

# Debating in the World Schools Style: A Guide

**S I M O N   Q U I N N**

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*Simon Quinn*

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# Introduction

When was the last time that you debated?

Was it today? Yesterday? Perhaps even last week?

If you said, “never,” you are wrong. Everyone has debated, and almost everyone has debated more recently than they think. If you said, “never,” or “not since the end of the last debating season,” you obviously think of debating as something formal; an activity involving two teams of three speakers each, with a set motion and an adjudicator. That is certainly one style of debating—the style discussed in this book. However, it is not the only style. Debating is all around us: on the television, in the newspapers, and in our own homes. As a society, we debate about almost everything—from tax reform to mowing the lawn. Debating is everywhere, and everyone can do it.

What’s more, *debating is fun!* Participating in organized debates gives you the chance to meet new people and new ideas. Best of all, you have the opportunity to stand up and argue with someone in public, in a stimulating and organized dispute about real issues. That’s what this book is about—improving your skills of formal argument. Hopefully, this book will help you to develop the right skills and strategies to be a successful debater. Most of all, this book should help you to make debating fun.

This book makes debating as simple as possible. Many people imagine that debating becomes more complicated and more abstract as debaters develop. It should not. Even if motions become more abstract and the subject matter more technical, debating itself should become simpler. There is very little skill required to make a complicated concept sound complicated. The challenge is to make complicated concepts easy to follow and simple to understand. It is a challenge that all debaters should set themselves. It is certainly a challenge I set myself in writing this book.

## How to Use This Book

Very few skills can be learned by reading alone. If you want to learn to play the piano, you need to sit down and strike the keys; if you want to play basketball, you need to pick up a ball. The same is true of debating. You can't learn debating simply by reading a book—you need to stand up and try it. Only by doing so—by putting theory into practice—will you understand the challenges and techniques of good debating.

This book is written for all debaters—from those who have never debated before to those who have significant experience. It is also written for the people who coach and support them. However, this does *not* mean that every section of this book will be relevant or helpful for every debater and every coach. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, and the process of learning how to debate is indeed a journey.

For this reason, many concepts in this book are divided into levels. There are three levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced.

**Beginner** refers to debaters who have limited or no experience. If you are about to start formal debating, or you have only debated for one or two years, this is probably the level for you.

**Intermediate** refers to debaters who understand the basics well. If you have debated for more than two years, this is probably the level for you.

**Advanced** refers to debaters who understand the basics completely, who are very comfortable with the intermediate techniques, and who are looking for a challenge. If you are debating on an experienced senior team at school, or you are in a representative team, this is probably your level.

I suggest that you only read up to your level. If you are a beginner, read that level. If you consider yourself intermediate, read the beginner *and* intermediate sections. If you are advanced, read the entire book! I suggest that coaches read up to the level of the team that they are coaching.

No part of this book is complicated. It is possible that a new debater might read the advanced sections and think, “I understand that! I will follow those techniques in my next debate!” However, understanding the words and concepts of a section is one thing; it is another matter to know how and when to use specific techniques. Debating techniques are something that you, as a debater, need to come to in your own time and with your own experience. My suggestion, therefore, is simple: Read up to your level. Go away and debate—try to put the techniques from your level into practice. When you are comfortable with those techniques, come back and read the next level.

In this way, this book should stay relevant for your debating as you improve. This book is not an instant fix for every debating challenge: it is a travel guide for a long and interesting journey.

## Debating: A Basic Introduction

Let's start at the beginning. Every debate needs a motion. This is a contentious assertion that forms the basis for the debate. For example, the motion might be "This House believes that it is better to be smart than to be kind" or "This House believes that the United Nations has failed."

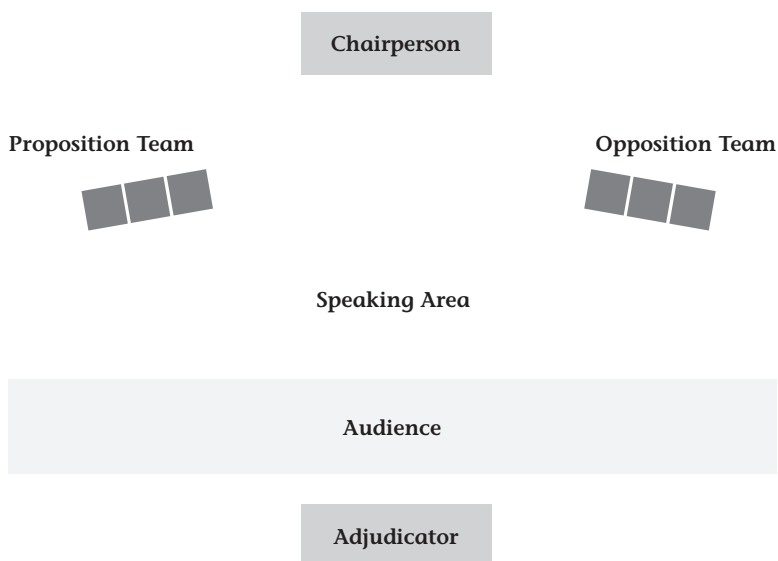
This book relates to a specific but common style of debate used in many countries and at the World Schools Debating Championships. This debate style requires two teams in every debate, one to argue that the motion is *true*, the proposition; the other to argue that the motion is *not true*, the opposition.

Each team uses two basic types of argument to support its side of the motion. *First*, there are *substantive arguments*. These are prepared arguments in favor of a team's side of the motion. *Second*, there is *rebuttal*. Rebuttal is your attack on your opposition's arguments. The difference between substantive arguments and rebuttal is the distinction between showing why your team is *right* and your opposition is *wrong*. It is impossible to say whether substantive arguments or rebuttal are more important—each is just as important as the other, and each is vital for successful debating.

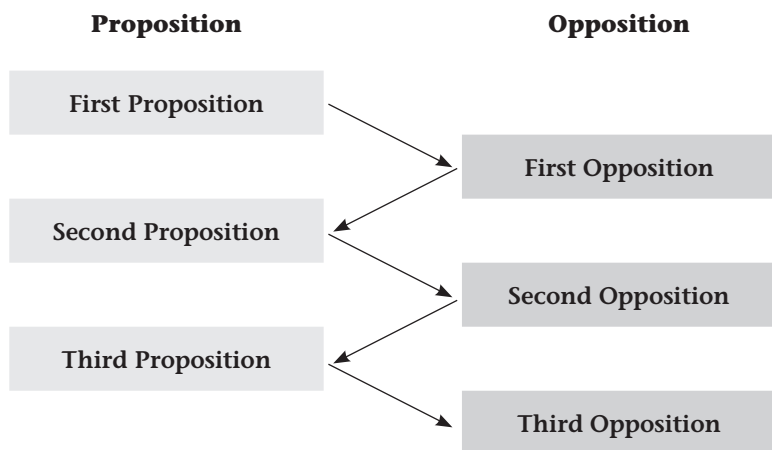
There are three speakers on each team. Speakers are usually identified by their speaking number and their team side. For example, debaters might speak of the first proposition (the first speaker of the proposition team), or the third opposition (the third speaker of the opposition team). Every speaker except the first proposition (the first speaker in the entire debate) is expected to rebut his or her opposition. The first and second speakers on both teams are also expected to present substantive arguments. The third speeches, therefore, are used for rebuttal and summary.

The debate is controlled by a chair, also referred to as a chairperson. Debaters should always start their speeches by acknowledging both the chair and the audience. A male chair is usually referred to as Mr. Chairman; a female chair as Madame Chair. A common way of starting a debating speech is therefore, “Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,” or “Madame Chair, ladies and gentlemen.” It is the duty of the chair to call each speaker in turn. For example, the chair might introduce the first speaker of the debate by saying, “It is now my pleasure to introduce the first speaker of the proposition team, Julie, to open her team’s case.” A suggested list of a chairperson’s duties is provided in Step 5, later in this chapter.

The following diagram shows the basic layout of a debate in this style.



Participants speak in order, alternating sides. The proposition team speaks first. The following diagram shows this.



Every debate has a result—one team wins and one team loses. There cannot be a draw. The result is decided and announced by the adjudicator—somebody who has watched and followed the debate carefully in order to decide the result. Adjudicators are not allowed to make random or arbitrary decisions—they must follow clear guidelines about what is, and is not, good debating. Of course, debaters and audience members will often disagree with an adjudicator’s decision, and sometimes adjudicators disagree with each other. However, this is part of the challenge of debating: to debate well enough that you can persuade *any* adjudicator that you deserve to win the debate.

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.

Although many good books divide their explanation into the traditional categories of style, content, and strategy, I have divided this book into what I consider to be the best three categories for teaching debating: Preparation, Rebuttal, and Style. The first two categories together cover content and strategy. The third category, as the name suggests, is the traditional category of style—it covers the way that you deliver your speech.

So let's begin!

# Preparation

## BEGINNER

### The Big Picture

To win a debate, you must do two things:

1. Give good reasons why your side of the motion is *true*, and
2. Show why your opposition's reasons are *wrong* (rebuttal).

We will discuss rebuttal in Chapter Two. For now, we are concerned with the first point.

Your group of prepared ideas about why your side of the motion is true is known as your *case*.

To prepare a case, you need to do three things:

1. Decide what the words of the motion mean *for the purposes of this debate*. This is known as your *definition*.
2. Think of some reasons why your side of the motion is true. These reasons are known as your *arguments*. As debaters, we try to join our arguments together into a single *case approach*.
3. Divide your arguments between your first and second speakers, so that each speaker knows what he or she has to present. This process is known as the *split*.

This chapter is about that preparation process. We start by discussing Step 1, the best way to find the *issue* of your debate, and how to *define* the words in the motion to reflect that issue. In Step 2, we examine the best way to develop your *overall case approach*. Once your team has decided on a case approach, in Step 3 you are ready to start developing your individual *arguments*. Step 4 explains the best way to divide those arguments between your first and second speakers: that is, it deals with the *split*. In Step 5, once your team has split the arguments, the first and second speakers are ready to prepare their *individual speeches*. Finally, we will examine some effective overall techniques for *team preparation*.

## Step 1: The Issue and Definition

### Finding the Battleground

All great historical battles had one thing in common: both sides came to the right address! This section is about Step 1 in your debate preparation, finding where the battleground should be (identifying the issue) and setting the battle at that location (defining the motion for the debate).

#### **FINDING THE ISSUE**

The first step in preparing any debate is working out the issue. Your team should agree on the issue before proceeding to *any* other preparation. Often, this will be very easy; the motion itself will tell you the issue. The first principle is simple: *where there is a clear issue, debate that issue!*

For example, let's take the motion "This House believes that the government should ban smoking." Wouldn't it be clever to say that "smoking" means "smoking marijuana"? Wouldn't it be crafty if "smoking" was a reference to campfires in National Parks? In a word,

no! Although these other issues might make for interesting debates on other occasions, the motion in this case clearly refers to tobacco smoking. This is how most people would read the motion, and this is therefore the issue that you should debate.

On other occasions, however, the issue will not be absolutely clear. The second principle of issue-spotting is that, in these cases, you need to *find the issue that is most obvious, most relevant, or most debatable*. Above all, remember to debate about an *issue*. For example, suppose you have the motion “This House believes that the carrot is better than the stick,” which is obviously intended to be a metaphor. If you read the motion literally, you would spend an entire debate discussing the pros and cons of carrots and sticks! In this case, the most debatable issue is whether incentive (the carrot) is more effective than the threat of punishment (the stick).

On rare occasions, there is no issue that appears most obvious, most relevant, or most debatable. For example, consider the motion “This House believes that it’s not whether you win or lose but how you play the game.” Is this a debate about sports? Or about life generally? The issue seems to be whether the means justify the ends. Is it therefore a debate about politics? Or perhaps even about whether terrorism is ever justified? The answer is given by a third principle: *where there is no obvious issue, you must choose an issue that the motion could refer to*. For example, any of the issues suggested above would be an acceptable interpretation of the motion. In this case, the best approach would probably be to select the general philosophical issue (whether the means justify the ends). This matches the general philosophical nature of the motion itself and minimizes the chance that you and your opposition will be debating about completely different issues. You can always use specific material (for example, sports or politics) as examples.

However, you should not *always* select the most general issue. For example, let’s take the motion “This House believes that big is beautiful.” The most general issue here is whether big things are better than small things, but there is really nothing to debate on this issue: the

entire debate would become a long list of big and small things that are “good” and “bad” respectively. In this case, you must choose another issue. For example, the issue could be whether we should welcome globalization (by which cultures, institutions, and economies become “big”). Alternatively, it could even be a debate about the role of advertising and popular culture on our self-images; the proposition team could argue, “Big is beautiful, so the government should ban unrealistic body images. This is the issue of the debate.” Instead of automatically choosing the most general issue, the better approach is to *select the issue that you consider most debatable from both sides*. Unfortunately, it is not possible to be any more specific than this.

There is one vital rule about unclear motions: *no matter how difficult the issue is to identify, you must **identify one issue and one issue only!*** For example, the motion “This House believes that big is beautiful” could be about globalization, or it could be about media portrayals of body images, *but it cannot be about both*. Each issue could provide a great debate, but a messy combination of issues will not. Pick one central issue and stick to it!

For example, consider one school debate on the motion “This House believes that two superpowers are better than one.” The proposition team debated about whether the world was more stable and peaceful with one political and military superpower (that is, the United States), or with two (that is, the situation during the Cold War, where both the United States and the Soviet Union were superpowers). The opposition team, however, tried to debate about many issues—their case ranged across issues as diverse as politics, economics, and pop culture, as they argued that having fewer of something is better than having more of that same thing. Apart from missing the real issue, the team had made a massive strategic mistake by trying to deal with more than one central issue.

Having decided on the general issue of the debate, it is time to decide on the specific and precise meaning of the motion: you need a definition.

## THE DEFINITION

### What Is the Definition?

It is impossible to debate without first understanding what the motion means. Therefore, both teams need to decide what they think the motion means *for the purposes of the debate*. This is known as *the definition*.

Not many debating motions involve complicated words. Therefore, the purpose of the definition is *not* to tell your audience, adjudicator, and opposition what a word means *in general*. Instead, the purpose of the definition is to explain what a word means *for your debate*. We examine the best ways of achieving this purpose below.

In all debates, the proposition team must present a definition of the motion: a clear statement of what the team understands the motion to mean. The first proposition speaker presents this definition early in his or her speech. (We will examine the structure of speeches in Step 5 of this chapter.) Essentially, by defining the motion, the first proposition speaker is saying, “We think that this is what the motion means for the purposes of our debate. We think that *both* teams should debate on the basis of this meaning.”

In some circumstances (explained later), the opposition team may disagree with the proposition team’s definition. In that case, the opposition team is essentially saying, “No—we disagree with your suggested interpretation of the motion. We think that *both* teams should be debating on the basis of another meaning—the meaning given by our definition.” Therefore, before every debate, *both teams* need to prepare a definition of the motion.

### How to Define a Motion

Above all, both teams should try to be as clear and simple as possible when defining the motion. This involves a number of techniques.

*Define terms in the motion, not every single word.* There is nothing wrong with defining individual words. However, you should choose the terms and words to define. There are two reasons for this:

1. Defining many words (such as “a” or “the”) is both confusing and a waste of time (for example, there is no need to say, “We define the word ‘a’ as an impersonal indefinite article that precedes nouns commencing with consonants”!).
2. Often, words can take on very different meanings when they are grouped together. For example, suppose the motion is “This House believes that we should support political correctness.” “Political correctness,” of course, has a specific meaning as a term. However, if you define the two words separately, you will be arguing about whether it is good for a politician to be correct. This argument is clearly not the issue of the debate—in fact, a definition like this would be unreasonable.

*Do not define metaphorical terms literally.* Remember, the definition is not an exercise for its own sake—it is your chance to explain what your team understands the motion to mean. Therefore, if you believe a motion is metaphorical, you should define the motion with its metaphorical, not its literal, meaning. In the example “This House believes that the carrot is better than the stick,” we’ve already noted that this motion is a metaphor. It would make no sense, therefore, to define a carrot as (for example) “an orange vegetable.” Instead, you would need to explain that the word “carrot” is a metaphor for incentive, and “stick” for punishment.

*Do not make definitions too complicated.* This technique is sometimes expressed as a simple rule: *Do not give a dictionary definition.* Doing so creates a risk of defining words wrongly (for example, by defining metaphorical terms literally, or defining groups of words one word at a time). More importantly, though, it removes meaning from your definition. The adjudicator does not want to hear what a dictionary says about a word—the dictionary was not written with your motion

in mind! Instead, you should explain what you think the terms mean for the specific motion that you are debating. Of course, you may refer to a dictionary to determine the meaning of a word in the motion. However, you should then rephrase that definition as you want it to apply to your debate.

*Be prepared to give examples to explain your definition.* This is not necessary in most motions. However, in some motions, even your definition won't clarify the meaning of the words. For example, suppose the motion is "This House believes that the United Nations is too reluctant to stand up to dictatorship." In this case, no matter how carefully you choose words to define "stand up to dictatorship," you will not give an effective or tangible explanation to your audience. It is important *also* to provide some examples—such as, "For example, the United Nations can stand up to dictatorships by authorizing military intervention, by diplomatic pressure, by economic sanctions, and so forth."

## INTERMEDIATE

### **Limiting Motions by Definition**

In addition to defining the terms in a motion, it is often necessary or helpful to limit the scope of the entire debate. That is, it can be strategic to set certain issues as off limits in order to clarify the real issue of the debate. You can do this in one of two ways:

1. *Limit the scope of one of the words in the motion.* For example, consider the motion "This House believes that we are the lost generation." Suppose that the debate is occurring in the United States, and that the proposition wants to limit the motion to American youth. In



that case, “we” could be defined as “Americans born since 1985.” (The notion of “we” or “us” is discussed below.)

2. *If none of the words can be limited, state your limitation after defining the motion.* For example, consider the motion “This House believes that criminal sentences are too harsh.” In this case, for reasons that will be explained later, it may be reasonable to limit the debate to the developed world. Why? Because it may be difficult (although not impossible) to argue that many criminal sentences delivered in parts of the developing world (such as public beheadings) are not too harsh. In this case, you could define all of the relevant terms in the motion, then say words to the effect of “we limit this debate to the developed world.”

You will often have some discretion in limiting the definition. For example, in the previous motion, the proposition team could choose between limiting the debate to the developed world or to the United States. However, *any limiting must be reasonable*. You are not permitted to do what is termed as *time setting* or *place setting*. (This is just one specific part of a general rule: *the definition as a whole must be reasonable*. We will examine this shortly.)

*Time setting* means taking a general motion and limiting it to a specific time, past or future. For example, when defining the criminal sentencing motion used previously, it would be time setting to say “we limit this debate to the early 18th century.” It is obviously not time setting to say “we limit this debate to the present day,” because the motion is clearly intended to be about the present time. However, while it would not be time setting, such a statement would be unnecessary.

*Place setting* means taking a general motion and setting it in a specific place that is different from that which is plainly intended. For example, if a debate was occurring in the United States on the motion “This House would outlaw mandatory sentencing,” it would not be place setting to limit the definition to the United States. However, if the proposition team in such debate said, “We limit this debate to man-

datory sentencing in Australia,” they would be place setting. Essentially, you can avoid place setting by thinking carefully about the context of the motion.

If the proposition team does time set or place set, the opposition team may rebut the definition. This kind of rebuttal is discussed in Chapter Two.

## **The Need for a Neutral Definition**

The definition is provided by the proposition team, and can be rebutted by the opposition team. (See Chapter Two: Rebuttal and the Section Definitional Rebuttal.) Unfortunately, some debaters think that, just because they supply the definition, they can make the definition as one-sided as they like. This is absolutely untrue, and is the cause of most of the problems with definitions.

The simple rule is this: *when your team is defining the motion, imagine that you are a neutral onlooker, not somebody participating in the debate.* Don't worry about how to win the debate at this stage—just figure out what the motion means!

A biased definition can be caused by any of the following:

- Defining certain terms in the motion unfairly,
- Limiting the motion unfairly,
- Refusing to limit a motion that could be unfair if it was not limited (for example, the criminal sentencing motion above),
- Any other crafty device that has the effect of weighting the motion in one team's favor.

On a technical level (which novice debaters do not need to remember), biased definitions usually (but not always) cause one of two types of unfair arguments: truisms and tautologies. Put simply, a truistic definition creates a one-sided argument; a tautological definition prevents any argument at all.

*A tautology is an argument that is true by logic.* That is, it does not matter what your opinions are, you cannot possibly argue against it. For example, consider the motion “This House believes that we should break a bad law.” If the proposition defines bad law as “a law that is impossible to obey,” that team will argue, “We should break laws if those laws are impossible to obey.” Apart from missing the issue (whether we are obliged to obey unjust laws), this team is arguing a tautology. Why? Because if the proposition’s definition is accepted, the motion is true *by definition*: the opposition team cannot possibly argue that we should obey laws that are impossible to obey. Such a definition defeats the purpose of debating in the first place.

*A truism is an argument that you cannot be expected to oppose* (as opposed to a tautology, which is *impossible* to oppose). For example, consider one school debate on the motion “This House believes that consumerism is today’s religion.” One opposition team defined “religion” quite literally, and proceeded to argue, “Consumerism is not today’s religion because it does not give an understanding of the fundamental nature of life and the universe.” This was a truism; *logically*, an proposition team could say that consumerism *does* provide religious insight, but it would be very hard-pressed to justify its argument! Therefore, the opposition team’s definition was unreasonable. This problem would have been avoided if the opposition team had taken a neutral approach to identifying the issue of the debate (that is, the importance of consumerism in modern society).

Similarly, consider one debate on the motion “This House believes that we should pay more attention to the environment.” The proposition team defined “the environment” as meaning essentially “the political, economic, and social environment of the state.” Under that definition, the proposition was essentially arguing “we should pay more attention to the important issues that affect us.” This is a truism—quite apart from missing the clear issue of the debate, it is almost impossible to expect the opposition team to argue that we should not pay more attention to such issues.

Often, debaters define motions unreasonably *by accident*. That is, they do not mean to define their opponents out of the debate, but they confuse the definition with an opportunity to present an argument. For example, consider the motion “This House would abolish the death penalty.” The proposition team may want to argue that the death penalty is an unfair and arbitrary form of punishment. However, if the proposition team *defines* the death penalty in this way, it is technically saying that the death penalty is bad *by definition*. In simple terms, the proposition would be implying—if taken literally—that any form of execution that is somehow not “unfair and arbitrary” is, by definition, not part of the debate. This is clearly unreasonable; if that definition were correct, the opposition team would have nothing to argue.

Put simply, *if you define your opponents out of the debate, your definition is considered unreasonable, and you will almost always lose*. Your opposition will, of course, need to challenge your definition, which is explained in Chapter Two: Rebuttal.

There is another unfair advantage that can be gained from the definition, too. What happens if the proposition team defines the motion so that there are two fair sides to argue, but gives the motion a very different meaning to what it plainly has? In other words, what happens when the proposition provides a balanced definition, but one that is better suited to another motion? For example, suppose the motion was “This House believes that we should not support marriage.” The issue of this debate is clear: whether the institution of marriage should be supported (which, presumably, could be taken to refer to support in general, support formally by government tax policy, etc.). If the proposition team defined “marriage” as corporate mergers or the marriage of companies, they have still set an evenhanded debate; there are arguments for and against supporting corporate mergers. However, this definition is *not reasonably close to the plain meaning of the words of the motion*. This kind of definition is not allowed: if the issue of the debate is clear, you must debate that issue!

Overall, the simple approach is this: if, when you first get a motion, you ask yourself, “how can we use the definition to our advantage?” you will run a very real risk of creating an unfair definition, either because it’s unreasonable or because you have chosen a definition far from the motion’s plain meaning. If you ask, “What is this debate supposed to be about?” and define the motion on that basis, you will have a much greater chance of providing a fair definition. *When it comes to the definition, you have more chance of winning the debate the less you worry about your side of the motion.*

## The Right of Definition

The definition becomes most complicated when the two teams each have a different interpretation of the motion. We will examine the best approach to this situation in much more detail in the chapter on rebuttal. For now, we will ask simply, “which team’s definition will be accepted as the ‘correct’ definition for the debate?”

There are two very different rules that may apply to definitions:

1. No exclusive right of definition, or
2. An exclusive right of definition.

The World Schools Debating Championships have an exclusive right of definition. If possible, you should find out which rule applies in your own competition.

### **NO EXCLUSIVE RIGHT**

Where there is no exclusive right of definition, *either* team has the right to define the motion. (That is, either team has the right to define the motion if the two teams have a substantially different definition. As we will examine in more detail later, the opposition team should not define the motion if it agrees with the proposition team’s definition.)

In this case, the adjudicator must resolve any definitional dispute by considering which team's definition is:

1. More reasonable, and/or
2. Closer to the real issue of the motion.

### **More Reasonable**

We have already discussed the concept of a reasonable definition; it is a definition that allows both teams a reasonable case to argue. For example, truisms and tautologies (discussed above) are both possible results of an unreasonable definition.

### **Closer to the Real Issue of the Motion**

To show that your definition is closer to the real issue of the motion, you must (obviously) show what that issue is, or should be.

The easiest way to do this is by reference to current affairs, essentially saying, "Our definition reflects the real debate occurring in society." For example, consider the motion suggested earlier "This House believes that big is beautiful." Assume that your opposition has defined the motion as relating to the fashion industry's perpetuation of unrealistic stereotypes, whereas you have defined it as relating to globalization and regionalism. You could argue that your definition was closer to the real issue of the motion by arguing that globalization is a more prominent issue in society than fashion stereotypes. It is important to use recent examples to show that your chosen issue is more relevant and topical in our society. For example, recent protests about globalization would be useful in showing that your team had chosen the real issue of the motion suggested earlier.

Of course, this doesn't mean that you should *always* pick the biggest or most newsworthy issue when defining your motion. Ultimately, as with so many things in debating, it depends on the context. If the

plain meaning of the words of the motion relate to an issue that is not particularly big or newsworthy, you should still debate about that issue.

Another effective (and rather obvious) method of showing that your definition is closer to the real meaning of the motion is to make reference to the specific words of the motion themselves. For example, suppose that the motion was “This House believes that college sports teams should not accept corporate sponsorship” and that your team had defined the motion as relating to sports *teams*, but your opponents had defined the motion as relating to sports teams *and individual players on those teams* (for example, signing individual sponsorship contracts). You could legitimately argue that your definition was the real meaning of the motion on the basis that the motion was specifically limited to school sports *teams*. This seems like an obvious point to make, but it can be easy to forget to refer to the actual words of the motion when those words could be of great assistance.

Two techniques deserve special mention because they are simultaneously so popular yet so ineffective. The first is the dictionary argument: “Our definition is closer to the meaning of the motion because Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary says so.” This approach is almost entirely useless because, as explained earlier, the dictionary was not written with your debate in mind. Further, the approach can lead to a clash of the dictionaries, as your *Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* meets my *Random House College Dictionary* head to head! It should be obvious that this kind of mind-numbing argument does not bring either team any closer to showing the real meaning of the words in the motion, so should be avoided. The second ineffective technique is very similar: to refer to a hypothetical person on the street, or reasonable person. As with the dictionary definition, the logical counter is for your opponents to refer to a hypothetical person of their own which, as with the dictionary definition, helps neither team.

