when the Proposition's task is to judge a particular subject favourably or unfavourably, and the Opposition has to challenge that judgement.

A judgement debate often has the word 'is' in the motion. For example, 'This House believes that there is too much money in sport' is a judgement debate. One of the first tasks of the Proposition is to set up criteria (some form of 'measuring stick') by which the subject can be judged. In this debate it will not be enough to show that there is a lot of money in sport; the Proposition must show there is 'too much money'. How can we judge when money in sport has become 'too much money'? The Proposition could suggest criteria such as when the traditional values of sport become corrupted (fair play ideals; playing being more important than winning). The Proposition would then argue these criteria have been satisfied (the media and sponsors support winners; athletes resort to drug-taking and playing when injured; even at amateur level, the behaviour of side-line supporters shows the corruption of fair play ideals).

In a judgement debate, the Opposition may argue one or all of the following:

- (a) the Proposition's criteria are not appropriate (sport has always been competitive and the Proposition is mythologising the idea of playing being more important than winning);

- (b) the Opposition has better (i.e. alternative) or additional criteria for judging the issue, and these criteria have not been satisfied (There is too much money in sport if it negatively affects sport's popularity and enjoyment derived from it. Money in fact allows for better sporting events seen by more people; it helps standards in sports improve);
- (c) even taking the Proposition's criteria, their arguments are incorrect (media and sponsors demand fair play; sports are taking action to deal with the few who engage in drug-taking and similar practices; people play sports at the amateur level for enjoyment of the game).

The Grand Final motion at the 1995 World Schools Debating Championships in Cardiff, 'This House believes that the United Nations has failed', similarly called for a judgement debate. The Opposition expected the criteria for whether the United Nations had 'failed' would be

whether it had lived up to its objectives (promoting peace, economic prosperity, human rights) and had prepared examples of UN peace-keeping operations, economic and social development programmes, human rights committees and the like. The Proposition said that failure, in terms of an institution, was whether it was doing as well as it should be, and the UN was performing more poorly than it should after fifty years of existence due to its failure to adapt or evolve to meet changing circumstances during that time (thus a Security Council that did not reflect the modern world; executive officers not appointed on merit; bloated bureaucracies impeding effective delivery of programmes; inadequate and politicised processes).

The Opposition expected the Proposition team would be arguing the UN was not meeting its objectives, whereas the Proposition in fact argued the UN was not meeting its objectives *as well as it should* (demonstrating institutionally poorer performance than would have been the case had it changed its structures and processes over the last fifty years). The Proposition also took on on the examples raised by the Opposition, arguing that they only further demonstrated the problems of the UN (peace-keeping operations had been blighted by politicised processes and unwieldy bureaucracies; the UN had in fact been irrelevant in terms of the major steps taken to promote peace in the world, human rights declarations were not enforced, and so on). The

Proposition won the debate by having set up criteria for judging 'failure' more carefully (and such criteria being reasonable in terms of the motion).

### **3. THE OPPOSITION'S OPTIONS**

Presuming the Proposition's definition is satisfactory, the First Speaker of the Opposition will not argue the definition, but will proceed immediately to dealing with the Proposition's arguments. There is no need to say that the Opposition accepts the definition; this is presumed unless the First Speaker of the Opposition challenges it.

If the Opposition is unhappy with the Proposition's definition, it has several options:

#### **(a) Accept and Debate**

The first option is to accept it anyway. If the Proposition's definition leads in to the expected issue and allows the Opposition to put forward the arguments and examples it was intending, there is no point to arguing over the precise words the Proposition has used. Some inexperienced debaters do exactly this. The words used by the Proposition differ from those they have written down, so they 'clear up' the definition by using different words with much the same meaning or that still result in essentially the same debate. The Opposition gains no marks talking about the definition unless it has to. Trifling objections are counter-productive. The best advice is to move into the debate and take on the Proposition's arguments.

Much more serious is an unreasonable definition by the Proposition that, if accepted, will result in a different debate to the one the Opposition expected. One option is for the Opposition, despite quite understandable annoyance, to accept the definition anyway. The rationale for doing this is to avoid a 'definition debate', where the focus of the debate becomes the meaning of the words in the motion. In such debates, interaction and clash between the two teams concentrates on whose definition is correct. The two teams' arguments and examples may end up having little to do with each other, and there might



as well be two parallel debates. For both teams and audience, the result is tedious. A lot will hinge on the adjudicators' opinion as to whether the definition was unreasonable or not. If the Opposition believes the matter is dicey, and the adjudicators might side with the Proposition, it may make more sense to accept the definition, borderline as it is.

Often when Proposition teams prepare surprise definitions, they put more effort into twisting the definition than to preparing solid cases. If the Opposition feels that what the First Speaker of the Proposition actually said (definition aside) is eminently rebuttable, it may wish to abandon its prepared case (or adapt what it can from this) and take the Proposition on its own ground. The Opposition may mention in passing the unexpected nature of the Proposition's definition which, presuming the audience agrees, may win it some sympathy. The adjudicators will also give credit to an Opposition that takes an unexpected definition in its stride.

The national final on the motion 'This House believes that we need a world government' has already been mentioned. The Proposition team gave an unexpected definition, arguing that there should be a new body that was similar to but more effective than the International Criminal Court then being established, and that it should have the ability to deal with the most terrible crimes against humanity, such as genocide. The Opposition team, while well aware that this sort of body did not begin to encompass what was meant by a 'world government' (although effectively punishing people who committed crimes against humanity might constitute a small sub-set of a world government's role), decided to accept the definition and avoid a definition debate in front of several hundred guests. The Opposition went on to argue there was no 'need' for the sort of body proposed by the Proposition, as the specifics of what they were suggesting ('the model' they were proposing) was little different from the International Criminal Court and would have the same degree of effectiveness. Since the Proposition was not proposing to transform the world order, there was likely to be little change.

## **(b) Challenge**

The second option for the Opposition is to challenge the Proposition's definition, arguing it is unreasonable. The Opposition will have to explain

exactly why it is unreasonable, then put up an alternative (and reasonable) definition, before proceeding to advance arguments and examples based on its own definition. It will meanwhile ignore the arguments and examples the Proposition has put forward (based, as they are, on an unreasonable definition).

The problems of a definition debate are canvassed above, but the Opposition may feel the Proposition's definition to be so grossly unreasonable, it has no choice but to challenge it. If the Proposition is arguing a truism or tautology, the Opposition must challenge the definition, or it would otherwise be shouldering an impossible burden. (Neither of the other options mentioned below is available for a truism or tautology.)

As mentioned above, unless the First Speaker of the Opposition challenges the definition, it is deemed to be accepted. The Judging Schedule to the Rules of the World Schools Debating Championships provide that the Opposition 'may not challenge the definition in any other speech unless the [Proposition...] significantly alters the definition in their subsequent speeches.'

The 'content' of definition debates hinges on which team presented the better arguments about the definition and which team then put forward the better case based on its own version of the definition. The definition having become the most important issue in the debate, it is marked accordingly. It is therefore vital that each team sticks to its definition. Even if the Proposition's definition was unsound, the second and third speakers will have to defend it and argue for it being reasonable, or they risk having their first speaker's speech become irrelevant.

As with any other argument put forward in a debate, the adjudicators must decide a definitional challenge, not on the basis of the adjudicators' own opinion (if the adjudicators believe the definition was reasonable or not), but in terms of the strength of the arguments offered. Even if the adjudicators feel the definition was a tautology, the Opposition will need to explain why this is so. If the adjudicators feel the Proposition argued better in its defence than the Opposition did in challenging it, the Proposition will 'win the definition'. But that said, the more unexpected, bizarre or unusual the definition would appear to the ordinary intelligent person, the less argument will be needed to point this out.

A team may still win despite a bad definition. Its marks for style and strategy may be considerably better. It may have much stronger arguments and examples, despite a poorer definition. But while winning remains possible, it has handicapped itself significantly by allowing the other team the opportunity to attack the premise of its case.

### **(c) Broaden**

The third option for the Opposition is neither outright acceptance nor outright rejection, but instead to supplement the definition. The Proposition's definition may be incomplete. It may have omitted to define a word in the motion that the Opposition considers pivotal. In this case, the Opposition can offer a definition of this word, so long as it meets the standards of reasonableness outlined above (or it may in turn be challenged by the Proposition). The best response by the Proposition would be to ignore the Opposition supplementing the definition if this leaves unaltered the basic issue in dispute, and the nature of the arguments and examples being contended. If the word was in fact important, the Proposition might claim its definition was implicit in the case and arguments it put forward.

'Broadening the debate' is a form of supplementing the definition, and is one of the best tactics available to the Opposition. In many cases when there is an unexpected definition, the Proposition will be seeking to debate a narrower version of the motion. What is being put forward is not alien to the motion, it is just a small subset of what it should encompass.

A number of examples have been given above: 'This House believes that we need a world government' meaning that there should be a new body similar to but more effective than the International Criminal Court; 'This House would compromise civil liberties in the interest of security' being restricted to the merits of national identification cards.

In each of these cases it is possible to say, yes, we will take on the example you have given, and show why you are wrong, but this is only one aspect of what the motion encompasses and we will present examples showing that in other aspects it is also wrong, thereby demonstrating that as a general proposition it is wrong. The Opposition is not rejecting the definition and the arguments

that flow from it; the Opposition is instead saying they are incomplete, and is supplementing them.

Broadening the debate (back to what was originally expected) avoids the pitfalls of a definition debate, while allowing the Opposition to present its case and arguments, as prepared. If the motion 'This House believes that low taxes are preferable to extensive government services' was restricted to health care (on the basis this was particularly controversial at present), the Opposition could spend a fair amount of time dealing with health care arguments (which it should have anticipated, given these are a major area in which consumer choice policies have been implemented or discussed), but could broaden the debate by noting that such policies have also been applied in education and public transport and failings in these areas further prove why it is wrong to suggest the consumer rather than the state should pay for such commodities.

The Opposition's decision to broaden the debate rather than just accept the Proposition's restriction will depend on how much it can say about the Proposition's chosen subset (if it knows a lot and believes the Proposition's case is weak, it may be better to concentrate on demolishing the Proposition rather than having to set up and defend other examples). It will also want to consider the effects of broadening the debate on the Proposition (while the Opposition has to cover more ground, so too does the Proposition, which may be rattled by the by-passing of its definition and may not know a lot about the other areas raised by the Opposition).

#### **(d) 'Even If'**

The fourth option for the Opposition is to both reject and accept the definition. This is called an 'even if' case and involves:

- (a) rejecting the Proposition definition as unreasonable and explaining why;
- (b) putting up an alternative (and reasonable) definition, then proceeding to advance arguments and examples based on this;
- (c) rather than ignoring the Proposition's arguments and examples on the basis they derive from an unreasonable definition, arguing that 'even if' the Proposition's definition was reasonable, its arguments and examples do not prove what is alleged.

This is sometimes known as the ‘you’re wrong, and even if you’re right, you’re wrong’ case. Historically, ‘even if’ debates were more likely to arise in Australian competitions, where the Opposition had an equal right of definition.

While this option avoids the danger of rejecting the Proposition’s definition, only to have the adjudicator uphold it, the ‘even if’ case requires the Opposition to cover a lot of ground. There are three separate issues to be argued: the definitional debate, the Opposition’s case and the Proposition’s case (rejecting the definition involves the first two; broadening the debate blends the last two). The adjudicators will have to judge both teams over each of the areas they tackle (the Proposition might decide to rely on winning the definition, or could reply with ‘even if the Opposition’s definition is correct’ counter-arguments of its own).

In addition to the quantity of argument involved, an ‘even if’ case has the further disadvantage that it makes the Opposition’s definitional challenge appear less pressing. If the Opposition can argue on the Proposition’s terms, and indeed wants to hedge its bets on the Proposition’s definition being found unreasonable, how vital was it to clog up the debate with an inevitably tedious and protracted definitional tussle? An ‘even if’ debate is almost always less advantageous than one of the three options set out above.

#### **4. CONSTRUCTING CASES**

The definition settled, each team has to present a case, arguments and examples. Each team presents a single case. The team’s case is supported by several arguments. Each argument is backed up by one or more examples.

##### **(a) Case**

The team’s case is sometimes called the team line or team theme. This is the essence of what the team is arguing. Every individual argument made must help prove the case, which in turn must prove the team’s side of the motion.

During preparation, the team should always try to work out the key point it wants to make. Does this prove its side of the motion? Does each individual argument derive from this?

Often the team case can be written out as a 'because statement'. For example, 'affluent nations *should* accept more refugees' *because* there is dire human need, they can easily afford to help alleviate it, and they themselves benefit from doing so; 'we should *not* cancel third world debt' *because* the real problem is not the debt but the governments of these countries. (These are two sample cases argued at the 2001 World Schools Debating Championships in South Africa.)

All three team members should write down the team case once it has been agreed. By referring each of their arguments back to the team case and repeating it at different junctures, the team's three speeches are given a unity and consistency.

'Remember there are people in need; we've got the means to help them; and we ourselves benefit from more diverse communities' is the sort of ending to a speech that sounds good and, more importantly, reiterates and reinforces the team case in the 'affluent nations should accept more refugees' debate.

The Opposition team case against cancelling third world debt is less wordy. Team cases can always be simplified and given more punch. The Proposition team case in the refugees debate could be refined to read 'affluent nations *should* accept more refugees' *because* this benefits both the refugees and the affluent nations.

## **(b) Arguments**

The team will need to ensure that it provides arguments in support of its case and that these arguments are divided among the three speakers, the most important arguments being made first.

An argument is a reason or rationale why the team's case is right. Inexperienced debaters sometimes state the team case, but then descend into a series of examples, without trying to show how they are linked or the underlying reasons why they prove the team's point.

A Proposition team speaker claiming affluent nations themselves benefit from accepting more refugees might say that this occurred when European countries took in some of the Kosovo Albanian refugees who

were fleeing into Macedonia in 2000. But this would be to go from case to example, without the intervening stage of argument. What is needed is an explanation as to *why* this example shows affluent nations benefit from taking more refugees. What was the benefit they gained?

The Proposition speaker should have said: Affluent nations themselves benefit from taking more refugees [part of the case]. Refugees often flood into neighbouring countries that face many of the same problems; this destabilises these countries, causing regional instability that often affects the affluent countries' political and economic interests [argument]. For example, the Kosovo Albanians fleeing into Macedonia in 2000 threatened to overwhelm that country and spark a civil war which could have involved Greece and directly affected

- 16 -

NATO interests, meaning Europe helped its own regional stability by taking some of those refugees [example linked to argument].

The Proposition speaker could then provide another example making the same point, then move to a second argument supporting this part of the case (regional stability is not the only self-interest affluent nations have in taking more refugees; doing so adds to those nations' diversity and multiculturalism, which is an element in their success) followed by an example in turn.

Debates without arguments become a hotchpotch of examples. What is important is not the number of examples, but the analysis of them.

In a debate on the motion 'This House would keep out of other people's wars', the Proposition team said that peacekeeping missions had exacerbated problems in Rwanda and Kosovo. The Opposition replied that peacekeeping ventures had assisted the situations in East Timor and Eritrea. Both teams resorted to citing examples without attaching them to arguments. What they needed to do was to provide reasons why intervening (here, by way of peacekeeping) in other people's wars was detrimental or advantageous (multinational peacekeeping forces suffered from cumbersome command structures which prevented their being effective when threatened; once enough nations committed to a multinational force it could deter local and neighbouring military threats

due to its firepower and international standing). The examples that supported such arguments would then follow.

Examples alone can never win a debate. There will always be examples for and against the motion. The strength of the arguments that seek to explain the examples will therefore be more important.

### **(c) Examples**

Arguments require logic and reason, and need to be supported by examples. The problem of the speaker who lists a series of examples without providing any argument is matched by that of the speaker who offers a variety of arguments, but with no supporting evidence. Without proof, arguments are reduced to assertions and generalisations.

The best examples are those that the ordinary intelligent person (hopefully most audience members!) will have heard of. These are facts, events and occurrences that have been widely reported in the media. A common usage example will have much more immediate credibility than an obscure statistic from an unknown author.

This is not to suggest that general knowledge is the only source of good evidence. Research will produce useful facts, figures and examples that can be introduced into a debate. But such specific material works best when it complements or provides detail for something that is commonly known or understood. Personal anecdotes (stories involving the speaker) are to be avoided; impartiality and credibility are dubious when arguing for a particular side of the motion.

When presenting an example, it is important that it be fully explained. It is better to mention a few examples well, linking them carefully to arguments just made, and explaining why they are relevant and significant to the debate, than merely to list a series of examples without proper clarification.



#### **(d) Restrictive Cases**

A lot has been said about the definition and about constructing cases. The aim is to make definitional issues less prominent, not more; for teams to debate the motion set, not the motion one team prefers.

The dangers of unexpected definitions and restrictive cases were illustrated in the final stages of the 2002 World Schools Debating Championships in Singapore. The semi-finals motion has already been mentioned. One of the proposition teams defined 'This House would compromise civil liberties in the interest of security' to mean that all countries should adopt a system of national identification cards (this compromise of civil liberties being warranted by the security benefits that would result). The Proposition in the Grand Final debate affirmed 'This House believes that the media has become too powerful' by claiming the media had become overly intrusive into the private lives of citizens.

Both cases were restrictive. The Proposition in the semi-final mentioned sought to restrict a general debate to a single *example*. The Proposition in the Grand Final was restricting its case to a single *argument*. The former approach was open to challenge; the latter was not.

The semi-final Proposition was effectively suggesting that if it proved a system of national identification cards to be beneficial, it would have proved that civil liberties should be compromised in the interest of security. The logic was faulty. At most, the Proposition would have proved the general principle true with respect to a single example. The Proposition having no grounds for narrowing a debate of general application to a single, specific example, the Opposition team was entitled not only to question the validity of the Proposition's example, but also to suggest that other examples proved the converse. The fact that the Proposition was restricting the motion to a much more specific level of abstraction than had been set is demonstrated by trying to write the team's case as a 'because statement'. 'Civil liberties should be compromised in the interest of security *because* a system of national identification cards is beneficial' becomes nonsensical. The Proposition First Speaker spent most of his first speech talking about the mechanics

of a national identification card (how it would be issued, updated, and replacement procedures in the event it was lost), itself an indicator of how peripheral his speech had become to the actual motion. Setting out a detailed model as to *how* a national identification card system might work was no substitute for providing reasons as to *why* civil liberties should be compromised in the interest of security.

The Proposition's case in the Grand Final makes sense when expressed as a 'because statement'. 'The media has become too powerful *because* it is now overly intrusive into the private lives of citizens' suffers no problems of logic or coherence. While the Opposition might be surprised that the Proposition had decided to rest its case on a single argument (media intrusion into the private lives of citizens) when there were a variety of other arguments available for claiming the media has become too powerful (ownership concentrations; the media's effect on public perceptions of politicians and public figures; biased and distorted news coverage), there is no necessity for the Proposition to raise every argument that might have been raised.

Media intrusion into the private lives of individuals is not an unexpected argument in this sort of debate, and the Opposition needed to be able to counter it. Unlike the Proposition in the semi-final debate mentioned, the Proposition here has defined the motion at the correct level of abstraction: 'the media' and 'powerful' are not being interpreted in an unexpected or unduly narrow manner. The Proposition has not arbitrarily declared the debate is only about television media or that it is restricted to the western world.

The Proposition's case in the 2002 Grand Final became muddled when it failed to set out clear criteria for assessing 'too powerful', simply linking this with the media's intrusion into individuals' private lives. The Proposition said its 'model' was to restrict the media to reporting on individuals' private lives when this impacted on their jobs.

In terms of the discussion of models and criteria above, this being a 'judgement' rather than a 'change' debate, the Proposition should have focused on setting out criteria for judging when the media's power became excessive rather than providing a model for how to change this.

The Opposition in turn misread the debate when it attempted to 'broaden' the definition so as to include the sort of arguments it had been expecting (which it could then rebut by pointing to regulatory schemes that inhibited ownership concentration and news distortion, and an educated populace able to deal with the same).

In addition to questioning whether the media had gone too far in its coverage of individuals' private lives, the Opposition may have fared better by coming back to the overall question posed and establishing a framework for assessing whether the media was 'too powerful'.