Obviously, it is entirely acceptable to show that your definition is better by showing that it is *both* more reasonable and closer to the real meaning of the motion. For example, consider again the motion “This

House believes that consumerism is today's religion," with the opposition team having defined religion as "an institution that seeks to give an understanding of the fundamental nature of life and the universe." The proposition team could argue both that the opposition's definition is unreasonable to the proposition team, and that there is no issue in our society about whether consumerism gives spiritual enlightenment; the issue is the extent to which we are influenced by consumerism in our everyday lives.

## THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT

When there is no exclusive right of definition, there are two tests (as explained above):

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. "Exclusive" does not mean "absolute"; the right is qualified by very similar questions to those above:

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?*

As long as the adjudicator is satisfied that the answer to each question is yes, the proposition team's definition is the definition for the debate; it may not be legitimately challenged by the opposition team.

To show the difference in approach, let's return to the motion "This House believes that big is beautiful." In all likelihood (depending, of course, on how it was argued), the globalization interpretation would win the definitional issue over the media stereotypes interpretation if there were no exclusive right of definition, because globalization seems



to be a more topical issue. However, consider what would happen if the proposition team had an exclusive right of definition. It would define the motion as relating to whether the government should ban unrealistic body images in the media. The adjudicator would then ask our two questions. *First*, is this definition reasonable? Although it may take the opposition team by surprise, that is frankly their bad luck; it is reasonable because the opposition team has ample room to argue that the government should not censor advertising in this way. *Second*, is the definition reasonably close to the plain meaning of the words of the motion? Another way of asking this question is, “are the words of the motion reasonably capable of bearing the meaning that they have been given?” Again, the answer is yes; the proposition could reasonably link the notions of “big” and “beauty” to the issue of media and fashion stereotyping of body images.

Therefore, unlike the situation when there was no exclusive right of definition, the opposition team would have no grounds of complaint; it would need to argue under the proposition team’s definition. Strategies for dealing with this kind of situation will be examined in more detail later. However, it suffices to say that the proposition team must be aware when formulating its definition of whether it has an exclusive right of definition, precisely because it should know what tests its definition must satisfy.

## Triggers

Hopefully by now you understand the basic principles in finding the issue of the debate and in defining the motion to reflect that issue. You should also understand what makes a definition unreasonable.

We now examine some specific terms or notions that often cause difficulty when identifying an issue. These are known as *triggers*—when you see them in a motion, they should trigger you to take a particular approach. None of the triggers are actually rules of debating; they are not exceptions to the principles we examined earlier. Instead, they are

cases where teams can often find it particularly useful to consider some general guidelines.

At this point, we need to understand the concept of the *standard of proof*. The standard of proof is simply *what your team needs to prove in order to show that your side of the motion is true*. In a criminal trial, for example, the prosecution needs to prove the charge *beyond reasonable doubt*. In debating, each team's burden of proof will vary depending on each motion. Triggers can help identify that burden of proof, both in terms of *what* we need to prove, and to *what degree* we need to prove it.

## **TRIGGERS FOR WHAT YOUR TEAM NEEDS TO PROVE**

### **Should**

What does it mean if we *should* do something? We all have a general idea, but in debating, the word “should” has a specific meaning. Suppose somebody said, “We should shoot the unemployed because taxpayers could stop paying their welfare benefits.” Most of us would be appalled at that argument; even though it might be *practical*, it is wrong because it is not *moral*. Suppose, on the other hand, that somebody said, “The government should buy every citizen a Rolls Royce and a swimming pool.” Most of us would find this suggestion ridiculous as well; it might be kind and *moral* for the government to do that, but the government does not have the money to make it *practical*.

From these two extreme examples, we can see a more general principle: to say that something *should* be done is to say that there is a *moral and practical imperative* to do it. Therefore, in general, it is best to define *should* as “a moral and practical imperative.” As you develop your arguments, you need to show why your proposal is both morally and practically worth supporting.

For example, consider the motion “This House believes that compensation should be paid for the injustices committed by past genera-

tions.” A moral reason to do so might be that we have an obligation to right past wrongs—to compensate those who are disadvantaged today because of injustices suffered in the past. However, the proposition team should not stop there—it ideally should have practical arguments as well. For example, a practical reason to compensate such peoples might be to bring peace to troubled regions or to appease grievances.

Similarly, suppose we were debating “This House believes that governments should never intervene to save private companies.” A moral argument might be that it is wrong for governments to use taxpayer money to bail out managers and investors who have, in many cases, acted irresponsibly. A practical argument might be that governments that save private companies encourage reckless risk-taking in future; managers and investors may be less cautious in their decisions if they know the government will fix their mistakes.

Just because you have defined “should” as meaning “a moral and practical imperative,” you do not need to create your arguments as either “moral” or “practical.” You cannot ignore either the moral or the practical part of the motion, but you do not need to be able to identify which arguments are moral and which are practical. It is entirely acceptable to have arguments that seem to show your side of the motion both morally and practically. However, if you are having difficulty thinking of arguments, a moral and practical approach may help. For example, you could ask your teammates, “We have many reasons why our side is practically true—what are some moral reasons?”

### ***When Should Doesn't Mean a Moral and Practical Imperative***

Almost every motion that includes the word “should” is about whether something *should* occur because of moral or practical obligation. However, as explained earlier, the overall concern in defining any motion must be to identify the *issue*, and this approach inevitably leads to exceptions to the rule.

For example, consider the motion “This House believes that the new century should be better than the last.” What is the issue of this debate? Clearly, the issue is whether the 21st century *will be* better or worse (whatever that may mean) than the 20th century. Suppose, however, that your team defined “should” as “a moral and practical imperative.” In that case, you would be debating about whether we have a moral and practical imperative to make the next century better than the last—in other words, about whether humans should try to make the world a better place. This is simply not a meaningful issue for debate.

Another example is the motion “This House believes that we should envy our grandparents.” What are the issues of this debate? They appear to be:

1. Whether our grandparents’ era was preferable to our own, and/or
2. Whether it is better to be elderly than young.

However, if the teams interpret the word “should” to mean “a moral and practical imperative,” then they would be debating the benefits, if any, to be gained from envying our grandparents. The opposition team could raise inane arguments like, “Envy is an inherently destructive human emotion and is one of the Seven Deadly Sins. Therefore, we should never envy anybody.” This approach clearly defeats the issue of the motion. The teams should have realized that this motion was an exception to the usual use of the word “should.”

### ***When Other Words Mean “a Moral and Practical Imperative”***

Many issues in our society reduce to the fundamental question of whether something should or should not be done, so it is not surprising that many motions refer to this question without necessarily using the word “should.”

For example, consider a debate that occurred on the motion “This House believes that college education is a right.” The proposition team said: “A right is something that the government has an obligation to

protect. Since high tuition prohibits some people from going to college, the government has a moral and practical obligation to reduce tuition by significantly increasing funding: through loans, scholarships, or direct financial support for universities. The issue is whether government spending on college education should be significantly increased.”

The opposition team, however, was personally opposed to arguing against an increase in government funding. Rather than “biting the bullet” and “playing hardball” (which will be discussed in more detail later), the team decided to define the motion as a question of fact: “The issue is whether tertiary education is a right. A right is something that is protected for all. We agree with the proposition team that fees prevent everybody from having access to higher education. Therefore, higher education is not a right because it is not currently recognized as a right in our society.” In effect, the opposition team argued a *parallel case* to that provided by the proposition; they interpreted the motion to make essentially the same argument as the other team. (Parallel cases will be considered in more detail in Chapter Two: Rebuttal.)

The clear issue of the debate ought to have been whether all of us should be able to attend college if we wish; in other words, the proposition’s approach was correct (and the opposition’s was not). Although the word “should” did not appear in the motion, the teams should have defined the motion to refer to the issue of whether the government has moral and practical imperative to provide significantly subsidized higher education. This was the clear issue presented in the wording of the motion.

One important type of debate that falls into this category is whether something is “justified.” This category will be further discussed below.

## **Too**

Many motions ask us whether there is *too much* of something. For example, “This House believes that there is too much money in sports” or “This House believes that we pay too much attention to television.”

Motions that use the word “too” inevitably require you to show three things:

1. That there is an abundance (in the case of “too much”) or a scarcity (in the case of “too little”),
2. That the harm outweighs the benefits,
3. That the abundance or scarcity *causes* the harm.

For example, consider the motion “This House believes that there is too much money in sports.” Novice debaters sometimes approach this motion by arguing, “There is lots of money in sports, and athletes often do not play with good sportsmanship. Therefore, there is too much money in sports.” It is clear what has been missed is an explanation of *how* the amount of money in sports *causes* the poor sportsmanship. If this explanation is not provided, it is all too easy for the opposition team to argue that poor sportsmanship is not dependent on money in sports and that poor sportsmanship exists in amateur sports as well.

## **Failed**

Many motions ask us to judge whether something has or has not failed. For example, “This House believes that the United Nations has failed” or “This House believes that capitalism has failed.” These debates will inevitably become very unclear unless some test is used to determine *when* failure can be said to have occurred. In other words, the concept of failure presents difficulties that cannot be overcome merely by a careful definition of the word “failed”; you also need a specific test that relates to the issue of the debate.

There are two standard types of test: a failure to meet expectations and a failure to meet certain external criteria.

1. *A failure to meet expectations.* This is particularly useful where the organization itself had stated goals. It is rare to debate about a movement or organization with clearly stated goals. However, in such a case, you could use these concerns—legitimate community

expectations, essentially—to judge the success of that movement or organization.

2. *A failure to meet certain external criteria.* This is a more common approach—using criteria designed and applied by you and your team in preparation. For example, consider a motion suggested earlier “This House believes that feminism has failed.” Feminism has never had a single set of stated objectives, so it is necessary to impose some criteria. For example, the teams could say “the issue is whether feminism has brought real and substantial equality of outcome between the genders; that is, whether its reforms have substantially removed discrimination against women or merely made the discrimination less obvious.”

Like the definition, criteria must be evenhanded. If they are not, your team will run the very real chance of arguing a truism and losing the debate. For example, consider another motion suggested earlier, “This House believes that capitalism has failed.” If the proposition team set its criterion for failure as “failed to eliminate poverty,” it will be arguing a truism (explained earlier): “‘Failure’ means failure to eliminate poverty. Poverty exists under capitalist systems. Therefore, capitalism has failed.” If the proposition’s interpretation of “failed” in this case is correct, it must automatically win the argument. All other things being equal, this is a pretty sure way to *lose* the debate!

One further question must often be asked: “*failed whom?*” For example, consider the motion “This House believes that feminism has failed.” This could either mean “failed society” or “failed women.” In this particular case, there is probably no correct answer. However, each team should nonetheless make a decision about which approach to adopt. Again, the rule about evenhandedness applies—you cannot interpret the relevant group to make your argument easier to win. For example, if the motion was “This House believes that capitalism has failed,” the opposition team cannot say, “failed means only ‘failed

the rich”’—this would leave the proposition team almost nothing to argue!

Finally, there is an issue of where such criteria fit in. The simple answer is that, where such criteria are used to provide meaning for a word in the motion (as here), they form part of the definition. We will examine this issue in more detail in Step 2, “The Case Approach.”

## **Big, Red Ball Motions**

Of all technical debating terminology, “big, red ball” is probably the most mystifying. However, the concept itself is quite simple.

Suppose I hold a certain object and, for no reason in particular, we debate the motion “This House believes that the object is a big, red ball.” What would the proposition team need to prove? Quite obviously, they would need to show three things:

1. That the object is big, *and*
2. That it is red, *and*
3. That it is a ball.

What would the opposition team need to show? Clearly, they would need to show that it is not a big, red ball. They could do this by showing:

1. That the object is not big, *or*
2. That it is not red, *or*
3. That it is not a ball.

The important point here is that the opposition team may disprove *any, all, or any combination* of the elements that the proposition was required to prove.

“Okay,” you’re probably thinking, “but how often do we debate about big, red balls?” The answer, of course, is never, but many motions conform to the same formula.



The principle of a big, red ball motion is neatly summarized by this excerpt from *Black Adder* (Episode 1, Series 2, written by Richard Curtis and Ben Elton).

**Edmund:** I seek information about a Wisewoman.

**Crone:** Ah, the Wisewoman . . . the Wisewoman.

**Edmund:** Yes, the Wisewoman.

**Crone:** Two things, my lord, must thee know of the Wisewoman.  
First, she is . . . a woman, and second, she is. . .

**Edmund:** . . . wise?

**Crone:** You do know her then?

As Edmund realized, the principle of big, red ball motions is not particularly difficult to grasp!

Consider the motion “This House believes that we should limit population growth by legislation.” What must the proposition team show in this case? Clearly, two things:

1. That there is a need to limit population growth, *and*
2. That we should use legislation (not merely, for example, education) to do so.

The opposition team can show *either* that there is no need to limit population growth, or that legislation is an inappropriate means of doing so (or both).

The main concern for opposition teams in this situation is that they do not choose a largely irrelevant part of the motion to refute. For example, consider the motion, “This House believes that London deserved to be awarded the 2012 Olympics.” The opposition team could, technically, refute this argument by saying, “We agree that London is an ideal city to host the Olympics, but the city needs more time to improve its accommodation and its transport infrastructure. There-

fore, London should have been awarded the 2016 Olympics instead.” However, this argument concedes most of the issue of the debate (London’s suitability to host the Olympics), and is a weak argument because it focuses on a relatively insignificant detail (a delay of four years). The message should hopefully be clear: although the opposition team technically may refute even the smallest part of a big, red ball motion, it will generally be more strategic to choose the most significant issue or issues—this is where the real debate lies.

## **TRIGGERS FOR THE DEGREE TO WHICH YOUR TEAM NEEDS TO PROVE ITS ARGUMENT**

We have considered a number of triggers for *what* you need to show in order to properly support your side of the motion. We now need to consider some triggers for *how much* (or how often) you need to show something is true in order to support your side of the motion properly.

### **General Truth**

This is most relevant for motions that are *positive* rather than *normative*; that is, motions that ask what *is*, rather than what *should be*. It is particularly relevant for motions that call for some comparison. For example, “This House believes that it is better to be smart than to be kind” or “This House believes that computers are more important than books.”

The question is this: does the proposition team need to show that the motion is *always* true, or *occasionally* true, or true *more often than not*, or something else? The answer is that, in most cases, the proposition team must show the motion to be *generally true* (or true “in general”). The opposition team must show, therefore, that the motion is generally not true. It is not possible to place a percentage value on the proportion of cases in which something must be true in order to be considered generally true.

Let's consider the motion suggested earlier: "This House believes that it is better to be smart than to be kind." Both teams should interpret the motion as "This House believes that it is *generally true to say* that it is better to be smart than to be kind," and develop their arguments on that basis.

This rule should not change the way that teams approach a motion; whether they realize it or not, most teams argue about general truth in most cases anyway. However, it is an important reminder that it is *not* enough to say that the motion is *sometimes* true, or *sometimes* not true. The classic case of this error is the use of Adolf Hitler as an easy example. Let's return to the motion "This House believes that it is better to be smart than to be kind." The opposition team might argue, "Hitler was brilliant, but very unkind. Look at all the suffering that he caused. Therefore, it is better to be kind than to be smart." However, this approach is wrong. Although it is undoubtedly true that it was better to be kind than smart in the isolated case of Hitler, the argument does nothing to show that it is *generally* better to be kind than to be smart. Both teams' approach must instead be to develop arguments that apply *in general*, and then use examples that are not extreme evidence of one side or the other. We will return to the process of developing arguments later.

Incidentally, Hitler is a remarkably common example in debates about all manner of issues, perhaps because he is simultaneously a very well known historical figure and such an obvious incarnation of evil that he can (apparently) be deployed to win any argument! This approach is, unfortunately, very weak. Hitler and his regime were very extreme in almost every way. It is highly unlikely, therefore, that any issue, argument, or perspective today would be "like Hitler." Of course, this does not mean that you can never use Hitler or Nazi Germany in debates. At times, you may find that a *careful* and *analytical* explanation of the Third Reich will help your argument. However, most debaters who use Hitler as an example do not provide this analysis—instead, they use his name as a simple analogy for all manner of supposed evils.

If your argument relies on a simple mention of an extreme example, you need to find another example. If you can't find another example, find another argument!

## Absolutes

The most obvious exception to the rule about general truth above occurs in motions that specify an absolute. For example, “This House believes that all adults should have to vote,” “This House believes that we are all feminists now,” or “This House believes that everyone should have the right to a college education.”

What does this require the proposition team to show? Clearly, we cannot expect the proposition team to prove the motion in *every imaginable case*. This would be unreasonable and would ignore the real issue posed by the motion.

For example, in the motion “This House believes that all adults should have to vote,” it is not enough for the opposition to say, “people in comas should not have to vote.”<sup>1</sup> In the motion “This House believes that everyone should have the right to a college education,” it is not enough for the opposition to say, “illiterate people should not have the right to a college education.” Clearly, the opposition team in each case is avoiding the clear issue of the debate; compulsory voting (in the first motion) and government subsidies of college education (the second). They have merely raised *insignificant minorities*, which the proposition team is not reasonably required to oppose.

Therefore, the rule for absolute motions is that *the proposition team must show that the motion is true for every case except for an insignificant minority*. The proposition team does not have to list every conceivable insignificant case and then show that the motion is true in that case! Instead, its general arguments must apply to every case that is not an insignificant minority. For example, in the motion “This House

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1 Philips J, Hooke J (1994). *The Debating Book*, UNSW Press, Sydney at page 75.

believes that all adults should have to vote,” the proposition team does not need to show why men must vote, why women must vote, why Native Americans must vote, why retirees must vote, and so on. It is enough to show that people’s opinions are important enough to require them legally to be expressed; this is a general argument that applies to all cases except the insignificant minority.

How, then, do you determine whether a particular group is an insignificant minority? You must do so in the context of the issue being debated. For example, we saw earlier that illiterate people were an insignificant minority for a debate about access to college education. Another debate, however, might be about the government’s responsibility to the illiterate. In that case, illiterate people are anything but an insignificant minority; they are the whole issue! Essentially, as has been emphasized repeatedly, the best approach is simply to ask, “what is the issue of this debate?” and *debate that issue!*

It may seem strange, but this can mean that some absolute motions do not have any insignificant minority. In other words, in some debates, “all” means just that. The best example is probably the motion “This House believes that the death penalty is always wrong.”<sup>2</sup> The proposition team may try to argue “the death penalty can never be justified, except in the case of unrepentant mass killers.” That is, the proposition may consider unrepentant mass killers to be an insignificant minority for the purposes of the motion. However, they are clearly wrong; the whole issue of the debate is whether the death penalty is *ever* acceptable. By making an exception, the proposition team in this case is effectively conceding the debate.

## “Justify” Motions

Many motions ask whether something is justified, or justifiable. These are usually absolute motions by another name.

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2 Philips J, Hooke J (1994). *The Debating Book*, UNSW Press, Sydney at pages 75 and 76.

The first question is whether such motions are *positive* or *normative*, that is, whether they ask what *is* or what *should be*. For example, to return to a familiar theme, suppose that the motion was “This House believes that the death penalty is justified.” Does the proposition team have to show that some countries *do* justify the death penalty (for example, the United States), or that the death penalty *should* be justified? Clearly, the first option does not provide for any debate; if it were the correct approach, the proposition could win the argument simply by showing that the United States (as one example) justifies the death penalty. Instead, “justify” debates are really “should” debates in disguise. Therefore, all of the guidelines about “should” debates, set out earlier, must apply. This includes the general requirement for teams to deal with both the moral and the practical part of the issue. (The only minor difference is that justify motions tend to ask whether something is morally and practically *acceptable*, rather than whether there is a moral and practical *imperative*. The answer makes no difference in practice.)

The second question is the extent to which the proposition team must show the motion to be true.

Of course, as always, much depends on the context. Usually, the word “justify” appears only in the context of debates about generally distasteful issues, rather than in the context of neutral policy suggestions. Therefore, the correct approach generally is to treat “justify” debates as falling into the absolute category. If the motion is “This House believes that terrorism is justified,” the proposition team is required to show *at least a significant minority* of cases where terrorism is morally and practically acceptable. That is, the proposition team could legitimately say, for example, “We support terrorism when terrorists are willing to negotiate, when they have political objectives, and when they represent a significant mass of public opinion. We will therefore show that terrorism was or is justified in the cases of the IRA (Irish Republican Army), the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization), and the ANC (African National Congress), but we are willing to concede that terrorism is unacceptable in the cases of Al-Qaeda, the

Aum Supreme Truth (a Japanese organization), or the ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, a Basque separatist group).”

It is important to remember that, in some cases, a “justify” debate only involves one particular case or consideration. In motions like this, it is obviously nonsensical to consider whether the proposition team needs to show general truth, or a significant minority, or any other proportion; the team must show that the case in question is justified. For example, consider the motion “This House believes that the cost of space exploration is justified.” It is nonsensical to ask whether the proposition team must show that the cost is justifiable in general, or in a significant minority of cases, because there is only one overall cost (unlike, for example, terrorist groups mentioned earlier). Therefore, the proposition team must show that the cost is worth it, and the opposition team must show that the cost is not worth it. In essence, this reduces to a simple “should” debate in disguise. As always, you need to carefully identify the issue of the debate that you face.

## **The Confusing Words “We” and “Our”**

For words so common in our language, “we” and “our” can cause surprising problems in debates. It is impossible to give a simple definition of “we” here, precisely because the word can describe so many different groups, depending on its context.

For example, in many motions, “we” refers to a group of people. In the motion “This House believes that we are the lost generation,” “we” obviously refers to a particular generation. Given that the debate is probably occurring between young people, the generation in question might be, for example, “people aged 21 or younger.” In the motion “This House believes that we pay too much attention to sports,” “we” must refer to society as a whole. In the motion “This House believes that we should stand up to our employers,” “we” obviously refers to employees.

However, what about motions like “This House believes that we should outlaw smoking,” or “This House believes that we should bring back the death penalty”? Clearly, the proposition team must argue in favor of actions that cannot be achieved solely by groups of people; they require governments. In motions such as these, “we” is usually defined either as the government, or as the people acting through their government.

Whether “we” refers to institutions or to groups of people, there is a further question: how widely should “we” be defined? This is essentially the same consideration as with limiting the scope of the debate, discussed earlier. For example, “we” could refer to institutions or groups of people around the world, or in a particular region, a particular country, and so on. Whatever you decide, it is important to make the scope clear when defining the words “we” or “our.”

## **TRIGGERS FOR DEVELOPING YOUR CASE**

The overall approach to developing your case will be discussed in more detail later. However, there are two triggers in particular that provide the general thrust your arguments should take.

### **Comparison Debates**

Many debates call for a comparison. For example, “This House believes that it is better to be smart than to be kind,” “This House believes that NATO is a better human rights defender than the United Nations,” or “This House believes that the media is more powerful than the church.”

As a general rule, what the proposition team must show in these debates is that one is greater than the other in some way (for example, greater benefit, power, etc.). However, the opposition position is less clear. Technically, an opposition team could refute a comparison motion in two ways; either show the one is *lesser* than the other, or that



the two are *equal*. For example, if the motion is “This House believes that the media is more powerful than the church,” the opposition team could refute the motion either by arguing “the church is more powerful than the media” or “the church and the media are equally powerful.” However, *negating a comparison motion by equality leads to a very weak argument!* Don’t do it! In the motion above, the opposition team should argue “the church is more powerful than the media,” and *not* argue that “the church and the media are equally powerful.”

Why is this? A tightrope walker makes for a useful analogy. Why is everybody amazed at the skills of a tightrope walker? Because he or she is able to tread very carefully along a very narrow line, without overbalancing on either side. In logical terms, this is exactly what a team attempts when it negates a comparison motion by equality: it is forced to balance its arguments very finely, while at the same time conceding most of the proposition team’s case. For example, in the motion suggested above, a weak opposition would argue, “We totally agree with all the proposition’s very good reasons that the media is very powerful. However, those reasons are *perfectly counterbalanced* by our arguments about the power of the church.” The opposition team is trying to *tie* the argument rather than *win* it, and it is an easy way to lose the debate! The opposition team should play hardball instead, as we’ll discuss below. Paradoxically, this tactic may leave the opposition team with a more difficult case to argue, but a case that will ultimately be more successful.

The final question triggered by such comparison debates, as with debates about failure, is “*for whom?*” For example, the motion “This House believes that NATO is a better human rights defender than the United Nations” begs the question: *better for whom?* For those having their human rights abused? For the international community generally? For the member-nations of each organization? There is no general answer to this question. However, you should answer this question, and make your approach clear at the outset.

## Debates About a Particular Age or Generation

Some motions ask about a characteristic of our times. Such motions are often include the words “age” or “generation.” For example, “This House believes that we are the lost generation,” or “This House believes that it is the age of Uncle Sam.” Other motions are “age” motions in disguise. For example, the motion “This House believes that the year is 1984” could be about issues of privacy in our society. That is, this implication of the motion (one interpretation, anyway) is that there is something special or different about this age and its respect (or lack of respect) for privacy.

When faced with a motion that suggests that there is something special about our particular point in history, you should ask a few key questions. The answers to these questions are vital for developing your case (discussed later). As a general rule, you should ask the following questions:

- *Why would it be the particular age or generation?*

This question directs your thinking to the issue of the debate. For example, if the motion were “This House believes that we are the lost generation,” you would start to ask, “In what ways is our generation ‘lost?’”

- *Why would it be the particular age or generation now?*

This question is easiest to overlook, but it is vital for developing your case. In the lost generation debate, for example, it is not a strong argument to say, “Our generation are the youth. Youth have always been lost—it is a natural part of growing up.” Why is this argument weak? Because it denies the key implication of this type of motion: that there is something *special* or *different* about our particular age.

A better answer might be, “Our generation is growing up at a time of unprecedented commercialism, which is often targeted exclusively at the youth market.”

- *What characterizes this age or generation?*

This question develops your team's answer to the second question. "Okay," you ask yourself, "so the relevant point about now is mass marketing through the mass media. So what?"

One answer might be, "Whereas previous generations were raised by their parents and communities, our generation is being raised by multinational mass-marketing and MTV. This leaves us lost because commercialism is self-interested, whereas previous generations were raised more by those with more benevolent ideals." This may not be true, of course, but it is a valid argument that answers the fundamental questions of "why now?" and "what characterizes our age in particular?"

- *When did the age or generation start?*

This question is necessary both to give further clarity to the issue of what characterizes this era, and to ensure again that you are not arguing merely about characteristics that have always existed (for example, the argument that "youth have always been lost").

The answer to this last question will often be that it started as a gradual process between certain years. That is, you do not always need to give a single defining date as the start of the generation. For example, in the case above, your team could answer, "The age of mass marketing to adolescents has been a gradual process reflecting the emergence of the teen as a distinct consumer. However, it has been particularly prevalent from and throughout the 1990s, and has rapidly increased with the growth of the Internet."

## **TRIGGERS FOR DISCLAIMERS**

The world is full of fine print, and debating is no exception. Some cases can be clarified and improved immensely by the addition of a few sentences (and no more) of disclaimer after the definition is provided. Two triggers in particular bear mentioning.

## Speculative Debates

Many debates relate to issues about the way the future may or may not be. For example, “This House believes that the 21st century will be better than the 20th century” or “This House believes that it’s all downhill from here.”

Clearly, such debates must be speculative in nature. However, to prevent your opponents, audience, or adjudicators from asking, “But how do you *know* that the world will be like that?” the simplest point to make is that the debate is a speculative debate; it concerns events that relate to the future. Since neither team has a crystal ball, both teams will be called upon to *project current trends* into the future (rather than to wildly speculate).

## Sensitivities

Debating concerns controversial issues, so it should be no surprise that many motions may arouse strong passions among debaters, audience members, and adjudicators alike. For example, after one World Schools Championships debate in which a team had advocated medical testing on animals, an audience member told the team, “If I had a gun, I would shoot you!” (thus proving a strong case for the otherwise unrelated issue of gun control).

The problem for debaters is not merely one of life or death; as an English soccer manager once put it, “It is much more serious than that.” Aside from wanting to leave a generally positive impression, debaters must realize that they are not adjudicated by machines; they are adjudicated by humans who, despite their best attempts to the contrary, may be unduly swayed by the emotive nature of some motions.

Therefore, if your team finds itself on the moral low-ground of a particular motion (for example, justifying child labor), or on territory that *some* would consider morally dubious (for example, arguing either for or against the legalization of abortion), it is wise to invest in “moral

insurance.” In essence, this means adding a simple reminder just after the definition that:

1. This is an emotive motion on which many people have legitimately strong feelings, and
2. Both teams must nonetheless take a rational and objective look at the issues involved.

This kind of disclaimer should distance your team from the issues personally and encourage an intelligent weighing of the appropriate questions in the debate.

If, on the other hand, you find yourself on the undoubted moral high ground (for example, arguing against child labor), you would not need moral insurance. While it would be a mistake to devote your case to a purely emotive appeal, there is no reason to voluntarily relinquish most observers’ initial leanings toward your side of the motion!

Finally, if it makes sense to *start* the debate in a sensitive and objective manner, it makes sense to *continue* the debate on those terms as well. That is, becoming angry, arrogant, patronizing, or unnecessarily intolerant will do you no favors with anybody, least of all your adjudicators. For example, if you have the privilege to debate at the World Schools Championships against the team from Israel, it would be a terrible tactical mistake to say (as one speaker is rumored to have said), “Just because you’re Jewish doesn’t mean you know more about the Holocaust than we do.” While undoubtedly logical, this kind of statement reduces the level of debate and the feeling of competitive respect that should ideally exist. Similarly, for example, any reference to a minority in the singular form, or with massive generalization (for example, the statement in one school debate in Australia that “the Australian Aborigine is a very spiritual person”) seems patronizing and stereotypical in the extreme. Such statements should be avoided completely.

In short, the best thing about debating is that it provides a forum to discuss important issues in a mature way. Debaters forget this at their peril!

## Step 2: The Case Approach

Having identified the issue of the debate and translated that issue into a workable definition, it is now time to develop the case. This chapter examines the best way to develop the *overall approach* that your team will adopt to arguing your side of the issue. Specific subsidiary issues (for example, the development of individual arguments) will be discussed in more detail in following chapters.

### BEGINNER

## The Theme or Caseline

Experience shows that the most successful arguments are those that can be expressed with a simple and unifying idea. It is important to give your audience many *individual* reasons (arguments) that support your side of the motion. However, if possible, it is also very helpful to show your audience, adjudicator, and opposition the big picture of your case. This is the purpose of a *theme* (also known as a *caseline*).

A theme is a single, concise sentence that explains the main idea behind your case.

Ideally, a theme will explain two things:

- *Why* you say the motion is (or is not) true, and
- *How* the motion is (or is not) true.

For example, consider the motion “This House believes that globalization is doing more harm than good.” A theme for the proposition team might be “globalization’s emphasis on economic competition advantages a few developed nations at the expense of the majority

of the world's population." Assuming that this statement reflects the proposition team's arguments, this is an effective theme (whether or not, of course, it is actually true). Specifically,

- It explains *why* the motion is said to be true: the proposition team opposes globalization because it "advantages a few developed nations at the expense of the majority of the world's population," and
- It explains *how* the motion is (or is not) true: through "globalization's emphasis on economic competition."

The simple approach to formulating a theme, therefore, is to ask, "Why is it true to say that our side of the motion is correct?" In our case, we would ask, "Why is it true to say that globalization is doing more harm than good?" An effective theme answers this question.

A recent example from the World Schools Championships illustrates both the value of having a theme and the importance of explaining the "why" and "how" aspects of a case. The motion was "This House believes that cultural treasures should be returned to their areas of origin," and the proposition's theme was "Cultural subjugation must end." This sentence is a succinct statement, and one that certainly assisted the clarity and consistency of the proposition case; in effect, the proposition was arguing that nations that retain cultural treasures are perpetuating "cultural subjugation," and this theme was a useful way of drawing every argument back to that central idea.

However, had the proposition theme answered "why" and "how," it would probably have been even more effective. In a sense, the proposition chose as their theme a sentiment that is largely uncontroversial; after all, few people would be in *favor* of continuing "cultural subjugation" (whatever that may mean), and it was very unlikely that the opposition team would take that approach (and, indeed, they did not). The bigger question of the debate was not *whether* cultural subjugation "must end" but *how and why* the retaining of cultural treasures amounts to such subjugation. For example, the proposition team might

instead have used a theme like this: “Cultural treasures were removed as an integral aspect of illegitimate colonial dominance, and their retention continues to confer unjustified benefits on colonial powers at the expense of their former colonies.” To be sure, this is much less catchy than the pithy “cultural subjugation must end”—and, of course, the proposition would be welcome to use that bold claim throughout the debate in any event. However, the advantage of a more detailed theme is that it emphasizes not only *what* the proposition thinks of the policy of retaining cultural treasures (namely, that it is “cultural subjugation”) but *how and why* the proposition believes it. What’s more, a theme like this deals more directly with the fundamental issue of the debate: the legitimacy of taking and retaining the treasures. To have a single idea unifying a case is good strategy; for that idea to engage with the most fundamental issues of the debate is better strategy still.

## **HOW OFTEN SHOULD THE THEME BE USED?**

Debaters are often told that a theme should be used so often that the audience can remember it when they leave the debate. Some believe that the theme should be stated at the beginning of the first speaker’s arguments, and at the conclusion of every point. Some particularly unimaginative debaters also use it as a standard introduction and conclusion, often in the same speech!

However, this approach is a particularly unsophisticated way of debating. As will be explained later, it is important at the end of each argument to explain very clearly how that argument supports the main *idea* of the team case. It is true that the theme should embody this main idea. However, repeating the theme after every argument becomes monotonous, and usually distracts debaters from actually *explaining* how their argument supports the main *idea* of their case.

Similarly, many debaters use their theme as a standard tool for rebuttal. The following is typical of an approach that adjudicators hear all too frequently: “Our opposition argued [X]. However, that’s clearly



wrong: our theme states [Y].” Rebuttal will be discussed in more detail later, but for now it should be obvious that this approach replaces actual analysis and criticism of the opposition’s case with a robotic repetition of a sentence. In this case, the debater thinks, “Of course I rebutted my opposition’s case—I repeated my theme to them seven times!”

Therefore, the simple rule for using themes is this: *The theme should be stated at least once in every speaker’s speech. Every speaker should return repeatedly to the idea that underpins his or her team’s case, but there is no need for a speaker to repeat the theme after it is initially stated.*

## **HOW SHOULD THE THEME BE PRESENTED?**

The theme is first presented by the first speaker of the team, early in his or her speech. (More detail about the order of duties is provided in Step 5.) There are a number of ways that the theme can be introduced. Some of these are:

- “Our theme for this debate is . . .”
- “Our central thematic argument will be . . .”
- “The crux of our case is this: . . .”
- “Tonight, our team will show you that . . .”
- “The fundamental reason that we support [or oppose] tonight’s motion is . . .”

Many people think that the theme must be introduced by saying, “Our theme is . . . .” However, there are more important things to worry about; as long as the adjudicator and audience can identify your theme as such, that is good enough!

Ultimately, your success or failure in using your theme will depend on how you develop your individual arguments. We will examine this in detail later. For now, we need to leave the theme to examine the overall case approach.

## The Team Stance

By now, we know the overall reason that a case should be supported (the theme), and we will soon develop specific arguments to support this. However, something is missing: the detail!

Often, teams argue with great passion in favor of abstract concepts that they never properly explain. For example, a speaker might give a moving and persuasive speech about why we should support the death penalty without ever specifying *who* ought to be executed, or *how*. When you think about it, these details are fundamentally important to your strategy. For many audience members and adjudicators, there may be a big difference between executing serial killers by lethal injection and killing petty thieves by public hanging.

Therefore, in almost all debates, you will need to present *more detail than the motion itself gives you*. If you are to support the death penalty, you must decide who is to be executed, and how. If you support military intervention for human rights, you must decide who will intervene, how, and under what circumstances. If you *oppose* military intervention for human rights, you must decide what alternative (if any) exists. In other words, you need an *overall team stance* beyond merely supporting or opposing the motion.

It is *vital* to remember what debating is about: debating is a formal argument about a contentious *issue*. Debating is not a youth parliament, or a model United Nations conference. Therefore, *while your team stance is important, it exists only to help you argue about the main issue*. Many debaters use very long and complex stances, encouraging both teams to spend the debate picking over the finer details. However, this is not what debating is about, and this is not the purpose of a team stance. If you must adopt a team stance, therefore, *keep it simple and keep it secondary to the main issue of debate*.

## A MODEL

The simplest team stance is a model: a proposal to be implemented.

Suppose, for example, that your team is arguing in favor of the legalization of marijuana. As explained earlier, it is not enough to say, “marijuana should be legalized.” This statement encompasses everything from legalization for limited medical use to legalization under any circumstances, for people of any age, for use as a recreational drug. Your team should go further and present a specific model. For example, you could argue the following.

1. The Congress should pass laws to:
  - (a) Remove the absolute legal prohibition on the use of marijuana as a recreational drug;
  - (b) Require licenses to sell marijuana;
  - (c) Require the consumption of marijuana to be either in the home or on specifically licensed premises;
  - (d) Require health warnings on marijuana products;
  - (e) Tax the sale of marijuana.
2. The Surgeon General (or similar government body) should run public education campaigns warning the public of the risks of marijuana usage.

In other words, marijuana should be treated in essentially the same way as alcohol.

In this case, the model involved a specific policy to be implemented through the institutions of government. Of course, this need not always be the case. We have already examined the confusing words “we” and “our”—some debates are about government action; others are about individuals’ actions.

## How Specific Does the Model Need to Be?

We have established that a model is necessary for many debates in order to provide clarity. But how specific does that model need to be? We know that any stance should be *simple* and *secondary to the main issue of debate*, but what does this mean for developing a model?

The simple and often-quoted answer is that the proposition team does not need to write the legislation. That is, the proposition team obviously does not need to spell out the operation of its model with the same degree of clarity and precision that a government might use in proposing a new law or policy.

More precisely, the degree of precision must be determined in the context of the degree to which a team needs to prove the motion. It was explained earlier that, in most motions, the proposition team needs only to show that the motion is *generally* true, or true as a *general proposition*. So it is with the model; the model must be sufficiently specific to enable the proposition team to show that the motion is true as a general proposition. However, the model does *not* need to be any more specific than this.

Take again, for example, the motion “This House believes that we should support the death penalty.” The proposition team cannot really show this motion to be true as a general proposition without specifying who is to be executed and in what manner. As explained earlier, there is such a wide divergence in criminals and means of execution that we could not support capital punishment, even as a general proposition, without knowing more detail.

However, the proposition team does not need to specify, for example, how long a criminal will be given to appeal his or her sentence, nor the extent to which appeal options will be available. If a *government* were to implement capital punishment, it would be required to specify these details. However, the *proposition team* does not need to; the length and precise nature of a capital appeal process is not directly relevant to the general question of whether or not we should support capital

punishment. *Unlike a government, the proposition team does not need to write the legislation.*

## **AN ALTERNATIVE FROM THE OPPOSITION**

What about the opposition team? Thus far, we have examined the situation where the *proposition* team proposes a model. However, the *opposition* team must often counter with a model of its own: an *alternative*.

This is particularly true when the current situation is very hard to defend. Of course, in debates about a proposed change, it is usually the case that the proposition team proposes a change to the status quo, whereas the opposition team defends the status quo. An alternative from the opposition is most strategic when the status quo is largely indefensible.

For example, suppose that the motion is “This House believes that we should intervene militarily for human rights,” and you are on the opposition team. The proposition team has defined “we” to mean “the international community, acting either through international or regional organizations,” and has set out a model that supports air strikes against regimes and armies that are committing widespread acts of genocide or torture. The primary example that they use as support is the 1999 NATO campaign in Yugoslavia, in which the United States and other NATO members bombed Yugoslavia in response to attacks on Albanian civilians in Kosovo. In that case, your team will no doubt raise a number of arguments against military intervention, such as:

1. Military intervention is an unjustifiably brutal response that often involves massive collateral damage (that is, incorrect targets are hit);
2. Military intervention damages infrastructure such as water and power facilities, punishing average civilians further for the crimes of their leaders;
3. Military intervention only hastens whatever human rights abuses were occurring previously;

4. Military intervention provides the oppressive local leadership with an obvious opponent against whom to play the nationalist card, increasing leaders' domestic support.

These may (or may not) be good arguments, but they will inevitably be met with a very simple and effective response from the proposition team: "Sure, there are problems with military intervention, but at least we propose doing *something*. Our opposition can complain all they like, but they haven't provided us with *any alternative solution* to what is clearly a serious problem."

This is the kind of simple but effective line that a good proposition team would pursue relentlessly throughout the debate. A third speaker, for example, might start his or her speech by saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, the issue of this debate has been how best to deal with the serious problems of genocide and torture. We have proposed military intervention. It may not be perfect, but we have showed that it is effective nonetheless. The opposition team, however, have proposed nothing." (Alternatively, the reply speaker might use this kind of introduction instead; reply speeches will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.)

Therefore, the simple answer for the opposition team is to propose an alternative. In this case, for example, the opposition team could argue in favor of economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure, the continued prosecution of war criminals in supranational tribunals, or some other alternative, or some specified combination of these alternatives. This strategy allows the opposition team to criticize military intervention, but to be proactive about the possible alternatives.

### **Is the Alternative Really Necessary?**

In the previous example, it was clearly necessary for the opposition team to provide an alternative, for two reasons:

1. The nature of the problem (genocide and torture) was sufficiently emotive that it seems to demand some response, or at least a strong statement that any response would further exacerbate the problem.
2. The alternative would have *simplified* rather than *complicated* the opposition team's approach. That is, if the opposition team had not provided an alternative, it would have been left arguing a very convoluted case: "Military intervention is wrong . . . but we can't really tell you what, if anything, is preferable!"

In many debates, however, the opposition team does not need an alternative at all. This is because:

1. The problem under discussion is not particularly emotive, so the proposition team can gain little by complaining that the opposition has provided no clear response;
2. An alternative from the opposition would *complicate* rather than *simplify* the opposition team's approach; or
3. An alternative from the opposition would simply become an easier target for the proposition team to hit.

For example, consider the motion "This House believes that we should have a single world currency." In this case, the proposition team will probably need a reasonably intricate model, explaining, for example, how such a currency should be brought into effect, how official interest rates would be set under the single currency, and so on. The opposition team is then faced with an important question: is a detailed alternative necessary?

The opposition team could develop an intricate alternative model. For example, it could argue in favor of combining national currencies into regional currencies: a single currency for Europe, a single currency for Asia, a single currency for North America, and so forth. It could explain in careful detail how the various currencies could be managed and then set out reasons why regional currencies are preferable to a global currency.

However, there are problems with this approach:

- The debate will be unclear enough without an opposition model. It would be more strategic for the opposition team to sit back and gleefully pick holes in the proposition's model, rather than provide an equally complicated model of its own.
- By presenting a model in this case, the opposition team only gives the proposition team a clearer target to hit.
- Aside from this easy attack on the opposition team for proposing a rather novel approach, the proposition team now gains a significant strategic advantage. Specifically, it is no longer the only team in the debate bearing the burden of properly explaining and defending its model. Had the opposition team *not* presented a model, the adjudicator might have thought, "The proposition team never really explained their model and didn't show that it would work. Therefore, the opposition team should win." Now, the adjudicator may think, "True, the proposition team never really explained their model, and didn't really show that it would work. *But neither did the opposition team with its model.*"

Therefore, in this particular debate, it would be much more strategic for the opposition to simply defend the status quo. In short, the opposition could argue, "Of course, there are many problems with the present system. However, there is no simple fix to these problems—and introducing a global currency will make things *much* worse. We should keep the status quo."

Ultimately, there are sound strategic reasons both for and against developed alternative models from the opposition team. Whether the opposition actually uses a model in a particular debate will obviously depend on the specifics of the motion. The important point is not that every opposition team needs an alternative model, but that every opposition team needs to think carefully and strategically about whether it should present an alternative.



## Is the Alternative Mutually Exclusive to the Motion?

If there is one very obvious point about an alternative, it is that it must actually be an *alternative!* That is, if you can have the proposition's model *and* the opposition's model, then the opposition's model is not an alternative at all, and opposition team is not actually opposing the motion.

For example, consider the motion “This House believes that alcohol should be banned.” The proposition will set out a clear but simple model, explaining how alcohol is to be banned for use as a recreational substance. The opposition team may respond with what it thinks is a clever and well-considered alternative; it argues, “We agree that alcohol is a very damaging substance whose consumption must be minimized as much as possible, but we think that the more effective policy is a massive public education campaign. This is our alternative.”

What is the problem with the opposition's alternative? Clearly it is not really an alternative at all—it is not mutually exclusive to the proposition proposal. The proposition team needs only to point out that legislation and education can both be implemented (as they are in the case of many drugs) and this point almost completely destroys the opposition team's entire approach. Of course, the opposition team can advocate a public education campaign, but the team must also provide strong reasons why it is wrong to ban alcohol, not merely why education might be more effective in reducing alcohol consumption.

So the simple rule is this: *It is not enough for an opposition team to disagree with the proposition team* (for example, “we have a more effective alternative”). *If the opposition model can be implemented along with the proposition model, the opposition has not opposed the proposition at all.*

## THE INVALID OPPOSITION

It is vital that opposition teams remember exactly what we have just examined: opposition alternatives *to the proposition case*. We noted that these can be very useful and entirely valid. However, we did *not* ever suggest that the opposition may provide an alternative *to the assumptions that underpin the motion itself*.

For example, suppose that the motion is “This House believes that the New Economy will benefit the developing world,” and that the opposition team argues, “We oppose the motion because the New Economy does not exist—it is merely a meaningless media catchphrase.” Is this a valid approach? The simple answer is, “no.” The statement may well be an accurate characterization of the New Economy, but that does not make it a valid case. The motion *assumes* that there is a new economy, and the opposition team is called on not merely to *oppose* the motion, but to *negate* it. The opposition team needed to argue, “The New Economy will not benefit the developing world.”

In simple terms, the opposition team is expected to oppose the proposition team, not to oppose whoever set the motion! Ultimately, such invalid opposition cases should never arise if opposition teams follow the correct process of identifying the *issue* of the debate, as explained in Chapter One.

## DRAWING A LINE IN THE SAND

So far, we have examined the situation where the proposition or opposition team proposes a *model*; that is, where the proposition or opposition team presents a specific *policy proposal*—a course of action that ought to be taken.

However, it is important to realize that your team stance need not always be a model to be implemented. Often, motions ask us for the *degree* to which something is desirable (or undesirable). It is usually

important for at least one team to draw a line in the sand; that is, to specify the degree that it considers ideal.

For example, consider the motion “This House believes that television is too violent.” In this case, the proposition team is clearly *not* required to propose a detailed model of a government policy to reduce violence on television; the motion is (at least in the strict sense) about what *is*, rather than about what *should be done*. The proposition team must nonetheless have a good idea, as a team, of just how much television violence it considers acceptable. To say “television is too violent” could mean anything from “graphic and sustained violence on television is unacceptable” to “even slapstick cartoon violence is unacceptable.” Ideally, the proposition team in this case should draw a line in the sand; it should establish, from the outset, what forms of televised violence are unacceptable in its opinion.

For example, the first speaker of the proposition team could say, “We will argue that television is too violent because there is too much gratuitous and graphic violence in fictional programs. We do not oppose other forms of television violence, such as the use of violent footage in nonfiction programs or slapstick cartoon violence.”

It is very important to understand what is being argued here. The proposition team is *not* saying, “By violence, we mean only very extreme violence. We will show you that very extreme violence is bad.” This would be a case of the proposition team defining the motion unfairly; by interpreting the word “violence” in a way that biases the debate to its side. Rather, the proposition team is saying, “We must show that there is an *abundance* of violence, and that the *abundance causes harm*. If the only violence on television were in cartoons and news programs, we would happily concede that there was not too much violence on television. However, because of the significant amount of gratuitous violence, television in general is too violent.”

The notion of drawing a line arises from the assumption that many motions (including this one) are about a continuum of degrees. In sim-



- believes that television is too violent”) were set for a younger grade, and you asked a debater, “What is your debate about?” he or she may reply, “It’s about whether television violence is good.” This, however, is only the most simplistic analysis. A proposition team using this approach would be left arguing “There should never be any violence on television,” which is not a very strategic approach.
2. This approach makes it equally clear to the opposition team that they cannot merely oppose an absolute. Many opposition teams, when faced with the motion “This House believes that television is too violent,” would proceed to argue, “Much of the televising of violence is harmless, or necessary for democratic decision-making.” However, this statement doesn’t show why television, as a general proposition, is not too violent. In simple terms, the opposition team must be aware that it will need to deal with even the most serious forms of televised violence in order to win the debate (either by arguing that they are rarely televised, or that they do not cause harm).
  3. It ensures that the proposition team presents a consistent case. If the proposition team does not decide and state what it would consider to be an acceptable level of television violence, different speakers will inevitably imply different things. For example, the first proposition may argue that “Itchy and Scratchy” (a violent cartoon shown as part of *The Simpsons*) encourages violence against cats. The second speaker, having seen this argument ridiculed by the first opposition, may retreat to argue that the real problem is violence in news programs, which is unsuitable for family viewing. The third speaker, having seen this argument attacked, may resort to arguing that the most extreme forms of violence are unacceptable. Although the speakers never said, “Okay, you’re right—our earlier argument was stupid,” this continual retreat nonetheless makes for an inconsistent (and therefore extremely weak) case. Drawing a line in the sand at least shows the troops where the front-line battle should be fought!

Of course, drawing a line in the sand is essentially about clarifying your argument. It does not involve running scared to the most easily defensible position. This will be discussed further below (in playing hardball). For now, it is enough to say that all of the principles explained earlier (for example, about triggers, and the need to show general truth in most cases) still apply. To use an earlier example, if you must argue that it is “better to be kind than to be smart,” it is still not acceptable to draw a line in the sand between Adolf Hitler (whom you *do* want to argue about) and the rest of the human race (whom you consider an irrelevant aside!). The technique of drawing a line in the sand is for clarifying your team stance in debates where various degrees of something can be supported—and for *no other purpose!*

## **A STANCE ON ASSOCIATED ISSUES**

So much for a stance on the *vital* issue of the debate. However, what about a stance on *associated* (or side) issues?

The simple answer is that you don’t need one. For example, if you are arguing that “we should support the death penalty for terrorists,” you do not need to have a stance on whether we should also support the death penalty for non-terrorist serial killers. If you do not have such a stance, the adjudicator cannot reasonably penalize your team (at least, not directly).

However, it is nonetheless often *helpful* to have a team stance on associated issues. This has essentially the same advantages that were explained earlier; it clarifies your team’s position and avoids inconsistencies in the team case. In debates where points of information are used, a team stance on associated issues can avoid on-the-spot confusion. (Points of information will be explained in more detail later.) Therefore, the first question to be asked of associated issues is: “*What about issue [X]? What’s our stance on that?*” (Of course, as explained earlier, the team’s stance on the issue may be that it is irrelevant and that the team will not be drawn one way or another on it.)

However, there is also a second question: “*Now that we’ve decided our stance on issue [X], do we make it clear at the outset, or wait until the issue arises?*”

There is no single or simple answer to this second question; it must be decided in the circumstances. In most cases, *if an associated issue is important enough to attract your attention during preparation, it is worthwhile to clarify your stance the outset.* In essence, clarifying your team stance costs only one or two sentences of your first speaker’s time, but can avoid significant confusion later. For example, a team arguing that “we should support the death penalty for terrorists” should probably explain at the outset whether it also supports the death penalty for non-terrorist serial killers (or others). This clarification is particularly useful because it explains whether the proposition team supports the death penalty for terrorists merely because terrorists kill many people, or whether because terrorists do so as part of a political or social movement. *It is worthwhile to clarify most relevant associated issues at the outset because this helps to clarify the vital issues.*

The exceptions to this approach are (obviously) those associated issues that are best left to the opposition to raise. In particular, these are associated issues that are:

1. Not particularly relevant at all, or
2. Potentially frustrating points for an opposition to raise, but which the opposition team may not have considered.

Therefore, the only clear guidance to give on associated issues is this: *Many issues that are not vital to your case are nonetheless important to the outcome of the debate. You should think about those issues, and how your team will deal with them.*

## IGNORING YOUR MODEL OR STANCE

There is no point establishing a model or stance if you are not going to use it and refer to it. Your model or stance must therefore underpin your arguments and case throughout the debate.

The difference between the proposition and opposition teams in this respect is that it *more* important for the opposition team to not ignore its model or stance. If the proposition team ignores the specifics of its model, the overall issue that the model concerns will usually remain highly relevant in the debate. For example, if the proposition team in the debate “This House believes that we should legalize marijuana” ignores the regulation and licensing elements of its model, it can still argue a persuasive case in favor of legalizing marijuana, and the debate will still be about legalizing marijuana. (Of course, the team would nonetheless deserve criticism for ignoring part of its model.)

However, the opposition team lacks such luxuries. For example, consider one debate on the motion “This House believes that we should support a heroin trial.” The proposition team had established a model to explain how such a heroin trial was to be conducted; broadly, the team advocated a limited trial of distributing heroin to addicts under medical supervision in order to reduce risks of overdose and other health problems. The first speaker of the opposition team specifically said that the opposition team would oppose a heroin trial, and would instead support stricter policing and drug courts. No further details were given as to what that meant. As the debate continued, the proposition team continued to develop its case in support of its model for a heroin trial. The opposition team forcefully opposed the proposition team’s model, but did *not* make any further reference to drug courts or stricter policing. This omission proved fatal; had the *proposition* team ignored its model, it could perhaps have won by nonetheless debating in favor of the motion—by supporting a heroin trial. However, the *opposition* team had ignored its model, so the opposition team’s entire proposal was left out of the debate.



The message here should be clear: *it is far better to have no alternative than to promise an alternative only to ignore it.*

## HOW NOT TO REBUT MODELS

Chapter Two is dedicated to rebuttal. For now, it is important to identify one popular *but very poor* method of rebutting models.

Suppose, unfortunate as it would be, that you are on trial for a criminal offence. There is only one witness for the prosecution, and he says, “I’m pretty sure that the defendant was the person I saw . . . from what I could make out, anyway . . . the criminal I saw was actually wearing a ski mask . . . but the shape of the nose looks kind of familiar . . . I think.” When you are called upon to give evidence, you could casually say, “No thank you, Your Honor—I choose not to give any explanation of my whereabouts on that night. The bottom line is that the prosecution must prove *beyond reasonable doubt* that I did it, and the only witness they have is only mildly confident. *Since they haven’t really proved their case, I won’t bother showing that it is wrong.*” This would be an entirely legitimate answer, at least in most criminal courts around the world, because the procedure and rules of criminal trials are deliberately weighted in the defendant’s favor.