Media intrusion into individuals' private lives was, at the end of the day, only *one* argument towards proving the media was 'too powerful' and it could be contended that, even conceding some unjustifiable media intrusion into individuals' private lives, this was outweighed by the controls on the media and the media's lack of power in a host of other significant areas (thus introducing the arguments the Opposition wanted to make about mechanisms preventing media distortion and the like).

Whereas an unduly restrictive *definition* (such as limiting a general motion to a single example) is illegitimate and can be challenged or broadened, a Proposition that runs a restrictive *case* (limiting itself to a single argument) acts legitimately and cannot be challenged for doing so, but runs the risk of the Opposition being able to more easily counter that case (by disproving that one argument and/ or by raising other arguments that disprove the motion, as defined).

The moral of the story is as mentioned at the outset. To debate the motion set. There are dangers in trying to run restricted definitions or restricted cases at the World Schools Championships, where teams are expected to take the obvious meaning of a motion and to debate the issue posed. Sometimes motions will be extremely specific, at other times they will be very general, and the Proposition's definition is expected to follow suit.

Specific motions should be defined specifically and general motions generally. Good debating involves an effective blend of argument, rebuttal, speaking ability and teamwork. It means displaying the best material, presentation and strategy on the motion set, not seeking to handicap the Opposition before the

debate begins or confounding the reasonable expectations of audiences and adjudicators who have come to watch an exchange of ideas and arguments for and against a particular motion.

### **Points of Information**

All debaters have surely sat listening to their opponents and thought, “That is so wrong!”—impatient at waiting until their speech, and frustrated by not being able to intervene immediately. Points of information ease that frustration by allowing a speaker’s opponents a limited right of interjection. If done well, points of information can greatly improve the standard and spectacle of debate—they make a debate more dynamic and exciting to watch, they reward debaters who can think on their feet, and they generally make speakers more accountable. Many debaters fear doing points of information for the first time, but the vast majority learn to master points of information by following a few simple techniques.

### **What Are Points of Information?**

Points of information are interjections by a speaker’s opponents. They are allowed in the middle part of speeches. For example, in an eight minute speech with points of information, a bell is rung at one minute and at seven minutes—between these bells, points of information may offered. (Of course, there is also a double bell at eight minutes to signal the end of the allocated speaking time.)

Debaters offer points of information by standing in their place and saying, “Point of information.” The speaker may then either accept or decline the point. If the speaker accepts, the offerer asks a question or makes a statement

relating to the speaker's argument; if the speaker declines, the offerer simply sits down.

## **Offering Points of Information**

### **How Many Points Should You Offer?**

As a general rule, each speaker of a team should offer two, three, or four

points of information to each speaker of the opposition. You should keep track of the number of points that you have offered during each speech. The minimum requirement (two points per team member to each opposition speaker) is a strict one—if you offer one point, or don't offer any points, an adjudicator will be entitled to deduct marks. You must offer at least two points of information, therefore. This is one reason that many debaters time every speech in the debate—by timing their opponents' speeches, they know how much time remains to offer points of information. Many debaters who do not offer at least two points of information see this as a sign of not having anything to say.

Usually, this is far from the truth—every debater has something to say! Instead, it is usually the result of not having the confidence to stand up and contribute to the debate. This hesitation can be overcome with a little experience and a determination to show the flaws in your opponents' arguments.

The maximum requirement (four points per team member to each opposition speaker) is not strict. You may offer more than four points without necessarily having marks deducted. In this case, the overall context is the key, because it is important not to use points of information to badger your opponents. For example, if your teammates have offered two points of information each, there would hardly be a problem with you offering six points. However, if everybody on your team offers six points, this may be viewed as badgering.

That said, there is no team maximum for the number of points to be offered—whether or not you are badgering depends on the context of the debate. If you offer many points politely to a confident speaker, you are less likely to be penalized for badgering. If your team offers the same number of points in a loud and aggressive manner to a timid speaker, you are more likely to be penalized. This does not mean that you should go easy on weak speakers: each

member of your team is entitled to offer four points of information. However, it does mean that context is important in determining if you should offer any more than four.

### **When Should You Offer Points of Information?**

The general answer to this question is simple: when you have something to say! Even by standing and offering a point, you are showing disagreement with what the speaker is saying. This is important: there are few things more complimentary to a speaker than for his or her opposition to sit mute for a significant period of time. It is vital, therefore, to offer points throughout your opponents' rebuttal and substantive arguments.

That said, you should never give points with the intention of being rejected. Some debaters do this by offering points at times when they are unlikely to be accepted (for example, just after the one minute bell, or just before the seven minute bell), or by offering in a particularly confident and aggressive manner. It may be true that these techniques reduce your chance of being accepted, but they don't eliminate it. Therefore, offering points throughout your opponents' rebuttal and substantive arguments means thinking hard to find flaws in those arguments, then offering points of information with those flaws in mind.

*There are a few times when you definitely should not offer points.*

*You should not offer points during a speaker's setup (for example,*

*when a first proposition is presenting the definition, theme, and split,*

*or when any speaker is presenting his or her outline). This is because it*

*is generally difficult to disagree with a setup on its own, and if you do disagree (for example, because the opposition's definition is unreasonable), your concern will usually be too detailed and important to be reduced to a single point. You also should not offer a point if you or a teammate has just had a point rejected—it is unlikely that the speaker will accept your point, and this is the easiest way to give the impression of badgering.*

## How Should You Offer Points of Information?

The simplest way of offering points is the best—stand in your place and politely say, “point of information.” There is no need to be aggressive—you are unlikely to have your point accepted, or achieve anything, by rising in a flurry of noise and motion while throwing your pen onto the desk! Similarly, some debaters (particularly at the college level) offer points by placing one hand on their head and outstretching the other toward the speaker. There is no need to do this—for the uninitiated audience member, this gesture is likely to cause confusion, distraction, and, occasionally, amusement.

Some debaters offer points by saying something other than “point of information.” For example, some speakers say, “point of contradiction,” “point of misrepresentation,” or “point of factual inaccuracy.”

This approach is unsporting and wrong—by saying this, you have effectively had your point of information. It is the speaker’s right to accept or decline a point, not the offerer’s right to impose an idea on the debate. What’s more, it will not endear you to your audience and adjudicator, who will likely see you as skirting the rules of debate for an easy advantage.

Occasionally, more than one member of your team may offer a point simultaneously. In that situation, it is best to quickly and quietly decide who should offer the point and leave only that person standing. For example, one offerer may not have offered enough points, or may have a particularly strong point. A quick decision avoids the confusion of the speaker saying, “Yes?” and your team fumbling around as it decides who will speak!

## How Should You Deliver a Point When Accepted?

There are a number of important techniques for delivering a point of information:

- Despite their name, there is no requirement for points of information to be about giving information at all—you can mention facts, statistics, the logic of your opposition’s case, or anything else that is relevant.

- The point should be relevant to what the speaker is saying at the time that the point is offered, or just prior to that. Some debaters and coaches consider it good technique to ask a point relating to something much earlier in the speaker's speech, with the aim of confusing the speaker's timing and strategy. However, this approach risks confusing the debate unnecessarily and harming your credibility—it can give the impression that you haven't been following!
- Where possible, phrase your point as a question. A question demands a response from the speaker and it can help to clarify your point. For example, suppose that a speaker is discussing the great benefits that the Internet can bring to the developing world. One point of information might be, "Approximately 80 percent of the world's population has never used a telephone." However, a more effective point would be, "You say that the Internet is bringing significant benefits to the people of the developing world. How is this consistent with the fact that approximately 80 percent of the world's population has never used a telephone?"
- Try not to ask questions that allow the speaker to expound the virtues of your opposition's case. This mistake usually occurs if your point is too general. For example, asking, "How can you prove that assertion?" simply invites your opponent to explain exactly how he or she plans to prove that assertion!
- Keep your points as short as possible. A point of information can be as long as 15 seconds before the chairperson or adjudicator will call the offerer to order. However, it is far more effective to offer a simple and concise five-second point than an intricate and rambling 15-second one. If your point is particularly intricate or subtle, save it for rebuttal.
- Delivering a point of information is not the start of a conversation. You should deliver your point and sit down—don't remain standing while the speaker answers, and don't engage in any further exchange with the speaker.
- Your point should attack your opposition's case, not defend your own case. In some circumstances (for example, extreme misrepresentation), you may find it necessary to defend your case by emphatically clarifying your argument. However, this is a rare situation—points are better used to attack.
- Don't offer points of clarification. Doing so is a wasted opportunity to attack, and any clarification provided will only help your opposition.



- Many debaters find it helpful to run over the opening words of their point in their head during the time between offering the point and being accepted. This practice run can help to deliver the point in a concise and hard-hitting way.
- Some ideas are too controversial and complex to be raised effectively in a point of information. We have already considered the strategic advantage (in some circumstances) of arguing controversial cases. We also noted that such cases need a clear and careful explanation. Clearly, points of information—which must be short, and which give an immediate right of reply—are a very weak way to raise such an idea.
- Be willing to refer back to a point of information later. For example, in your rebuttal, you may find it effective to say something like, “Now, I asked the first speaker about this on a point of information, and she said [X]. However, even this doesn’t really explain things . . .”
- Use points of information to identify problems with your opposition’s case, not reasons that your opposition might lose. For example, if your opposition has forgotten to rebut the main argument of your case, leave it that way—you can always remind the audience and adjudicator of this fact in a reply speech or at third opposition (if you are opposition, of course). For example, it would be a massive strategic mistake to offer a point of information saying, “You haven’t rebutted our major argument, which is [X].” If you do so, you give the game away because a wise opposition speaker will address the issue immediately, so that it is no longer a problem for your opposition!

## **Responding to Points of Information**

### **How Many Points of Information**

#### **Should You Accept?**

Two. It’s that simple! Adjudicators will expect you to accept at least two points, and will be entitled to deduct marks if you don’t. However, strategically, there is no reason to take any more than two points—this is simply giving your opposition additional opportunity to speak!

## **When Should You Accept Points of Information?**

The most important principle in accepting and dealing with points of information is that you, the speaker, are in control. Your opposition is trying to interject in your speech, so they will do it on your terms.

Merely because your opposition is aggressive or frustrated does not mean that you have any greater responsibility to accept a point of information—you should accept a point of information if and when it suits you.

As a general rule, you should aim to accept points of information when you are established and clear in what you are saying. For example, the middle or end of an argument is often an excellent time to accept a point, because you have explained what the argument is about. The setup of an argument, or of your speech as a whole, is generally a very poor time to accept a point of information—you should clarify the foundations of your case or argument before allowing your opposition to confuse matters. Similarly, you should not accept points of information during rebuttal. Rebuttal should be about attacking your opposition's case—accepting points of information can make your rebuttal seem confusing and defensive. Finally, on the small chance that you might be making a weak argument—don't accept a point! Hopefully, you should never find yourself in this position, but if you do, you will only compound your problems by giving your opposition a say.

## **How Should You Decline a Point of Information?**

As with offering points, the simplest approach is the best.

Always be polite in declining a point of information—just say, “No, thank you.” There is no need to be abrupt (“No!”) or rude (“No—this is your fault!”). It is generally not a good idea to decline a point simply by gesturing at the offerer—this can seem discourteous, and he or she may not misinterpret the gesture.

Do not waste time declining points of information. For example, if you say, “No, thank you, please sit down” or “No, thank you, you've had your turn” every time you decline a point, you will quickly lose momentum and time in delivering your speech. The simplest approach is the best!

## How Should You Accept a Point of Information and Respond?

So you've decided to accept the point of information that you've just been offered. What should you do next? You should first finish your sentence! This is unquestionably one of the most underrated debating techniques—it seems trite and simple, but is very important. Debaters who drop everything to answer a point give the impression of being flustered and of allowing their opponents to dictate terms. By finishing your sentence, you maintain control of your speech—and give the impression that you are doing so!

You can accept a point simply by turning to the offerer and saying,

“Yes?” or something to this effect. It is generally considered rude and inappropriate to put pressure on the offerer, for example by saying, “And what do you think of [one of the finer points of the example being presented]?” Similarly, it is not acceptable to ask the offerer what the point is about before deciding to accept or decline.

If more than one member of your opposition has offered a point simultaneously, you should never choose which opponent you will accept. This gives the impression (whether accurate or not) that you are deliberately picking what you think will be the weakest point offered. Instead, if you have decided to accept a point, simply say “Yes?” (or something similar) to all of the speakers offering; your opposition speakers can then decide quickly among themselves who will speak.

It is important to listen carefully to what the offerer has to say. Many debaters view responding to points of information as a kind of time out—they take the opportunity to check where they are up to in their note cards, or to see how much longer they have to spend on a given argument. Other debaters interrupt the point before it is complete, saying something like, “Yes, yes, I understand, but the problem is . . .” If this does occur, the offerer is obliged to sit down—after all, the speaker on the floor has the right to control the speech. However, unless the offerer is waffling badly, interrupting seems very weak. Rather than appearing as though you know what your opponent is saying, you give the impression that you don't want to know!

Occasionally, you will not have understood the offerer's point. For example, the offerer may have explained things in a particularly oblique way or, at an

international competition, you may have trouble understanding the offerer's accent. In that case, it is entirely acceptable to ask the offerer politely to repeat the point. Alternatively, if repeating the point is unlikely to help, you may respond with something like, "I understand you to be saying [X]. In that case, my response is [Y]." Usually, however, this will not occur—the offerer will deliver a perfectly good point of information that demands a good response.

It is important to answer the point that was delivered. Many debaters respond to points of information by answering a point similar to that which was delivered, or simply by restating their initial argument.

Although this is better than simply ignoring the point, it is inferior listening carefully and responding to the point that was delivered.

Although it is important to give a good answer, you need not deliver a long answer. On the contrary, it is important not to get carried away when answering a point—you should aim to give an effective but concise answer that allows you to return to your prepared material.

### **When you do return to your prepared material**

It is important to finish whatever you were up to. For example, you may have said something like, "This is true for two reasons," but only presented one reason when you accepted the point. It is important to return to where you were, and to make this clear. For example, you might continue, "I said there were two reasons—the second reason is . . ."

Sometimes, your opposition will deliver a point of information that relates to an argument that you have already presented, or an argument that you or a subsequent speaker will present. Rather than waste time arguing the point twice, the strategic approach is to refer to the other argument, then briefly answer the point. For example, you could say, "My second speaker will be dealing with that in depth. Essentially, he will show you that [X] . . ." This response is much better than simply saying, "Um . . . my second speaker will deal with that"—this gives the impression that you are running away from answering the point.

Finally, you will occasionally receive points that you simply can't answer. Usually, this is because the point relates to a very specific example, beyond your general knowledge. For example, an opponent may ask, "How does this

relate to the Dabhol Power Corporation and its activities in the Indian state of Maharashtra?” Obviously, the best response is to explain exactly how your point relates (or doesn’t relate) to that example. However, if you cannot answer the point, the best response is to put the onus back on your opponents by saying something like, “I don’t see how the Dabhol Power Corporation has any direct relevance. If our opposition would like to explain what elements of that example are so important for us, we will be happy to answer them later.” (In that case, if your opponents do clarify the point in a later speech, you should then respond to the argument and its example in the next rebuttal speech.)

## **Reply Speeches**

### **What Are Reply Speeches?**

Reply speeches are speeches that follow the third speeches. They are significantly shorter than the substantive speeches—usually, the substantive speeches are eight minutes long, reply speeches are four minutes long, with a warning bell at three minutes. Reply speeches are given by either the first or second speaker on each team. As mentioned earlier, reply speeches are used in many debating tournaments that use the World Schools Championships style, but not all.

Reply speeches occur in reverse order—the opposition replies before the proposition. The opposition team therefore has two consecutive speeches: the third opposition speech, followed by the opposition reply speech. Reply speeches are not merely a continuation of the third speeches.

The aim of reply speeches is to give each team a brief opportunity to consolidate its ideas and review the debate, in order to present the debate in the most favorable light for each side.

### **The Aim of a Good Reply Speech**

By now, you will have realized that some parts of debating can be very inflexible, even painfully technical. Reply speeches are quite the opposite. Being a good reply speaker is largely about understanding the aim and the role of an effective reply speech, rather than learning numerous rules.

The reply speeches should be different from the other six speeches in the debate. By the time the reply speeches arrive, the debate is essentially concluded. The goal of the reply speech, therefore, is not so much to win the argument as it is to step back and explain how your team won the debate. Of course, saying, “We have won this debate because . . .” is hardly likely to endear you to either your audience or your adjudicator! However, this is the essential idea that drives effective reply speaking.

In many respects, you should view a reply speech as a post-game interview after a football game that your team has won. You can emphasize the reasons that your team won, and you can constructively criticize your opponents’ approach, explaining why they lost. However, you cannot tackle an opposition player who merely happens to be walking past at the time!

The distinction between tackling an opposition player (rebutting an opposition argument, in our case) and criticizing your opponents’ approach can seem minor. However, it is nonetheless important and can be reinforced by using two techniques:

1. Use a tone that is less confrontational and more analytical. That is, worry less about why your side of the motion is true and more about why your side won the debate.

2. Use the past tense wherever possible. For example, instead of “We say

[X],” try “We showed you that [X].”

You can show why your side won the debate by critically adjudicating their case as you recount it. For example, suppose that your opposition has argued that “[X] is true” (whatever that may mean!).

If you were to rebut this in a substantive speech, you would aim to

- (i) criticize the way the argument was presented, and

- (ii) use this to show how “[X] is false.” In a reply speech, you would find it more effective to focus merely on the criticism—to say (for example), “Our opposition asserted that [X] is true. However, they made no effort to substantiate this assertion. In fact, their third speaker largely conceded the point when she claimed [Y].”

## The Structure of a Reply Speech

There is no set structure for a reply speech. As a reply speaker, you can structure your speech in whatever way you choose. Not every structure is equally good—your structure will be marked on its effectiveness—so an issue-by-issue analysis will always outdo a random collection of ideas! Most reply speakers, however, like to have a structure to work with, so we examine the two most common approaches here. Regardless of the structure you choose, the best way to start a reply speech is to identify the issue of debate. A reply speech is designed to be a simple and brief overview of the entire debate, so there is no need to make this complicated or subtle. Usually, the issue that you decided in preparation will have been—at least in the broadest terms—the issue of the debate. It may not be exciting, but it is generally a safe way to start a reply.

The simplest approach is to spend approximately half of your reply speech discussing your opposition's case, and approximately half discussing your own. Of course, this does not mean giving an evenhanded appraisal of the cases—naturally, you will analytically criticize your opposition's case as you summarize it, and emphasize the strengths of your own case. Ideally, when you summarize your case, you will show how it has answered the questions or problems posed by your opponents.

**Another approach** is to recount the debate as it occurred—essentially, give a blow-by-blow summary. This approach is not often used, because it can be confusing. However, it can be very effective in a debate where your opposition's case has changed throughout the debate, or where the issues have substantially evolved. For example, this approach might be the best way to explain how your opposition's case changed in response to your rebuttal, how this was inconsistent with your opposition's earlier arguments, and why you therefore won the main issues of contention.

A more sophisticated approach (although not necessarily more effective) is to show how the cases clashed on an issue-by-issue basis.

This is done by spending the first three minutes of your reply speech comparing and contrasting the cases, and the last minute on a summary of your own case and a conclusion.

Of course, we still need to know just what “compare and contrast” means. Under this structure, it means identifying a few main issues in the debate. As the reply speaker, you can then move through those issues. Within each issue, you can set out your opposition’s argument(s), and provide some kind of response—either by a critical adjudication, or by showing how your team answered that argument. At the end of each issue, you can briefly highlight any further arguments that your team made on the point.

Having taken the trouble to divide the debate into issues, it is worthwhile outlining those issues before presenting them, and summarizing them afterwards. Having summarized the issues of debate, you can then summarize your own team’s approach before presenting a punchy conclusion.

### **Choosing the Issues**

Choosing the issues or areas on which to base your reply speech is very similar to the process of choosing the issues or areas for a third speech.

Inevitably, there will be many issues in the debate. It is not enough merely to choose some of the more important of these—you will miss important ideas. Instead, you need to group the issues and arguments of the debate into larger and more abstract areas, just as a good third speaker will group arguments and sub-issues into his or her targets for rebuttal.