Unfortunately for the opposition team, the same does not apply in debating. Therefore, it is not enough for an opposition speaker to parrot, “You haven’t shown us how your model will work” every time that he or she faces a proposition team with a model. This approach often causes opponents to think, “They would say the same thing regardless of how much detail was in our model!”

Therefore, the better approach is this:

- If you must criticize a proposition team for not explaining how their model will work, wait until you meet a proposition team who *actually* haven’t explained how their model will work! Your cries will fall on deaf ears (one hopes) if you direct the same complaint to a team that has dedicated two minutes of its first speech in

explaining *exactly* how it envisages its model working. Remember: the proposition team does not need to write the legislation!

- Whether you criticize a proposition team along these lines or not, *you must then go on* to show how their model *won't work*. Too many speakers say, “The proposition has not shown how its model *will* work,” but do not make any arguments about how or why the proposition model *won't* work. Most adjudicators respond by thinking, “Well, maybe they didn't *prove* that their model would work, but at least they tried to support their side of the motion, which is more than can be said for you!”

Of course, unimaginative opposition teams are welcome to complain all they like about their opponents' standard of proof, but they should be warned: unlike the criminal defendant, they enjoy no presumption of innocence!

## A D V A N C E D

### The Strategy of Case Development

We have examined the basics of case development (essentially, the requirements of an effective theme), and we have noted the importance of models and stances to simplify cases. Both of these topics have discussed the best way to order and present your team's case. However, we haven't developed any guidelines about how to decide the most effective team stance. For example, we explained how to set out a model of legalizing marijuana for recreational use. We have not yet asked why the proposition team should propose legalization for recreational use at all, as opposed to the (perhaps easier) alternative of medical use

only. To return to a familiar theme, it is impossible to set out any golden rules for this purpose. However, there are important guidelines that every debater should bear in mind.

## **DEBATING: A GAME**

Debating is an important and interesting way to discuss issues facing our society. However, debating is necessarily an *artificial* way of doing this—debaters are expected to follow recognized structures, and teams are told which sides of what issues they must support. Therefore, although we debate about important public issues, debating is not designed to be a public forum: debates don't necessarily reflect the most important issues in society, and speakers are not invited simply to speak their mind. Debating is important, interesting and relevant, but *debating is also a game*.

Even though you feel personally uncomfortable arguing a particular side of a motion, or using certain arguments to support your case—as a debater, you should debate as best you can, within the rules, *to win the game!* This approach is the best way of ensuring a high standard of debate and an entertaining clash of perspectives.

It is important to remember this principle at all times when debating, but especially in this section of the book. This rule seems totally unprincipled, and extraordinarily pragmatic, but that is entirely the point: when considering the strategy of case development, good debaters ask one question, and one question only: *Which case will be most likely to win us this debate?* This approach is 100% pragmatism and 0% personal belief or ideology. Debating is a game and, as long as you always follow the rules, playing to win is the best approach to adopt.

## **PLAYING HARDBALL**

Let's start with an example from a debate in Australia. The motion was "This House believes that the government should apologize to the

Stolen Generation.” The Stolen Generation in Australia refers to the large group of indigenous Australian children forcibly removed from their families under government policies that lasted until the 1970s. The particular debate discussed here occurred in 1998. In 2008, the Australian government did, at last, provide a formal apology to the Stolen Generation; however, this debate nonetheless still illustrates an important general point about debating in the World Schools style.

On the simplest analysis, the motion clearly posed two questions:

1. Did the Stolen Generation *deserve* an apology? (That is, the *moral* question.)
2. Would an apology *help* indigenous Australians, the Australian community as a whole, and/or the reconciliation process? (That is, the *practical* question.)

The opposition team in the debate were, as individuals, strong supporters of a national apology; they would have much preferred to have been the proposition team. Therefore, they approached the debate by essentially answering the questions as follows:

1. “Of course the Stolen Generation deserves an apology,” *but*
2. “Australian society is not quite ready for an apology at the moment, so an apology would be counterproductive to the reconciliation process. Therefore, the government should not apologize to the Stolen Generation.”

The opposition was legitimately accused by the proposition team of “wanting to apologize but not being brave enough to admit it.”

So, was this a good case approach, or not? The simple answer is that the case approach was *valid*, but *very weak*. Why? There are at least two reasons:

1. The opposition team had conceded one of the two major issues of the debate (namely, the moral argument), and

2. The opposition team had essentially agreed in-principle with an apology, but had argued that it should be postponed until the rest of Australian society agreed with them!

Most importantly, the opposition team made itself look weak, as though it was shying away from a fight—adjudicators do not generally look kindly upon teams that do not take the debate to their opposition. In this case, the opposition team should have taken a stronger and less apologetic stance. Of course, on such an emotive issue, this stance should have been accompanied by recognition of the sensitivities involved—a disclaimer, as discussed earlier. Such a stance would be far more effective.

For example, a better starting point for an opposition case would have been:

1. “The Stolen Generation does not deserve an apology—the policy of forcible removal was carried out by past generations in pursuance of what they considered a noble goal. There is no moral obligation on current generations to apologize for the actions of previous generations.”
2. “An apology will be counterproductive to the reconciliation process and will distract attention from the more important needs of indigenous Australians (health care, etc.). This is the case today, and will be the case indefinitely. Therefore, an apology to the Stolen Generation is totally unjustified and unwarranted; the government should not apologize now, and it should never apologize in the future.”

This opposition case approach may cause many people to cringe, but that is only because they would personally prefer to argue the *proposition* side of the motion. It is clearly a better case approach: it is simpler and stronger, it fights on both of the major issues of debate and, above all, it does not look weak.

From this example, we can extrapolate the key principle to playing hardball: *Never be afraid to argue an unpopular or controversial case, or a case with which you personally disagree.*

However, the principle of playing hardball goes beyond not being afraid of controversial cases; often, it is better for debaters *actively to seek out controversial cases* to argue, if they make the case simpler. This principle was ably demonstrated by a debate on the motion “This House believes that athletes who test positive for performance-enhancing drugs should be banned for life.” The proposition team essentially argued, “We all know that performance-enhancing drugs are a form of cheating. Current bans are inadequate, so life bans must be imposed.” The opposition team responded with, “Performance-enhancing drugs are no more a form of cheating than other sports technology, such as cyclists’ disc wheels. Since the use of such drugs is so widespread, and it is so hard to effectively test for them, such substances should be completely legalized in sports. This will finally stop disadvantaging those athletes who follow the rules.”

What were the strategic advantages of this approach?

- The opposition had shifted the issue of the debate from under the proposition’s nose: the proposition had established the issue as *the extent* to which drug users should be punished, whereas the opposition had (legitimately) changed it to *whether* drug users should be punished at all. This argument left much of the proposition case and mind-set as irrelevant in the circumstances.
- The proposition was so taken aback by the extremity of the opposition case that they never properly responded; they could do little more than scoff in shock at an argument that they had probably never even considered. Ultimately, the opposition won the debate unanimously—they *were brave enough to take the initiative and to argue a simple case, however controversial it seemed.*

Therefore, in summary, there are three essential points about playing hardball:

1. Be willing and able to question every personal opinion that you hold, and the assumptions that underpin it.
2. Never be afraid to argue an unpopular or controversial case, or a case with which you personally disagree.
3. Be willing to actively seek out controversial cases if they will be more likely to win the debate.

## **FEAR COMPLEXITY, NOT CONTROVERSY**

In discussing the drugs in sports debate earlier, we noted two key advantages of playing hardball:

1. It can change the fundamental issue of the debate, thus shifting the debate onto your team's terms; *and*
2. It can take your opponents by surprise, leaving them unwilling or unable to respond to your challenge to the fundamental assumptions of their case or mind-set.

However, the most important and most persuasive reason to play hardball is that, in many situations, you can argue a *much simpler case*. "So what?" you may ask. The answer is straightforward: debating is not like other forms of intellectual argument (such as the writing of academic articles). There are at least two key distinctions:

1. *Debaters have a relatively short time to put their case.* Debates in the World Schools style involve three speeches of eight minutes and then a reply speech of four minutes; that is, a *total* of 28 minutes of speaking. As we will examine in detail later, a team's prepared arguments must be presented by the first two speakers only; given the need for a case outline and rebuttal, the prepared arguments themselves may therefore take as little as 10–12 minutes in total. This time limit is not suited to complex or intricate cases!
2. *Debaters must use the spoken word.* Debaters do not have the luxury of writing an intricate essay, allowing their audience to read the complicated sections as many times as they need to. Similarly, unlike

many public speakers, debaters cannot use whiteboards or computer presentations to display their ideas graphically.

Therefore, as a general rule, you should seek the simplest case, however controversial it may be. *Play hardball if your argument, although harder to stomach, is easier to understand!*

For example, consider a debate between Australia and Scotland, hosted by the Oxford Union, as part of the 1999 World Schools Debating Championships. The motion was “This House believes that the Kyoto Summit didn’t go far enough,” and Scotland was proposition. The case approach for Scotland was always going to be relatively straightforward; they were required to argue that the agreement at the Kyoto Summit did not go far enough in protecting the environment. In that sense, the Scottish team had little scope to play hardball, even if they had wanted to.

But what about the Australian team? A simple analysis would be that the proposition team (Scotland) was designated to *criticize* the Kyoto agreement, whereas the opposition team (Australia) was designated to *defend* the agreement. Indeed, this was the analysis used by most (if not all) of the other opposition teams who argued the same motion at the championships. Essentially, they said to themselves, “The two sides of the debate are clear: the proposition will criticize Kyoto, and we will defend it. Simple.”

This approach seemed simple and straightforward, until the opposition team tried to prepare its case. Only then did the team realize what a difficult task it had set for itself. The Kyoto Protocol is, in many respects, a mish-mash of different targets for different nations, often determined more by each nation’s bargaining position than by its environmental or economic needs. The more that the opposition team researched the intricacies of the Protocol, the more difficult it became to justify the Protocol as a perfect compromise between economic and environmental needs. Specifically, the team found itself logically trapped on both sides:



- If the team conceded, even briefly, that the Protocol could reasonably have done even a little more for the environment, it would concede the debate and lose.
- If the team tried to balance this risk by suggesting that the Protocol could have done less for the environment, it would have contradicted its own case approach (that the Protocol struck a perfect balance), and again would probably lose.

There is a further strategic problem, too: that of *simplicity*. The opposition team knew that the proposition could present a very clear case, simply arguing, “Every nation lacked the courage to meet an appropriate target. Therefore, the Summit didn’t go far enough.” However, by maintaining that Kyoto was an effective compromise, the proposition team would be forced to argue, “The EU promised an 8 percent emissions cut, the United States promised 7 percent, Japan promised 6 percent, Australia was allowed an 8 percent increase, and the overall reduction was 5.2 percent. Each of these amounts was entirely appropriate for the relevant nation or region. Therefore, the Summit struck an appropriate balance.” Clearly, by trying to argue for such a complicated balance, an opposition team would be handing the proposition a *significant* strategic advantage.

So what, then, was the ideal opposition case? The answer was simple: *play hardball*—*the case would be more controversial, but much more likely to win*. This was exactly what the Australian team did; they chose to conceptualize the debate as a conflict between the environment and the economy (rather than between criticizing and defending Kyoto). Rather than defending Kyoto, the Australian team chose to attack it just as emphatically as did their opponents—but *from the other side*. In simple terms, the opposition team chose to argue, “The Kyoto Summit went *too far* in supporting environmentalists’ claims.”

Had the opposition argued its original case, it would have been trying to balance on a very narrow part of the continuum; walking a

logical tightrope, in constant fear of falling either to one side (not far enough) or the other (too far). Just as tightrope walkers prefer their feet on solid ground, so did the opposition find it much easier to argue a clear and simple alternative, that is, to play hardball.

This analysis may seem very specific: it may seem that we are examining this one motion in far too much detail. However, this principle is useful for a large number of debates. For example, we noted in Step One that it is strategically very weak to negate comparison motions by arguing that the relevant quantities are equal. The example used was the motion “This House believes that the media is more powerful than the church,” and we noted that it was much more effective for the opposition to argue “the church is more powerful than the media” rather than “the church and the media are equally powerful.” We can now understand this strategy as a form of playing hardball.

Of course, playing hardball is a guiding principle, not an underlying rule. Above all, you must use your common sense in choosing when and how to play hardball. For example, suppose you are proposition for the motion “This House believes that the United States should abandon missile defense.” A simple, controversial and ultimately hardball case for the proposition team might be to argue, “The United States should abandon missile defense in favor of missile attack—if the United States perceives a nation as a threat, it should use nuclear weapons to obliterate that nation and its government.” Although this may *seem* like a courageous case, it is almost certainly more stupid than simple; common sense would indicate that this case would be *so* controversial as to be absurd. Unlike the cases for Kyoto or for drugs in sports, it could be effectively (although not ideally) destroyed by an opposition team willing to scoff and ridicule.

Therefore, the guiding principle is clear:

***Be willing to argue controversial or hardball cases if they are simpler or easier to defend. However, use your common sense to distinguish between cases that are brave and those that are foolhardy—between those that are simple and those that are merely facile.***

## **PLAYING HARBALL IS A WHOLE CASE APPROACH**

It is important to remember the context in which this discussion of playing hardball is taking place: it is an approach for *case development*. We have not yet discussed the development of individual arguments or rebuttal. As will be later explained, both individual arguments and rebuttal must be entirely consistent with the overall case approach. Therefore, *if your case is not fundamentally controversial, you cannot suddenly decide to play hardball in developing either an individual argument or a rebuttal point.*

The reason to remember this point should be clear: we noted that controversial ideas often surprise audiences and adjudicators (and opponents, of course, but they don't matter!). Experience has shown that this surprise or disbelief can be overcome by reinforcing an idea, however controversial, throughout the course of the debate. For example, the Australian team initially shocked its audience and adjudicators with its controversial case in the Kyoto debate. However, the team was able to use the entire length of the debate to persuade those present that its case was plausible and reasonable. (Whether or not the team managed to change its audience and adjudicators' long-held views is beside the point; it managed to overcome any initial disbelief that

might have prevented its arguments being treated seriously for the purposes of the debate.)

The team could not, however, have successfully persuaded anyone within the short amount of time allocated to present a single argument or rebuttal point. In fact, this lesson was illustrated by the Australian team one year later when competing against the United States in a warm-up debate prior to the 2000 World Schools Championships in Pittsburgh. The Australian team was required to argue that the 21st century is worth welcoming. Among other points, the American team argued that the 21st century is not worth welcoming because of the environmental havoc that the greenhouse effect will cause. The Australian team responded, as a single rebuttal point, by claiming that the greenhouse effect does not exist. This strategy was a similar (although certainly not identical) argument to that successfully presented in the Kyoto debate. However, the results were very different: whereas the Kyoto case had succeeded, this individual argument fell flat. It was simply not possible for the Australian team to explain, support, and reinforce such a controversial proposition in the space of a single rebuttal point. *Just because a controversial idea can succeed as an entire case approach does not mean that it can be effective as an isolated point in an otherwise conservative case.*

Let's consider one final example—a debate on the motion “This House believes that the British Empire has done more harm than good.” Among other points, the opposition team argued that the British Empire brought democracy to nations that might not otherwise enjoy such a system. One speaker from the proposition team responded by arguing that democracy was often not an effective system of government for developing nations. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this idea; it is not unheard of and itself often forms the issue of debates (for example, on motions such as “This House believes that a strong dictatorship is better than a weak democracy,” or “This House believes that democracy has failed the developing world”). However, it remains a controversial argument that will take many audiences and

adjudicators by surprise. Therefore, the proposition team should have decided *either* to argue against democracy in the developing world as a key part of its entire case approach, *or* not to challenge the worth of democracy at all. To raise such a controversial idea so briefly was a strategic mistake that confused the audience and adjudicators.

## Arguing Too Much

It has become something of a cliché for debating coaches, adjudicators, and books to say, “don’t prove more than you have to.” This is an important principle, and the cliché certainly draws attention to it. However, saying “don’t prove more than you have to” really begs the question; it leaves young debaters saying, “Sure—I *won’t* prove more than I have to . . . but how much do I have to prove?” Certainly, if this saying is interpreted as suggesting that debaters should argue only the bare minimum on every point, it is a very dangerous and misleading saying indeed. For example, we have already spent some time examining circumstances where teams can gain a strategic advantage by playing hardball—by arguing more than the motion strictly required. So what, then, is meant by this nebulous principle that debaters should not prove too much?

The principle can be extrapolated into three key points, explained below.

1. *You don’t need to fight every logical part of the motion.* To return to a well-trodden path, strategy in debating is essentially about common sense. It is common sense that debaters are expected to debate the issue at hand—not necessarily to dissect the motion and fight over every issue that might conceivably arise.

For example, consider the motion “This House believes that we should intervene militarily to protect human rights.” *Logically*, the motion can be analyzed as raising two issues:

- A. Whether human rights are worth protecting, *and*,
- B. Whether we should intervene militarily in order to do so.

An over-technical or over-zealous opposition team may try to negate both issues: by arguing that human rights are not worth protecting and that, even if they are, military intervention is a counterproductive means of doing so. However, this is an unnecessarily weak and controversial case: there is no need, in negating this motion, to argue that human rights are not worth protecting. A very strong and simple case can be built on the central argument that military intervention does more to harm human rights (both in the short- and long-term) than to protect them.

This is a common sense approach: hopefully, very few debaters would think to automatically fight every logical part of the motion. It is nonetheless an important principle to bear in mind. Ignore it and you may find yourself arguing too much!

2. *Beware the temptation to make your case sound too good.*

**“What you guys want, I’m for.”**

***Former U.S. Vice President and Senator Dan Quayle***

**“By the year 1990, no Australian child will live in poverty.”**

***Former Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke in 1987***

One common way of arguing too much is for a team to exaggerate the benefits that will apparently result from its proposal. One classic example of this mistake occurred at the 2001 World Schools Debating Championships in Johannesburg, on the issue of gun control. The proposition team (arguing in favor of gun control) noted that guns were used to assassinate both President John F. Kennedy and Austrian Archduke Ferdinand. The team then proceeded literally to claim that stricter gun controls would have prevented both assassinations, as well as World War I (which they implied would not have occurred but for Ferdinand’s death). Further, they asserted that similar world-shattering incidents of

organized crime could be prevented in the future by simple gun control legislation! Hopefully, the flaws in this argument are obvious. (For example, the fact that neither assassin was apparently a particularly law-abiding person is the first problem.)

In retrospect, a much stronger case for the proposition would have been to argue, “Sure, there will still be many gun crimes committed, primarily by people and organizations that are sufficiently sophisticated to buy guns on the black market. However, strict gun controls will eliminate the many gun deaths that occur annually in ordinary households, especially those caused by gun accidents, impulsive gun suicides, or domestic violence.” True, the team is not promising extraordinary results (for example, the prevention of World War III!), but the team is nonetheless showing overall benefit, *and that is all that is required*.

Therefore, it is important to remember that the most persuasive cases are not necessarily those that promise the greatest benefit; usually, they are the cases that promise a reasonable benefit that can be substantiated. Many teams, especially in younger grades, claim either that (1) their proposal will save the nation, world, or civilization as we know it, or (2) their opponent’s proposal will destroy the same, or (3) both. If your team finds itself in this position, change your case! To misquote a famous movie, beware of letting your enthusiasm write checks that your case can’t cash!

3. *Be specific.* The final way of arguing too much is arguing *about* too much. We have already examined the importance of defining the motion to one issue. The alternative approach (debating about more than one issue) should be avoided because it complicates debates unnecessarily. Every debater should fear complexity!

However, it is equally easy to complicate debates with your case approach: by having a case approach that tries to cover too many ideas *within* the single issue that you have selected by your definition. There is a second problem, too: the more ideas that your case incorporates, the less detail you can spend on any single idea. This approach risks

losing to an opposition team that focuses on a very specific idea and spends significant time doing so.

To clarify these distinctions, let's consider a debate that occurred in 2002 on the motion "This House believes that there is a case for dictatorship." Both sides correctly identified the issue as being whether it was ever justifiable to have national government by dictator. However, it was not enough to have a specific definition: the proposition team also had the opportunity to present a specific *case*. That is, the motion implicitly invited the proposition team to provide some reasonable circumstance where dictatorship would be justifiable, and this is what the team did. Rather than arguing in favor of all dictators, or even most dictators, the proposition team chose one specific model: that of Pakistan under its then-president Pervez Musharraf. The team's case approach essentially was, "In some circumstances (namely, where a weak democracy cannot control dangerous political, ethnic, or religious instabilities), it is best that a nation has a strong dictator with the expressed intention of protecting the nation's best interests." The team supported the implementation of that model in Pakistan, and in a few other cases.

This was an effective example of a specific case approach. The opposition team faced two significant problems. *First*, it was largely excluded from the debate, simply because it had prepared a case arguing against dictatorship *in general*. Rather than showing that dictatorship was *never* justified (or at least not in conceivable, real-world situations), it argued that dictatorship is *generally* wrong. This approach gave the proposition a strategic advantage, because it could argue, "Sure—maybe dictatorship *is* wrong in *most* cases, but we only need to show that it works in *some* cases, and that is exactly what we have done." *Second*, because the opposition team was forced to rely on many examples (from Pol Pot of Cambodia to Augusto Pinochet of Chile), it could not deal with any example in the same detail as the proposition team discussed Pakistan. Since the proposition team had managed



to set Pakistan as the key example of the debate, this was a significant strategic disadvantage for the opposition.

Of course, part of the proposition team's strategic advantage was inherent in the motion: that it was *allowed* to choose a relatively small battleground to defend. However, it was a very effective strategy for the proposition team to argue a specific case—indeed, the proposition team deservedly won the debate. The key distinction for us is simple: after you have *defined* the motion to a single and specific issue, you can often proceed to argue a specific case *within* that issue.

The approach inevitably overlaps with the selection of arguments: a motion that will be discussed in Step 3.

## CRITERIA

### What Are Criteria in Debating?

We have learned that it is very important to clarify the meaning of words and concepts in a debate. This, after all, is the entire point of the definition.

On some rare occasions, however, you need to provide more clarity than any single definition can give. We learned earlier that the burden of proof is *what your team needs to prove in order to show that your side of the motion is true*. Sometimes, you need to break this burden of proof into smaller and more manageable parts. These parts are then referred to as *criteria*.

Criteria add complications to a case—often, *many* complications! Since we've noted that simplicity is a very important part of effective debating strategy, it is vital to use criteria only when absolutely necessary.

We need an example. The motion “This House believes that feminism has failed” needs criteria because no single definition of the motion can give a meaningful test of whether or when feminism has failed.

Let's consider the approach of the proposition team to this motion. Imagine a conversation among members of the proposition team as they struggle with the question of what it might mean for feminism to have "failed."

"Okay, so we need to show that feminism has failed. First, we need to know, 'failed whom?'"

"It would have to be 'failed women'—feminism was a movement about the empowerment of women."

"Sure. But we still don't know what it means to have 'failed women.'"

"Perhaps the simplest approach is to say that 'failed' means 'failed to meet its objectives.'"

"Good point. But feminism has never *had* any unified or stated objectives—it's a diverse social movement!"

"True, but I think that, for this debate, we can really reduce feminism's objectives to one central idea — the goal of bringing substantive equality between men and women."

"That sounds logical, but 'substantive equality' could really mean anything. How are we going to *judge* 'substantive equality'?"

"Well, I think it falls into two clear categories. First, there is equality of opportunity—essentially, about women having access to positions on the basis of their merit. Second, there is attitudinal equality—social attitudes respecting women to the same degree that they respect men."

"Great. Well, let's use those as our criteria—we will prove that feminism has failed because it has failed to bring attitudinal equality, and failed to bring equality of opportunity."

Therefore, in this case, the proposition team has set two criteria: it has promised to show

1. That feminism has not brought attitudinal equality, and
2. That feminism has not brought equality of opportunity.

These criteria are *one* way for a proposition team to clarify its burden of proof. If used correctly, they will be very helpful to the proposition team, both by providing clarity of concepts and clarity of structure.

## Using Criteria

### *Setting Up Your Criteria*

As we examined in Step 1, the simplest understanding of criteria is that they are part of the definition. Therefore, your criteria should be set up at the same time as your definition—early in the first speaker’s speech, as will be discussed later.

As a general rule, it is worth explaining exactly *what* your criteria are seeking to clarify. For example, take the “feminism” criteria established earlier. One approach would be to establish those criteria by saying:

We define “failed” as meaning “failed to bring attitudinal equality and failed to bring equality of opportunity.”

However, this approach doesn’t really show the audience and adjudicator *where* the criteria fit in, nor *why* the criteria are relevant. A better approach would be to say something like this:

We define “failed” as meaning that feminism has failed its core objective, which we see as being the achievement of substantial equality between men and women. In this debate, we will use two criteria to judge whether that equality exists. First, there must be attitudinal equality—meaning that our society’s attitudes respect women as much as they do men. Second, there must be equality of opportunity—meaning that women have access

to positions (such as jobs or political appointments) on the basis of their merit. Today, we will show you that feminism has failed on both counts.

### ***Referring Back to Criteria***

It is not enough to establish criteria at the start of your case. You must refer back to those criteria throughout your team's speeches and show those criteria to be true in order to prove your side of the motion!

The simplest way to refer back to your criteria is to explain at the end of each argument *how* that argument supports one or more of your criteria.

For example, let's continue with the feminism motion. Suppose that the proposition team has just presented an argument that inadequate government support, particularly for childcare, prevents women from enjoying equality in the workforce. It is not really enough for the proposition team simply to conclude that argument and move on. Rather, the speaker needs to show *how* that argument supports *at least one* of the criteria that have been established.

In this case, the speaker can probably claim that the argument supports *both* of the criteria that have been established, by using words to this effect:

What does this argument show? First, the government's attitude, as representative of society's attitudes, fails to properly acknowledge women's special needs. This shows our first criterion, that feminism has failed to bring any kind of attitudinal equality. Second, I have shown that women are materially disadvantaged in the workforce, because they cannot access adequate childcare support. This means that women with the same level of competence and qualification as men will nonetheless not have the same opportunities in the workforce as those men—which shows our second criterion.

This is the first important point about referring back to criteria—if you have criteria, you must refer back to them! However, there is a second important requirement—if you have criteria, *every criterion must be proved by both the first and second speaker*. We already know that criteria set out your team’s burden of proof. When we consider splits, we will learn that both the first and the second speaker must prove *all* the logical elements of your case. For now, we will simply note that this means that *both* the first and second speakers need to be able to prove *all* the team’s criteria.

## Taking Criteria Too Far

As the previous section shows, criteria are one of the more complicated (and complicating) aspects of preparing your case. Sometimes, of course, you *need* criteria, because you cannot be sufficiently specific without them—you would find yourself speaking only in the broadest generalizations. However, *this does not mean that criteria should be used often, and it certainly does not mean that criteria should be made complex or intricate*.

Often, debaters fall into the trap of using criteria regularly—and using quite complicated criteria at that. Usually, this happens when they confuse *arguments* (that is, reasons that your side of the motion *might* be true) with *criteria* (that is, fundamental elements that *must* be true if your side of the motion is to succeed).

Before we examine the general pitfalls of this approach, let’s take an example. Remember: this is an example of what **not** to do!

Suppose the motion is “This House believes that the United States was justified in attacking Afghanistan.” A proposition team who misunderstood the role of criteria might be tempted to divide this motion into its smallest logical components, making each of them a criterion. We could expect the team to say words to this effect:

“We need to prove four things in order to show our case. They are:

1. That there was a need for action;

2. That military intervention was the most appropriate form of action;
3. That the United States' approach was successful;
4. That the United States was the most appropriate body to carry out such an attack."

The team would then dutifully ensure that *both* the first and second speaker proved *each* of these points, and that adequate time was spent on each one.

However, let's consider some of the reasons that this is a *very weak* strategy.

- There is no suggestion that the initial concept (namely, whether the United States was justified in attacking Afghanistan) is inherently vague or uncertain. Remember: criteria are used to *clarify* a concept that needs to be made more substantial (such as the notion of "failure"). Using them in this case is not merely unnecessary—it complicates things terribly!
- The proposition team will almost certainly spend significant time on issues that quickly become irrelevant to the debate. For example, the opposition team might argue that diplomatic action would have been more appropriate, thus making criteria 1 and 4 irrelevant. The proposition team should have left these points for rebuttal—to be used only if necessary.
- As this example shows, this approach is often cumulative—that is, the criteria build up so that the real issue is identified by the later criteria. This buildup often means that a speaker will spend the best part of his or her speech on irrelevancies (in our example, whether there was a need for any action whatsoever), leaving little time for the key issues (such as whether America's action was effective).
- Identifying numerous criteria in this way simply gives an opposition (and an adjudicator!) more targets to hit. Remember—by setting up criteria, you are essentially saying, "We promise to show all of these things are true." If an adjudicator subsequently feels

that you did not prove *any* of your criteria (even a criterion that is somewhat irrelevant to the debate at hand), you will run the risk of losing. For example, in this case, criterion 4 suggests an argument to opponents and adjudicators alike—it does not help the proposition case.

## Criteria—A Loaded Term

Clearly, the word “criteria” carries a lot of baggage in debating! Therefore, be careful *not* to use the word unless you mean it in the sense that we have discussed. For example, it might be tempting to say, “Today, I will present you with two criteria,” when you really mean, “Today, I will present two arguments.” Although it *shouldn’t* matter, throwing around loaded words like “criteria” will serve only to confuse adjudicators.

## Criteria—Key Points

Essentially, these are the key points about using criteria.

- Criteria are designed to *clarify and simplify*, not to *complicate*. Unless a concept is inherently vague, don’t use criteria. In practice, this means that criteria are far more useful in debates requiring a judgment of fact (“This House believes that feminism has failed”) rather than a judgment of policy (“This House believes that the United States was justified in attacking Afghanistan”).
- If you think you must use criteria,
  - Use as few as possible;
  - Set them up clearly at the outset, explaining how they elucidate the key concept;
  - Refer back to the relevant criterion (or criteria) at the end of each point;
  - Make sure that both the first and second speakers have proven *all* of the criteria;
  - Go back and think about whether you *really* need criteria!

## Step 3: The Arguments

### BEGINNER

## The Basic Approach

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY AN “ARGUMENT”?

Like many words used in debating, the word “argument” has many meanings. For example, in its broadest sense, the entire debate is an argument between two teams. In a narrower sense, a team’s theme could be considered an argument, because it supports one side of the motion. However, the word “argument” generally has a more specific meaning to debaters, and that is the meaning used in this book.

For our purposes, an argument is *a distinct point supporting your side of the motion*. For example, if the motion is “This House believes that schools give too much homework,” then the essence of an argument for the proposition might be, “Students have so much homework to do that they do not have enough time for sports or other activities.” This is not necessarily the *main* point for the proposition team, and it is hardly the *central* point (that is, the theme). However, it is *a* point nonetheless so, for our purposes, it is an argument.

In the simplest sense, we can consider a debating case to comprise different arguments, brought together by the case approach (which we examined in the last chapter).



## WHY DO WE NEED DISTINCT ARGUMENTS?

Many young debaters do not understand why distinct arguments are necessary—they wonder, “Why can’t I just give a speech supporting my side of the motion?”

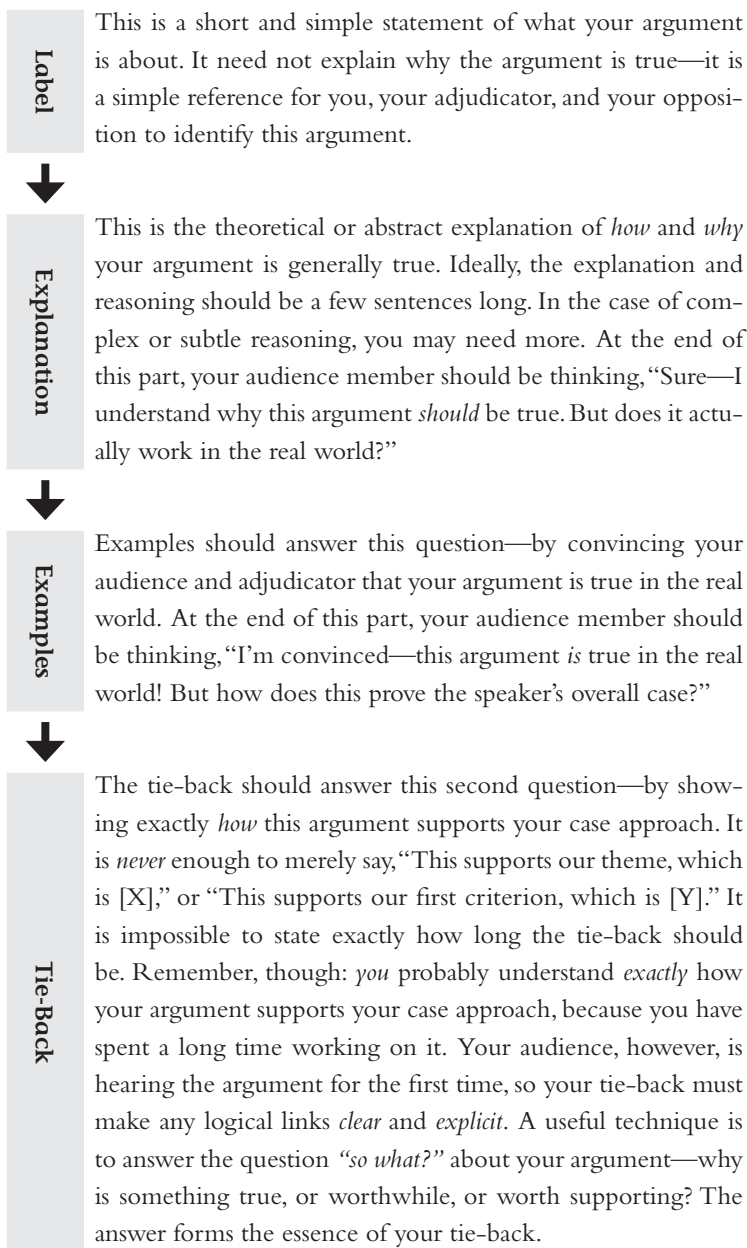
The answer is straightforward: that speech would inevitably involve a number of different ideas and, hopefully, examples. It is an important strategic skill for debaters to be able to separate those ideas and examples, and present them to the audience and adjudicator in a clear and logical way. The question, “Should I just give a speech supporting my side of the motion?” reduces to “Should I trust the audience and adjudicator to identify my reasons for me?” The answer, of course, is no!

A flowing speech that merely supports the motion in the most abstract terms *will* include important arguments and examples, but they will rarely be identified as such, or placed into a logical order. Our approach here forces the speaker to identify the arguments and examples in his or her speech, and give them a clear structure. Even at this simple and abstract level, it is obvious that the second approach is clearer, more logical, and easier to follow. This is why we need distinct arguments.

## THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF AN ARGUMENT

Structuring a speech by using distinct arguments is a great start. Ideally, however, each argument itself needs some kind of internal structure. We are now examining the structure that *each* argument should have, rather than the structure of the case as a whole.

It is important not to be *too* rigid in discussing the internal structure of an argument; different speakers can use different structures for different arguments, and those structures can be successful. The following approach is a basic structure that works in many cases. Of course, you don’t have to use it—often you will find other structures that work just as well, or better—but understanding this structure is still worthwhile!



## HOW MANY ARGUMENTS DO YOU NEED?

There is no set rule about how many arguments you need in your case. Naturally, the ideal number of arguments will depend upon the context of your debate—for example, the grade, the length of speeches, and the complexity of the motion itself. However, we can spot some important guidelines.

The first and second speakers almost always need at least two arguments. A speaker who thinks that he or she has only one idea to present needs to look more carefully at that idea—usually, there are at least two smaller parts that can each be developed as an argument.

Four or more arguments for either the first or the second speaker will almost certainly become unwieldy—the speaker will probably spend so much time setting up and tying-back those arguments that there will be little time for the essence of each argument itself!

Therefore, as a general principle, the first and second speaker should each have two or three arguments. This means that, as a team, you should prepare four, five, or six arguments.

## INTERMEDIATE

We now need to focus more closely on the examples—that part of your argument that convinces the audience that your assertions are true in the real world. We will examine the best ways to choose and to develop examples. We will also look at some effective alternatives to examples.

## Examples

Examples are the simplest and most popular form of substantiation. However, it is important to understand that only certain kinds of examples are useful in debates. Specifically, examples should be:

1. Real,
2. General, and
3. Significant.

*First*, examples must be real; they cannot be hypothetical. Many debaters, particularly in debates about philosophical or abstract motions, simply make up examples to illustrate their point. Consider the motion “This House believes that it is better to be smart than to be kind.” Many young debaters would use hypothetical examples to support their argument. For example, “Imagine that you are at school, and the teacher asks you a question that you can’t answer. Everyone will laugh at you, no matter how kind you are. Therefore, it is better to be smart than to be kind.” The problems with this approach should be obvious—there is *no* evidence that “everyone will laugh at you,” and your opposition could just as easily make up their own hypothetical example to prove exactly the opposite!

Of course, the rule against hypothetical examples should not be misunderstood. It does not prevent you from hypothesizing about the future, based on predicted trends, supported by real events. For example, if you were arguing against a war with North Korea, you could legitimately say, “North Korea has a huge conventional weaponry, and possibly nuclear arms. President Kim Jong-Il would be willing to deploy those weapons if his regime is attacked—his regime has always responded to the prospect of conflict with aggressive belligerence, and has repeatedly threatened military action if it is attacked.” This may not be true, of course, but it is certainly arguable—although the speaker is hypothesizing, he or she is supporting the predictions with real examples.

*Second*, examples must be general. This principle has already been explained in Chapter One, when we considered the requirement of general truth. Remember, Adolf Hitler is a real example, and he is certainly a significant example, but he is not a *general* example. The examples you choose must be significantly general to illustrate your abstract principle. Relatively isolated incidents will not show general truth.

*Third*, examples must be significant. Where possible, you should focus on the big examples relating to your particular motion. Consider the motion, “This House believes that terrorism achieves nothing.” Both teams should spend significant time discussing the most recent examples of terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda, Hamas, the IRA, and the PLO. Of course, the teams are welcome to discuss more obscure groups (such as the Shining Path, the Red Brigade, or the Kurdistan Workers Party). However, if such groups are discussed, it must be *in addition to*, not *instead of*, an analysis of the most significant examples. Essentially, this is an application of the earlier principle that *where there is a clear issue, you should debate that issue*.

The easiest way for young debaters to use insignificant examples is to use personal anecdotes. For example, novice debaters can sometimes be heard to say things like, “The other day in my math class . . .,” or “My sister plays sports, and . . . .” These examples should be avoided at all costs—they are insignificant to substantiate your argument, and they leave you open to a cheap attack (“maybe our opposition’s family does that, but I’m sure the rest of us don’t.”).

## **ANALYSIS OF EXAMPLES**

A single event can mean many things to many different people. For this reason, it is *never* enough simply to mention an example; for each example that you present, you must provide some interpretation and analysis. For example, suppose that the motion is “This House believes that the war with Iraq was justified.” A proposition speaker might *merely*

say, “America was justified in attacking Iraq because Saddam Hussein’s government had aggressive motives. Organizations with aggressive motives cannot be left to pursue those motives in peace—September 11 is proof of that.” However, although September 11 is *mentioned* as an example, there is no *analysis* or *interpretation*. The statement poses more questions than it answers: *Why* is September 11 proof of that? What *part* of September 11 is proof of that? How are Al-Qaeda and the Taliban analogous to Saddam Hussein and his regime? It is not difficult to see ways that the *opposition* could use the same example for its own case; it could suggest that September 11 was an unjustified excuse for the war with Iraq, or even argue that an expansive foreign policy may lead to more terrorist attacks in future. The point is not that the example is a poor one for the proposition—indeed, a proposition team may find it to be very effective. However, merely stating the example, without any explanation, analysis, or interpretation, would clearly be a very poor strategy.

### **Weak Analysis: A Case Study**

The 1997 World Schools Debating Championships were held in Bermuda, and the quarter-final motion was “This House welcomes the 21st century.” The proposition had defined the motion (quite reasonably) to set itself the task of showing that the 21st century would be an improvement upon the 20th century. The second proposition speaker’s first argument was that human rights are improving. It is transcribed in full here, with an approximate guide to its internal structure.

<b>Label (Incomplete)</b>	Premise One, ladies and gentlemen,
<b>Explanation</b>	<p>Human rights are good. Because it stops people being abused. It stops sinister things happening to people. It stops people being genetically engineered, with three heads, or not to be gay, or to be a different color. It stops nasty things happening to people.</p> <p>Premise Two: More and more people are gaining human rights, because the world as a whole is becoming more and more democratic. The influence of western democracies, the influence particularly of America, exporting its great MTV culture all over the world, and its “you can go to McDonald’s and you can pick whatever you want—you have freedom of choice,” exporting this to the world is making the world more and more democratic.</p>
<b>Examples</b>	We see the example of Burma, where Aung San Suu Kyi is doing great things for the democratic movement in Burma.
<b>Tie-Back</b>	<p>So, Premise One: human rights are good. Premise Two: more and more people are gaining human rights. Those have been proved.</p> <p>Therefore, we infer to the conclusion that more and more people are gaining something that is good. They will continue to gain this into the 21st century. Therefore, the 21st century will be better than before.</p>

We could critique this argument on a number of levels. For example, while there is nothing wrong with the “premise one, premise two, conclusion” structure, it seems weak in this context. This is because the first premise (“human rights are good”) was not really an important contention at all: it was stated in such abstract terms as to be uncontroversial.

The more relevant critique for our purposes is the complete lack of analysis of the examples. Three examples were used: MTV, McDonald’s, and Aung San Suu Kyi. There is nothing *inherently* wrong with these examples—true, it is a brave speaker who claims that MTV and McDonald’s have any direct relevance to the spread of human rights, but some link could no doubt be found. The problem is not necessarily the choice of example so much as the abject lack of analysis. For example, the speaker never explained what an “MTV culture” is, nor why it and McDonald’s represent freedom of choice. The speaker never showed how freedom of consumer choice (which is presumably the point) relates to freedom of political choice (that is, democracy), and never showed how democracy relates to human rights. Indeed, the very notion of human rights was never explained—it was simply reduced to an apparent prohibition on the most bizarre genetic engineering.

The speaker used the example of Aung San Suu Kyi, yet never explained who she was, what she was doing for democracy, whether or how she was having any real effect on Burmese society, or why the world should care what happens in Burma.

The point here is not that the argument was fundamentally flawed—indeed, with a bit more caution, it could have been a very logical point. Rather, the point is that the speaker never properly analyzed his examples, which never showed the truth of his assertions in any meaningful way. This is what some coaches and adjudicators mean when they criticize a speaker for “failing to ask the ‘big questions’”—the speaker has dealt in labels rather than in any real explanation and analysis.



## ADDING MORE EXAMPLES

Your argument will generally be stronger if you can substantiate it with more than one example. There are a couple of reasons for this.

*First*, using multiple examples generally adds credibility to your case. The principle that you are asserting is more likely to seem generally true if you can show that it applies in a number of cases, rather than in one case. Your team will generally seem more knowledgeable and credible on the issue if you can substantiate your arguments with numerous relevant examples, which will help you to “cover the field” much more effectively.

*Second*, using multiple examples can, in some circumstances, give you a distinct strategic advantage, because many adjudicators, particularly at the World Championships level, use “flowing” (or “flowsheet”) marking guides. This means that the adjudicator will write down every argument and example as it is raised, then map its treatment throughout the debate. The adjudicator will look favorably on a team that has raised an argument or example that has not been rebutted by its opposition. Under this adjudication approach, a team that uses multiple examples to support each argument receives a clear strategic advantage—the opposition is given more examples to rebut, which they are less likely to do successfully. Of course, using multiple examples in this way will also add credibility and weight to your argument.

The danger of using multiple examples to substantiate an argument is that you simply list the examples, with no real analysis or interpretation. This is sometimes referred to as using a “shopping list” of examples—the mind-set, essentially, is “throw out enough examples and one of them will stick.” Using a shopping list of examples is much weaker than providing a single example with strong analysis and interpretation. In its most extreme form, this approach becomes argument *by example*—where a team will simply list examples that are asserted to show a particular point. That is, many teams provide little if any explanation for their arguments. This is a very weak approach—it is

unlikely that any list of examples, without abstract reasoning, can show an argument to be generally true.

The best approach to using multiple examples is very simple—choose one example, analyze it fully, then list the other examples, with brief explanation. That is, you should present an example fully, as you would if it were the only example. *Then*, you can add words to this effect: “This is also shown by the examples of [X], [Y] and [Z], which illustrate the same principle.” If you have time, you might add a *brief* explanation of how that same principle applies in each of the additional cases you cite.

## STATISTICS

We learned earlier that an effective example is real, general, and significant. In the previous section, these requirements were discussed to help us decide *which* example would be used. However, what if there is *no* example that meets these criteria, as when our argument refers to numerous individual examples, rather than a relatively small number of examples?

Suppose that the debate is about terrorism. There are a relatively small number of terrorist groups (or a relatively small number of significant terrorist groups), so we can happily choose some of these groups in order to generalize about the whole. However, suppose instead that our debate is about poverty and development. The number of poor people in the world is extraordinarily large. Even if we discussed in detail 10 individual cases, we would be no closer to understanding or generalizing about the issues of poverty and development.

It is here that statistics become important. For example, suppose that the debate is about the global response to AIDS, and that you are arguing in favor of a significant and urgent response. You could use a heart-wrenching (true) story of a specific AIDS orphan as your example. However, despite its obvious pathos, this story cannot capture the significance of the AIDS issue. It would be more effective to

explain the problem of AIDS orphans and then provide a relevant statistic—for example, that UNAIDS estimated in 2008 that more than 15 million children have been orphaned by AIDS.

If you do choose to use statistics, it is important to make them sound credible. Where possible, you should state the initial source of your statistics, as well as any other relevant information (such as dates). For example, “According to the International Telecommunications Union statistics for 2007, about 32 percent of Iranians are regular users of the Internet.” This specificity is much more credible than saying, “statistics show that about a third of Iranians use the Internet.”

## **OTHER ALTERNATIVES TO EXAMPLES**

Examples and statistics are by far the most common ways of supporting an argument. However, they are not the only ways.

In particular, problems can arise in trying to support an argument that is appealing to a sense of morality, or broad principle. Suppose that the motion is “This House believes that the Guantanamo Bay detentions were justified.” No doubt the opposition will discuss the harsh conditions of detention at Guantanamo, and may argue that the camp harmed the security and international influence of the United States. However, what if the opposition team also wants to argue that the very *fact* of detention was wrong? Numerous examples and statistics exist about the Guantanamo detentions, but none inherently show why it was wrong.

In cases like this, it is acceptable to revert to formal expressions of moral standards. Usually, this means citing international agreements to show a collective international will on a particular issue. In this case, the proposition could argue something like this:

It is a national and international disgrace that the United States chose to detain suspected terrorists at Guantanamo Bay. This breaches fundamental international principles of human rights. Arbitrary detention is prohib-

ited by Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and by Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The detainees' treatment was arbitrary because they were afforded inadequate rights to challenge their detention before a fair and open court. Their treatment also breached the protections of the Geneva Conventions, something recognized by the United States Supreme Court in 2006 in the case of *Hamdan v Rumsfeld*. What's more, the process of review provided to the detainees infringed important principles of the American Constitution itself (in particular, the right to *habeas corpus*) as the Supreme Court recognized in 2008 in the case of *Boumediene v Bush*.

None of this substantiation involves statistics or examples as such. However, if used carefully, it is an acceptable form of support of a broad moral and community principle.

The second popular source of moral authority is religion. However, unlike international convention, religion is generally a very weak support in debates. Consider the motion "This House believes that we should support the death penalty."

The opposition team may argue, "Killing is wrong. The Ten Commandments say, 'Thou shalt not kill,' and Jesus taught us, 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.'" However, this argument is very weak in a debate—notwithstanding that many people follow these canons, there is no reason why the Bible should have any inherent authority in debating. What's more, many of the most ardent supporters of capital punishment (for example, in parts of the United States) are also firm believers in statements such as these.

A more sophisticated approach is to say, "Killing is wrong. This is a recognized principle of morality, as we can see by looking at the doctrines of most major religions around the world." However, even this approach is weak. Not only is it questionable whether most major religions do oppose capital punishment, there is no inherent reason

why religious doctrine should determine public policy (or debating results!) in secular countries.

It is easy to see why debaters occasionally look to religious doctrine to substantiate their arguments when neither examples nor statistics exist to make the point. However, in these cases, it is much better to look to international convention than to religious pronouncements, however important those pronouncements may be to many members of our society.

## **FINDING CONTENT**

Of course, it is easy to discuss the principles of content in theoretical terms, throwing around many examples in the process. For most debaters, a very practical question arises: “Where do I *find* these examples and statistics?”

This is where debating can become sheer hard work! Good debaters have good general knowledge—of world events, issues, and organizations. In fact, a significant proportion of the time that a good team spends before a debating tournament is spent on research, for just this reason.

## **News and Current Affairs**

At the most basic level, debaters can improve their general knowledge by keeping in touch with news and current affairs by watching the news on television, listening on radio, or reading it in the newspapers or on the Internet. If you are going to spend time keeping in touch with the news, you should spend your time effectively—and that means knowing which news sources are worthwhile. Every city has serious news sources, and every city has sensational news sources—good general knowledge comes from the former, not the latter!

Keeping in touch with the news is a great way to start improving your general knowledge. However, simply watching the news will

usually not be enough to gain a good understanding of the issues—at least, not for higher levels of debating. Usually, you need to seek out big-picture articles and analysis, which discuss entire issues rather than simply report on the most recent news story. There are many good sources for such discussion.

## **Research**

General knowledge is vital for any form of debate. However, it is sometimes necessary to do specific research on an issue to complement your general knowledge. It is difficult to give much general guidance for research of this kind. However, two points probably bear mentioning.

*First*, remember to keep your research debate-worthy. Where possible, avoid long discussions or facts that are of curiosity value only. Instead, try to note relevant names, dates, and numbers, as well as concise discussions of important relevant events. Relevant, concise information will be of great use in developing a case.

*Second*, the Internet is an invaluable tool, but you must use it properly. Simply searching for the issue of your debate (for example, capital punishment), then clicking links is unlikely to yield good results. You will have more success by looking at facts, press statements, and publications produced by relevant nongovernment organizations (such as Amnesty International). There is no need to limit your search to websites supporting your side of the motion. For example, if you are supporting capital punishment, Amnesty's website provides useful news, facts, and figures on the issue—even though Amnesty opposes capital punishment.

## **Fabricating Content**

There are not many ways of cheating in debating, but fabricating content (that is, making up examples and claiming that they are true) is one of them. Everyone who attends a debate—the audience, the adju-

indicator, and your opposition—is entitled to assume that the substantiation you present is true. Of course, every debater will try to interpret examples and statistics in a favorable way—that, after all, is the essence of analysis and interpretation—but analysis and interpretation are fundamentally different from fabrication.

Fortunately, the fabrication of content is not merely morally objectionable—it can be strategically catastrophic. If you know so little about an issue that you are forced to fabricate content, you probably don't know enough to make that fabrication sound reasonable. Adjudicators, opponents, and audiences are adept at spotting fabrication when it occurs—and the subsequent decline in a debater's overall credibility is overwhelming.

The message is simple: don't fabricate content. Ever. Take the time to do more research. If no good examples or statistics exist, change your argument. On a somewhat philosophical level, competitive debating is one part of public debate in our society—fabricating content defeats its entire purpose.

## **CREDIBILITY IN PRESENTING CONTENT**

By now, it should be clear that credibility is very important in debating—audience members and adjudicators want to know which case (and which team) they should trust. Credibility is most important in presenting content—it is not enough to know what you are talking about; you must *sound* like you know what you are talking about.

There are two ways to achieve credibility in presenting content. *First*, your arguments should, if possible, maintain a sense of perspective and proportionality. If, for example, you claim that the Russian government is dominated by militaristic hawks, your perspective is understandable; if you argue that the country is likely to invade the United States at the drop of a hat, you are probably going too far! This principle should seem obvious, but it is important: debaters with a trite

or superficial understanding of current events suffer a greater risk of presenting bizarre or extreme perspectives.

*Second*, regardless of how credible your argument is, there are a number of techniques that can be used to make your argument *sound* credible. These are the same techniques that news reporters use all the time: mention names, dates, and numbers! It is sounds much more credible to say, “British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his government provided strong ongoing support for the Bush Administration’s hard-line stance on Iraq” than “Britain strongly supported America’s hard-line stance on Iraq.” Similarly, it is more credible to say, “On October 12, 2000, members of Al-Qaeda bombed the USS *Cole* while harbored in Yemen, killing 17 American sailors” than, “Al-Qaeda killed a number of people when they bombed an American warship in the Middle East.” Sounding credible is the main reason that you should pay attention to names, dates, and numbers when you follow current affairs—this information does not always *change* the argument, but it contributes to your credibility in presenting the argument. It is not unusual for general knowledge tests to be used in debating trials. Significant portions of these tests are usually devoted to naming names for precisely this reason.

## **Home Turf Examples**

We mentioned earlier that it is a strategic mistake to use examples from your personal life in building your case. The reason given earlier was that such examples are strategically insignificant.

However, there is a second reason: speakers lack credibility if their only substantiation comes from personal experience. This reason becomes particularly important at national and international debating tournaments, where teams tend to overuse examples from their own country. The correct principle is simple: a team’s substantiation should be governed by the issue of the debate and the geographical scope of the tournament, not by the team’s place of origin.



For example, the World Schools Debating Championships are an *international* debating tournament. Therefore, examples and statistics used should be of *international* significance. Of course, examples do need to apply to the whole world; examples and statistics from specific countries are fine, but only if they are relevant internationally. Debating tournaments are not conferences. At a conference, delegates would be expected and encouraged to discuss issues in the context of their own experience. At a debating tournament, participants are expected to argue their side of every issue in the best way possible—and that means *not* unduly relying upon home turf material.