Both the third speaker and you as reply speaker will therefore be undertaking a similar task in choosing issues for your structure. Ideally, you should not choose the same issues—if you do, the reply speech may seem like a rehashing of the third speech, which is clearly not its aim. The reply speech is an additional four minutes of material for your team—if you can use it to look at the debate from a somewhat different perspective, you will likely have covered the issue in a more comprehensive way. This does not mean that the third speaker and the reply speaker should discuss different content (although obviously the reply speech is shorter and presented somewhat differently). Rather, it means that the third speaker and the reply speaker should choose different groupings to examine the same content.



It is important to remember that a reply speech is your last chance to convince an adjudicator that you deserve to win the debate. For that reason, as with rebuttal generally, you should not necessarily focus on your team's strongest arguments, or on those aspects of the debate about which you feel confident. Rather, you should concentrate first on those significant aspects of the debate about which you do not feel confident—these will be the most likely reasons for you to lose, so you should pay special attention to showing how you prevailed on these issues.

Finally, look for specific reasons that your opposition may have lost the debate. For example, your opposition may have established criteria that it has failed to meet, or promised to support a model that has not been mentioned since the first speaker. Similarly, your opposition may have forgotten to rebut one of your arguments—you should keep track of this, because it can be a significant point in your favor.

As we noted earlier, it is not endearing to say, “Our opposition has lost because . . .” However, short of actually using those words, you should highlight any specific problems that your opposition's approach may have suffered. As experienced debaters know, nothing sways an adjudicator like a broken promise—if your opposition has promised something it did not deliver, you should remind your audience and adjudicator of that in the clearest terms!

### **The Interaction Between Reply Speeches and Third Speeches**

We noted earlier that points of information and reply speeches do not substantially change the characteristics of good debating technique.

They do, however, have some impact on the ideal structure. Specifically, the presence of reply speeches has an impact on the optimal structure for a third speech.

Without reply speeches, the third speaker is the final speaker of a team. It is therefore a third speaker's responsibility to provide a detailed summary of the team case. Specifically, the third speaker would be expected to summarize the theme and perhaps the basic case approach, as well as summarizing each speaker's individual arguments.

However, when reply speeches are used, they are the final speeches of each team. Therefore, the bulk of the summary (namely, the summary of the individual arguments) should pass to the reply speaker.

The third speaker needs only to summarize very briefly the theme and case approach, and perhaps mention the team split (that is, the labels for the first and second speakers' speeches). More detailed summary of arguments can strategically be left to the reply speaker.

### **Style and Reply Speeches**

Style must be appropriate to its context. It is worth emphasizing the context of a reply speech: a reply speech should be analytical (rather than confrontational) and it should be different from the third speech. This, therefore, should govern the style of your reply speech. Ideally, you should speak in a calm and analytical style—without speaking too loudly or quickly. You need not lull your audience to sleep, but you should avoid the trap of becoming flustered. A reply speaker often needs to cover a relatively large number of points in a relatively short period of time. The best way to do this is to maintain a calm and controlled demeanor. Becoming flustered may be easy, but it is not helpful!

Finally, if possible, you should try to provide a contrast to your third speaker's style. This is less important, but it can still help: just as variation in the identification of issues is welcome, so too is variation in style.

## **REBUTTAL/REFUTATION**

### **The Importance of Rebuttal**

*Two opposing cases do not make a debate, however important they are. To have a debate, we need something more—we need interaction between those cases.*

It is not enough for your team to present and support its own arguments—you must also attack your opponents' arguments. This is what we call "rebuttal." Rebuttal is vital for debating. Unfortunately, many less-experienced debaters treat rebuttal as an added extra to their prepared arguments. It is easy to understand why.

Because rebuttal involves attacking your opponents' arguments, it is generally much more difficult to prepare rebuttal in advance than to prepare your substantive arguments. However, rebuttal is not particularly difficult. When you think about it, rebuttal points out the differences between your arguments and your opponents'.

Given that you are both arguing opposite sides of the one issue, these differences should be easy to spot and straightforward to point out! Of course, this does not mean that you will never stumble a few times during rebuttal. But that doesn't matter! Rebuttal is so important to successful debating—particularly in younger grades—that it is much better to stumble a bit than to give a word-perfect speech that contains little or no rebuttal at all.

### **What Should You Rebut?**

This is a simple question with a simple answer. The goal of a debate is to convince your audience that your side of the motion is true—that is, for your case to defeat your opposition's case. Therefore, you should refute your opposition's case—by rebutting any notion, assertion, argument, example, statistic, or anything else that will contribute to the collapse of your opposition's case.

Of course, there is a difference between rebutting your opposition's case and adjudicating it. As a debater, it is not your role to adjudicate your opposition's case. For example, suppose that your opposition speaks overtime. This may be a significant flaw in your opposition's approach—it could even cost them the debate—but it is not your role as a debater to point this out.

Speaking overtime does not affect the persuasiveness of your opposition's case, so it is not a debater's role to criticize it. Similarly, suppose that your opposition presented an argument without any supporting examples.

It is not enough to say, "This argument didn't have an example"—that sounds like something an adjudicator would say. Instead, a debater should identify the lack of examples as evidence of why the argument is not true—essentially, by saying, "Our opposition claimed [X] was true, but they couldn't find a single example where this was the case! We, on the other hand, claimed [Y]."

The general principle of rebuttal is straightforward, but we need to examine some of its specific implications—particularly because many adjudicators, coaches, and debaters confuse this issue by resorting to trite mantras (for example, "never rebut examples").

## Rebutting Your Opposition's Theme

*The first issue is rebuttal of your opposition's theme.*

There is no question that you must rebut the underlying themes of your opposition's case, but this does not necessarily mean directly rebutting the one sentence that your opposition has called their theme. Inexperienced debaters often explicitly rebut their opposition's theme.

This is not necessarily a bad thing—at the least, this approach gives inexperienced debaters an easy way of targeting the main idea underpinning their opposition's case.

However, there are better approaches.

Explicit rebuttal of your opposition's theme quickly becomes redundant when you become more experienced at identifying and directly attacking the ideas underlying your opposition's case. The better approach, therefore, is to attack the important ideas and assumptions underlying your opposition's case, and to refer to your opposition's theme while doing this. This distinction is explained by the examples in the following table.

Simple Approach	Better Approach
"The main problem with our opposition's case is their theme, which states [X]. This theme is wrong because . . ."	"The main problem with our opposition's case is their underlying assumption that [Y]. There is no question that this assumption was a vital part of our opponents' case. For example, their theme stated that [X]. Now, the assumption that [Y] is clearly not true, for a number of reasons . . ."

## Rebutting Examples and Statistics

The second issue is rebuttal of substantiation: examples and statistics. As we noted earlier, it is often common to hear adjudicators, coaches, and debaters boldly declare, "You should never rebut examples!"

This statement is absolutely untrue, for the important reason given earlier: your goal in rebuttal is to destroy your opposition's case; if your opposition's case is well supported by certain examples or statistics, you need to rebut them!

However, a modified version of the earlier statement is true: **Examples and statistics of themselves prove nothing.** Therefore, if you do rebut examples

and statistics, you need constantly to consider and discuss their relevance and context in the debate.

In simple terms, it can be very effective to rebut an example or statistic, if you show how your opposition's case was reliant upon that material. The alternative approach is simply to go through your opposition's case like a commando with a machine gun, shooting everything in sight!

This approach leads to argument by example, where the debate becomes about examples and statistics, rather than about principles and arguments. This style of argument and rebuttal is rightly condemned, because no list of examples (whether in substantive argument or in rebuttal) can show an abstract principle to be true—as we learned in developing arguments, you need some kind of reasoning and explanation.

### **Rebutting Rebuttal**

The third issue is rebuttal of rebuttal. Debaters commonly ask, “What happens if our opposition rebuts one of our arguments? Should we rebut their rebuttal?” This question seems to demand a very technical and rule-based answer—until you rephrase it somewhat.

What these debaters are really saying is, “If our opposition has managed to attack one of our arguments, should we let that attack stand?” The strategic answer to this question is clearly, “No!”—you should answer your opposition's attack. However, rebuttal of rebuttal is quite different from rebuttal of a substantive argument. Although defense of your case is important, your ultimate goal in rebuttal is still to attack your opposition's case.

Therefore, although it may be strategically vital to rebut some of your opposition's rebuttal, it would usually be strategically weak to spend significant time doing so—it is very important not to look defensive.

In particular, you should never explicitly identify rebuttal of rebuttal as a key issue of debate (for example, “The first problem with our opposition's argument is that they have misrepresented our case.”). This looks defensive in the extreme, and gives the impression that you are shying from actually rebutting your opposition's case.

It is important to remember that, when rebutting rebuttal, you have the luxury of relying on a substantive argument that your team has already developed in

detail (that is, the argument that you are defending). Therefore, it should not usually prove difficult to deal with such rebuttal briefly.

### **The Importance of Being Thorough**

Every debater has an opinion about which are the main issues of the debate. Naturally, you need to focus on these issues when you are preparing your rebuttal—if you think that an issue is particularly important, you need to spend more rebuttal time dealing with it.

However, just because you think that something is a main issue of debate does not mean that the adjudicator shares that view. The adjudicator may (quite legitimately) see a completely different issue, argument, or example as vital to the outcome of the debate.

### ***Therefore, your rebuttal must be thorough.***

One way or another, you should deal with every argument, example, and significant idea that your opposition raises. You need not spend equal time on everything, of course, but you must clearly rebut all of the important ideas at some point. For example, if you have shown that an argument is logically false, you should then ideally say something like, “I have now dealt with this argument, and therefore shown that the examples of [X] and [Y], which were part of that argument, do not assist our opposition’s case.”

This statement ensures that you avoid a situation where the adjudicator thinks (perhaps illogically), “Well, she rebutted the idea behind the argument successfully—but I still found the example convincing.” Further, the third speaker must work hard to mop up anything that has not otherwise been rebutted. We examine the role of the third speaker below, and this principle does not change that role substantially.

A third speaker must be particularly careful to note down everything that has been said, and to provide an answer to it—either by rebutting it directly, or by showing how it has already been rebutted in another point. It is difficult to overstate the importance of following these rebuttal strategies whenever you know (or suspect) that your adjudicator may be using a flowchart approach.

For example, the Grand Final of the 1998 World Schools Debating Championships in Israel was won 4-3 by Australia (against Scotland). One of the majority adjudicators awarded the debate by a very narrow margin, and

was apparently swayed by Scotland's failure to deal with a small but substantial part of the Australian case.

As technical as it may seem, this approach literally can make and break world championships—it pays to follow the correct technique whenever flowchart adjudication is in place.

### **Preparing for Rebuttal**

We have already seen that good rebuttal is vital for success in debating, so it is naturally important to think about how to prepare rebuttal effectively. The most important point about effective rebuttal preparation is what it's not: effective rebuttal preparation is not pre-prepared rebuttal.

Pre-prepared rebuttal is rebuttal that your team has planned to the finest detail—essentially, by knowing exactly what you will say if your opposition raises one of a few given arguments. Some teams even go so far as to write their pre-prepared rebuttal on note cards!

The problem with this approach should be clear. Good rebuttal is about effectively attacking your opposition's arguments, as they are presented. Preparing very detailed rebuttal to attack very specific arguments is ineffective—if your opposition presents somewhat different arguments, or even the same arguments with a different emphasis, your pre-prepared rebuttal will be almost useless.

The best way to prepare for rebuttal is to sit down as a team and think about the kinds of arguments and examples that your opposition may raise. You can then plan your general approach to those arguments and examples. This approach allows you to be flexible (and hence much more effective) in responding to your opposition's case.

### **Definitional Rebuttal**

In a perfect world, this section would not be necessary—both teams would agree on the same definition, so there would be no need for definitional rebuttal. In fact, perfect world or not, most definitional disputes would be avoided if both teams had followed the for choosing an appropriate and evenhanded definition.

However, avoidable or not, definitional disputes do happen. What's more, when they happen, your adjudicator will expect you to follow a relatively standard

approach in dealing with the situation. Of all the aspects of rebuttal, this is one of the driest; however, it is also one of the most technically demanding.

### **Definitional Rules Revisited**

Before we dive into the techniques of definitional rebuttal, we need to be clear about the definitional rules. Remember, there are two definitional rules, and you need to know which applies to you and your competition. They are:

1. No exclusive right of definition, and
2. An exclusive right of definition. You will recall that there are two tests for whether one definition is better than another, and that these tests change depending on the definitional rule being used. When there is no exclusive right of definition, the two tests are:

1. Which definition is more reasonable?
2. Which definition is closer to the real issue (otherwise known as the plain meaning) of the motion? Where there is an exclusive right of definition, the proposition team has the right to define the motion, and two questions can then be asked of that definition:
  1. Is the proposition's definition reasonable?
  2. Is the proposition's definition reasonably close to the plain meaning of the words of the motion? (This was explained in detail earlier in the book. If you are unsure of the details, you should go back and re-read that section now. Definitional rebuttal is very confusing if you don't know your definitional rules!)

### **Deciding to Rebut Your Opposition's Definition**

The first issue is how to decide whether to rebut your opposition's definition. Debating is about disagreeing with what your opposition says about the issue posed by the motion.

We do not assemble debaters, adjudicators, and audiences to quibble about the meaning of a word or two—at least, not if we can help it. Therefore, an opposition team should only rebut the definition if it's absolutely necessary.

But when is it absolutely necessary? The simple approach is to ask a single question: "Can we continue with our case under this definition?" Usually, the answer should be, "yes." In most debates, your opposition will have used slightly different words to define the motion, but their definition will be



substantially similar to yours—similar enough that you can easily continue with your case under their definition. However, let’s return to the motion “This House believes that big is beautiful” and suppose that you (as opposition) have defined the motion as relating to globalization, while the proposition has defined it as relating to body images.

You cannot continue under the proposition’s definition: if the adjudicator accepts that the motion is about body images, your arguments about globalization are irrelevant. If you cannot continue under the proposition’s definition, you need to do something. Exactly what that is will depend on why you cannot continue, and on which definitional rule applies. Let’s consider this with a table.

<b>DEFINITIONAL RULE</b>			
		<b>No exclusive right of definition</b>	<b>Exclusive right of definition</b>
<b>You could not argue under the proposition’s case if you tried.</b>		You <i>can challenge</i> , on the basis that the proposition definition is <i>unreasonable</i> (that is, that your definition is <i>more reasonable</i> ).	You <i>can challenge</i> , on the basis that the proposition definition is <i>unreasonable</i> .
<b>Why can’t you continue?</b>	<b>The proposition has defined the motion as relating to a different issue, but the definition is not itself unreasonable.</b>	You <i>can challenge</i> , on the basis that your definition is <i>closer to the plain meaning of the words of the motion</i> (that is, your definition has picked the real issue posed by the motion).	You <i>cannot challenge</i> , unless the proposition definition is particularly bizarre ( <i>not reasonably close to the plain meaning of the words of the motion</i> ). If you cannot challenge, you must <i>abandon your prepared case</i> in this scenario. This was discussed earlier.

The table shows the various combinations of definitional problem and definitional rule, and indicates the best response for an opposition team. The table is essentially just a summary—it should be clear that the principles in the table follow directly from the definitional rules that were set out earlier in the book. One point deserves emphasis before we move on: It is a big step to rebut a definition. If you rebut the definition wrongly, or badly, you will often lose as a result. Therefore, only rebut the definition when you feel confident that you cannot continue under the proposition’s approach.

### How to Rebut the Definition

We will examine a general structure for a rebuttal point shortly. Rebuttal of the definition is nothing more than a special form of that general structure.

However, we just learned that poor definitional rebuttal can lose a debate, so it is worth considering this special form carefully!

The most important requirement of definitional rebuttal is clarity. Your adjudicator needs to understand precisely why you are rebutting your opponents' definition, and how you propose to replace your opponents' definition. Therefore, it is vital to signpost clearly, speak clearly, and avoid any distractions (for example, jokes) during this aspect of your speech. There are four essential parts to rebutting the definition.

1. Make it clear that you are challenging your opponents' definition. Too often, teams complain and whine about their opposition's definition, but don't actually formally challenge it. This is a waste of time. Either challenge your opponents' definition or accept it. It is helpful to actually use the word "challenge"—for example, "First, we challenge our opposition's definition."

2. Explain how their definition is wrong. We have already examined the reasons that a definition might be wrong, and the way that those reasons depend on the definitional rule in place

3. Replace their definition with your own definition. This is vital, because every debate needs a definition—if your opponents' definition is not good enough, you need something to replace it. You need only replace your opponents' definition to the extent that you disagree with it.

For example, if you disagree with your opponents' definition of one word in the motion, you need only replace their definition of that word with your definition of that word—there is no need to redefine the entire motion.

4. Explain how your definition avoids the problems of your opposition's definition. You don't need to spend much time on this explanation, but it is important. This explanation involves showing how your definition avoids the pitfall(s) of your opposition's.

For example, if you have criticized your opposition's definition for being unreasonable, you should briefly explain how your definition is reasonable (or is more reasonable).

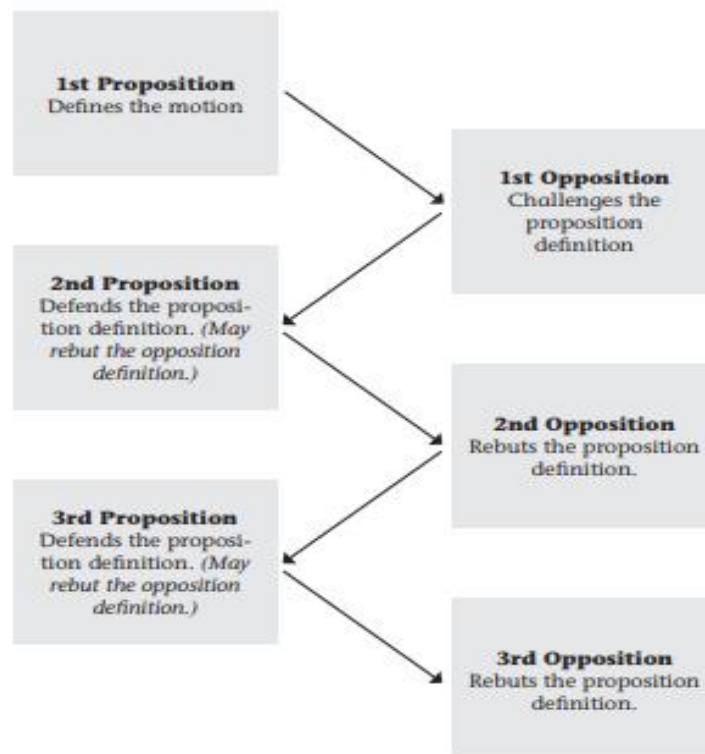
### **Definitional Challenges and Their Impact on the Debate as a Whole**

In many respects, a definition is to a debate what a foundation is to a building. It is inconceivable, therefore, that an attack on that foundation (a

definitional challenge) would not send shudders throughout the entire structure.

Definitional challenges have important ramifications for the debate as a whole. If you are not challenging your opposition's definition, it is generally good technique to say so—formally accepting your opposition's definition is a valuable way of adding clarity to your case. However, you don't need to do so—if you do not challenge your opposition's definition, you are taken to have accepted it.

At first, this seems like a mere rule of convenience, but its effects are much greater than that. Specifically, this rule means that a definitional challenge must be continued throughout the debate, as the following diagram shows.



This diagram shows how the definition should be treated in a definitional debate. The definition is presented by the first proposition. If the opposition team wishes to challenge the definition, it must do so in the first opposition's speech.

In that case, the proposition team will

1st Proposition Defines the motion

1st Opposition Challenges the proposition definition

2nd Proposition Defends the proposition definition. (May rebut the opposition definition.)

2nd Opposition Rebuts the proposition definition.

3rd Proposition Defends the proposition definition. (May rebut the opposition definition.)

3rd Opposition Rebuts the proposition definition.

If the prop want to defend their definition—this must be done by the second proposition. This process must continue throughout the debate.

The diagram says that the second and third proposition speakers may rebut the opposition definition. The meaning of this will depend on the definitional rule. If there is no exclusive right of definition, the issue is whether the proposition team's definition is better than the opposition team's definition.

In that case, the second and third proposition speakers defend their own definition and should rebut the opposition team's definition as well—this, after all, is the best way for the proposition to show that it has a better definition.

However, the situation is different if the proposition holds an exclusive right of definition. In that case, the issue is whether the proposition's definition is acceptable on its own merits (for example, the issue will usually be whether or not the proposition's definition is reasonable).