The correlative to this principle is that debaters should avoid, where possible, using material from their opposition's place of origin. The rationale for this is straightforward: your opposition will be much better informed about those examples than you are, but will not suffer any credibility loss by discussing it—because it was your team that brought the example into the debate.

The Australian Schools Debating Team made this mistake when debating the English Schools Debating Team at the 2000 World Schools Debating Championships in Pittsburgh. The Australian team cited the example of a town in England that had witnessed a significant increase in crime rates, and claimed that the example showed the weakness of that town's policing policy. What the Australian team did *not* know (and the English team *did*) was that the town was a new and wealthy housing development—the overall crime rate was therefore quite *low*, although it had increased. The English team was, of course, quite willing to explain this distinction to their Australian friends on numerous occasions during the debate, reminding the Australian team the hard way of an important principle: *where possible, avoid using examples or statistics from your opposition's home turf!*

## USE OF SUBSTANTIATION ELSEWHERE IN YOUR CASE

We have spent significant time examining the internal structure of an argument, and considering the importance of interpretation and explanation in presenting any substantiation. Specifically, we have learned that substantiation is only as good as the explanation that accompanies it, and the argument that it supports.

For this reason, it is a significant strategic mistake to use substantiation elsewhere in your team case. For example, one debate at the 2001 World Schools Debating Championships in Johannesburg involved the issue of AIDS drugs for the developing world. One first proposition speaker began his speech with a long list of emotive statistics about the spread of AIDS around the world. The statistics were impressive, and the team had clearly done a significant amount of research. However, the statistics were largely wasted. By simply dumping them at the start of his speech (rather than incorporating them into individual arguments), the speaker missed the opportunity to analyze, explain, and interpret those statistics. That is, he left all of the big questions unanswered: *Why? How? So what?* The lesson here should be simple: if you go to the trouble to find good examples or statistics, make sure you incorporate them into distinct arguments. Remember: a statistic or example left on its own proves nothing.

This lesson does not mean that you can never *mention* examples elsewhere in your speech. A first proposition speaker might quite effectively use an introduction like this: “Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen . . . when a second plane hit the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, the world changed forever. This is a debate about how our governments can best respond to the new security threats that we all face.” There is nothing wrong with *mentioning* the example of September 11, because the speaker is not trying to use it to make any *point*. However, if you want your examples or statistics to have any persuasive weight, you need to develop them as part of a distinct argument.

## SOPHISTICATION IN EXPLANATION

It is important to provide some abstract explanation (theoretical reasoning) as to why your argument is true. However, this explanation need not be entirely abstract or theoretical—where possible, present your explanation simply and tangibly so your audience can follow it.

For example, consider a debate held in 1998 on the motion “This House believes that Bill Gates is too big for his bytes.” The issue here was whether Microsoft is too big, and the debate reduces significantly to a discussion of whether Microsoft had acted in an unacceptably anticompetitive way—an issue that remains current today. Suppose that you were debating this issue and presenting an argument that Microsoft’s strategy involves beneficial product integration.

An abstract (and easy) way of explaining that argument might be something like this: “Product integration is the process of integrating more components and benefits into a product. Product integration is an important way for corporations to distinguish their products in a competitive marketplace, and it ultimately increases the real value of a product. For this reason, we should not criticize Microsoft’s conduct—it simply amounts to welcome product integration.”

This explanation is sound. However, it would probably not connect with many audience members, and even your adjudicator might not be clear as to exactly what you were arguing.

When this motion was debated in Australia in 1998, the first speaker of the opposition was Adam Spencer, who had previously been awarded Best Speaker at the World University Debating Championships. He explained this argument in a particularly innovative way:

Let’s look at the concept of integration of product. This is one of the main issues that the whole antitrust action is about.

Ten, fifteen years ago, when you bought a car, the thought of it having a radio—nup. Air-conditioning—no chance. Sunroof—no chance. Dot, dot, dot. Those things were expensive, hard-to-obtain extras that everyone wanted and had to go out of their way to get.

Computers have developed in exactly the same way. Not just Microsoft, but every single one of Microsoft's competitors—IBM, Apple, Sun, Novell—have been integrating product into their packages throughout the process. Microsoft is simply better at it. So it comes that if you buy a Microsoft product, and you get Windows thrown in, that is nothing more than product integration.

Adam then proceeded to give specific substantiation of the argument—that is, this was simply his abstract explanation.

The beauty of this approach is its deceptive simplicity. The reasoning here is general and abstract, in the sense that Adam did not start simply by discussing Microsoft in great detail—he established an abstract principle about product integration. However, the explanation is simple, even colloquial. The use of common examples makes it all the more tangible; it is an explanation that an audience could relate to, and unquestionably did—Adam and his team won the debate.

The point here is *not* that you should always use analogies to explain your arguments, for analogies can often obscure rather than clarify an issue. Rather, the point is that even theoretical and abstract reasoning can be made simple and tangible if you work hard enough. Inexperienced debaters are probably best advised to stick with a basic explanation until they feel comfortable with it—Adam Spencer is undoubtedly a master of the art, and explanations of his colloquial simplicity come with experience.

## Testing Your Arguments

So far, we have examined the abstract principles of developing individual arguments. However, we have not examined any techniques for

deciding whether or not an argument you are considering will help your case. Like stress-testing in a manufacturing process, the process called “testing your arguments” involves searching for weakness and possible improvements in your “product,” which is, of course, your argument.

## **SPECIFIC WEAKNESSES**

There are a number of potential weaknesses with arguments that are sufficiently common to receive specific mention. Of course, this is by no means an exhaustive list of the potential problems with arguments, but it is certainly worth keeping in mind.

### **Inconsistency**

It is obvious that arguments must be consistent with each other and with your team’s theme. A direct and relevant contradiction will almost certainly cause a team to lose, because it erodes so much of the team’s credibility.

Direct and relevant contradictions are, thankfully, fairly easy to identify in preparation. However, subtle inconsistencies between arguments can also erode a team’s credibility (although not to the same degree), and can be difficult to spot in preparation.

For example, in the debate about AIDS drugs discussed earlier, the opposition team (opposition) was arguing that generic drugs are not very good, and hence are not a viable substitute brand-name AIDS drugs. One opposition speaker took the line that AIDS drugs were *as bad* as generics, which were very bad. Another speaker on the same team argued that generic drugs were so bad that they were *worse* than actual AIDS drugs. This example shows just how subtle some inconsistencies can be. Here, both speakers were arguing that generic drugs were of poor quality, and hence inadequate substitutes. However, their understanding of these drugs was inconsistent. While this inconsistency

certainly did not lose the debate (in fact, the team won), it was not helpful to the team's credibility. For this reason, it is always important when developing arguments to ensure that *every* speaker of the team understands the argument in the same way.

## **Insignificance**

Remember, it is usually necessary to show that your side of the motion is generally true. It is possible to present arguments or examples that are logically relevant, and well argued, but which nonetheless do not show your side of the motion to be true in general.

For example, consider the motion "This House regrets the 20th century." In this case, the opposition team must provide arguments and examples to show the benefits or the gains from the 20th century. Almost inevitably, an inexperienced team will discuss the Internet as one of the key benefits of the 20th century. However, this is logically and strategically very weak! Why? Because the Internet was widely relevant only in the last five years of the 20th century. Even then, it has been regularly used by only a small percentage of the world's population. Although the Internet can be portrayed as a gain of the 20th century, it is simply not significant enough to use in the case—particularly given the extraordinary political, social, and economic changes that occurred over the course of the century. The Internet will surely pale against the opposition's examples, which would likely include two World Wars, numerous other conflicts, widespread genocide, and mass starvation.

A simple rule of thumb may help here. It is not enough to ask, "Is this argument relevant?" or "Does this help our side of the motion?" You should also ask, "Will this argument or example stand up against the biggest and most significant arguments and examples presented by our opposition?"

## Arguments That Are Too General

Quite obviously, the objective of a debate is to argue about an issue. Therefore, your arguments must relate to the issue of debate, and do so directly.

This principle seems self-evident, but can often be overlooked. For example, one debate at the 2001 World Schools Debating Championships in Johannesburg was on the issue of whether gay couples should be allowed to adopt children. The proposition team was arguing in favor of allowing such adoption, and started with the argument that “discrimination is always wrong,” giving the example of the unacceptability of anti-Semitism. This argument, however, was too general, and merely begged the crucial question—the proposition team was arguing, “Distinctions should not be drawn without good reason,” but was not discussing whether or not good reason did exist, *in this case*. The principle here should be clear: either you should be arguing directly on the issue at hand, or you should be drawing an analogy and explaining its relevance. If you find yourself stating general propositions in the abstract, your argument is probably not specific enough.

## Irrelevance

Some arguments are not so much *weak* as *invalid*—they are irrelevant to what your team needs to show. That is, even if they are well substantiated and well argued, some arguments simply do not assist your side of the motion. For that reason, quite obviously, you should never use them!

The simplest form of irrelevant argument is an argument that does not prove what your team set out to show. Although this sounds obvious, it is surprising how often debaters can become so enthused by an argument that they completely fail to realize its irrelevance! This situation is often caused by misunderstanding the underlying assumptions of the debate.

Let's consider an example. Suppose the motion was "This House believes that we should support globalization." The opposition team may argue something along these lines: "We should not support globalization. We live in a democracy, and our government is obliged to respect public opinions. Massive antiglobalization protests around the world, as well as numerous opinion polls, prove that the majority of our society is opposed to globalization. Therefore, our government has a moral duty to oppose it."

The problem with this argument should be clear: it confuses the notions of "we" and "our government." The underlying assumption of a debate like this is that "we" (whoever "we" are) are required to decide whether "we" support globalization. Merely showing that many other people oppose globalization is utterly irrelevant to whether "we" should support it. This principle should seem obvious—and the argument is quite bizarre and illogical—but this kind of approach can sometimes occur. Like so many traps in debating, this trap can be avoided by debating the clear issue required by the motion: in our case, the merits and demerits of globalization.

## **Dependent Arguments**

One special form of invalid argument is a dependent argument—an argument whose effectiveness depends entirely on the success of another argument, and is therefore not a distinct reason in support of the motion.

A dependent argument is best explained with an example. One debate at the World Schools Debating Championships was on the motion "This House supports voluntary euthanasia." The proposition team argued on two fronts. *First*, the team argued, "Terminally ill patients in extraordinary pain should have a right to die, and allowing those patients to receive voluntary euthanasia is a good thing." (Of course, the argument was more sophisticated than this, but this was its essence.) *Second*, the team argued, "Palliative care is extremely



costly, and a significant drain on our society's resources. Of course, we wouldn't support killing people simply to save money, but *given* that terminally ill patients should have a right to die, and *given* that a specific patient exercises that right, society will receive economic benefits by not having to support that patient's palliative care."

The main clash between the cases is, understandably, over whether or not a terminally ill patient has a right to die. The proposition team is essentially arguing, "If a patient has a right to die, then there is an additional benefit by our economic cost argument. But if a patient has no right to die, the economic cost does not itself justify voluntary euthanasia." Therefore, the economic cost argument does not contribute to any clash between the cases, because its value is dependent entirely on the success of another argument (the "right to die" argument). It therefore does not assist the proposition case, and should have been omitted.

No doubt, it can be difficult to spot dependent arguments such as this, which do not arise very often (although they tend to arise most in debates of a particularly moral nature). However, the underlying principle should be clear: where a debate concerns a fundamental issue, your arguments must address that issue. Merely pointing to additional benefits will not generally strengthen your arguments on the main issue of debate.

## Conclusion to Step 3

In this chapter, we have examined the importance of using distinct arguments, the essential requirements of an argument, and *one* possible internal structure for an argument.

We know that every argument must include a number of components:

- A label,
- Theoretical reasoning and explanation,
- Substantiation,
- At least one tie-back,

- An internal structure that is clear and simple, and that assists rather than impedes the persuasive value of your argument.

The simple structure that we examined (a label, followed by an explanation, examples, and tie-back) is one way of combining these components. Ultimately, your goal in developing every argument should be to use a structure that is clear, logical, and easy to follow.

## Step 4: The Split

Once your team has developed arguments, you are ready to start writing speeches, but you can't write any speeches until you know which speaker will be presenting which arguments. This allocation—of arguments to speakers—is known as *the split*. In this chapter, we will examine the important guiding principles for deciding on your split.

### BEGINNER

## The Basic Concept

Let's begin by understanding the basic concept. There are three people in a debating team. It might be tempting to think that all three speakers present substantive arguments, but this is not accepted practice. Instead, it is accepted that the third speakers will devote their speeches to rebuttal and summary (as we will examine in more detail later). Therefore, the first two speakers present all of the team's prepared (substantive) arguments.

Splitting your case is about dividing your prepared arguments between your team's first and second speakers. The easiest way is to do it arbitrarily: for example, each speaker could take the arguments that he or she likes, or the arguments could be divided alphabetically. However, this approach is *wrong*! It is far more strategic to divide your arguments along some common or logical lines.

Therefore, splitting your case involves finding two labels—one for the first speaker's material and one for the second speaker's material—and determining which arguments fit under each label.

## **CHOOSING THE GROUPINGS**

The first challenge in splitting your case is to identify which arguments belong together—that is, to decide how the arguments will be grouped. It is difficult to be very dogmatic about this aspect of debating technique—each split needs to be decided on the merits of the entire case that you have developed, so we can only examine general principles.

Your arguments should be grouped along common logical lines—essentially, you should consider the different areas or groups to which the motion applies. For example, in a debate about whether voluntary euthanasia should be legalized, you may choose to group your arguments under the labels “patients” and “doctors,” or “patients” and “society in general.” In a debate about American foreign policy since September 11, you may wish to group your arguments under the labels “defense and security issues” and “broader geopolitical issues.”

Often, you will not immediately be able to identify distinct groups that appear from the motion itself. In that case, you need to look through your list of individual arguments to group similar arguments together. The outcome should be the same—that is, you should identify common logical lines that unite the arguments for each speaker.

## A HUNG CASE

When we examined the development of individual arguments, we learned the importance of tying each argument back to the overall case approach. We do this in order to present a unified case.

For this same reason, it is vital that each speaker proves the *whole* case, albeit by considering different areas. A simple way of considering this principle is to imagine that an audience member will watch *either* your first or second speech, but not both. You need to be able to convince that audience member of your side of the motion.

For example, let's consider that you are proposition for the motion "This House supports voluntary euthanasia," and assume again that your first speaker is discussing patients and your second speaker is discussing society more broadly. An audience member who watched only the first speech could be convinced that we should support voluntary euthanasia, because of the issues confronting patients. An audience member who watched only the second speech could be convinced that we should support voluntary euthanasia because of the issues confronting society in general. Therefore, this split is valid.

However, suppose you were proposition for the motion "This House believes that sports stars are paid too much." Presume that your first speaker shows sports stars are paid *a lot*, and that your second speaker shows how this causes detriment. In that case, an audience member who watched only the first speech *could not possibly* be convinced that sports stars are paid too much—the entire notion of "too much" (excess causing detriment) is not shown until the second speech. Therefore, this split is invalid, and is known as a hung case.

Hung cases can arise in debates that require a number of distinct points to be shown (such as "too" motions, or "big, red ball" motions generally). However, they can also arise in other motions if a team is not careful—particularly if a team tries to use its first speech to set the stage for the second speech. For example, one motion at a school debating tournament was "This House believes that trade with China

should be linked to improvements in human rights.” One proposition team allocated its material so that the first speaker showed that human rights abuses were serious and widespread in China, and the second speaker showed why, therefore, it was important to link trade with human rights. It should be obvious why this was a hung case: the first speaker had not proved the motion; indeed, the opposition team happily conceded the fact that China has widespread human rights problems. A common example of this form of hung case, particularly among inexperienced debaters, is for one speaker (usually the first speaker) to discuss some kind of subsidiary issue or background (for example, historical background), and the other speaker (usually the second speaker) to present actual arguments. Remember: *each* of your first and second speakers must show your case and your side of the motion.

We have learned that a hung case arises if you split the elements of a “big, red ball” motion on the *proposition*. However, what if you split the elements of a “big, red ball” motion on the *opposition*? Essentially, in the most abstract sense, what if your first speaker argues, “It’s not big,” and your second speaker argues, “It’s not a red ball”? On first appearances, this seems to be a valid split: both speakers are disproving the motion (as an opposition team must do), and the speeches are not contradictory. However, on closer inspection, this *is* a hung case—although each opposition speaker may be opposing the *motion*, they are not each showing their *case*. That is, in this abstract example, the opposition team’s case approach essentially says, “It’s neither big, red, nor a ball.” It is this case approach that is invalidly hung by splitting the elements of the “big, red ball” motion.

Finally, we must examine the moral/practical split, which is often popular in debates involving “should” motions. Some debaters consider this split to create a hung case. Their reasoning is that a “should” motion requires a team to show *both* a moral and a practical element, and those elements cannot be divided. However, this is not strictly correct. A speaker *can* validly show that something “should” be done

purely for moral reasons, while another speaker can support it purely for practical reasons. Nonetheless, the moral/practical split is very weak—while you *can* show that something “should” be done purely for moral or purely for practical reasons, your argument will almost always be stronger if you combine both elements.

## INTERMEDIATE

### COMMON SPLITS

Some splits seem to apply well to numerous motions, and many debaters understandably look to these when trying to find a split for their own case. Common splits include:

- society/individual;
- international/domestic;
- military/political;
- some combination of social, political, and economic;
- short-term/long-term.

A few words of warning are in order. *First*, you should try initially to find a split that works well with your case and your arguments before resorting to any list of common splits (such as this one above). *Second*, if you *do* resort to a common split, it is generally a good idea to tailor the labels of the split to your own case. For example, splitting society/patient in a debate about euthanasia is essentially a society/individual split with a more specific name.

## WHERE TO START?

Having chosen your arguments' groupings, you now need to decide the order of speeches. For example, in the euthanasia debate, you need to decide whether the first speaker discusses "patients" or "society." There are a number of helpful guides for deciding this issue.

*First*, one of your groupings may represent the primary group in the debate, because of its central importance to the issue. If this is the case, it is generally strategic to put that group first. For example, "patients" is clearly the fundamental or primary group in a debate about euthanasia. Therefore, if you were going to split a debate about euthanasia along the lines of "patients" and "society," it would be better to allocate "patients" to your first speaker.

*Second*, you may have a split where one grouping represents a general or big-picture view, and the other grouping represents a specific view. If this is the case, it is *generally* preferable to move from the general to the specific. For example, if your split was "society" and "individual," it would usually be strategic to allocate "society" to the first speaker. This is only a general principle, however—indeed, in the previous paragraph, we examined a split that is probably best ordered the other way around (that is, we placed "patients" first, although they are the more specific group).

*Third*, if you have time, it is generally worthwhile to consider how your opposition will split their case, particularly if you are on the opposition. You *may* want to decide the order of your split in response to your opposition's likely split. For example, suppose the motion is "This House believes that we are too soft on crime." It is likely that two good teams debating this motion will each split their case "criminal" and "society." A strategic proposition team is likely to place "society" first, because the case for harsher criminal punishment is generally strongest when viewed from society's point of view (for example, looking at high crime rates, unfortunate victims, and the like). An opposition team's first impulse would probably be to place "criminal" first, both

because criminals are the fundamental group and because the opposition will prefer to empathize with criminals throughout the debate (for example, discussing many criminals' unfortunate childhood and the like). However, a strategic opposition team *may* choose to reverse its split (that is, to place "society" first) in order to combat the emotive social arguments that the first proposition is likely to raise.

These general guidelines may assist in determining the order of some splits; in other cases, they will prove useless. Ultimately, like the grouping itself, the ordering of the split is something to be considered and decided carefully in each individual case. Often, no general principle is as useful as examining your arguments, and asking a simple question: "What needs to come out first?" There are at least two good reasons why an important or obvious argument should be presented by the first speaker:

- The audience and adjudicator will often expect to hear that argument. If you don't present it early, you may give the impression of having missed the issue.
- The arguments and examples presented by the first speaker will usually attract the most attention in the debate—essentially, both you and your opposition have more speeches in which to discuss them.

It is not difficult to think of arguments or examples that must be presented and dealt with early in a debate. If the debate is about terrorism, both first speakers should plan to discuss the September 11 attacks. If the debate is about American foreign policy, both first speakers should plan to discuss the conflict with Iraq. The list is long, but the point is short. *Some ideas need to come out first. Try to order your split to achieve this.*



## CONTENT SPLITS

It is important to remember exactly what a split entails: it involves dividing your arguments into two different conceptual groupings, so that each speaker argues your case from a different (although mutually consistent) perspective. This is *not* the same as merely splitting examples into different groups, then using them to prove essentially the same arguments. Such an approach is known as a “content split,” and it is strategically very weak, because the second speaker does not develop the team case at all—he or she merely piles more examples onto existing arguments and ideas.

For example, let’s consider again the “social/individual” split. Too often, debating teams take this to mean examples about society/ examples about individuals. However, this is a classic content split—it involves splitting on the basis of the substantiation, rather than the arguments. Instead, “social” must usually refer to social institutions (such as the institutions of government, or perhaps the media), rather than merely examples that apply to many individuals. It is difficult to be more specific than this, but the underlying principle should be clear: we split *ideas* and *arguments*, not examples.

## Step 5: Preparing Individual Speeches

**Tell them what you’re going to tell them,  
Then tell them,  
Then tell them what you told them.**

*Old speechwriters’ saying*

## The Need for Structure

At last, your team has developed all of the major elements of your speech: an issue, a definition, a theme, and arguments. You have even split those arguments, so that each speaker knows which points he or she will use. It is now time to build those arguments into a speech—or into the prepared part of a speech, anyway.

Of all the steps in preparing a debate, structuring a speech is probably the easiest. Having a clear structure is as simple as following the understood roles for each speaker.

## 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. The structure of a third speech is largely determined by the structure of rebuttal, so it is discussed in Chapter Two.

### 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, and is explained in Chapter Two. Such a disagreement should ideally form the first part of rebuttal.

## **SECOND SPEAKERS**

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;

- The arguments;
- A summary of arguments;
- A conclusion.

## THIRD SPEAKERS

The third speakers must spend most of their speeches rebutting. They must also summarize. The structure of a third speaker's speech will be covered in more detail later.

## Signposting

In debating, a signpost is a label that tells your audience, adjudicator, and opposition an indication of where you are in your speech. A signpost does not need to be complicated, but it does need to be clear. We have already covered a number of forms of signposting. For example, it is never enough simply to start an argument with abstract reasoning—you need to give it a clear label, and say something like, “My first argument this evening relates to . . .” Similarly, you should never simply state your theme. As we examined earlier, you need somehow to make it clear to your audience that it *is* your theme.

These techniques seem simple—even facile—but they are a vital part of effective structure. If you don't signpost the important elements of your speech, you run a significant risk that your adjudicator and audience will view your speech as a wandering discussion rather than a carefully structured argument.

That said, you need only signpost the *major* elements of your speech. For example, it is important to signpost the start of each argument, but you do not need to signpost the fact that you are moving from the explanation to the examples within each point.

## A Formal Introduction

A formal introduction is required for the first proposition speaker. This means more than merely saying, “Good evening,” or “Madame Chair, ladies and gentlemen . . .”—it means that you need to actually introduce the debate *as a whole*. In essence, a formal introduction involves taking the audience by the hand, and introducing to them the overall *issue* of the debate. This introduction does not have to give an intricate factual or historical background to the issue; the goal is to provide a conversational and big-picture introduction to the debate.

Formal introductions will rarely win you a debate—no adjudicator is likely to say, “Despite everything that followed, this debate was really won by the first proposition’s formal introduction.” However, the formal introduction *is* a vital opportunity for you, as first proposition, to introduce the motion and issue as you see it.

The important point is that a formal introduction is more than a mere greeting—it is an introduction to the issue and, if you choose, a characterization of that issue from your team’s point of view.

## A Brief Introduction

As the earlier speaker roles, a brief introduction is required for the first opposition, second proposition, and second opposition speakers. It is also required for the third proposition and third opposition speakers—everyone, in fact, except the first proposition. As we will learn in Chapter Two, these speakers begin their speeches with rebuttal. However, what comes before that? How do you actually start your speech?

The answer is simple: acknowledge the chair of the debate and the audience, and don’t waste time doing it! For example, start simply with something like, “Good evening Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen . . .,” or “Madame Chair, ladies and gentlemen . . .,” then dive straight into your rebuttal.

Big deal! Why is this relevant? Because many debaters use a formal introduction even when they are not the first proposition—for example, by telling a long and hypothetical story, or by reading a quote they found when preparing for the debate. This approach does engender self-confidence, because speakers know before the debate how they will open their speech. For this reason, understandably, this technique is often used by inexperienced debaters learning their craft.

Ultimately, however, a formal introduction from any speaker other than the first proposition is not strategic. When a rebuttal speaker stands up, the audience and adjudicator are itching to hear rebuttal—the opposition speaker has just sat down, and they want to know why you think he or she is wrong! Starting with a pre-written introduction misses this opportunity.

## Setting Up Your Team's Approach

The first speaker of each team must carefully move through every part of the foundation of his or her team's case. Essentially, this means presenting everything that your team developed on the issue and definition, the case approach, and the split. It is strategically very weak to be introducing elements of your model later in the debate—for example, during an argument, or during your second speaker's speech.

For example, if your team has a model, it needs to be set out in full at this point. If you have criteria, they need to be made clear. If you want to highlight the speculative or emotive nature of the debate, you should do it here. There is no set order for these components to be presented. For example, there is no rule as to whether your criteria should come before your model, or whether your emotive disclaimer should precede your theme.

## A Brief Link to the Team Case

As a second speaker, you will not have to set up a case. However, it is nice to give a sense of case unity—to show the audience and adjudicator how your arguments fit together. Therefore, as a second speaker, it helps to provide a brief link to your case as a whole before you dive into your individual arguments.

Usually, this means stating your team's theme and briefly recounting your first speaker's arguments, before moving on to outline your own.

For example, “Our team, on the other hand, has showed you that [theme]. Our first speaker, Michael, discussed our case from a political perspective, looking at the role of political parties and of the public service respectively. I will continue our case from a social point of view. Specifically, I will have two arguments . . .”

## The Outline and Summary

The speechwriters' adage at the beginning of Step 5 is a useful tool for many aspects of public speaking and debating. Nowhere is it more directly relevant, however, than to the outline and the summary. If the labels for your arguments are signposts (telling your audience and adjudicator where they are), the outline and summary are a roadmap that shows your audience and adjudicator the overall plan of your arguments.

The outline and summary are *very* simple, or at least they should be. They can be almost identical. It is enough simply to list the arguments that you will present, or have presented. If you would like to provide *some* further explanation (for example, by reminding your audience how the arguments linked together, or how they supported the theme), you are welcome to do so. However, neither the outline nor the summary is a mini-argument. You will never convince anybody that your argument is true by outlining or summarizing it, so you shouldn't waste

time by giving a blow-by-blow description of the important parts of the argument, nor by recounting examples or statistics in detail. It is better to give a simple outline and summary, then spend the extra time developing and explaining your argument itself in more detail—this is the part of your speech that may actually persuade!

Finally, remember what the outline and summary are: an outline and summary *of your arguments*. As a first or second speaker, there is no need to outline or summarize other parts of your speech, such as your rebuttal or your conclusion. What's more, there is no need to outline your *other team-members'* speeches, either! Of course, the first speaker is expected to provide the split, which will give the audience and adjudicator a very general idea of what the second speaker will discuss. There is no need, however, to show your hand by outlining the specific arguments that your second speaker will discuss—this is a strategic mistake, and it wastes time. There is *never* any need to outline your third speaker. Everybody knows, or should know, that the third speaker will rebut and summarize—there is no need to announce this as a first or second speaker.

## A Conclusion

In a purely rational world, audiences would never be swayed or convinced by a speaker's eloquence or rhetoric—they would simply and rationally judge the arguments on their merits. There would have been no place for Winston Churchill to say, "Give us the tools and we will finish the job," and no reason for Ronald Reagan to demand, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall."

But people are not like this. No matter how hard they have concentrated, and how carefully they have listened, audiences and adjudicators can still be swayed by an effective appeal to emotion or a punchy summary of a main idea. This is the role of an effective conclusion—not to waffle self-indulgently, nor to hyperbolize, but to succinctly and powerfully remind your audience of your central point.



Don't use your theme as your conclusion—although it should reflect your central point, it will usually be too long and too hackneyed to gain your audience's attention. Try to find something else—a quote, an idea, a triplet (that is, a list of three ideas or descriptions grouped for dramatic effect), or any other kind of punchy line that sums up your approach.

Conclusions like this don't just happen. It is always a good idea to script your conclusion before the debate. This does not mean writing your conclusion word for word on your note cards—if you do that, you are likely to simply read your final words, thus having a much weaker style. Instead, it means preparing your conclusion carefully and practicing it. In fact, your conclusion is probably the *most important* part of your speech to practice. The reason is simple: many adjudicators do not really consider a speaker's style until after he or she has sat down. A well-crafted and well-delivered conclusion is not only important for the sake of your case; it can also do wonders for your style mark!

## Timing

So far, we have not considered the internal timing of a speech—we have not looked at how much time you should spend on each part of your presentation.

It is important not to be too prescriptive about timing. Ultimately, the best timing depends on the context. Sometimes, for example, you will find it important to spend more time than usual on rebuttal; on other occasions, you will need to spend more time explaining your arguments clearly. The most important requirement of internal timing is simply that you spend about 30 seconds on your conclusion and a few minutes on rebuttal. As a general rule, each speaker in the debate will spend more time on rebuttal—so the second opposition, for example, will generally rebut for longer than the second proposition, who will rebut for longer than the first opposition.

Just as important as internal timing is what is sometimes called external timing—the amount of time that you speak for. The principle here is simple: *you should use all of your allotted time, but not much more!*

For example, many debates have substantive speeches of eight minutes, with a warning bell at seven minutes. It is tempting to think that this means “seven to eight minutes,” but this is not correct. A speaker who speaks for seven minutes in this situation is making a significant strategic mistake—he or she is missing an entire minute of persuasion (and a minute can be a long time in an eight-minute speech!). That said, it is important not to go overtime, either. Adjudicators will generally allow a speaker about 30 seconds overtime before they start deducting marks. Speaking overtime is completely unwarranted—not only will adjudicators deduct marks; they will stop listening to what you are saying!

There is no single way to ensure effective timing. Some speakers wear stopwatches and check the time of their speech; most simply develop a good sense of how long an argument should take. Either way, you need to be aware of time as your speech progresses. When you hear the warning bell (for example, at seven minutes), you need to finish the point that you are on and start summarizing. When you hear the double bell, you need to finish whatever you’re on and sit down!

## Teamwork in Preparation

### Introduction

We have now considered all of the elements necessary to prepare a debate: the issue and definition, the case approach, the arguments, the split, and the overall structure of both the first and second speeches. All that remains is to examine the *process* for deciding on these ele-

ments and for putting the whole thing together! This is the process of teamwork in preparation.

It is tempting to view teamwork in preparation as merely an added extra, subsidiary to the important principles that we have covered up to this point. However, it is all-important: effective teamwork in preparation *allows* your team to work through the principles covered earlier effectively and efficiently.

## BEGINNER

### The Basics

#### BASIC STEPS

A successful preparation will generally have five steps—brainstorming, feeding back, case development, writing speeches, and final discussions. These are not set in stone, and many experienced debaters will no doubt read this and think, “I have *never* prepared a debate by using those five steps!” However, most successful preparations follow this basic approach, and using these five steps is an effective initial guide to preparation. We discuss each in turn.

#### Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a popular term, particularly among those teachers who prefer to be known as educators! It is usually understood to mean a process where people write down anything and everything that comes to mind, often in a very disorganized and somewhat artistic way!

This is not what is meant by brainstorming in debating. In debating, brainstorming is usually understood to mean that each member of your team will *separately* prepare the case. That is, each member of your team should find an issue, definition, theme, model and/or criteria (if necessary), arguments, and a split. Of course, there is nothing to *stop* speakers from jotting down other thoughts, ideas, jokes, quotes, or anything else that may be relevant. However, the important point is that each speaker should prepare the entire case. Ideally, this should be done in sufficient detail that, if the second step (case development) were omitted, speeches could be written from any of the team members' proposed cases.

The reason for brainstorming separately is simple—there is a risk that a few team members (even perhaps just one team member) will dominate, either deliberately or inadvertently, so that other valuable perspectives will be missed.

## **Feeding Back**

The next step is for everyone briefly to feed back from his or her brainstorming. This means that each speaker in turn tells the team everything that he or she has prepared, at least in brief. It is best to hear each speaker in turn, rather than to hear each speaker's definition, then each speaker's theme, and so on—this allows each speaker to give due credit to his or her case, by presenting it in its entirety. Of course, speakers should not merely repeat what has already been said—it is much better in this situation simply to say (for example), “I had the same issue and definition as Tim,” rather than to force everyone to hear it again!

It is vital at this stage to allow each speaker to have a chance to present his or her full case. Often, nervous or excited debaters are keen to interrupt at this point, either to disagree or even to agree with what is being said. However, although such interruption can sometimes appear to accelerate or simplify discussion of an individual point, its overall

effect is usually to complicate, confuse, and delay the preparation. Of course, it is always acceptable (indeed, it is often necessary) politely to interrupt a speaker who is waffling or giving too much detail about examples—at this point in the preparation, the aim is for each speaker to succinctly allow every other team member to know his or her ideas, not to provide fine details that can be filled in later.

It is equally important at this stage that all other team members write down what the speaker is saying. The best way to do this is to note your teammates' case elements next to your own. For example, you can best compare proposed definitions by noting your teammates' proposed definitions. Similarly, it can often help to note any issues arising during the feedback time (for example, different arguments that could be merged, or contradictions between arguments that need to be avoided), for discussion later.

## **Case Development**

The next step is for the team to *build* the case. Building the case is the essence of preparation. There is very little to be said about case development that has not been discussed at length in the first four steps—this step involves deciding your team's issue, definition, theme, model and/or criteria (if necessary), arguments (including substantiation), and a split.

It would be tempting to view this process as simply selecting the best elements from each team member's brainstormed case. Case development can sometimes be this simple, but not usually. Instead, the usual approach (and best approach) is to start over again, with a blank page (literally and metaphorically). The elements of each team member's brainstormed case will hopefully be highly relevant, and can be of great assistance in building your case. However, the team case must nonetheless be built from scratch—this is the best way to ensure that it is a consistent and simple case, rather than a jumble of different ideas.

It is common practice for teams to ignore the internal structure of arguments when preparing together. That is, teams often take the approach that *everyone* will decide the label, essential reasoning, and basic substantiation, but that the *individual speaker* will be responsible for developing the argument. However, this approach is risky, and should be avoided wherever possible. We discussed the importance of arguments' internal structure at great length; this is an important and legitimate part of the team case, which the team as a whole should be responsible for developing.

## Writing Speeches

By this point, speakers are able to go away and actually write their speeches, individually. This involves writing note cards and developing introductions and conclusions where necessary.

The only important point here is that speechwriting occurs *after* the case development is complete. There are few things more nerve-racking and irritating for a team to have a speaker trying to write his or her note cards *during* case development—that is, writing ideas on note cards as they are decided. Write your note cards once you know exactly what should be on them!

The third speaker should now script his or her conclusion and, if necessary, write a summary. After doing so, he or she should brainstorm possible opposition arguments and effective rebuttal to those points. These ideas should be shared with the team in final discussions.

## Final Discussions

The final step in the preparation process is for the team to have brief final discussions. This step usually involves some or all of the following:

- The first and second speakers briefly summarizing their speeches for the team, to ensure that everyone (including the person giving the speech!) understands any subtleties in the case.

- The team discussing potential opposition arguments, and possible rebuttal against those arguments. This often involves the third speaker explaining the possible arguments and rebuttal that he or she has just considered.
- The team discussing potential opposition rebuttal against its arguments, or discussing any potential weaknesses in the case generally.
- The team identifying the key strategic goals in the debate. For example, “We have to make this a debate about [X],” or “Point [Y] is very important—let’s remember to keep emphasizing it in rebuttal.”

These last five points cover the basic steps of team preparation. It is vital to follow these steps, especially if you are new to debating. Many debaters, particularly inexperienced debaters, start in the middle, move to the end, and finish somewhere near the beginning! It is not uncommon for teams to find some examples, write arguments about those examples, think of a theme, write their speeches, *then* realize what the issue of the debate actually is and decide that they really need a model.

## **RESOLVING DIFFERENCES OF OPINION**

Disagreement is the essence of debating. Any good debating team will face frequent disagreements about the best way to argue a case—that is the inevitable consequence of team members brainstorming separately. This section is about reaching a compromise in such a situation. Of course, we are not discussing a situation where two team members have suggested arguments that are different yet complimentary—in that case, you don’t have a problem! We are discussing arguments (or even entire case approaches) that are either openly contradictory or that are inconsistent in their approach. What is the best way to resolve this situation?

Ask any expert on team building, and he or she will swear solemnly that compromise is vital for any successful team situation. However, to use compromise effectively in a debate preparation, we need to know

what *kind* of compromise is successful. In debating, the most successful form of compromise is usually for one proposal to be rejected completely, and the other proposal to be accepted completely. Generally, the worst form of compromise is to try to merge two arguments or approaches that are quite different.

Hopefully, you have already realized this—it flows logically from everything that has been discussed earlier. For example, in Step 1, we examined two very different issues that *could* be raised by the motion “This House believes that big is beautiful”: globalization, or unrealistic body images. The only effective way to compromise between two team members who presented these interpretations is to have a mature discussion about which approach is most likely to win the debate, then to choose that approach. The *worst* possible approach would be to combine the ideas, to argue about whether “big things” are somehow “beautiful!”

In fact, this principle is really just part of a broader debating technique: that sometimes, debates are won as much by what teams leave *out* of their case as by what teams manage to stuff *into* their case. This is not to suggest that you should shy away from controversial arguments, of course, but too often teams come unstuck for trying to include too many ideas in a case that could have done well on a few simple and well-developed arguments.

## INTERMEDIATE

### Short Preparation Before the Debate

We just examined the general steps involved in preparing a debate. There was no timing set down for these steps. This is often the case



in many debating tournaments—motions are released weeks or even months before the debate, so your team’s preparation is really limited only by your diligence and enthusiasm.

However, many tournaments involve short preparation debates, where the motion is released a specific and short time before the debate begins—usually, one hour. More than half of the debates at the World Schools Debating Championships are short preparation. In this section, we examine the best strategy for short preparation debates.

The most important point in moving from unlimited preparation debating to short preparation debating is that *nothing really changes!* Sure, you have much less time to prepare, so you and your team must be more efficient—the basic steps in preparation do not change, nor do the underlying principles of debating.

## THE BASIC TIMING

Most short preparation debates in this style have one-hour preparations. The following is the most common and successful way to divide your time in a one-hour preparation.

0–10 minutes	Brainstorming
10–15 minutes	Feeding back
15–35 minutes	Case development
35–50 minutes	Individual speech preparation
50–60 minutes	Final discussions

Of course, this is the *ideal* timing of a short preparation, and most teams run significantly late in case development until they are quite experienced at doing short preparations. For this reason, coaching teams for short preparation debates usually involves having the team do short preparations of many different motions. The aim is to improve a

team's efficiency, to be able to prepare a simple but high-quality case in a short period. Ultimately, this is a skill that can be learned only from experience, but there are definitely some important pointers worth discussing.

## **HASTENING SLOWLY**

Debaters who face a one-hour preparation for the first time inevitably rush—they feel that the only way to prepare their case in a short period is to do everything as fast as possible. However, an hour can be a long time if you work efficiently. The best way to work quickly in preparation is to focus on working efficiently, not on rushing.

Perhaps the greatest waste of time in preparation is to follow one path, only to find that it hits a dead-end and that you need to change course—for example, by realizing that your split is invalid once your first and second speakers have almost finished writing their speeches. For this reason, it is worth taking the time to ensure that the fundamentals of your case are sound, even if this means running overtime in the case development part of the preparation. If you do, you will have less time to write speeches and to have final discussions. Although this is certainly not ideal, it is much better to spend time clarifying and developing your team case—if you are forced to choose, it is always preferable to write a strong case onto a few note cards briefly than to write a weak case onto many note cards in great detail!

## **LEADERSHIP**

Somewhat strangely, we did not discuss the issue of leadership when setting out the basic structure of a preparation. This is not because leadership is unimportant but because, over the course of a long preparation, a team's style of interaction generally has the time and the relaxed atmosphere to evolve. However, short preparations are different. In short preparations, there is a much greater need for a team to

continue moving forward—there is less time to mull over ideas, and greater need for efficient discussion and prompt decisions. The best way to ensure this forward movement is to appoint one team member to lead the preparation; collective leadership (where every team member interjects to tell other team members to hurry up!) usually serves only to increase the tension and strain in a preparation.

Leadership in a short preparation involves its own challenges that, like short preparation itself, can only really be mastered by experience. These challenges include the following:

- *Watching the clock.* It is the leader of the preparation who is responsible for ensuring that the preparation runs close to schedule. This means that the leader is responsible for politely interrupting other team members, if necessary, to ensure that they are not wasting time by waffling. Similarly, the leader is the team member most likely to decide that the team needs to slow down and spend time clarifying something, even if this means running behind schedule.
- *Clarifying team ideas.* After feeding back, there are usually a number of outstanding issues—for example, there might be two different definitional suggestions, three ideas for a theme, and seven suggested arguments. It is usually the role of the leader to identify these issues for the team, and to lead a discussion about how to resolve them. (For example, to lead a discussion on whether the definitional suggestions are actually different and, if so, which definition to adopt.) This relates closely to an important mantra of short preparation: “fear silence!” Too often, teams reach an impasse because the way forward is unclear—a deadly silence often descends, because nobody is willing or able to resolve the situation. In this situation, the leader must step up and say something like, “We have a disagreement here between approach [X] and approach [Y]. We need to make a decision!”
- *Making the tough decisions.* Most issues in a preparation can be decided by a consensus, because one approach will emerge as the most strategic. However, this is not always the case. Every team needs to

understand in advance some rules to resolve intractable disagreements. One approach is for decisions to be made by a vote, but this rarely works effectively: you may have an even number of team members, or team members' views may not be clear cut. The best approach is for the leader to have the right to make any tough decision—even if he or she is the only person in the preparation who feels that way about the outcome. Of course, it is a brave decision to overrule a consensus of the rest of your team, and a leader should always be flexible and modest enough to yield to a better approach. However, it is important for the leader to have the final say, particularly since many important decisions need to be made relatively quickly and without the chance for extensive discussion.

## ADVANCED

### **“Oh &@!#\$^@ !!!” (or Short Preparation during the Debate)**

This is an issue most debaters wish simply didn't exist! Sometimes, during the first proposition's speech, the opposition team needs to abandon its prepared case, and prepare again from scratch. The most common reason for this is that the proposition team presents an unexpected but reasonable definition in a debate under the “exclusive right of definition” rule.

For example, let's return to the motion “This House believes that big is beautiful,” and suppose that the “exclusive right of definition” rule is being used. The opposition team may have prepared a case on the issue of unrealistic body images, only to find (to their dismay!) that the first proposition defines the debate as relating to the merits

of globalization. The opposition team cannot accept the proposition team's definition *and* argue about unrealistic body images—it will not be refuting the accepted issue of the debate. Therefore, the opposition team must decide whether to challenge the proposition team's definition, or to prepare a new case. In this case, for reasons set out earlier, the proposition's definition is reasonable, so cannot be challenged. Therefore, the opposition team must prepare a new case in whatever time is left of the first proposition's speech! A number of important guidelines can assist in this quite daunting task.

## **DECIDING TO ABANDON YOUR CASE**

It is very tempting for an opposition team, under pressure and running out of time, to decide automatically not to abandon its case. Instead, it may try to challenge the proposition definition. However, if the proposition definition is reasonable, this approach is almost certainly doomed: the opposition team must show that the proposition's definition is unreasonable, and a definition does not become unreasonable merely because the opposition team doesn't like it!

It is important, therefore, to be open-minded when deciding whether or not to abandon your case. Rather than seeing the situation from your perspective (“oh no—we're going to have to start again—oh no, oh no, oh no . . .”), try to see it from your adjudicator's perspective (“the proposition definition is reasonable, and the opposition team must oppose the proposition's case if it wants to win this debate”). It is better to abandon your case and to have a chance of winning than to stick doggedly to your case and lose on a weak definitional challenge.

It is important for the team to briefly confer on the issue, but the ultimate decision to abandon a case should fall to the team leader.

## START WITH THE BIG PICTURE

If you are forced to prepare a new case in a couple of minutes, you do not have the luxury to dwell on fine details. As a team, you need quickly to decide three things:

1. *Your case approach.* Fundamentally, this means finding a central idea for a case and, if time permits, working that idea into a theme.
2. *Your split.* All of the usual techniques for splitting your case still apply. However, in a situation like this, you would be more likely to choose a very simple split (for example, “society/individual”).
3. *Your first speaker’s arguments.* Your first speaker must stand up and speak in a matter of minutes, so your priority as a team is to ensure that he or she has something to say! This means briefly deciding what your first speaker’s arguments will be, and which examples or statistics will be used to substantiate those arguments. It will usually fall to the first speaker to then explain those arguments in whatever way he or she understands them—unlike a normal preparation, it is not usually possible to fully prepare the internal structure for each point as a team.

Of course, the second speaker’s arguments and examples also need to be developed, but there are at least two speeches in which to do that—in relative terms, plenty of time! It can be tempting for a second opposition in this situation to start writing his or her speech as soon as the first opposition has started, but this can be a very dangerous tactic. When a case is prepared as quickly as this, it is quite possible that speakers on the same team will understand the same argument in quite different ways. Therefore, it is vital for the second speaker to listen closely to the first speaker’s presentation, while briefly jotting notes for his or her own speech. Short preparation during the debate does not happen often. However, it pays to understand the important techniques and be aware of the issue—particularly if you are debating under the “exclusive right of definition” rule.



# Rebuttal

## BEGINNER

### The Importance of Rebuttal

Congratulations on making it through Chapter One! By now, you should have a good understanding of the many important techniques of case development. With some practice, you should be able to develop strong arguments in favor of your side of the motion, and anticipate the strongest arguments in favor of the opposing side of a motion.

However, two opposing cases do not a debate make, 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



opposition's arguments. 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]. We showed you how this is true by using the following examples . . ."

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.

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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 . . .”

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## 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 strate-

gic 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.

## INTERMEDIATE

### 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 guidelines set out in Chapter One 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.



## DEFINITIONAL RULE

	No exclusive right of definition	Exclusive right of definition
	<p>You could not argue under the proposition's case if you tried.</p>	<p>You can challenge, on the basis that the proposition definition is <i>unreasonable</i> (that is, that your definition is <i>more reasonable</i>).</p>
<p>Why can't you continue?</p>	<p>The proposition has defined the motion as relating to a different issue, but the definition is not itself unreasonable.</p>	<p>You cannot challenge, 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.</p>

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.

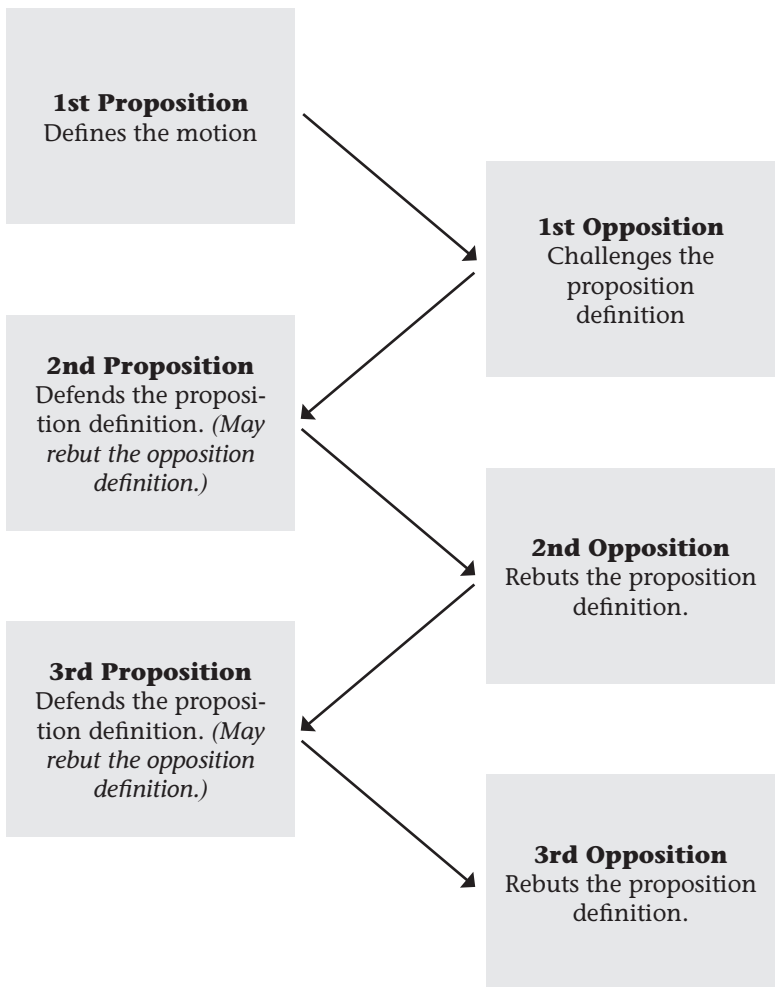
1. *Make it clear that you are challenging your opponents' definition.* Too often, teams complain and whine about their opposition's definition, but don't actually formally challenge it. This is a waste of time. Either challenge your opponents' definition or accept it. It is helpful to actually use the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

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

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,”<sup>3</sup> 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

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3 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].”<sup>4</sup> 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.”

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4 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 con-

fused—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

In Step 5 of Chapter One, we examined the general internal timing of a speech, 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

debate. 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] . . ." (This same point was examined in Step 5 of Chapter One.)

## 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 audi-



ence 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.

## ADVANCED

### 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.

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<sup>5</sup> 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

We learned in Chapter One that 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 con-tort 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, mean-ing 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. How-ever, it is equally important to avoid even subtle misrepresentation—for example, by suggesting that your opposition was implying some-thing 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 misrep-resentation, 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.

<p>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 . . .</p>	
<p>However, <b>even if</b> we accept that Iraq appeared to have such weapons, or may have been pursuing such weapons . . .</p>	<p>Attacking Iraq was unprincipled and inconsistent given the global response to weapons of mass destruction programs in North Korea, Pakistan, India, and Israel . . .</p>
<p>However, <b>even if</b> we take a purely pragmatic approach . . .</p>	<p>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.</p>

## Conclusion

Rebuttal is undoubtedly one of the most exciting parts of debating, both for the audience and for the debaters themselves. Unfortunately, for many debaters, rebuttal appears quite daunting, because it involves limited preparation. In this chapter, we have covered a number of techniques to make rebuttal clearer and simpler. We have also recognized that rebuttal is a vital part of good debating. Most importantly, we saw that rebuttal can be quite straightforward—ultimately, there are two cases in the debate, and you need to show why yours is right and theirs is wrong!

It is rebuttal that distinguishes debating from ordinary public speaking, by giving participants a chance to openly criticize their opponents' arguments. As a debater, you should grab this opportunity with both hands. Not only will your debating improve—it will be a lot more fun!

# Style

## Introduction

We have now discussed both preparation and rebuttal. The techniques that we have examined are vital for developing simple and forceful *concepts*, whether they are your case approach, your individual arguments, or your response to the opposing team. However, debating is about more than merely concepts—it is about the effective presentation of those concepts. In this part, we will examine the most important techniques and principles for effectively presenting your ideas to the audience.

## Being Yourself

There is a fundamental distinction between style (on the one hand) and content and strategy (on the other). Without understanding this distinction, your approach to style will probably suffer significantly.

When we examined content and strategy (which we did when we looked at the respective principles of preparation and rebuttal), we focused largely on *process*. There are some things that you *should* do, and other things that you *should not* do. Style, however, is somewhat different. The most important point about style is not what you should



*do*—it’s who you should *be*. Quite simply, *you should be yourself and enjoy yourself!*

All of us have a natural speaking style, whether we realize it or not. Each of us has our individual style, which has been evolving since our very first words. This is our natural style of speaking, our most comfortable way of communicating, *and our most effective way of persuading*. Unfortunately, a few debaters do not trust their natural style. Instead, they adopt a debating persona—a completely different speaking style that emerges only for debates. Usually, this style involves forced gestures, an uncomfortably rigid stance, and a painfully careful pronunciation of almost every word. Ultimately, this approach is weak—rather than being persuasive, it appears insincere.

Instead, you must be yourself. Of course, you can always try to make your style more convincing and engaging. The ideas and pointers in this chapter are designed to help you do that. However, the aim of coaching style is never to change a speaker’s entire style—rather, it is to mold that style to be more effective. Naturally, this does not mean that a speaker can legitimately say, “Of course I mumble quickly and make no eye contact—that’s my natural style!” However, it *does* mean that you should use these techniques in a way that feels natural and sincere *to you*.

## Visual Presentation

At first, it may seem strange that we should even be concerned with visual presentation. After all, debating is about the clash of arguments, and visual presentation does not directly relate to the arguments at all (at least, not in the same way that oral or verbal presentation does).

However, visual presentation is a vital part of a speaker’s overall presentation, and hence a vital part of debating. This is because a speaker’s visual presentation is an important aspect of a speaker’s *credibility*, and a speaker who seems more credible will be more convincing.

## Start from the Very Beginning

The first issue relating to visual presentation is one that very few debaters think to ask: “When does it begin?” The simple answer is that your style begins from the moment you reach the middle of the floor and start to speak. However, adjudicators are entitled to penalize a speaker who delays in taking the floor after having been introduced. More importantly, once you are introduced, your audience’s eyes will immediately focus on you. If you spend the next 30 seconds writing a few notes and arranging your note cards, you are hardly likely to exude credibility! Therefore, strictly speaking, your style begins from the moment that you are called by the chairperson.<sup>6</sup>

However, given the importance of visual presentation, the *best* answer is that your style begins from the moment that you and your team enter the room. For example, it is common for many debaters to gesture wildly, shake their heads viciously, and speak audibly with their team at the table—while their opponents are speaking. This is not merely unsporting behavior; it is also likely to detract from the overall credibility of your presentation.