Therefore, under the exclusive right of definition rule, the proposition team should rarely (if ever) rebut the opposition definition directly. It is far more strategic in that case for the proposition team simply to show how its own definition is acceptable. The effects of not continuing a definitional dispute throughout a debate can be disastrous.

For example, suppose that the two teams have very different definitions of the motion. If the first opposition challenges the proposition definition (as he or she almost certainly should in this circumstance) and the second proposition speaker does not defend the proposition definition, the proposition is taken to have accepted the opposition's definitional challenge—even if the proposition

clearly disagrees with the opposition team's definition! In that case, the debate is understood to proceed under the opposition team's definition.

This means that the proposition team's case will essentially be irrelevant, because it will be supporting an interpretation of the motion that the proposition team itself has conceded. This means, of course, that the opposition team must challenge the proposition definition at first speaker or not at all. If the first opposition

If the opposition speaker does not challenge the proposition definition, the opposition team is taken to have accepted the proposition definition, so it will be considered a contradiction if the second opposition then turns around and challenges. Many teams claim to disagree with their opposition's definition when in fact the definitions are essentially the same.

For example, an opposition team may try to rebut the proposition definition because the proposition has defined a term using different words to achieve the same meaning. In this case, it is still wise for the proposition to defend its definition, even if that defense essentially involves showing that the opposition's definition is the same as that provided by the proposition.

### **The Definitional “Even If”**

Definitional debates can often be difficult. One reason is that definitional disputes can reduce the amount of argument on the substantive issues posed by the motion. In a normal debate, the disagreement between the teams centers on the actual difference between the cases; in a definitional debate, however, it is confined to the difference between definitions. This difference poses a problem.

Suppose that your team is caught in a definitional debate. You face the prospect of losing the debate if the adjudicator disagrees with your arguments on the definitional issue. Therefore, you need a way to rebut your opposition's case while maintaining your stance on the opposition's definition. You can do this with a definitional “even if”—essentially, by saying, “We disagree with our opposition's definition.

However, even if our opposition's definition were correct, we would still disagree with their case—it does not even prove their side of their interpretation of the definition!” Naturally, this is done after rebutting the opposition's definition.

In their guide books, Australian debaters James Hooke and Jeremy Philips have described this rebuttal as creating “a mini-debate within the debate proper,” and their point (as usual) is a good one.

An “even if” allows your team to

- (i) rebut your opposition’s definition, and
- (ii) show the adjudicator that you can happily rebut your opposition’s case. Essentially, this tactic creates insurance: your adjudicator can say, “Well, I preferred your opposition’s definition, but you completely destroyed their case, so you deserved to win the debate.” If both teams use “even if” techniques, there are essentially three mini-debates occurring:
  1. A debate about whose definition is correct;
  2. A debate under the proposition’s definition (on the assumption that it is correct); and
  3. A debate under the opposition’s definition (on the assumption that it is correct).

This is unquestionably a very sophisticated and complex technique. For that reason, alarm bells should be ringing—remember: fear complexity! Just as important as understanding how to use an “even if” is understanding when to.

The key issue is the basis on which you are challenging your opposition’s definition. If you are challenging on the ground that your opponents’ definition is bizarre, you are generally safe in using a definitional “even if”—you can essentially say, “Well, we don’t think you’re debating the right issue, but we’ll happily beat you on that issue as well.”

If you are challenging on the basis that your opposition’s definition is somehow unreasonable, you face much greater problems. You cannot say, “Our opposition’s definition is totally unreasonable and leaves us no room to argue.

However, if we were to accept it, we’d produce the following arguments. . . .” This is clearly a contradiction.

In practice, under an exclusive right of definition, it is rare for a team to argue that a definition is not reasonably close to the

plain Philips J, Hooke J (1994). *The Debating Book*, UNSW Press, Sydney at page 68. Also, Philips J, Hooke J (1998). *The Sport of Debating: Winning Skills and Strategies*, UNSW Press, Sydney at page 101 meaning of the motion.

Therefore, as a general principle, it is unwise to attempt a definitional “even if” under the exclusive right of definition rule. In these circumstances, it is better to focus your attention on winning the definitional argument and on substantiating your own case well.

### **Dealing with an Unreasonable Definition**

We have already dealt with the issue of unreasonable definitions in some detail. However, this can be an area of significant confusion, so it is worth briefly unifying the principles. It is important to be very clear when rebutting a definition, particularly if you are accusing your opposition of having defined you out of the debate—that is, of defining the motion to leave you with an unreasonable case to argue.

It is very easy to accuse your opposition of having defined you out of the debate by simply saying, “Our opposition’s definition is unreasonable.” However, this is a particularly dangerous and weak approach. It is not always clear that a case is unreasonable to those who are not forced to oppose it—whereas you may have sat through your opposition’s case thinking, “What a truism!” your audience and adjudicator may easily have thought, “Hmmm . . . makes sense!” Therefore, if you are accusing your opposition of having defined you out of the debate, it is vital to explain exactly how it is unreasonable.

For example, “The motion is ‘This House believes that the next century should be better than the last.’ Our opposition has defined and treated the word ‘should’ as meaning ‘a moral and practical obligation.’ This is unreasonable. If this definition is accepted, we on the opposition team must argue that we have a moral and practical obligation not to make the world a better place—essentially, that we are obliged to make the world worse! It is unreasonable to expect us to argue this—nobody in society argues that we should make the world a worse place, and we should not be forced to do so.”

You would then proceed to replace your opposition’s definition of the word, and explain how your definition was reasonable. Finally, you would clearly refuse to deal with your opposition’s case, on the basis that you could not reasonably

oppose it. You could safely proceed to substantiate your own material under your own definition.

This is the best approach because it is the clearest. Some suggest the best approach is to “conditionalize the truism,” meaning that you essentially say, “Of course, our opposition couldn’t possibly be arguing [X], because that would be a truism. The real issue is [Y].”

However, this approach seems dangerously subtle and confusing. First, it leaves the adjudicator unclear as to whether you are actually challenging the proposition’s definition—as we learned earlier, you should either challenge or accept the proposition’s definition, not merely complain about it and carry on. Second, if a team is mistaken enough to argue an unreasonable case, it may not immediately see why that case is unreasonable.

There is a significant risk that your opposition would respond with, “No, we’re definitely arguing [X].” An adjudicator who did not see that case as unreasonable might think simply that you had misrepresented your opposition’s case and missed the issue of the debate.

**Parallel Cases:** A Special Issue Parallel cases occur when both teams argue substantially the same case—notwithstanding that they are on opposite sides of the motion! We have already considered an example of a parallel case when we covered the definition. In that case, the motion was “This House believes that college education is a right.” Let’s consider a different motion: “This House believes that it’s all downhill from here.”

For example, see Philips J, Hooke J (1994). *The Debating Book*, UNSW Press, Sydney at page 74. Also, Philips J, Hooke J (1998). *The Sport of Debating: Winning Skills and Strategies*, UNSW Press, Sydney at page 107.

Suppose that both teams take this motion as a reference to the overall trends in our world—about whether things are getting better or worse. Imagine that the proposition team takes downhill to mean “getting better”—just as a cyclist might understand it. Imagine, however, that the opposition team takes downhill to mean “getting worse”—as in “the world is going downhill.”

In that case, both teams will argue that the world is getting better! The only real disagreement will be about which side of the motion their common approach supports.



Two things should be clear. First, since debating is supposed to be about a clash of issues and ideas, parallel cases should not arise—they are somebody’s “fault.”

Second, if each team thinks that the same case shows its side of the motion, there must be a disagreement about the meaning of the motion. That is, a parallel case is essentially a definitional issue.

The best response to a parallel debate, therefore, is twofold:

1. You should acknowledge that there are parallel cases.
2. You should show, using the accepted method of definitional rebuttal, that your understanding of the motion and definition is right, and that your opposition’s is wrong. That is, the proposition team should try to convince the adjudicator that the parallel case is the opposition’s “fault”; the opposition team should blame it on the proposition.

Each team will essentially be trying to show that it was arguing what the motion required, but that its opposition was arguing the wrong way.

### **The Internal Structure of a Rebuttal Point**

At this point, we need to assume that you have identified some problem with your opposition’s case or a specific argument within it. We will shortly examine some of the specific problems that you may have identified, but these problems are really little more than a crystallization of every debater’s reaction to an opponent’s argument: “That’s wrong!” For now, we are interested in the best way to structure a rebuttal point internally.

As with most elements of debating, it is impossible to be completely rigid about the internal structure of a rebuttal point. However, a good rebuttal point will always demonstrate a number of key characteristics.

First, it is important to identify the argument or idea that you are attacking. Too often, debaters simply launch into a criticism of an opposition argument, without explaining which argument or idea, and where it appeared in the opposition case.

Second, you obviously have to show what is wrong with that argument or idea. This is the essence of rebuttal, and to the extent that someone might be a naturally talented rebuttal speaker, this will be his or her strength. We will look at this part in more detail later.

Third, you need to bring your case into the picture, either by referring to an argument that your team has already presented or to your overall case approach, then showing how your team responds to the problem that you have identified in your opposition's case. This is particularly important because of the initiative-debating approach to adjudication.

Many adjudicators, whether they know it or not, place significant emphasis on the issue of which team has gained the initiative in the debate.

“Initiative” can mean different things to different adjudicators. However, if one team's case plays a more prominent part in the debate as a whole, it is a fair bet that many adjudicators will view that team as having taken the initiative of the debate, and will reward that team accordingly. If you spend time attacking your opposition's case, but do not tie that rebuttal back to your own case, you will run a significant risk of losing the initiative, no matter how good your rebuttal is.

It is vital, therefore, to use your rebuttal not merely to attack your opposition's arguments but to compare and contrast both teams' approaches.

These three requirements reduce neatly (perhaps too neatly!) into a four-step mantra that summarizes the simplest effective internal structure for a rebuttal point:

1. What they said;
2. Why it's wrong;
3. What we said;
4. Why it's right.

The essence of rebuttal is unquestionably the second point, and you should almost always spend most of your time here. The first, third, and fourth points may be padding, but they are vital points to cover and deserve to be included. It is important to emphasize again that this is not the only acceptable internal structure for a rebuttal point; indeed, there are probably countless internal structures that could be very effective.

However, regardless of how you structure your rebuttal point, it must contain the four elements set out in this simple approach.

## **The Overall Structure of Rebuttal**

We have now examined the important elements for internally structuring a rebuttal point. However, good rebuttal structure is about more than the internal structure of each argument—it also requires an effective overall structure for your rebuttal. We will start by considering the general elements of good rebuttal structure, then the specific requirements of first, second, and third-speaker rebuttal structure. **Starting Your Rebuttal** What is the most effective way to start your rebuttal? It can be tempting to dive straight in to the first individual rebuttal point. However, this will probably leave your audience and adjudicator somewhat confused—they will understand your rebuttal on that individual point, but they may be left wondering how it all fits together.

The best way to start your rebuttal, therefore, is to focus on the big picture—to make a concise attack on the main idea (or the key weakness) that underpins your opposition’s case. A simple way to decide this introduction is to ask yourself, “If I had time to make only one brief point before sitting down, what would that point be?” It is unlikely that you would waste this one brief point on an easy put-down, a witty aside, or a convincing but trivial piece of rebuttal.

Instead, you would hope to use your time to target the fundamental flaw in your opposition’s case. The introduction to your rebuttal may often be closely related to a separate rebuttal point that you have prepared. Hopefully, however, your introduction will encapsulate your opposition’s entire approach. The technique of developing an effective introduction to your rebuttal is similar to the technique of developing an effective formal introduction, which we examined earlier.

A formal introduction can take many forms, but should be a brief characterization of the issue as you see it; your introduction to rebuttal can also take many forms, and should be a brief characterization of your opposition’s case and the fundamental basis upon which you oppose it.

## **Strategic Allocation of Rebuttal Time**

There should be general internal timing of a speech by a speaker, with different components (rebuttal, substantive argument, conclusion, etc.) each allocated an ideal time. It is also important to consider the internal timing of your rebuttal itself. There is no required internal timing for your rebuttal, but there are two important general principles:

1. More important rebuttal should come before less important rebuttal.

2. More important rebuttal should be allocated more time than less important rebuttal.

Whether rebuttal is “more important” depends not on how easy or convincing a rebuttal point is, but on the importance of a rebuttal point to the debate as a whole. For example, an inexperienced debater might think, “Point [X] must be the first point—I can make the opposition look really stupid and get some good laughs with that point!”

However, a more experienced debater is likely to think, “Well, we definitely have point [X] won, and I’ll emphasize that in good time. But point [Y] is really the core of the issue, and that’s where the adjudicator is probably most concerned. Therefore, I’ll start with a careful and detailed rebuttal of point [Y], and wipe off point [X] briefly later.”

The only apparent exception to this rule concerns the definition. The definition is the foundation to the entire debate. Therefore, any rebuttal or clarification of the definition is automatically considered the most important point, at least for these purposes. (That does not mean it will necessarily be most important in determining the outcome of the debate.)

Therefore, if you are taking up any point concerning your opposition’s definition, you must order that point first. (This rule does not apply to the first opposition accepting the proposition’s definition, which can safely be done in one sentence at the end of rebuttal.)

### **First and Second Speaker Structure**

There are two overall rebuttal structures—that is, two ways of organizing your rebuttal points in your speech. One structure is for first and second speakers; the other is for third speakers. We will start with the structure for first and second speakers.

The key to organizing rebuttal as a first or second speaker is efficiency. As a first or second speaker, you have a substantive case to present. Therefore, you do not enjoy the third speaker’s luxury of delving or exploring a point more deeply—you need to rebut very efficiently and move on.

If possible, it is important to start with some kind of ethos attack; that is, a general attack on your opposition’s entire approach to the The alternative is simply to dive into your first rebuttal point, but this is not particularly inspiring and doesn’t give much of a big picture context for your rebuttal.

An ethos attack at first or second speaker needs only to be one or two sentences long, but you should use one if you can. Following your ethos attack, you can simply move through your various rebuttal points.

There is no need to outline your rebuttal as a first or second speaker—it is enough simply to give each distinct point a clear label, so your adjudicator and audience can follow your ideas. You should aim to have two, three, or four rebuttal points—any more is difficult to manage in a limited time; any fewer seems like you are lacking ideas!

If you find that you have more than four rebuttal points, you should try to group some of your points together to reduce the number, or pass your ideas to a later speaker. As a general rule, if you find that you have only one rebuttal point, you need to look harder!

Finally, having moved through your rebuttal, you can move on to your substantive case. As a first opposition, this means setting up your team’s case before moving to your substantive arguments. As a second speaker, it usually means briefly reminding your audience and adjudicator of your case approach and split before outlining and delivering your arguments.

As a second speaker, this link is important in giving a sense of unity to your team’s approach. For example, you can say, “Our team, on the other hand, presented the theme that [X]. Our first speaker discussed the social aspects of this issue; I will discuss the individual aspects. Specifically, I will make two arguments: [Y] and [Z]. Now, to my first argument, [Y] . . .”

### **Third Speaker Structure**

The fundamental difference between first and second speakers on the one hand and third speakers on the other is that third speakers do not present any substantive arguments. Instead, they must spend their speech rebutting and summarizing.

Essentially, the first part of the speech is spent on rebuttal; the second part is spent on summary and conclusion. The transition between these two parts occurs at about the time of the warning bell (for example, in an eight-minute speech, this would usually be at the seven minute mark).

It is certainly possible to deviate from this timing—for example, you may feel the need to spend a little more time on summary. However, it is important not to deviate too much from this timing. Far too many third speakers, particularly

in younger grades, rebut for all of two minutes, then provide a summary that is far too intricate.

This is strategically weak and a complete waste of time: although summary is a vital part of a third speech, a five-minute summary is no better than a one- or two-minute summary.

As a third speaker, it is much better to spend your time rebutting. This is all very well for a general guide. But how exactly is the rebuttal part structured? We learned earlier that the biggest challenge for effective first and second speaker rebuttal structure is efficiency, because of the limited time available for rebuttal.

The situation is somewhat different for third speakers, because they have longer to rebut. There is no doubt that efficiency is important for third speakers, too—there is no point wasting time when you present a rebuttal point. However, the biggest challenge for effective third speaker rebuttal structure is overall clarity. That is, because you are rebutting for longer, it is important to give your audience and adjudicator some sense of your overall structure.

The easiest way to organize your rebuttal is simply to move through one rebuttal point after another, jumping randomly from one idea to the other. However, this approach (often called a “shopping list” of rebuttal points) lacks overall clarity. Although your audience and adjudicator may understand very clearly the point you are making at any given time, they will struggle to see any big picture in your speech.

This is particularly unfortunate because, by the time that a debate reaches the third speakers, a sense of the big picture is vital—your audience and adjudicator will crave a speaker who can unify and organize the various ideas, arguments, and examples that have been presented in order to show why one side has won the debate.

The simplest and best approach, therefore, is to group your rebuttal points into common ideas and concepts. You can then move through concept-by-concept, using your individual rebuttal points to show how your team has prevailed on the major issues of debate. It is generally most effective to identify two, three, or four major issues, which become your rebuttal groupings.

To provide an overall sense of structure, it is worth giving an outline and summary of your own rebuttal—not of your individual rebuttal points, but of your overall rebuttal groupings. As always, your rebuttal should ideally be preceded by an effective ethos attack. Hopefully, this sounds like a good approach.

However, it poses a question: how do we decide how to group our individual points into rebuttal targets? There is no single way of doing this effectively. The simplest approach is to write your rebuttal points separately as you listen to your opposition's arguments.

You can then lay your note cards out on the desk, and group similar ideas together. For example, you might find that you have two points relating to "social" ideas, three to "political," and one to "economic." These can become your labels. Having grouped your note cards together, it is simply a matter of writing a single note card for each label, to use as a placeholder of sorts.

Fill out a single note card for each of your outline and summary points, and you will be ready to speak! Of course, this is not the only way to group your rebuttal. Sometimes, you can find your rebuttal groupings by considering the overall structure of your opposition's case.

Perhaps, for example, your opposition has established a set of criteria by which the issue will be judged. In that case, you may wish to use those criteria as your rebuttal groupings—essentially saying, "Our opposition identified three criteria by which to judge this issue. I would like to move through those criteria, showing how we have prevailed on every one."

As with the ordering of substantive arguments, rebuttal arguments can essentially be ordered on two bases. The simplest approach is to order your groupings (and your individual points within those groupings) on the basis of importance: the more important issues go before the less important ones.

Alternatively, you might find some logical sequence that matches your groupings—that is an equally strategic way of ordering your points. Ultimately, you should order and group your points in order to best "take your audience and adjudicator by the hand," to lead them through the issues of the debate in a clear and logical way

## Key Grounds for Rebuttal

Rebuttal, like debating itself, is a part of everyday life. All of us, whether we realize it or not, have experience in finding reasons to oppose other peoples' arguments and perspectives.

In this section, we examine some of the common grounds on which to rebut an argument. This is certainly not an exhaustive list of the reasons that an argument might be flawed, nor the grounds on which it can be rebutted. However, your rebuttal should improve greatly if you bear these grounds in mind while listening carefully to your opponents' speeches and while preparing your rebuttal.

### Logical Irrelevance

Logical irrelevance is one of the simplest problems that a case can suffer: even at its most convincing, your opposition's case may simply not be proving your opposition's side of the motion. For example, suppose the motion is "This House believes that junk food should be banned from school vending machines."

The proposition can argue with all the passion in the world about how junk food is unhealthy, but that in itself does not show why it should be banned from school vending machines—to make that link, the proposition would need to discuss why schools (not merely parents or students) have a responsibility to ensure that students eat healthy food. Similarly, consider again the motion "This House believes that there is too much money in sports."

As we have already discussed, it does not matter how many arguments or examples your opposition provides to show that there is a lot of money in sports: they also need to show how the amount of money is causing overall harm. Although somewhat rare, this ground for rebuttal is a debate winner!

If you can convince your adjudicator that your opposition's case does not fulfill the logical requirements of the motion, you will stand an excellent chance of winning the debate (assuming, of course, that your own case does not suffer similar problems!).

In some cases of logical irrelevance, concession itself can be an effective rebuttal technique. For example, in the debate about junk food, an opposition team can argue, "We completely agree that junk food is unhealthy; after all, that's why it's called junk food. But that's not the issue of this debate. The



issue of this debate is whether it is right for schools to make choices about healthy eating on behalf of their students. . . .”

Don't get too excited! It can be very easy to overlook logical irrelevance. Often, debaters concentrate so hard on rebutting what their opposition says that they forget to think about what their opposition is not saying. In the first example earlier, an opposition team might spend their rebuttal arguing, “Junk food is not that bad!” simply because this is the direct opposite to what the proposition argued.

The message here should be clear: rebuttal is not merely about repeating your opposition's arguments with the word “not” inserted! You should spend time, both before and during the debate, considering exactly what your opposition is required to prove, and whether in fact they are proving it.

This is the best way to identify logical irrelevance. Insignificance When we considered testing your arguments, we examined insignificance as a potential weakness of an argument: although valid, an argument or example may not represent the general norm that you are arguing about. This is a reason for rebuttal.

The rebuttal technique that best deals with this situation is marginalization. Marginalization is a common form of rebuttal but, unfortunately, marginalization by distinction is much less common. Too often, debaters dismiss opposing examples or even arguments with responses like, “Our opposition's example is just one isolated case.

We have given you many more examples supporting our side of the motion.” Perhaps the worst possible response is, “That example is just the exception that proves the rule.” The reason that these approaches are so weak is because they lack any explanation as to why a perfectly good example or argument should merely be cast aside.

We need to draw a distinction in order to marginalize an example or argument. But what kind of distinction should we draw? On what basis should we set aside our opposition's arguments or examples? The only guidance is very general: the distinction must be on a relevant ground in the context of the issue being debated.

It is very easy to distinguish examples on irrelevant grounds. Consider a debate about the benefits of nuclear power, where a speaker has used the example of

Chernobyl to argue that nuclear power is dangerously unsafe. An opposing speaker could try to distinguish Chernobyl by arguing, “Chernobyl occurred in the Soviet Union, and we are talking about using nuclear power in the United States.”

Although this is a distinction, it is not a relevant difference between Chernobyl and modern American nuclear plants in the context of a debate about the overall safety of nuclear power. The better response is that given earlier—draw a distinction on the very basis of the disasters: the technology and safety measures themselves.

Therefore, marginalization by distinction reduces to three important points:

1. Marginalization is an effective way of rebutting an argument or its example.
2. To marginalize an argument or example, you need to provide a basis on which to distinguish that argument or example from the direct issue being debated.
3. You can distinguish arguments and examples on any ground.

However, it is important to choose the most relevant distinction possible in order to make your marginalization effective.

### **Factual Inaccuracy**

It is inevitable in the rustle of newsprint, the tangled web of Internet searches, and the dusty recesses of a debater’s memory that, sometimes, your opposition will just get things plain wrong! The ability to correct your opposition’s factual inaccuracy does not mean that you have found a legitimate ground for rebuttal. For example, suppose that you are debating the issue of terrorism generally, and your opposition refers to “the bombing of the USS Cole on October 12, 2001.” Pointing out that the USS Cole was bombed on October 12, 2000, not 2001, may make you look intelligent, but it is not itself a good rebuttal point. An adjudicator would be entitled to think, “Okay, so they got the date wrong—but the argument itself was solid, and the opposition didn’t touch it.”

Consider, in contrast, that the debate was about the Bush administration and its response to terrorism, and suppose that your opposition argued, “The Bush administration did next to nothing in response to the bombing of the USS Cole on October 12, 2001.”

This is the same factual inaccuracy but, in this case, it has very different consequences. In this case, you can argue, “The USS Cole was not bombed on October 12, 2001—it was bombed on October 12, 2000, during the Clinton administration!

Therefore, our opposition’s best criticism of the Bush administration in fact doesn’t apply to the Bush administration at all!” This would be a very effective rebuttal point—in fact, it would deservedly destroy the value of the example completely. The point here should be clear: factual inaccuracies are not automatically grounds for rebuttal.

However, they can be grounds for rebuttal if they substantially affect the argument being made. One final point deserves a mention. Even if a factual inaccuracy does not substantially affect the argument (and hence is not a ground for rebuttal), it can still be used as an effective one-line attack on the credibility of your opposition’s case.

For example, in one debate a speaker claimed that, on the eve of the 1991 Gulf War, “Saddam Hussein phoned Bill Clinton and begged for peace.” Whether or not this is true, the speaker clearly meant to say “President George Bush,” not “Bill Clinton.” This factual inaccuracy did not change the essence of the argument, so it could not ground a rebuttal point itself. However, it did make for an effective ethos attack: an opposing speaker responded with, “And, ladies and gentlemen, our opposition would even have us believe that, on the eve of the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein phoned Bill Clinton, the Governor of Arkansas, to beg for peace!”

That debater realized that even a trite factual inaccuracy, if used effectively, can devastate a speaker’s overall credibility. We discussed “ethos attack” earlier as a way of starting your rebuttal. This is essentially a form of ethos attack, although it does not necessarily need to be used to start your rebuttal—it can simply be added to a rebuttal point.

### **Unsubstantiated Assertions**

It is vital to substantiate your arguments, either with examples, statistics, or some other accepted form of substantiation. If you fail to substantiate an argument or any other proposition, you are left with a mere assertion—a bald statement without any effective substantiation.

This is a ground for rebuttal. Pointing out that your opposition has merely asserted something, without substantiation, is a good start. However, rebuttal

is about opposing your opposition's case, not merely criticizing or adjudicating it. Therefore, you need to show why your opposition's assertion is false, rather than merely unsubstantiated.

For example, consider that you are debating the merits of censorship, and suppose that your opposition (without further substantiation) says, "The government has an obligation to censor violence in the media, because media violence causes significant harm to people, particularly to young people." You could start by pointing out, "Our opposition has merely asserted that media violence causes harm to people, particularly children.

However, they have not given us any supporting proof of this!" This is a valid criticism, but not one that impacts on the issue. To rebut the point effectively, you would need to oppose the assertion itself. For example, you could continue, "The Guardian Weekly claims that, over the past 70 years, over 10, 000 studies have been done on this issue in the United States alone, yet none has convincingly found a clear causal link between media violence and violent actions.

As for young people—in 1982, Milavsky, Stipp, Kessler and Rubens studied the lifestyle and behavioral patterns of 2,400 primary school students and 800 adolescents. They found that there was 'no significant association' between television violence and behavioral patterns."

Whether the argument is actually correct or not, this would be an effective rebuttal response. You would have rightly criticized your opposition for not substantiating its argument, but carefully avoided falling into the same trap yourself—by providing convincing evidence to the contrary. Underlying

### **Assumptions**

Whether we realize it or not, every opinion we hold—as well as every case and argument that we as debaters present—rests on numerous underlying and often unexpressed assumptions.

Why do events like the Tiananmen Square massacre or the killings in Kosovo shock us? Because, as a general rule, we believe that killing our fellow human beings is wrong.

Why were allegations of voting irregularities in the 2000 U.S. presidential election so emotive? Because, as a general rule, we believe that democracy is a good thing, and that it is important to respect the principles of a fair election.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with resting opinions, cases, or arguments on underlying assumptions. Similarly, there is no automatic need to identify these assumptions, nor to justify them.

Earlier, we examined the strategic weakness of spending significant time justifying propositions that may not be controversial in your debate (for example, the proposition that “human rights are good”).

However, although they are not inherently wrong, these underlying assumptions can become a ground for rebuttal if a rebuttal speaker makes them such. This is an important point.

Many speakers proudly identify the assumptions underlying their opponents’ arguments, but do not conclusively adopt any stance on those assumptions. For example, it is not unusual to hear a rebuttal speaker declare, “Our opposition has assumed that democracy is a good thing! However, it may not be. . . .”

This is a very weak approach—unless you are going to argue that democracy is not always good, you cannot complain that your opposition has assumed it to be good! The key to this ground for rebuttal, therefore, is a strategic choice: whether or not your team wants to challenge the assumptions that underlie your opposition’s case. In some cases, it will be eminently strategic to challenge those assumptions.

For example, we have already considered the example of the opposition team that successfully challenged a proposition team’s assumption that performance-enhancing drugs in sports are necessarily a bad thing.

In other cases, challenging those assumptions would be a very weak approach. For example, a debate about the NATO intervention in Kosovo can be a straightforward debate on a simple (although not easy) issue.

There is no strategic need to challenge the assumption that human rights are good—even if done well, this would make the debate very abstract, philosophical, and complex. A team that tried it would probably suffer as a result. A final reminder about challenging underlying assumptions: when we discussed playing hardball, we discussed a simple mantra: Be fundamentally controversial, or not controversial at all! If you are going to make a particularly controversial challenge to an assumption underlying your opposition’s case, you need to incorporate it as a fundamental part of your entire case approach.

What if you find yourself on the receiving end of such a challenge? What is the best way to deal with an attack on the key assumptions that underpin your entire case?

The answer is simple: you need to return to the core values that are being challenged and explain very carefully just why you support them. For example, if your opposition is challenging your assumption that democracy is good, don't scoff incredulously— go back and explain precisely how democracy is so good, and why we should support it. In many respects, the strategy of challenging underlying assumptions is useful as an effective surprise tactic. However, it need not be—any team can respond to such a challenge by carefully justifying any assumptions under attack.

### Causation

Many debates and arguments involve the issue of whether one thing causes another—that is, whether there is causation. We have already considered one example: the issue of whether media violence causes violence in society. Arguments about causation tend to have a typical pattern.

There will usually be some evidence that two trends move together (for example, it might be claimed that violent people are more likely to watch violent media).

This is called **correlation**. One team (your opposition, say) will claim that one trend (for example, the trend to watch violent media) causes the other trend (for example, the trend to be a violent person). This is called causation—so the issue essentially is whether there is causation and correlation, or merely correlation. It is easy to overlook an important issue of causation—essentially, to listen to your opposition's argument and think, "Well, those trends move together, so it makes sense that one causes the other."

However, this is often not the case, and challenging an assertion of causation can be a useful rebuttal strategy. Simply identifying an issue of causation is not particularly effective. The strongest way of expressing this in a rebuttal point is to provide and support some other explanation for why the trends move together.

For example, your opposition may argue, "Violent media causes people to be violent. We know this because of the large number of violent crimes that are committed by people who had been watching violent movies and playing violent video games."

You could respond to this by arguing, “It is true that many violent people watch violent media. However, many nonviolent people also watch violent media as a form of entertainment, but suffer no harmful effects. The more logical conclusion is that there are many other causes for violence—violent people watch violent media because they are violent.”

### **Contradictions**

Contradictions are obviously grounds for rebuttal, and we have considered them earlier—when we examined the importance of testing your arguments. Let’s consider three important points about effectively rebutting contradictions. First, many contradictions will be clear and explicit.

For example, we have already considered a situation where one speaker concedes a point, but another speaker on the same team tries to oppose the same point. This is a clear contradiction, and you should refer to it as such. Second, many contradictions are indirect or implicit.

For example, we have examined the case of a debate about AIDS drugs, where one speaker argued that the drugs were as bad as generics, while another speaker on the same team argued that they were worse than generics. This form of contradiction is clearly not as damaging as a direct or explicit contradiction—in this case, unlike in the earlier example, one argument does not completely destroy the other.

However, this is an inconsistency nonetheless, and it is worth pointing out. At the least, it will damage the credibility of your opposition’s case (for example, “Our opposition could not even decide among themselves how bad these drugs are supposed to be!”).

Third, it is often not enough merely to point a contradiction out. It is often necessary to state clearly your team’s stance on the issue. For example, in the AIDS drugs example, you could explain, “Of course, our team disagrees with both of those inconsistent assertions—we have already shown you that AIDS drugs can be very effective in suppressing a patient’s symptoms.” Sometimes, you need to agree with one of your opposition speakers.

For example, in the case of the clear contradiction earlier, you could respond, “The opposition’s first speaker said that this argument was irrelevant. However, our opposition’s second speaker rebutted this argument at length, and called it an important issue of the debate. Although we disagree with her rebuttal, we agree with her concession that this is indeed an important and relevant issue.”

## Misrepresentation

Misrepresentation is an easy form of rebuttal—simply reduce or contort your opposition’s arguments until they are unrecognizable and feeble, then treat them as though they are self-evidently wrong. There is only one problem with this approach: it is extraordinarily weak!

The aim of rebuttal is to attack your opposition’s arguments, meaning your opposition’s actual arguments. If you twist or misrepresent your opposition’s arguments, you will find yourself refuting the wrong argument—and your rebuttal will be rendered almost completely meaningless if your adjudicator realizes the fact or your opposition points it out.

Most debaters recognize and avoid blatant misrepresentation. However, it is equally important to avoid even subtle misrepresentation—for example, by suggesting that your opposition was implying something that they were not.

As a rule of thumb, your opposition should not listen to your rebuttal and say, “We definitely didn’t say that!”—this would indicate blatant misrepresentation on your part. However, you should not even give your opposition reason to say, “That’s not what we meant when we said that!”—this would indicate subtle misrepresentation, but it would still be wrong.

Ideally, your opposition should think, “That’s exactly our argument—and we didn’t spot all these problems with it!” At the lower levels of debating, misrepresentation is often regarded as unsporting. Teams are likely to be offended to hear their arguments misrepresented, and speakers are taught not to misrepresent because “that’s not what debating is all about.”

This approach is not wrong. However, at the higher levels of debating, misrepresentation is usually considered a significant technical and strategic flaw—teams often don’t mind being misrepresented, because they can be confident that their opposition’s rebuttal is much weaker as a result. The word on misrepresentation, therefore, is simple: don’t! This means that you should not deliberately misrepresent your opposition, but it also means that you must be careful not to accidentally do so. Often, misrepresentation is the result of lazy listening as much as it is a symptom of some nefarious plan.

Either way, it will not help a team that does it!



## Cumulative Rebuttal

So far, we have considered individual grounds for rebuttal in isolation. We also have some understanding that those grounds fit into the “why it’s wrong” section of a simple rebuttal structure. However, we have not considered the use of more than one ground for rebuttal—that is, what if your opposition’s arguments are wrong for a number of reasons? This is not a problem—in fact, from your perspective, it’s a very good thing! The simplest approach is to move through the various reasons one at a time.

There is no need to outline the various reasons—it is enough to move through and explain (for example) that your opposition’s argument depends on a factual inaccuracy, is contradictory, and rests on an assumption that you are willing to challenge. This approach works well if you have a number of separate and independent grounds on which to rebut your opposition’s case.

However, often your grounds for rebuttal are not independent—they stand behind each other, in a retreating line of defense. Earlier, we discussed the definitional “even if.” The approach we are now considering is essentially a general argumentative “even if”—you can provide a number of responses to an opposition argument, each becoming relevant only if the previous response fails.

To return to the military analogy, you present a second line of rebuttal in case your front line fails; perhaps a third line in case your second line fails, and perhaps further still. Let’s consider this with a tangible example. Suppose that the debate is about whether the war on Iraq was justified, and the proposition team argues that, from the perspective of the United States and her allies, Iraq posed a threat to the peace and stability of the world— essentially, because there was a real risk that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction.

Whether this argument is correct or not, you could effectively rebut it with the following retreating line of defense. This diagram shows only the essence of each response—naturally, each assertion would need to be substantiated with some explanation and substantiation.

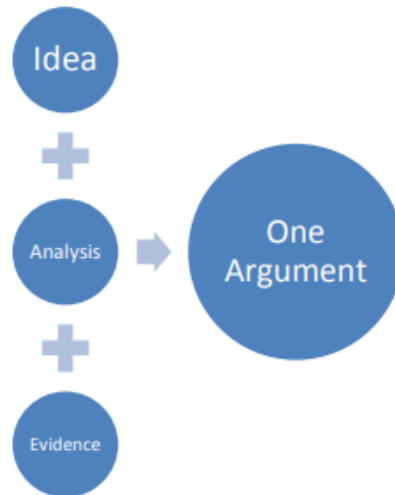
Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction, and posed no tangible threat to any other nation. Moreover, significant evidence showed this at the time that the decision was made to invade . . .	
However, <b>even if</b> we accept that Iraq appeared to have such weapons, or may have been pursuing such weapons . . .	Attacking Iraq was unprincipled and inconsistent given the global response to weapons of mass destruction programs in North Korea, Pakistan, India, and Israel . . .
However, <b>even if</b> we take a purely pragmatic approach . . .	The war has succeeded only in destabilizing Iraq, providing increased opportunities for Al-Qaeda, and inflaming radical sentiments around the world, and this should have been evident beforehand.

## UNDERSTANDING ARGUMENT DECONSTRUCTION

### Part A: Making Arguments

Before anything else, you need to know the difference between an argument and an assertion. In simple terms, an assertion is something that is stated as true, without enough analysis to demonstrate that it is reasonable for a reasonable person to be convinced that the statement is likely to be true. It's a statement of fact, without proof of its validity. To avoid using assertions, you need to understand the anatomy of an argument. The 'Anatomy of an Argument' .

Whereas an assertion is simply a statement of fact (in slightly more sophisticated cases, an assertion can include simplistic/superficial analysis – see 'Casual Causation' below) a proper 'argument' (in the sense of "one argument for X is..." not "we had an argument the other day...") has the following structure;



Different people will use different labels for the various sections of an argument, but this basic format is necessary to have a properly formed argument. Idea refers to the concept or proposition that you seek to prove – it might be a principle, such as “the government has an obligation to provide free education” or it might just be something that would be helpful to your side of the debate, such as “the death penalty is an effective deterrent for criminals”.

Either way, it’s nothing on its own – it may be true, or it might not. The point is that you and your team want people to believe that it’s true. So how do you make them believe it? Well, you start with some analysis of why the idea is likely to be true – why it is logical and reasonable to believe it. This involves saying (out loud or in your head) “why?” and “because” a lot!

But I’ll give you an example in a moment Finally there is the evidence. I put it last for two reasons – first because it’s the least important, and second because it should be the last thing you worry about – focus first on having the right ideas about what your side needs to argue, and then spend your time coming up with smart analysis to make it sound reasonable. If after that you have time for thinking up evidence and examples, then that’s great.

Evidence can be statistics (like the unemployment rate before and after a policy, or the percentage of people affected by a particular problem, or the costs of a proposal) or quotes (not direct quotes, but knowing what important people have said about an issue).

But in advanced debates, evidence is most commonly presented by case study or analogy. Having an example of a similar situation or policy can be very handy if you can clearly draw the link back to the issue at hand.

Note: it really should go without saying, but you should never invent evidence – firstly, it’s just poor form. You should have enough respect for your opponents not to try and cheat or cheapen the debate.

Also, it’s unintelligent – the more experienced debaters/adjudicators get, the better they become at spotting lies. It’s pretty humiliating to have someone show that you were lying because they know the real details of a given situation.

Don’t take the risk of it happening to you! Let’s bring all that together by using a motion as an example. On the Affirmative of “that we should stop protecting our local film industry”, it would be handy to be able to show that small-budget, local productions can compete with big budget imports – since fear of competition is the rationale behind government protection (so that’s the idea – local media can compete with foreign imports).

How would you go about demonstrating an idea that is a little counter-intuitive? Well you’d need some logical analysis mixed with relevant examples. For example: “The fear of unrestricted foreign media – particularly American – stems from the belief that bigger budget productions are inherently more attractive to viewers. Although it’s true that people do enjoy special effects laden films and TV, there is plenty of reason to believe that even without government protection, local media can survive and even prosper.

Why? Because beyond the superficial desire to see things blow up, what really attracts viewers is media that is relevant to their interests and culture.

For instance, one of the most popular shows on the ABC is Gardening Australia – it consistently out-rates the news, and every other competitor that rival networks have run against it. It might seem like an odd choice for a hit show, but it has very loyal viewers because it’s relevant to their interests. Similarly the ABC had a major hit with the drama series Sea change – which was not only well written, but it so actually tapped into the mood of the times that it has sparked the real-life “sea change” and “tree change” phenomenon’s, in which city-based people move to beachside or rural towns to enjoy the same lifestyle they saw on the show.

At the other end of the scale there is *Neighbors* – although it’s routinely the subject of ridicule, it has been one of the most consistently popular shows in Australian television history and has launched the careers of many Australian actors and artists – you might think it’s lame, but to 15 year olds, it’s relevant. None of this should be surprising, since although American culture is almost universally popular, people from all over the globe respond to stories about their own country, and their own culture. Australian media doesn’t need government protection to be competitive, it just need good writers and talented actors – which the evidence shows that we have in abundance”.

Note that the argument doesn’t have to rigidly follow the structure outlined above – but you should be able to clearly identify the key elements of the ‘anatomy of an argument’ within that example.

### **Part B: Surgical Strike Rebuttal – Minimal Fuss, Maximum Damage**

In order to effectively evaluate the weakness in any given argument, you need to understand what a ‘good’ argument looks like (see above). Each part of a well-constructed argument is open to rebuttal, but some attacks will usually be more effective than others. The argument chain is weakest at link three – evidence – since it’s always easy to dispute the evidence presented by your opposition. For example, you could criticize the examples used in the above argument about protecting Australian film industry – perhaps they are isolated examples, or they are outweighed by counter examples you know.

But attacking the argument here is a poor strategy. Because the opposition can repair the chain by providing more evidence (which you attack and they give more and it’s a stalemate) or by simply rebutting your criticisms.

Attacking the argument a little higher, at the analysis, is more difficult but also more effective. If you can demonstrate that the analysis is illogical or based on assumptions that are not true (or are unlikely to be true) then you damage the credibility of the whole argument. This is the most common sort of rebuttal used by experienced speakers.

However, it’s usually not a fatal blow. For example, you might say that people’s desire to see stories that are relevant to them is outweighed by their desire for exciting or well-produced entertainment, and the Australian film industry can’t compete with better-funded international media without government support. Unfortunately for you, a clever opposition can rebuild their analysis by giving other reasons, or explaining the logical links in a different way, which weakens

your rebuttal. So finally we get to the top of the chain, the idea. This is usually very difficult to attack since usually it is a reasonable idea.

But sometimes you can attack the idea and if you can do it effectively, it's a fatal blow to that argument. In our example, you can attack the idea that stopping supporting the film industry won't end the capacity of Australian films to compete internationally by arguing the truth of the argument (attack the analysis), but you can also run an "even if" line that attacks the idea: even if some Australian films continue to thrive, they're not the point of this debate – for your team, the point of Australian film subsidies might not be to produce mainstream films, but rather to produce ones that tell stories that wouldn't otherwise be told. If the adjudicator accepts that sort of argument (or any other attack on the idea) then the other links in the chain are irrelevant.

Obviously, it's not that simple - the opposition will defend their idea, and you need very good reasons to show that an entire idea and the argument that flows from it is irrelevant. But if you think the idea is vulnerable, you should attack it, because it's effective and efficient.

### **Part C: Rebuttal from First Principles**

Once you understand the anatomy of an argument, it should be relatively simple to see how best to attack an argument, as outlined above. But in just the same way that you can (and should!) use First Principles to construct your arguments, there are some fundamental, logical principles by which you can attack arguments.

So even if you don't know anything about the evidence they used, and you've never heard that type of analysis before, if you listen carefully and take good notes, then you might find one of the following flaws has occurred in the argument.

### **Five Common Flaws with Arguments that Anyone Should Be Able to Spot Regardless of How Much they Know About a Topic**

1) **Assertion** – the argument is not an argument at all, it's simply an assertion and there is no logical reason given to believe that it is true. Simply point out why there has not been any/enough analysis to demonstrate the validity of the assertion and then provide a reason why the assertion is not obviously or intuitively true.

2) **Contradiction** – the argument may be valid, but it is in contradiction with a previous argument. To be a real – or 'full blown' contradiction, it must be that

the case that it is impossible for the two arguments in question to both be true simultaneously.

So it cannot logically be both cheaper and more expensive to do a given thing. Don't go calling every argument you hear a contradiction or you will look foolish. If it is in fact a contradiction then that can cause massive damage to an opponent's case, but if it isn't, then the false accusation can cause massive damage to your credibility. But spotting – and pointing out – a contradiction is only the beginning, if you want to fully exploit it, you have to explain to the adjudicator exactly how this compromises the credibility of their case. So don't just say “first they said their plan would be really cheap, and now they say it would be really expensive, but is worth the money – that's a pretty blatant contradiction”, follow it up with some analysis, like “so which is it then?”

One of them clearly doesn't really understand the nature of this situation – if a cheap program can be effective, then why is this she trying to tell us we'll need to spend lots of money to resolve the problem? But if she's right and it would take a lot of money to make a dent in this problem then everything the first guy said is rubbish. Hopefully their next speaker will tell us which one of his teammates knows what they are talking about, and which one was just making stuff up”. You need to make it as uncomfortable for them as possible and try to force them to not just retract the statement but also concede that a number of their arguments are irrelevant (they usually won't say that, they'll just stop mentioning all the arguments on one side of the contradiction, so you should listen closely to how they defend themselves – if they stop mentioning certain arguments, then attack them for abandoning part of their case).

Note: the most important thing is that you clearly explain the contradiction – it's critical that the adjudicator understands and believes you, so explain it slowly and carefully and keep your eye on the adjudicator to see if they're following you.

As you can see, a contradiction is a serious flaw in a case, so if an opponent accuses your team of a contradiction it is very important that your side respond as soon as possible and attempt to demonstrate how the two arguments are not contradictory.

3) **Casual Causation** – essentially, this is a lack of analysis. It occurs when someone tries to draw a link between two events, without showing how the former event actually caused the latter event to happen.

A classic is when people argue that the introduction of the death penalty for murders causes a reduction in the number of murders. Never mind the fact that there are instances in which introducing the death penalty has preceded a rise in the murder rate, this is simply not reason to believe – prima facie – that the death penalty is a deterrence.

There may have been a reduction in murders the following year for any number of reasons (it depends entirely on why people commit murder in the first place). Between 1996 and 1997 there was dramatic drop in the number of murders in Australia – but the death penalty was abolished here in the 1970s. So what happened? In 1996 there was the Port Arthur Massacre, when Martin Bryant killed 35 people in Tasmania. Immediately after that incident, the Federal Government instituted strict gun laws, which saw thousands of guns handed in as the result of “gun buy-back” scheme and made it much harder to buy a gun and keep it in your home. Without saying too much about gun control, the point of this example is that there can be many reasons why the crime rate – especially the murder rate – goes up and down. So be careful not to assume that one factor is more important to the outcome than another, unless you have the analysis to show why that is the case.

4) **False Dichotomy** – this a particular type of mischaracterization of a debate or problem. It occurs when someone says that there is a choice to be made and claims that the only options are ‘A’ or ‘B’, when in fact there are other options. This can occur because a speakers is trying to assert a self-serving dichotomy (in a decent debate this won’t be true, it’s almost always a choice between two options designed to improve a situation) or because the speaker is stupid/lazy and doesn’t understand the debate/your argument properly. Either way, it’s important to recognise when someone is attempting to falsely divide the debate into two positions, one of which is either not what you are arguing, or not what anyone would argue. Be very clear at all times about what your team is trying to prove and you should be able to deal with this situation easily enough.

5) **Straw Man** – this is another type of misrepresentation or mischaracterisation of an argument. Basically, the straw man is when a team sets up an argument (which you have not made, and don’t intend too) and then proceed to rebut it Sometimes this happens when a speaker takes an extreme example of your proposal, sometimes it happens when they misrepresent something you said, sometimes it happens when they were hoping you would argue a certain thing and you actually proposed something different.



It doesn't really matter why, it's important to point out when a team is not engaging with your case, because if you let a straw man argument be beaten to death without pointing out that it's not your argument in the first place, a weak adjudicator can assume that it was part of your case

### **How to do Thematic Rebuttal by Kim Little**

It sounds impressive and difficult. Actually, thematic rebuttal isn't that hard at all. The idea is that instead of just listing the opposition's arguments speaker by speaker, you group their arguments into themes.

Common examples of themes are: economic, social, feminist, national and international. Sound familiar? They are the same sorts of categories that you use when setting up team splits.

A theme can also be an issue that didn't seem important at the beginning of the debate, but became a big issue. Throughout the debate, write down the opposition's arguments, and start grouping them into themes. Some debaters have coloured cards, i.e. yellow for economic arguments, red for social arguments – under which they write points concerning these themes.

When doing thematic rebuttal, watch out for trying to “force” arguments to fit into themes. If you have to leap through analytical hoops to claim that an argument was an “economic” argument, you're probably using the wrong themes. The themes you use will change from debate to debate.

Thematic rebuttal is more than just grouping themes together – it's all about presentation. At the beginning of your speech, list the major themes of the opposition, and then shred 'em one at a time. It's as simple as saying: “...tonight, the opposition have presented three themes: economic, social and environmental. I will discuss these one at a time.”

Believe it or not, this sort of stuff is guaranteed to whip your adjudicator into a frenzy. And the best thing about thematic rebuttal is that each speaker can do it when they rebut at the start of their speech!

### **Part D: 'Even If'**

In the previous discussion of rebuttal I showed you to build up a proper argument and then how to tear it down by targeting one of the links in the argument chain. There is of course another, simpler way of discrediting an argument, and ironically it's so simple that the more experienced most debaters become, the less they tend to think about arguments in this way.

### ***The Simplest Form of Rebuttal: Accept the Premises, Deny the Conclusion***

Too often debaters – especially good debaters, who are used to thinking about issues and arguments in fairly complex ways – forget to apply the simplest and most powerful test: what would happen if the model was implemented exactly as your opponents suggest? Of course, there are benefits to attempting to show that a problem is more complicated than your opponents seem to realise and it's good to show that their model is too unwieldy to ever be implemented in the way they suggest.

But that still leaves the most important question for any debate – what if it was? I saw a perfect example of this in a practice debate I watched recently on the topic “that Pakistan should hold free elections or lose the support of the West”.

The Negative team spent a lot of time explaining how elections wouldn't work – because the dictatorial government would cheat, because opposition forces have been smashed, because there are the proper institutions in place to handle the elections.

Of course the Affirmative team denied all those things and said a decent election was possible. But that's not the best argument for the Negative team. The best argument is: what would happen if there was an election right now, in just the way you say there could be? Who would win? And the answer is pretty simple: if a free and fair election was held in Pakistan right now, there is a very high chance that a radical Islamic group would win – just as Hamas won a generally fair election in Palestine.

The reasons are a little complicated and not worth discussing here, but if you can show that a win by the radicals is the most likely outcome of real election, then that's potentially a much better reason not to have an election at all. Naturally that doesn't mean the debate would be over – a decent Affirmative team will deny that the radicals would win and give some good reasons (and there is a good argument to be made – look at who has won all the previous free elections in Pakistan for instance), but it's a powerful and important argument for a Negative team.

***So remember – before you spend time trying to destroy a model, take a moment to ask yourself; ‘if we did do this, what would happen?’ You might be surprised by the answer!***

## ADJUDICATING THE WORLD SCHOOLS DEBATE FORMAT

Adjudicators in the World Schools Debating Championships use three categories when evaluating debates:

- **Style** describes the way that a particular speech is presented: how you say it. For example, how interesting, sincere, or humorous is the speaker? At the World Schools Debating Championships, the average mark is 28, but scores range generally from 24 to 32.
- **Content** describes the arguments that you present, both in their general strength and in the way that you support and explain them. The marking scheme is the same as for style.
- **Strategy** describes the structure of your speech. It can often become a mixed bag category involving all those parts of your speech that don't seem to fit into either style or content. The average mark is 14, with marks ranging from 12 to 16.

It is important to consider the weightings of these categories.

*First*, content and style are weighted equally. Many debaters and supporters automatically assume that a team that presents well should win the debate—but this is not necessarily the case.

*Second*, strategy is only weighted half as significantly as content and style, but is significant nonetheless. Many debaters and supporters discount the importance of strategy, seeing it as a poor cousin to content and style. However, although it is weighted less, strategy can and does directly affect the outcome of many debates.

Regardless of how effective the categories are in evaluating speeches, or which marking scheme is being used, they are not very effective in explaining or teaching debating. This is largely because content and strategy are very closely linked—if you structure your speech well, you will present a stronger argument. Similarly, a strong, clear argument is impossible without at least some structure. Therefore, if you try to prepare debates by separating content and strategy, you risk becoming confused and complicating your arguments.

## THE MODEL ADJUDICATOR

- **Hypothetical ‘ordinary intelligent voter’ (‘average reasonable person’)**
- **Impartial: Doesn’t judge teams they have a personal bond with (nation of affiliation, teams they have coached, etc.).**
- **Unbiased:** Has no prior idea who is going to win the debate. They set aside their personal opinion about the motion or specific arguments. They don’t expect teams to argue their preferred arguments or discount arguments they don’t like. They judge the debate that happened before them.
- **Open-minded and concerned** to decide how to vote – they are thus willing to be convinced by the debaters who provide the most compelling case for or against a certain policy.
- **Observant and diligent:** Listens carefully to what debaters say and doesn’t construct ideas that haven’t been explained well. They look for substantiation and evidence equally from both teams. They track arguments, responses, and POIs – and are able to fairly and accurately summarize the debate (not necessarily to the debaters, even just to themselves) before evaluating it.
- **Possessing general knowledge:** Take on the role of an average, intelligent listener and is aware of current affairs and basic facts without letting specialist knowledge interfere with the debate.
- **Expert on the rules:** Knows WSDC debating rules well and understands the words in the motion and the roles of teams/speakers.
- **Accountable & Constructive:** Can justify their decision based on a sound understanding of issues in the debate and the criteria for judging & gives debaters constructive and concrete feedback after the result of the debate is announced

### Judges Should NOT:

- **Use extremely specific knowledge** on a certain topic. A judge should never say:

- **“The proposition claimed that 1 million electric cars were produced in the UK last year, and it wasn’t attacked by the opposition, but since this is my field of expertise I know that the correct number is 39000 which is why the argument falls.”**  
→ adjudicators judge the debate as it happened.
- Assess the content in the debate **based on the arguments a team could have made.** A judge should never say:
  - **“I penalized you because you didn’t bring an argument about the economy, even though I think that is really relevant in the debate.”** → adjudicators can not penalize teams for not bringing certain arguments. They can, however, give this as explicit feedback for teams to improve. Not as a legitimization of the call for the given debate.
- Assess the content **based on refutation the judge is able to think of against an argument.** A judge should never say:
  - **You explained your arguments about violence pretty well, but I thought of 3 different ways to rebut it which is why I penalized you on content.** → Judges only take into account what has been said, not what could have been said in the debate.
- **Fill in the gaps** in analysis or rebuttal that a team has themselves  
**You tried to explain why this policy harms minorities, and even though you didn’t give the right reasons, I do agree with you that it’s an important argument because of reason X, Y and Z. This is why I awarded you on content.** → Judges only take into account what has been said, not what could have been said in the debate. They can only give such advice during feedback for improvement purposes, if teams want to know how to make their argument(s) stronger, not as a justification of awarding marks

#### **JUDGES SHOULD:**

- Be **courteous and respectful** to the teams and coaches
- Do **not allow coaches to make signs** or signals to debaters beyond time signals, and **maintains room decorum**

- Always makes themselves **available for feedback**
- **Pay attention** in rounds:
  - Not checking their phones
  - Taking good notes

## JUDGING CRITERIA

### DECIDING THE WIN

- Judges should determine which team did the best to persuade them, by reasoned argument, within the constraints set by the rules of Debating, that the motion ought to be adopted or rejected. The judges do so as the ordinary intelligent voter, and their assessments are always holistic and comparative
- Role fulfilment can be considered, but should not be the sole or primary criterion for judging a debate.

### WSDC JUDGING CRITERIA

Content (40%)	Style (40%)	BP Judging Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deals with <b>WHAT</b> is being presented.</li> <li>• Evaluates the quality of content</li> <li>• Covers arguments, rebuttal, content of POIs and responses to POIs.</li> <li>• Even if material is not explicitly flagged as rebuttal, it may be responsive to the other side's material</li> <li>• If an argument or rebuttal is weak / poorly developed, it is generally a content weakness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Style deals with <b>HOW</b> the content is presented.</li> <li>• Style does <b>NOT</b> include Accents. A speaker's accent (foreign-ness or familiarity of an accent, or perceived harshness or pleasantness of an accent) should never be consideration when scoring for style.</li> <li>• Style is <b>NOT</b> about immutable characteristics of an individual's voice - perceived to be a harsh vocal tone or pitch.</li> <li>• Style also does not include the format speakers choose to organise and deliver their speech (palm cards, sheets of paper, etc.)</li> <li>• Style includes body language (if applicable), pace of speech, volume and tonal variations, choice of vocabulary (too technical or too lay? Emotive or dry?), eye contact maintained, or fixated on notes? (if applicable)</li> <li>• Bad style typically hinders the intelligibility or persuasiveness of the argumentation offered, and could include mumbling, shouting too loudly, or speaking too quickly to be understood. However, it's important to bear in mind that some speakers may not have access to a strong and stable internet connection, and therefore may not be provide a video stream of their speech or may freeze/lag.</li> <li>• Speakers should be encouraged to appear on video, but when this is possible or practical, judges should not apply a style penalty simply because they cannot see the speaker.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In BP debating, analysis and style are not separate criteria on which an argument is assessed.</li> <li>• Style and analysis thus do not independently generate persuasiveness, but describe the necessary collective elements that make an argument persuasive.</li> <li>• Being persuasive is also not just about making arguments that are, considered entirely on their own, persuasive. Persuasion in debating also rests on detailed engagement with other teams, and comparatively demonstrating why one's own arguments are better than, defeat, and should be preferred over other arguments.</li> </ul>
<div style="text-align: center;"> <h4>Strategy (20%)</h4> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deals with <b>WHY</b> content is said</li> <li>• It's the sum of choices that a team makes in order to win a debate.</li> <li>• It includes interpretation and relevance of the motion, time allocation, structuring of the speech (prioritization), consistency between arguments and speeches, dealing with POIs in your speech</li> <li>• Strategy points are awarded when a speaker identifies and addresses the right issues in the debate, even if they don't analyse these issues very well.</li> <li>• Good strategy can be independent of good content, and is intrinsically tied to good engagement</li> </ul>		

## EVALUATING ANALYSIS

### Arguments

Merely stating a consequence v. explaining why it is a consequence and its impact  
Quality of analysis (missing logical links)

### Rebuttal

Misrepresenting and then attacking v. attacking the actual argument  
Stating an argument is false v. using logical steps to disprove it

### Examples

Quality of examples (broadly applicable or cherry-picked? generalised or personal anecdotes?)  
Stating overly specific, irrelevant examples v. explaining relevant persuasive examples

### What is good analysis?

- **Rigorous Logic:** Links made, conclusion clearly derived from assumptions
- **Goes beyond assertions:** not just claiming outcomes such as harms and benefits without analysis to back up why that outcome is likely.
- **Relevance:** Decided on by the teams, and what they make relevant to the debate
- **Relative Importance:** Why is this argument important in the world/in the debate?
- **Tracking Evolution:** Responding to responses, adding new illustrations/language

### How should knowledge of good analysis affect judge behavior?

- A good judge never takes what teams say they have proven at face value; always check if they actually did so! Labels can be misleading
- Saying why something is important is not the same as proving that it happens.

## EVALUATING 3RD SPEAKERS

- Unlike BP whips, 3rd speeches in WSDC style may include a small part of their teams substantive case, IF flagged in the case division announced by the 1st speaker. However, they are not required to include new arguments in their case
- The role of the 3rd speaker is to respond to the other team's case. "Responding" is a broad term covering direct rebuttal, weighing of arguments, new examples, etc. all forms of responsiveness often involve new ideas, logic, examples, components of arguments or new lines of rebuttal. It is acceptable for third speakers to bring these new aspects into their speeches
- "Newness" in a third speech is not sufficient justification to discredit material at third. However, newness is not permissible if third speakers introduce an independent and entirely new concept or argument in the debate that didn't exist earlier.

### What is new material?

For 3rd Speeches: Balancing Act

- Extreme 1: Nothing that even sounds remotely new, makes 3rd speech obsolete
- Extreme 2: So much new analysis barely allowing Prop room to respond
- HAPPY MEDIUM: New material can be introduced in the form of some lines of analysis, new examples, new ways of balancing/comparative. Has to meet the standard of responsiveness. Even then, less time for the other side to respond = less engagement = bad strategic choice to bring so late.

## EVALUATING REPLY SPEECHES

### SCORING REPLY SPEECHES

Mark	Standard
30	The speaker did not describe the debate as it happened. They misunderstood or misrepresented central arguments and responses.
31-34	Instead of actually identifying or analysing points of clash, speaker mostly just retold the debate as it happened or attempted to keep arguing for their side.
35	Speaker identified the major points of clash between two teams and was able to provide some basic justification for awarding the win to speaker's team.
36-39	Almost perfect overview of the debate. Particular interactions from the debate were analysed and used as evidence for awarding the win to the speaker's team.
40	Flawless analysis of the debate that just occurred. Speaker was able to accurately identify turning points in the debate (including the strongest arguments and rebuttal of their opponents) and why their side wins on balance

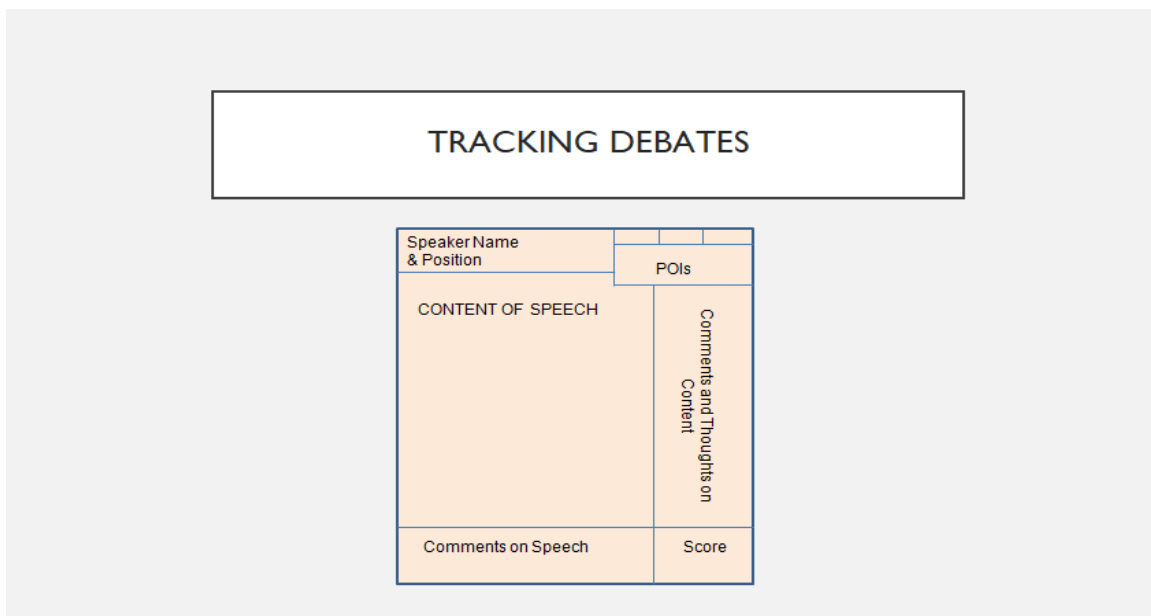
- The reply speaker may be either the first or second speaker of the team, but not the third.
- Neither reply speaker may introduce a new part of the team case.
- A reply speaker may not introduce a new argument.
- Reply speeches are a crucial part of the debate - they can definitely swing the result of a debate

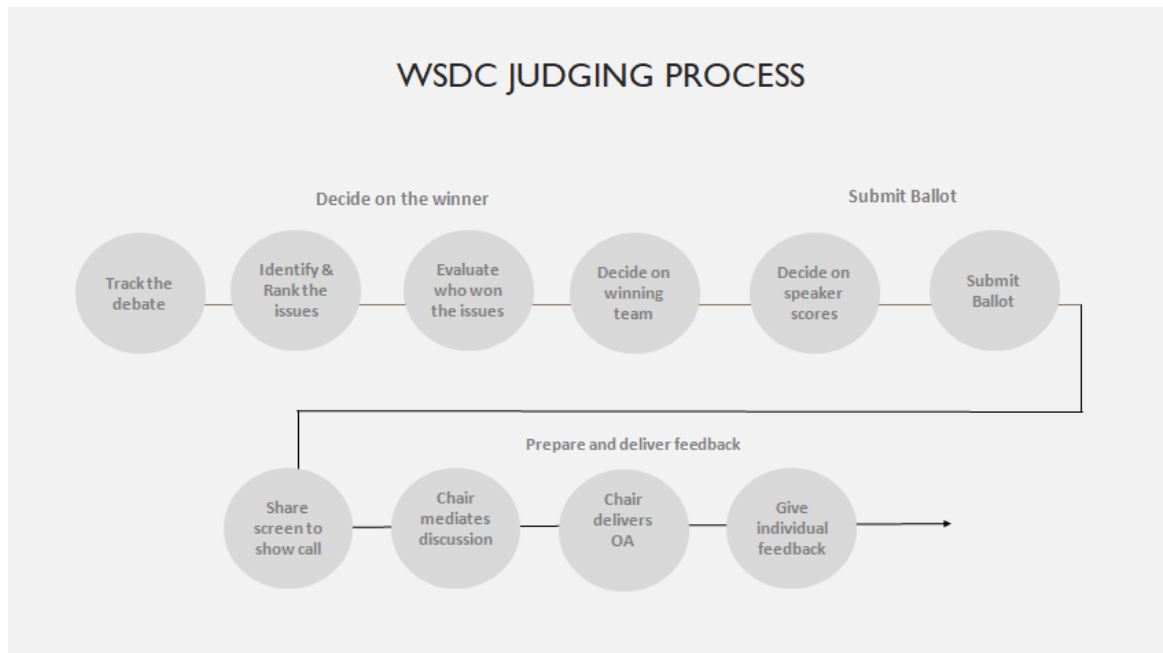


- Good reply speeches do not just report on the debate that happened, but contribute to the team’s overall strategy and approach in the debate, in order to shape how the debate has evolved and panned out
- New weighing of arguments, framing, contextual observations, or examples can all serve this function and are permitted and credited in replies – however, these need to be clearly derivative of the existing events in the debate
- Newness in Reply Speeches: Significantly stricter
  - Even if derivative of previous material, should be considered very late.
  - Some leeway: if 3rd Opp brings substantially new material, prop should have opportunity to note this for the judge.

EPIPHANIES ARE GREAT, BUT THEY SHOULD HAVE HAD THEM EARLIER

## WORLD SCHOOLS DEBATE FORMAT JUDGING PROCESS





## IDENTIFYING ISSUES

You must identify issues that were discussed in the debate in order to judge in a systematic manner. Issues are often questions that help you decide whether a particular motion should pass

- What are the main issues in a debate?
  - The clashes/issues most discussed?
  - You have to identify the issues that are more crucial to winning the debate than others
- How do you identify main issues in a debate?
  - Debaters do it for you

Example - THW ban smoking: Is it a legitimate choice to smoke?

- Does banning smoking reduce harms on smokers and their families?

- With no clash – you track and evaluate arguments and engagement

- It is important to identify and issues as they emerged in the debate, do NOT enter the debate and decide what issues should have emerged
- How do I do that?
  - What does the motion require teams to prove?
  - What were/became the most important issues raised in the debate
  - Who won those issues effectively through arguments and evidence provided

### **WEIGHING ISSUES**

After deciding the issues in the debate, you need to deciding the importance of each issue in comparison with all others. This helps decide which issue is most crucial for a team to win in order to win the debate

- How to rank issues?
  - What did teams explicitly agree on as important?
  - If that's not clear, then what did teams implicitly agree on as important?
  - If that's also not clear, then the reasons given by teams on why a particular issue matters more than other issues (weighing).
  - If there is no explicit weighing, ONLY then enter the debate to decide the ranking of issues (not as your personal self but as the average reasonable person we described earlier).. Examples of Weighing: Size of group impacted/Extent of impact
- Finally, evaluate who won the issues, and subsequently, the debate
- Compare the contribution of the two teams on a given issue (arguments + rebuttal)
- Decide which team ultimately won the particular issue – was there important material that stood at the end that was unresponded to by the other side? Did the existing responses adequately take down the core of a point a team made?

## MARKING RANGE

### SCORING CRITERIA

- Content, Style and Strategy are the criteria used to review the performance of each team and assess scores to each speaker. Rather than rigidly seeing them as discrete elements when determining speaker scores/which team won, these three areas should help a judge understand what team did a best job during the debate overall, i.e. which team won the debate
  - **Style:** 40% (40 points)
  - **Content:** 40% (40 points)
  - **Strategy:** 20% (20 points)
- The speaker scores are a mathematical expression of your decision and they help you evaluate individual performance of speaker
- For example, if you write down your speakers' scores and when calculating the totals they indicate that team A won but you honestly think team B should win because they were overall more convincing and did a better job, then you should review the scores you've awarded as your decision and the final scores should not contradict themselves.

### SPEAKER SCALE

Standard	Overall (/100)	Style (/40)	Content (/40)	Strategy (/20)
<i>Exceptional</i>	80	32	32	16
<i>Excellent</i>	76-79	31	31	15-16
<i>Extremely Good</i>	74-75	30	30	15
<i>Very Good</i>	71-73	29	29	14-15
<i>Good</i>	70	28	28	14
<i>Satisfactory</i>	67-69	27	27	13-14
<i>Competent</i>	65-66	26	26	13
<i>Pass</i>	61-64	25	25	12-13
<i>Improvement Needed</i>	60	24	24	12

Standard	Overall (/50)	Style (/20)	Content (/20)	Strategy (/10)
<i>Exceptional</i>	40	16	16	8
<i>V Good to Excellent</i>	36-39	15	15	7.5
<i>Good</i>	35	14	14	7
<i>Pass to satisfactory</i>	31-34	13	13	6.5
<i>Improvement Needed</i>	30	12	12	6

BP

- In BP debating, speeches are marked out of 100%, holistically
- The speaker scale is between 50-100
- The average speech is around **74-75**

WSDC

- In WSDC debating, main speeches are marked out of 100%
- Judges are expected to fill in scores for each category
- The WSDC speaker scale is between 60-80
- The average speech is **70 (28, 28, 14)**
- Half marks (0.5) are the lowest fraction allowed.
- Reply speeches are marked out of 50%.
- An average reply speech is 35

## SCORING SUBSTANTIVE SPEECHES

Mark	Standard
60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content is not relevant to the motion and what the team needs to prove.</li> <li>• All points made are claims, with no analysis, and are confusing.</li> <li>• The speech is hard to follow throughout, so it is hard to give it any credit.</li> </ul>
61-63	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A few marginally relevant claims.</li> <li>• No analysis provided in the claims, which are mainly lines without explanation.</li> <li>• Parts of the speech are clear, but significant parts are still hard to follow.</li> </ul>
64 - 66	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some of the points made are relevant to the debate.</li> <li>• Arguments / rebuttals are made with some explanation and analysis, but with significant logical gaps in the explanation.</li> <li>• Sometimes the speech is difficult to follow.</li> </ul>
67 - 69	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most of the points made are relevant to the debate.</li> <li>• All arguments / rebuttals have some explanation, but it still has logical and analytical gaps in important parts of the argument and lacks evidence.</li> <li>• Mostly easy to follow, but some sections may still be hard to understand.</li> </ul>
70	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No major shortfalls, nor any strong moments.</li> <li>• Arguments are almost exclusively relevant, although may fail to address one or more core issues sufficiently.</li> <li>• All arguments have sufficient explanation without major logical gaps and some examples, but are simplistic and easy to attack.</li> <li>• Easy to follow throughout which makes the speech understandable, though style does not necessarily serve to make the speech more persuasive.</li> </ul>

## SCORING SUBSTANTIVE SPEECHES

71 - 72	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arguments are all relevant, and address the core issues in the debate.</li> <li>• All arguments have sufficient explanation without major logical gaps and most have credible evidence. Some points raised may have minor logical gaps or deficits in explanation.</li> <li>• Easy to follow throughout. On occasion the style may even serve to make the speech more engaging and persuasive.</li> </ul>
73 - 76	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arguments are relevant and engage with the most important issues. Arguments have sufficient explanation without major logical gaps.</li> <li>• Occasionally, the speaker provides more sophisticated and nuanced analysis, making their arguments hard to attack.</li> <li>• Easy to follow throughout. On occasion the style may even serve to make the speech more engaging and persuasive.</li> </ul>
77 - 79	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arguments are all relevant and well-illustrated, and address the core issues in the debate, with thorough explanations, no logical gaps, and credible examples, making them hard to attack</li> <li>• Easy to follow throughout. The style serves to make the speech's content more engaging.</li> </ul>
80	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plausibly one of the best debating speeches ever given in a schools competition.</li> <li>• It is incredibly difficult to think up satisfactory responses to any of the arguments made.</li> <li>• Flawless and compelling arguments, made with outstanding delivery.</li> </ul>

## **SCORING AND MARGINS**

Simple checks:

- What would an average score sound in a debate speech? Move up and down accordingly for speakers who are below or above average.
- To score reply speeches, assess it like a regular speech and divide it by 2
- Half marks are the lowest fraction allowed.
- After tallying the scores, the total score of the winning team must be higher than the total score of the losing team.

Margins between teams

- 0-2 pts – very close debate
- 3-5 pts – close but rather clear
- 5-10 pts – one team clearly better, but not dominating
- 10-20 pts – winning team dominated the debate
- 20+ pts – winning team “shredded” the losing team

## **EFFECTIVE ORAL FEEDBACK/ ADJUDICATION**

### **Judicial Discussions**

The practice in the World competition is for the judges to go outside after the debate to discuss the issues so that one can present a short commentary on behalf of the judges. It ought to go without saying that a judge cannot go outside to discuss the debate without having reached a decision.

The easiest way to ensure this is to insist that each judge hand in their completed marksheet to the person chairing the debate before they go outside to discuss the result. Once handed in, it cannot be changed as a result of the discussions outside. If we did not insist on this rule, the debate outside the room would be more important than the one inside it!

## Who Wins the Debate?

If you find yourself saying "I thought the proposition won the debate but when I added up my marks. I found that the opposition had won instead," something is wrong. It might be your belief about who won the debate or it might be your marks: somehow the two things must be reconciled before you cast your vote. Look back over your marks to make sure that you were evaluating all speakers by the same standards and therefore that the marks accurately express your view of the relative performances of the speakers. Was the third opposition speaker really eight marks better than the first proposition speaker? Was there really no difference in the quality of style or content in the first four speeches? Also, make sure that your belief about who won the debate is not being unduly influenced by the last few speeches: all speeches count equally (except for the reply speeches, which count at half value) and the speaker marks help to ensure that this fact is reflected in your decision.

Likewise, make sure that your belief is not being unduly influenced by one category in the marks: perhaps you think that the proposition won only because you are not giving full (i.e. 40%) weight in your mind to the fact that the opposition were significantly ahead on style or content. If your marks for each category and each speaker accurately reflect your view of the debate, then your total marks should reliably indicate which team won the debate, given the particular weightings of different categories we use at World Schools.

It is also worth noting the phenomenon called "the accelerating rebuttal mark". Some judges are swayed by rebuttal or clash. The more there is, the more they believe the speaker is doing a good job. This is logical until you realise that the proposition has one less opportunity to rebut the other side than the opposition does. The accelerating rebuttal mark means that opposition teams get a big advantage. Always be sure that you are giving full credit to the way a team has proposed an argument as well as to the way their opponents have attempted to knock it down.

## The Adjudication Speech

Before the adjudication speech, but after ballots have been completed and handed to the chairperson, the judges have a brief opportunity to confer. This is not the time to try to persuade your fellow judges that they made a mistake on a particular issue or in their overall result. Their ballots are locked in like yours, and the only point of conferring is to help one of the judges give the adjudication speech. So, keep the discussion short and to the point. If you

dissented and your views are quite different from the rest of the panel, briefly express your reasons and then stay out of the discussion.

The adjudication speech should explain the result of the debate to the audience. Teams can and should speak to the judges individually after the debate, but this is the only opportunity for the audience to hear the reason for the decision. The adjudication speech should not refer to mistakes made by individual speakers: you can discuss these privately after the debate instead of belittling a speaker in public. The result to an audience that has just seen its first World Schools debate may require outlining the three categories in which we award marks and, where appropriate, identifying the category in which the decisive difference between the teams was to be found. The adjudication speech should not summarize the content of the debate except insofar as is truly necessary to explain the result. The speech should be as short as possible – typically between 2 and 4 minutes – while communicating to the audience a clear, explanation of the result of the debate (and expressing thanks to the hosts and sponsors).

When giving the adjudication speech you should remember that you are speaking for the panel, not just for yourself. Where there are importantly differing views, especially if the decision is not unanimous, you need to try as far as possible to explain how those differences came about. If at all possible, you should explain the grounds on which one or more judge dissented in a way that emphasizes the reasonableness of the disagreement, rather than leaving the audience to think that one judge got it wrong. In the unlikely and unfortunate event that you cannot present the dissenting view in a way that makes it sound reasonable, it is better to say nothing about it: just explain that the panel reached a majority verdict and then present the views of the majority.

The final responsibility of the adjudicators is to report their decision.

An **effective oral adjudication** is critical to good judging.

The oral adjudication presents the adjudicators the opportunity to explain how they interpreted the round and to meet their obligation to the principle of education discussed earlier.

If an adjudicator has progressed through the steps as outlined, an effective oral adjudication should be easy.

I recommend using the steps as the structure for the oral adjudication.



1. Begin by identifying the proposition.
2. You'll want to explain how you arrived at that proposition, either from the motion, the teams' interpretation of that motion, or by your own assessment of the general point of focus for the teams' arguments.
3. From there, you should identify the issues that you believe were contested between the teams by pointing to specific arguments that were made for and against that issue.
4. The next three steps in the judging process are usually combined. The topics of which team won each issue, how important each issue was relative to the other issues, and which team made the greatest contribution to the effort to prove or disprove an issue are typically presented in concert with extensive references to specific arguments the teams made. At times, the same argument that wins an issue simultaneously proves that issue is most important.
5. Identifying the debater (or team) responsible for making that argument is likely the way in which the adjudicators will highlight the argument that most affected their decision.
6. At the end of the day, the judges must render a decision and present a rationale for that decision that is mindful of the guiding principles of adjudication discussed above. Their decision should adhere to the movement model and present a good faith effort to consider all the arguments made by each team and the relative merit of those arguments.

When done well, the adjudicators' contribution is a satisfying accompaniment to the intellectual efforts of the debaters.

## ORAL ADJUDICATION/REASON FOR DECISION

### WSDC

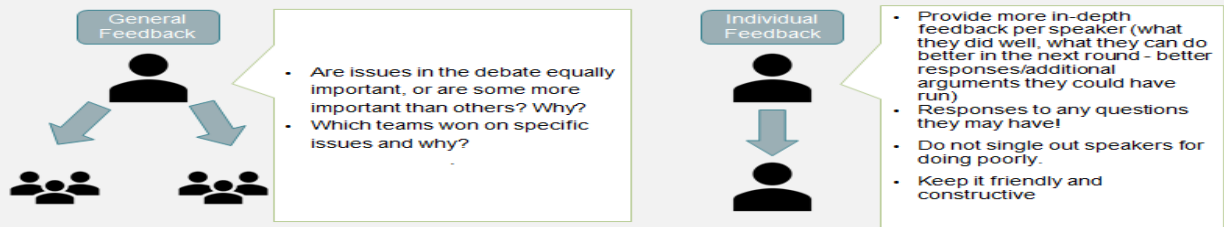
- Judges need to decide a winner between the 2 teams
- Judges announce results first
- Judges deliver RFD based on Content, Style & Strategy
- When discussing content, Judges should focus on issues in the debate – which ones were important, which team won which issues and why. Be specific, making close reference to the relevant speeches.
- Judges should be comparative when discussing content, style and strategy, and the relative strengths and weakness of each team.
- Judges should spend an equal amount of time on both teams
- Judges should try to balance positive and critical comments
- Keep it short - don't spend longer than 5-7 minutes giving your reason for decision.
- Tell teams they may approach for individual feedback

### BP

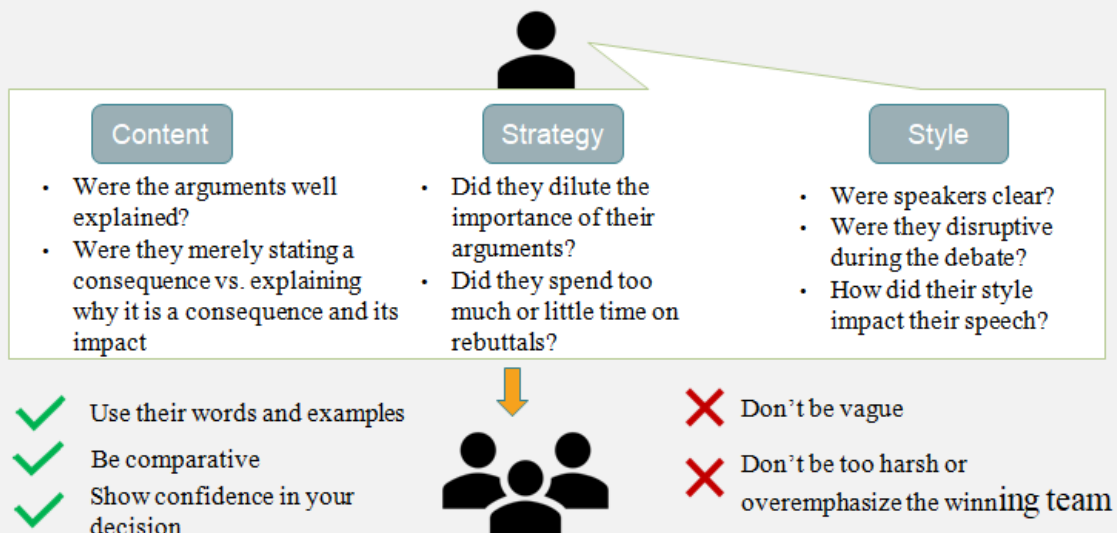
- Judges have to rank teams from 1st to 4th
- Judges announce result first
- Judges explain the decision, comparatively
- Why did 1st beat 2nd, why second beat 3rd ...
- Judges explain what would have improved the debate
- What would the team that came 4th needed to have done in the debate to beat 3rd?
- What would 3rd needed to have done to beat 2nd? etc.

**In both cases, the OA/RFD should be clear, concise and comparative**

## OA/RFD VS INDIVIDUAL FEEDBACK



## EFFECTIVE OA/RFD



## THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF ADJUDICATION

Three principles should guide the adjudicators' appraisal of a debate:

1. An adjudicator should be tabula rasa (literally, "a blank slate") in her orientation toward the proposition;
2. An adjudicator should operate under the principle of non-intervention regarding the debaters' efforts; and

3. An adjudicator is first and foremost an educator entrusted with the responsibility of helping others improve their skills.

### **Tabula Rasa**

The metaphor of the blank slate is appropriate for the adjudicator's orientation toward the arguments made in the round. Regardless of the particular preferences for the truth or falsity of a motion, the adjudicator must—to the greatest extent possible—set aside those preferences and embrace the artifice of impartiality. Adjudicators must avoid deciding the round based on what they believed before the round occurred rather than what occurred in the round.

That said, the artifice of tabula rasa is just that: an artifice. Subjectivity is the defining characteristic of the human experience; not surprisingly, it simply cannot be set aside when adjudicating. A tabula rasa orientation is an ideal toward which an adjudicator should strive, but simultaneously that adjudicator must recognize that such impartiality will likely never be achieved.

### **Non-Intervention**

If the adjudicator is aware of the need to set aside her predispositions prior to the round, she should also be committed to avoiding intervening in the teams' efforts in the round. More to the point, non-intervention means one simple thing: adjudicators should let the debaters do the debating.

In practice, this means adjudicators must resist two temptations.

First, adjudicators should avoid doing the work of the debaters. They should not complete unfinished or inadequate arguments, connect lines of argument to opposing points the debater did not recognize, or fabricate a unifying strategy for a debater's disparate arguments that was not the debater's creation. Second, and by far the more significant sin, an adjudicator must never render the debater's efforts irrelevant.

Ignoring a debater's efforts is contrary to the very purpose of the activity. An adjudicator is in the round to assess the efforts of the debaters, not to selectively recognize only those efforts that she prefers. That is not to say that the adjudicator has to give equal credence to every argument made simply because a debater articulated that argument; the very purpose of adjudicating a round is to evaluate the quality of the debaters' efforts. But adjudicators

should make a conscious effort to consider all arguments made to avoid inserting themselves into the round.

## **Education**

This principle is perhaps the most important for putting the adjudicator in the appropriate frame of mind to judge a round. Debating is connected to academia for a very important reason: debating is one of the most intellectually stimulating activities an individual may undertake. Skill development in persuasive communication and critical thinking will enhance a student's academic experience across the board. For providing opportunity and motivation to enhance these skills, debating has few peers. The adjudicators should take seriously their responsibilities regarding education; decisions should honor the significant intellectual energy the debaters have expended and constructive criticism designed to help the debaters improve their skills should be paramount.

## **Adjudication Models**

A useful way to begin thinking about your responsibilities as an adjudicator is to consider the various models of adjudication available to you. These models provide you with a general orientation and perspective from which you may assess the efforts of the debaters in the round.

While none of these models is sufficient to address the complexity of rendering a decision after a debate, they do provide useful starting points for the discussion of how to do so. In general, there are two less practical and one preferred model.

## **Less Practical Models**

### **“Truth of Motion” Model**

Adjudicators who operate under the “truth of motion” model see their role as assessing the veracity of the motion. These adjudicators see the motion as a statement with truth value (i.e., it may be either more true or more false); the defining question they ask themselves when rendering a decision is “At the end of the debate, do I believe the motion is true or false?”

This model recognizes that the debate is ultimately a contest of ideas and that the most compelling arguments should carry the day. The approach is oriented toward the matter of the arguments; this type of adjudicator awards the win to

the team whose arguments have the most significant influence on her assessment of the truth or falsity of the motion.

The risk of this model, of course, is that the adjudicator's inherent bias may create an uneven playing field. These biases—whether explicitly acknowledged or implicit in the adjudicator's interpretation of the round—may predispose her to believe the motion is true (or false) even before a round begins. The subjective nature of the activity means that an adjudicator will likely inherently prefer one side of the motion to the other. If the adjudicator is unable to set those biases aside (and adjudicators are unable to do so—see the discussion of the tabula rasa orientation above), the result is an unfair advantage for either the Proposition or the Opposition teams.

### **“Skill of Debaters” Model**

A contrast to the “truth of motion” model is the “skill of debaters” model. A judge who uses this model is primarily concerned with the teams' execution of their arguments and broader strategy. At the end of the round, an adjudicator using this model asks herself “Which team did the better job of debating?”

The “skill” model focuses on the manner of the debaters. An advantage of this focus is that a factor the debaters can control—their own performance—is the basis for the decision. Adjudicators who render decisions using this model look to criteria such as role fulfillment, speaking style, structural clarity, and engagement of the opposing teams' arguments to determine who prevailed in the round. But the “skill of debaters” model is not without risks. Chief among the perils of this model is the possibility that a technically strong team will make inaccurate or irrelevant arguments and thus be rewarded

### **A Preferred Model: The “Movement” Model**

The “movement” model attempts to account for the weaknesses of the two previous models by combining the best of each. It recognizes that the adjudicator's focus should be on the truth of the motion and the quality of the arguments that seek to establish that truth while also recognizing that the best efforts of the debaters—while able to make a significant impact on the adjudicator—may not result in the adjudicator changing her mind. The question the adjudicator using the movement model asks herself when

rendering a decision is “By the end of the round, which team moved me farthest from my original beliefs about the motion?”

Imagine the adjudicator’s conviction as a point on a continuum; most adjudicators will have an opinion about the truth of the motion prior to the round. Before the round, the adjudicator’s belief about the truth of the motion may be represented as follows:

**Before the round, the adjudicator thought the motion was:**



Throughout the course of the round, attentive adjudicators will listen to the arguments made by the various debaters, assess the quality of the arguments presented, evaluate the debaters’ presentation of those arguments, and react to the effort of the debaters to execute a particular strategy in the debate. Following the round and after consideration of all these factors, the adjudicators’ convictions may have shifted:

**After the round, the adjudicator thought the motion was:**



In this case, though the adjudicator continues to believe that the motion is true, the teams on the Opposition side would be more likely to win because they moved the adjudicator’s conviction the farthest. Even though the adjudicators’ opinion is that the motion is likely true, the Opposition team were successful in tempering that conviction. Though they didn’t absolutely convince the adjudicators that the motion was false, they did affect the adjudicators more than did the Proposition teams.

The strength of this model is that it marries content (matter) to effort (manner) and is perfectly suited to Worlds-style debating, wherein each team must be evaluated for its contribution to the debate. The model also accounts for biases the adjudicator may possess and is capable of rewarding teams that challenge those biases even if they're

unsuccessful at fully convincing an adjudicator of their position.

### **Relevant Standards of Adjudication**

Adjudicators who specialize in Worlds-style debating employ a variety of standards to determine who wins the rounds, three of which are most common. None of these standards is definitive and each has its own strengths and weaknesses. Most importantly, these standards are best used in combination to produce a holistic assessment of the round.

#### **Role Fulfillment**

A common standard is to evaluate each team's merit by assessing whether that team's speakers met the expectations of their respective roles.

### **The “Better Debate” Standard**

Not many adjudicators would refer to this standard as the “better debate” standard, but I have little doubt that many adjudicators employ the criteria that are foundational for this standard.

Phrased simply, the “better debate” standard asks, “Which team contributed most to (or detracted most from) the quality of this de-

bate?” In other words, adjudicators using this standard ask themselves what each team did to make this debate better. If this standard implies that adjudicators have in mind some Platonic form of the ideal debate, such an implication wouldn't be entirely inaccurate. Whether that form is based on an amalgam of the best debates the judges have witnessed or is the product of the adjudicators' more objective perspective about the appropriate focus of the



round, the “perfect debate” is a standard against which many adjudicators evaluate debates.

In an effort to bring some objectivity to this standard, I recommend that adjudicators focus on four criteria to determine who most contributed to the quality of the round:

**Inquiry:** Do the teams interrogate the most germane issues in the round?

**Advancement:** Does each speech/speaker move the debate forward with new perspectives, arguments, or evidence? Focus: Do the teams avoid distractions and concentrate their efforts on the most substantive issues in the round?

**Performance:** Do the teams deliver a compelling oratorical effort?

These four factors allow a more structured and impartial means by which to determine which team has done the most to make the debate better. The teams that contribute the most in each of these areas are typically those who make the debate better by moving it closer to the ideal debate round. Conversely, those who fail in these areas often detract from the overall quality of the round.

The better debate standard also implies that the best course of strategy isn't always the easy course. The natural inclination of debaters to attempt to define the debate in terms most favorable to them may not produce the best debate. The best debate is typically one that has ample ground for both sides, ground that allows each side to completely interrogate the full range of issues implied by the motion (or at least those issues that may potentially arise). Debaters would do well to keep in mind that the best debate for them (i.e. that which presents them with the most narrow, defensible ground) is rarely the best debate from the viewpoint of the adjudicators (i.e., that which presents the most ground for the proposition to be thoroughly tested).

## Matter and Manner

### Matter

- Matter is the content of the speech. It is the arguments a debater uses to further his or her case and persuade the audience.

- Matter includes arguments and reasoning, examples, case studies, facts and any other material that attempts to further the case.
- Matter includes positive (or substantive) material and rebuttal (arguments specifically aimed to refute the arguments of the opposing team[s]).
- Matter includes Points of Information.

### ***Manner***

- Manner is the presentation of the speech. It is the style and structure a member uses to further his or her case and persuade the audience.
- Manner is comprised of many separate elements. Primarily, manner may be assessed by examining the speakers' style (deliv-ery) and structure (organization).

Armed with a general model of adjudication and having discussed some of the most common standards adjudicators use, we can now turn our attention to outlining the process of rendering a decision following a round.

### ***Reaching a Decision***

To reach a decision about which team should be ranked first, second, the adjudicators must sort through and evaluate the competing lines of argument made by each of the four teams. Comparing the arguments of the debater that spoke in the first minutes of a debate round to those made by the debater who spoke in the last is a challenging task. In this section, I outline an approach that gives structure and direction to that process.

Comparing the relative efforts of teams in a debate round requires that adjudicators progress through six steps:

1. Identify the proposition
2. Identify the issues
3. Determine the winner of each issue
4. Determine the importance of each issue

5. Assess each team's effort relative to the issues
6. Justify and report the decision

To outline a plan for the evaluation of competing lines of argument,

I'll treat each of these steps in order

### **1. Identify the Proposition**

To the list of benefits derived from clearly identified points of stasis I should add that clearly identified and articulated points of stasis allow adjudicators to more accurately and thoroughly evaluate each team's effort. By first identifying the places where each team's arguments clashed with their opponents', the adjudicator will be better able to assess the relative merits of each team's arguments.

The first point of stasis the adjudicator should identify is the primary point of stasis in the round: the proposition. As noted earlier, the proposition is the major dividing line between the Proposition and Opposition sides in the round and functions as the dividing line in the ground over which the Proposition and Opposition disagree.

Propositions may either come from the motion provided to the teams or they may emerge from the arguments made in that round. If the motion is very straightforward, the motion itself may serve as the proposition for the round. The motion "This house would recognize the independence of Abkhazia" defines clear ground for the Proposition and Opposition and, therefore, would likely serve as the proposition. Other motions, such as "This house believes that religious leaders should listen to public opinion," provide less clear direction to the teams. These motions rely on the teams to negotiate the proposition in the round.

For example, the Proposition could choose to run a case that argues the Catholic Church should be more proactive in acknowledging and addressing issues of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests.

When the Proposition chooses to define a case that is more focused and specific than the motion offered, and when the Opposition accepts that case as the focus of the debate, that interpretation becomes the proposition for the round.

While the proposition will usually be explicit in the round, there will be cases in which neither side makes clear the central focus in the round. In this case, the

adjudicator must phrase a proposition that functions as the central point of stasis. This effort is a starting point for her adjudication and will later serve as a touchstone used to assess the arguments made by the teams.

When creating a proposition, an adjudicator should phrase a statement that is clear and balanced. To be clear, a proposition statement should define ground for both the Proposition and Opposition teams in a way that makes obvious their responsibilities. A balanced proposition statement will avoid expressing the controversy in a way that might be weighted toward one side or the other.

## ***2. Identify the Issues***

While each debate is defined by the proposition that divides the ground between the Proposition and Opposition, more specific points of stasis will emerge as the debate progresses. Known as issues, these minor points of stasis are those places where the particular arguments of each team interact with the responses of the opposing teams. Issues emerge as the round progresses. They may come from the explicit efforts of the debaters; in an ideal situation, the debaters on both sides agree on the relevant issues in the round. In certain rounds, all teams—explicitly or implicitly—may agree to structure their argu-

ments around those issues. Unfortunately, in most cases the teams in a debate do not identify the issues so clearly. When the teams fail to do so, adjudicators must sift through the arguments offered by each team, attempt to phrase reasonable issue statements that are material to the proposition and inclusive of the arguments made by the teams, and, finally, to evaluate the various arguments made relative to these issues.

## ***3. Determine the Winner of Each Issue***

Once the adjudicators have identified the round's proposition and the issues relevant to that proposition have been identified, the real work of adjudication begins. The adjudicators must now determine which side prevailed in capturing ground on each issue. To do so, the adjudicators must assess the arguments of each team and the interaction of each team's arguments with the arguments made by other teams in the round.

While determining which team's arguments prevailed is a complex and subjective exercise, a couple of points will make this process easier: first, if the former two steps have been completed properly, the adjudicators can easily recognize where (i.e., over which issues) the teams' arguments compete. This clear structure is essential to determining which arguments prevail: to know

which argument on either side of a common point wins, you must first know which issues are in contest.

After structuring the arguments so they are clearly opposed to each other, the adjudicators must then assess the merits of each team's argument relative to each issue. Again, while determining which argument you personally find most compelling is an inherently subjective process, the effort may be guided by traditional standards of argument quality: truth and validity.

### *The Standard of Truth*

The standard of truth asks, "Which side's arguments are most believable?" To evaluate an argument's believability, an adjudicator may assess that argument's fidelity and coherence.

Fidelity refers to the arguments maintenance of external consistency. Put simply, an argument maintains external consistency if it is consistent with what the adjudicator knows to be true. This is, of course, another way of asking if a particular claim is grounded in evidence that the judge finds acceptable; judges are more likely to believe claims supported by such evidence. This is not to say that adjudicators automatically reject claims counter to what they believe is true, simply that adjudicators—like all human beings—are more skeptical of that which does not mesh with their perception of what's right, true, and accurate.

Coherence, on the other hand, refers to an argument's maintenance of internal consistency. Internal consistency is maintained if an argument is not contradicted by some other argument made by the same team. Obviously, a coherent strategy is essential to a successful effort; the presence of contradictions between a team's arguments is cause for concern.

### *Validity*

To evaluate an argument's validity, the adjudicator must look to how a team conveys an argument. In the terms of formal logic, validity refers to the structure of an argument; if the premises and conclusion of an argument conform to a recognized (and logical) pattern, that argument is judged to be valid. In more informal terms (and in terms more relevant to the evaluation of

arguments in a competitive debate), an adjudicator may evaluate validity by examining the team's execution and expression of that argument.

### ***Execution***

**Execution** refers to the reasoning used to connect the claim to the evidence offered. If the debater's reasoning makes the support offered relevant to the claim advanced, the argument may be said to be valid.

In more holistic terms, an adjudicator may also look to the function of that argument in the team's broader strategy. If a particular argument a significant and necessary contribution to a team's strategy, or if that strategy is particularly compelling relative to the proposition, the team executed the argument well.

Another way to judge the validity of an argument is to assess the debater's expression of that argument. The force of an argument is a product of both its content and its expression; an argument that is well-structured and conveyed passionately will necessarily garner more attention than one that is poorly organized or presented with little enthusiasm.

These criteria allow adjudicators to assess the relative power of each side's arguments and decide which side prevailed on each issue. Once the adjudicators know which side won each issue, they must determine the relative importance of that issue to the proposition being debated.

### ***4. Determine the Importance of Each Issue***

Once the adjudicators reach a determination about which side won each issue, they can then evaluate the relative significance of each issue. Any issue can be won by either the Proposition or the Opposition (represented below by the horizontal movement of the dividing line in an issue) and that same issue may occupy relatively more or less of the adjudicators' attention than other issues (represented by the vertical expansion of issues relative to each other).

To determine the relative importance of each issue, the adjudicators must return to the proposition around which the issues are focused. They may ask themselves which issues are most germane to the proposition at hand, giving greater weight to issues that more directly address the question and less to those issues deemed ancillary to the proposition. This is not, obviously, an exact science. Determining which issues are most significant requires the evaluation of a variety of factors, including assessing which are most relevant

to the motion being debated, which issues the debaters claim are most important, and how each issue relates to the overall strategy of each team.

At the conclusion of this process, the adjudicators should have a clear picture of which side (Proposition or Opposition) won each issue and how significant those issues are to the proposition under consideration.

### ***5. Assess Each Team's Efforts Relative to the Issues***

An adjudicator must also determine which teams contributed most significantly to the overall effort in the round.

Another way to express this, consistent with the “mental map” metaphor used throughout this book, is that the winning team is the one that occupies the majority of the adjudicators’ attention at the end of round. The second place team is the team that occupies the second most attention. Fortunately, the map metaphor may be adapted easily to this assessment. In addition to representing which side won each issue and the relative significance of each issue, the territory of the debate may be mapped to represent each team’s contribution to that effort:

#### **Public Health?**

#### **Economic Consequences?**

Proposition

Opposition

#### **Smokers' Rights?**

Proposition

Opposition

According to the map of this round’s territory, at the end of this round, the Proposition team would be ranked first, since they not only were on the winning side of the most critical issue, but in the adjudicators’ assessment they were most responsible for proving that public health would benefit from a ban on tobacco. On the other issues—though ultimately the adjudicators’ felt the Opposition side prevailed on both less important issues

## 6. Report the Decision

The final responsibility of the adjudicators is to report their decision.

An effective oral adjudication is critical to good judging. The oral adjudication presents the adjudicators the opportunity to explain how they interpreted the round and to meet their obligation to the principle of education discussed earlier. If an adjudicator has progressed through the steps as outlined, an effective oral adjudication should be easy.

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Your dreams are valid; Africa's future will be alive because of you!