## Eye Contact

Eye contact (or the lack of it, to be more precise!) is a significant problem among many debaters, particularly young debaters. As humans, we are generally accustomed to looking into each other’s eyes as we converse. It is nearly impossible to be an effective debater without maintaining effective eye contact.

This means making eye contact with specific individuals in the audience, and holding that contact for a time (as a general guide, from

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<sup>6</sup> That is, when the chairperson says (for example), “I now call the second speaker of the proposition team, to continue her team’s case.”

five seconds to 30 seconds). There are a number of ways a speaker can *fail* to make effective eye contact:

- *Reading his or her notes.* The effective use of notes will be examined later. For now, it should be noted that, particularly among young debaters, reading is usually the biggest cause of a failure to make adequate eye contact.
- *Flickering his or her eyes between notes and audience.* Many debaters *think* that they are making adequate eye contact when, in fact, they are constantly flickering their eyes between notes and audience. Audience members may be left with the impression that the speaker looked *at* them, but will not feel that the speaker spoke *to* them.
- *Speaking to his or her opposition* and, in the extreme case, addressing his or her speech to the opposition in the second person (“you said . . .”). You may convince your audience, but you will rarely ever convince your opponents.
- *Looking elsewhere in the room.* Some speakers are sufficiently confident that they do not constantly read their notes; however, they are not confident enough to look the audience in the eye. Therefore, they address inanimate parts of the room—such as the door, a window, or a chair. A more sophisticated variant on this theme is for speakers to deliberately stare just over the heads of their audience, trying to give the impression of eye contact without *actually* making eye contact. Your audience will not be fooled!

## Gesture

Gesture is a natural part of most people’s everyday conversation. Watch people talking, particularly when they are standing, and you will often see them gesturing constantly—even if they are speaking on the phone! So what? As debaters, we should strive to appear credible and sincere—in other words, *to look natural*. Gesturing in conversation is natural, so it should be natural to gesture while speaking in a debate.

Good gesturing *allows your natural gestures to occur*. It can often be very tempting to grip your note cards with both hands, particularly if you are nervous. However, gripping limits your natural tendency to gesture. *Free your hands if you can, and let the gestures happen!*

Some debaters, coaches, and adjudicators worry about fine details of how you should gesture—for example, a downward gesture is sometimes said to provide a sense of authority. However, paying excessive attention to your gestures usually makes those gestures seem artificial. In everyday conversation, we do not deliberately choreograph gestures to match our words (for example, by sweeping your hands outwards above your head when discussing the whole world!). It therefore seems unnatural and insincere to pay significant attention to specific gestures during your speech. You are much better thinking about your arguments, and keeping the issue of gesture in the back of your mind.

## Stance

As with gesture, the most important aspect of an effective stance is that you are natural. Many speakers worry about fine details of their stance, such as the position of their feet, the distribution of their weight, or the straightness of their back. However, the most effective way to have a natural stance is not to worry about your stance at all!

The only exception is the issue of movement. There is no rule that requires you to stand rooted to the one spot as you speak—you are welcome to move around the floor. Indeed, as long as it does not seem contrived, it can be quite effective to take a few deliberate paces between arguments. *However, you must avoid movement that is repetitive or distracting*. For example, many speakers rock on one spot by taking small steps forwards and then backwards, or left and then right. Similarly, many speakers wander around the floor without purpose, often in repetitive patterns. Pacing back and forth will not endear you to an audience who has to watch you for eight minutes! The principle of

movement is simple: *by all means move, but be aware of what you're doing and move with a purpose.*

## **Mannerisms**

In debating, a mannerism is understood as a distinctive or idiosyncratic trait of visual presentation. For example, a speaker may have a particular unique gesture or way of moving.

Of themselves, mannerisms pose no problem—every debater will have his or her own way of speaking. However, they become a problem when they are repetitive. In some cases, audience members who notice a speaker's mannerism will pay attention to little else! For example, you might have a tendency to look at a particular part of the room on a regular basis, to fiddle with your hair, or (as we discussed earlier) to make the same gesture repetitively.

It is impossible to set out any kind of complete list of mannerisms, precisely because they are so idiosyncratic. However, you must be aware of the dangers of mannerisms, and be alert to any elements of your visual presentation that could become repetitive and distracting.

## **Vocal Presentation**

Vocal presentation concerns the way that you enunciate and deliver your words to the audience.

### **Speed**

Unquestionably, the biggest issue concerning vocal presentation is speed—and the biggest problem is going too fast. Inexplicably, speaking before an audience can create a time dilation that relativity theory is only now beginning to recognize! That is, what may seem a perfectly normal speed to you, the speaker, can in fact be unbearably fast to your

audience and adjudicators. Initially, it can be difficult to recognize this as a speaker, so it is important to pay attention to what adjudicators or audience members say about your speed of delivery. If you *do* need to slow down, there are at least two good ways of doing it. *First*, remember to start slowly, to reinforce the feeling of speaking at a measured pace to your audience. *Second*, many speakers like to write “slow down” on their note cards. This can be a useful technique, as long as you don’t read those words out loud!

It is possible to have a speed problem by going too slowly, but this is unlikely. Usually, this is simply the result of not having enough to say, or not properly understanding those things that you do have to say. From a debater’s perspective (though not an adjudicator’s), this is a content issue—you need to ensure that you have enough to discuss, and that you understand it in sufficient detail.

## Volume

Volume is a significant component of vocal presentation. Perhaps the most important element of volume is that *your volume should be appropriate for the context of your speech*.

For example, if you are speaking to a large crowd in a big hall, it is important to project your voice loudly; if you are addressing a small group in a classroom, it is far more effective to adopt a conversational tone.

Some speakers feel that they always need to speak loudly and aggressively in order to appear confident and forceful. There is no question that this technique can be worthwhile, but if used continuously, it can have the opposite effect—the speaker can appear flustered and out of control. It is often more effective *not* to give the impression of taking your argument and “shoving it down your audience’s throat”—it is more effective to speak softly, almost as though letting your audience in on an important secret. This style has the advantage of forcing your audience to concentrate harder on what you are saying,

and can itself give the impression of force and confidence, because you are comfortable enough to deliver your message in a more relaxed and subdued tone.

The ultimate goal with volume is to present a confident speech appropriate to the context, and vary your volume where appropriate.

## Variation

Whether or not variety is the spice of life, it can certainly help your style mark! Of course, you can always have variety in your visual presentation—by using different kinds of gestures, for example. However, variety in style is essentially an issue of vocal presentation. This is because, as a speaker, the monotone poses the greatest risk of monotony.

Perhaps the most important way to avoid a monotone is to use your note cards effectively—simply reading your note cards is the easiest way to fall into a comfortable (and boring!) monotone.

It is important, therefore, to vary your style of presentation throughout. For example, you can vary the pitch of your voice by speaking in an expressive and animated style, rather than in a monotone. You can vary your natural speaking rhythm by pausing. Ironically, the best way to regain your audience's attention on what you are saying is often to say nothing—to pause quite deliberately between sentences, arguments, or ideas. Finally, always remember variation in volume. There is no rule about how or when to do this, except that you should generally aim for sharp and noticeable changes, rather than subtle or gradual variation. For example, it can be very effective to finish one argument in a loud and aggressive style, take a significant pause, and then commence your next argument in a soft and analytical manner.

This last example is a case of a style change. A style change is a specific form of variation in manner, involving a sharp and noticeable change at a key point in your speech. Further, it often involves your *entire* manner—for example, you may change from speaking aggressively, quickly, and with large gestures to speaking softly, slowly, and

with more constrained gestures. Style changes are most popular when moving from substantive arguments to summary, or from one argument to another. Some coaches and adjudicators swear by style changes; others are less concerned. Ultimately, style changes are one form of effective variation, and it is variety that is the key.

## Verbal Presentation

Content and strategy are often described as comprising “what you say.” This, however, is not strictly true—in reality, content and strategy comprise the *ideas* behind what you say. The *way* that you actually use words to express those ideas and concepts is best understood as being a component of manner—verbal presentation.

It is impossible to teach people how to express their ideas in words—that is a natural skill learned from a young age! However, this expression can be refined and improved for debating purposes.

## The Importance of Clarity

Clarity is by far the most important element of verbal presentation. For many public speakers, clarity refers to the way that they enunciate their words. That, however, is not the point here—we should be far more concerned with the actual words used to enunciate ideas. Too many debaters use long words and convoluted sentences to sound impressive—making their speeches difficult to understand and painful to follow.

The opposite should be true. You should always aim to express your ideas as simply and clearly as possible, using simple language and short sentences. We have already seen an example of this earlier, when discussing Adam Spencer’s colloquial and effective explanation of an argument about Microsoft’s market power. The underlying principle should be clear: you should aim to present an impressive case, not to



use impressive words and phrases! Of course, this is *totally unrelated* to the content of your argument itself—although arguments should be simple, there is no need to reduce your ideas to colloquial or banal concepts. Our concern here is the language used to *express* those concepts, however intricate they may (or may not) be. There are a number of important principles:

- *Avoid complex vocabulary wherever possible.* For example, there is no reason to accuse your opposition of “naive inductionism”—it is simpler and more effective to say, “Our opposition assumes that because [X] has occurred in the past, it will continue to occur in the future.”
- *State what acronyms stand for.* Acronyms can cause great confusion to adjudicators or audience members who don’t understand them. Therefore, you should state what any acronym stands for the first time you use it. For example, it is not enough to simply refer to the WHO—the first time you do so, you should say something like, “the WHO—the World Health Organization.”<sup>7</sup>
- *Explain technical terms.* Technical terms can be valuable, but they need to be explained. For example, it is never enough simply to refer to “economies of scale”—you need to explain the term as well (“declining average costs as production increases”).
- *Answer any rhetorical question.* Rhetorical questions can be a useful way of directing your audience’s attention to the core of your argument. However, there is nothing worse than leaving a rhetorical question unanswered (for example, “How can we possibly justify having killed innocent Iraqi civilians?”). Your opponents will happily answer the question for you—or rather, for them (for example, “Our case shows exactly why it was justified to take innocent Iraqi lives to avoid a much greater conflict in the future.”).

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<sup>7</sup> This principle does not apply to the *very* simplest acronyms, such as the USA or the UN.

## Clever Verbal Techniques

In other forms of public speaking, speakers are often encouraged to use various literary devices when writing their speeches—for example, the frequent use of metaphors, triplets, or alliteration. There is nothing inherently wrong with these techniques, but they do, understandably, sound scripted. Therefore, in debating, you should limit these devices to those areas of your speech where the audience expects to hear well-crafted prose—essentially, to your formal introduction and your conclusion. A debater who presents substantive arguments (or even rebuttal) in cleverly crafted language will almost always suffer as a result, because these arguments will lack the sincerity and effectiveness of a more natural expression.

## Humor

Humor in debating is a double-edged sword. If used effectively, it can significantly improve your connection with an audience; if used poorly, it can distract, confuse, and reduce your credibility. Humor is very difficult to teach, but easy to practice. Below are some general pointers:

- *You don't need humor!* It is often easy, particularly in the company of funny and entertaining debaters, to see humor as an essential part of debating. It is not—some of the great argumentative speeches in history were presented without any humor (can you imagine, “I have a dream . . . in fact, I have lots of dreams . . . what it is about dreams anyway . . .”?). Usually, a debater's sense of humor—and sense of when to use that humor—develops slowly and over many years. There is no need to rush this process.
- *If you are using humor, make sure that it is appropriate for your context.* Of course, style should always be appropriate to its context, as we will examine below. This is especially important in the case of humor. If, for example, you are debating about sports or television, jokes are probably great. If, on the other hand, you are debating about

terrorism or domestic violence, jokes will almost certainly go down poorly—and even if they are well received by the audience, they will hardly improve your credibility on the issue of debate.

- *There is no point using isolated jokes.* If your humor does not directly relate to the issue and the debate, it will hardly be amusing. For example, general witticisms may raise a smile, but will not improve your credibility on the issue of debate (for example, “Our opposition’s case is like a skyscraper—it has many ‘flaws.’”).
- *Don’t get personal or sarcastic.* We learned in Step 1 of Chapter One that it is important to maintain polite and respectful relations with your opposition—cracking personal jokes about your opponents is probably the easiest way to violate this principle.
- *Keep it clean.* Humor in debates is supposed to lighten the atmosphere and endear you and your arguments to your audience. Jokes that even *some* members of your audience may find lewd or rude will only harm your persuasive credibility as a speaker.
- *Laughter is not rebuttal.* It does not matter how many jokes you make about your opposition’s case, nor how much your audience laughs—this does not in itself show why your opponents’ arguments are wrong. Of course, you can use humor to *assist* your rebuttal, but it will never substitute for analysis and argument.
- *Don’t get distracted.* It is very easy to become enthused because your audience is responding warmly to your humor. At this point, you have a choice—either push on with your arguments (confident that your audience is responding well to your speech, and is listening carefully to what you say) or simply tell a few more jokes. Too many debaters in this situation choose the latter. Musicians sometimes say, “If you play for applause, that’s all you’ll ever get”—the same can be said of debaters who get carried away and manage to trade their argument for a few more laughs.

For a section on humor, this all sounds very depressing! Our list of general pointers was a list of “*don’ts*.” This is not to suggest that humor

should not be used—in fact, if it is used effectively, humor can be one of the most effective contributors to effective manner. The key is to use humor carefully so that the joke doesn't end up on you.

## General Pointers

There are some important concepts that do not apply exclusively to visual, verbal, or vocal presentation. Rather, these issues are important because they apply to style *as a whole*.

## Using Note Cards Effectively

The vast majority of style problems among inexperienced debaters are caused, either directly or indirectly, by ineffective use of note cards. Essentially, you will suffer all kinds of style problems if you read your speech from your note cards, rather than using notes on your note cards to prompt you in explaining your argument. Most obviously, your eye contact will suffer—short of using a teleprompter, it is almost impossible to make effective eye contact while reading from a script. However, an equally serious problem is that your entire vocal presentation will suffer. Quite simply, your audience and adjudicator will know from the intonation of your voice that you are reading a script. This is not a problem for news anchors, or politicians giving set speeches, because audiences expect those presenters to read. However, audiences and adjudicators respond best to debaters who *actually* argue—not to those who read an argument from a note card. It is more effective to stumble occasionally by putting your thoughts into words during your speech than to present a perfectly fluent speech read verbatim from your notes.

So much for theory—how can you put this into practice? The answer is simple: don't write much on your note cards. Perhaps the most frustrating common remark to hear from debaters is, “Of course,

I won't read my speech word for word, but I *will* write it on my note cards word for word, just to be sure." This makes no sense—if you have your entire speech on note cards, you will inevitably read it word for word. Even if you manage to avoid doing this, your presentation will still suffer, because it is very difficult to extract your key points from a speech that is written out in full.

What should you write on your note cards then? There is no simple answer—every debater's note cards look different, because everybody has a different way of taking notes and abbreviating ideas. However, the general principle is that you should *write as little as possible, while preserving the important ideas of your speech*. Just what those ideas are will obviously vary from one debate to the next. Most good debaters find it helpful to note the signposts and subheadings in their speech. For example, in presenting a substantive argument, most good debaters will write the label of the argument, then note some kind of internal structure on their note card—for example, the “label, reasoning, substantiation, tie-back” structure. This does not mean writing those words, but it does mean using subheadings to maintain the internal structure of your argument. The following note card gives a very simple example of this, with subheadings (a label, “Why?,” “e.g.,” “So what?”) to remind the speaker of the internal structure of the argument.

**[Label]**

Why?

**[Explanation]**

e.g.

**[Example(s)]**

So what?

**[Tie-Back]**

You do not have to use this format for a note card. The format of your note cards is closely related to the internal structure of your argument, so it is important that you think about this carefully on an argument-by-argument basis.

A similar common remark to hear from debaters is, “Oh sure, I will only write notes on my note cards—but I like to write my speech out word for word on other paper first, *then* reduce it to note form.” This misses the point—notes on note cards are designed to summarize ideas, not specific sentences. You should worry about the clarity and persuasiveness of your arguments, not about how specific sentences are to be expressed. On a more practical level, this approach is a complete waste of time—why bother writing your speech out word for word only to speak from notes?

Save your time! The best approach is to write your speech directly onto note cards, in note form. The time that you save by not writing it out word for word is best spent practicing delivering your speech from those note cards—that is, practicing taking the notes on your note cards and presenting them as a speech. Many debaters find that the best way to practice like this is to speak in front of a mirror—this can also help to improve your visual manner. The advantage of preparing this way is twofold: not only will you deliver your immediate speech in a more natural and sincere way, you will improve the technique of delivering a speech from notes on a note card. These are two advantages that you will never gain by writing your speech out word for word.

## The Importance of Context

Context is all-important for speeches in everyday life. It would be rare to speak in the same manner to a friend or family member as to a teacher or employer—and it would be ridiculous to ask which style is better. So it is in debating. Although the basic characteristics of good style do not change, your overall style should reflect the context of your debate. It is impossible to have a standard perfect style—the

requirements of good style will be somewhat different before different audiences, against different opponents, in different venues, and on different issues.

We have already considered the danger of using humor in a debate about a solemn motion. The point here is that the issue of debate is an important part of context, and your style should reflect that context if you are to be a credible presenter.

We have also examined the importance of context for volume. If you are debating before a large audience in a large hall, you will probably find it most effective to use a loud voice and expansive gestures. However, if you are debating before a small group in a small classroom, that kind of style will probably not endear you to your audience, who will likely feel simply that you are shouting at them. Instead, this is the best time to use a conversational tone and more restrained gestures.

Your opposition is undoubtedly part of the context of the debate. For example, you may find yourself debating a flippant and funny opposition that appears to have endeared itself to the audience. Although it can be tempting to try to match this style, this is not always the most effective approach. Instead, it can be more effective to take the opposite tack—to emphasize just how serious your motion is, without making a single humorous remark.

As with so many aspects of debating, it is impossible to be dogmatic about the circumstances in which different forms of style work best. However, the underlying point is important: when it comes to effective style, one size does not fit all—not all speakers, and certainly not all contexts.

# Points of Information and Reply Speeches

## Introduction

The first three parts of this book have covered the essence of good debating technique in the style that is used in many debates around the world. However, we also need to examine two further aspects of that style: points of information and reply speeches. Points of information and reply speeches tend to be used only at the higher levels of debating. For example, many school debates follow a simple structure of six speeches with no points of information. However, the World Schools Debating Championships do use points of information and reply speeches.

Points of information and reply speeches do not substantially change the characteristics of good debating technique—they add to what we have already covered, not replace it. However, they do pose specific challenges, because both techniques have specific designs of their own.



## 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 be 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 and struggling 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 to 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

We learned in Chapter Three that 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.

# Conclusion

Every debater likes to think that he or she can finish on the key point, and I'm no different. My key point is writing this book is simply this: *debating is a game*. It's true that debating is an interesting process that teaches valuable skills, but ultimately it is still a game. The aim of any game, including a debate, is *to win*. There is no better way to improve your debating, and to have fun doing so, than to enter every debate determined to do whatever possible—within the rules and the spirit of the contest—to win.

Of course, nobody who debates for any length of time keeps winning—sooner or later, adjudicators will award debates against you. This fact can be difficult to accept, but it is important to remember that most debaters learn most of their vital lessons from the debates they lose, not the ones they win. Sadly, every adjudicator has stories of debaters, coaches, or supporters from a losing team who prefer to disagree emphatically with the result rather than consider the reasons for their loss. This is unfortunate, and not merely because most adjudicators get it right most of the time. Every debate is an opportunity to learn something—particularly the debates you lose. In my experience, those debaters who learn the most over the long haul are those who never rest upon the good days and never complain about the bad.

This book has been full of detailed explanations—of tips and techniques, rules, and other requirements. These things are vital to successful debating, at any age and at every standard. But, ultimately, they are

not what debating *is*, and they are certainly not what makes debating *fun*. When I started debating in primary school, I knew little about technique and even less about the rules. But I thought debating was exciting and that debates were fun. And there was just one simple reason for this—I *got to stand up and argue with somebody in public*.

I decided to write this book because I thought that I should write down what I had learned about debating while I still remembered it. This book will have been a success if it helps some debaters, their coaches, or their supporters to understand better the rules, motivations, and strategies for successful debating. If it encourages some young people to take an interest in some important issues of social discussion, that will be better still. But ultimately, I hope this book inspires debaters to enjoy debating for what it is: the simple challenge and thrill of standing up and telling someone that they're wrong.

# Appendixes

## Games and Activities

Success in debating is about understanding theories and mastering techniques. Until now, we have focused almost exclusively on theory—the theory underlying effective debating techniques, to be sure, but theory nonetheless. For many coaches and other supporters, this is where learning debating ends—their attitude is, “Well, you know how debating should be done, so go and do it!”

This attitude is understandable, but still somewhat strange—it certainly doesn’t apply to other competitive activities. After all, as we noted at the outset, it doesn’t matter how many books you’ve read or photos you’ve studied, you won’t learn to play basketball without picking up a ball, nor learn to swim without getting into a pool!

In many respects, the same applies to debating—experience matters. Of course, the best way to gain experience in debating is to debate! However, for the sake of variety, time, and technique, you can also gain experience by using various games and activities. In many respects, these games and activities are to debating what an intrasquad game is to baseball: they are not the real thing, but they allow us to focus on specific aspects of our technique and improve our game!

Of course, there is no set or specific way to use these games and activities. As a coach or debater, you can use all of them or none of them; follow precisely from the book or transform them beyond recognition. The point is that, in my opinion, debaters don’t use activities

like this enough—such activities can simplify techniques and engender confidence in public speaking, especially in younger grades.

This section is written primarily for debating teachers and coaches. However, many of the activities do not specifically require a coach or teacher present. Motivated debaters and debating teams will be able to do many of the activities on their own. Don't forget—we have already covered a number of effective techniques and activities earlier in the book, such as rebutting yourself, or practicing your speech in front of a mirror. These games and activities merely *supplement* those we have already covered.

## Introduction to Debating

The following activities are designed to introduce people to debating for the first time. They are designed to emphasize that a debate is an *argument*, not merely a series of speeches on either side of a motion.

### GROUP PREPARATION

***Aim:*** To encourage inexperienced debaters to develop distinct arguments on both sides of an issue.

***What to do:***

1. Sit down with a small group of debaters—anywhere between three and ten, for example. You are all on the same team.
2. Announce a motion and adopt a side of that motion. Try to match the motion to the age and experience of the debaters. For example, announce “The motion is ‘This House believes that homework should be banned for primary students.’ We will be on the proposition side—that means that we agree with the motion.”
3. Give the debaters time *individually* to prepare reasons to support your side of the motion. There should be no talking during this time!

4. Have the debaters share their ideas, one at a time.
5. *After* all of the ideas have been shared, develop a single list of reasons in support of your side of the motion. For example, write a list on a chalkboard, or on a piece of flip chart paper.
6. To encourage more sophisticated discussion, encourage the debaters to consider:
  - Whether numerous speakers, although they have used different words, have really expressed the same argument or idea.
  - Whether their idea is a reason to support your side of the motion or an example or statistic to support a reason (to support your side of the motion!).
7. To encourage still more sophisticated discussion, try to develop distinct arguments from the reasons that you have collated. It may be too difficult to develop any single unifying idea (that is, theme), but you can use a truncated version of the basic structure explained earlier in this book: Label–Explanation–Substantiation. (That is, you can ignore “tie-back” for now.)
8. Now adopt the other side of the same motion. Repeat the exercise, so that you end up with a good list of reasons both for and against the issue.
9. Ask the debaters to consider which side of the motion they personally agree with and why. Discuss this in the group.

## **FORUM DEBATE**

### ***Aims:***

- To show inexperienced debaters that debating is as much about a lively and dynamic argument as it is about presenting formal public speeches.
- To take prepared arguments and use them for a debate.

### ***What to do:***

1. Select two teams with approximately equal numbers. There should be between three and ten speakers on each team.
2. Set a motion for debate and allocate sides. As with the *Group Preparation* activity earlier, try to choose a motion appropriate to the debaters' age and experience.
3. Have each team prepare arguments supporting their side of the motion. Essentially, this will follow the *Group Preparation* structure set out earlier, although you may choose not to follow that structure so rigidly (for example, you need not necessarily chair the preparation this time).
4. If you have a large number of speakers, you may wish to divide each team into two groups of approximately equal numbers: one group will present prepared arguments and the other group will present rebuttal. (Remember that the rebuttal speakers should not start writing their rebuttal—the point is for them to respond to what the other team says *during* the debate.)
5. Arrange the room so that the two teams face each other in a parliamentary configuration.
6. Introduce the teams, the motion, and the general rules of debate (which follow).
7. Start the debate by calling on a member of the proposition team to present a prepared argument.
8. Call on a member of the opposition team to present a brief rebuttal of that argument.
9. Call a different member of the opposition team to present a prepared argument for the opposition side.
10. Call on a member of the proposition team to present a brief rebuttal of that argument.
11. Continue until all of the prepared arguments have been presented and, ideally, everyone has spoken.
12. Continue a general argument about the issue, by alternating between the teams and asking for volunteers to speak.

13. Declare the debate closed. Tell the speakers that there is no result—that is not the aim of this style of debate.
14. Ask each speaker to consider which side of the motion he or she supports. Ask each speaker to briefly state *why* he or she supports that side of the motion (for example, “Of all the points presented, which one swayed your opinion?”).

***Specifics of the speeches:***

- Each prepared argument should be quite short—approximately one minute in length (two minutes at most!).
- Each rebuttal point should be even shorter—about thirty seconds long.
- Speakers should stand in their place when they speak. To keep the speeches very short, speakers should be strongly encouraged not to use any notes. The aim of this exercise is to encourage the speakers to view debating as an *argument*, so speakers should be encouraged to express themselves in a natural and informal way.

## **UNDERSTANDING THEORY**

***Aim:*** To teach the theory of good debating in an enjoyable and interactive way.

***What to do:***

1. Divide the participants into groups of between three and five students—each group will work separately and then compare results.
2. Announce a motion to all participants and, if necessary, a side (for example, proposition).
3. Announce one aspect of preparation—for example, the issue, the definition, etc.
4. Give the participants a short amount of time to prepare that aspect of a case for that motion (for example, one minute to work on an issue, three minutes to work on a definition).



5. Each group must agree among itself. Groups can then share their responses with all participants.
6. Repeat the activity as desired, changing the motion and aspect of preparation each time.
7. To properly test the participants' understanding, choose difficult or obscure motions. Such motions don't necessarily make for the best debates, but they can prove most effective in learning techniques. (For example, we used the motion "This House believes that big is beautiful" to examine the technique of finding an issue in Chapter One.)

## General Knowledge and Current Affairs

We discussed general knowledge tests in Step 3 of Chapter One. A general knowledge test is straightforward, but often overlooked by teams and coaches. Simply, it involves giving debaters a test, usually written, on the kind of general knowledge and current affairs that is useful in debating—for example, naming names ("Who is the Secretary-General of the United Nations?"), knowing key statistics ("Approximately what proportion of the world's population lives in the developing countries?"), or following current events.

The test serves as a way of judging debaters' general knowledge (for example, to assist selecting a debating team) and gives debaters an incentive to stay in touch with news and current affairs.

### THE NAME GAME

**Aim:** To test and improve debaters' general knowledge in a fun and interactive way.

**What to do:**

1. Divide the participants into groups so that each group has an even number of members (greater than two). The game generally works

- best when played in groups of four or six. The following instructions apply to a single group—in this case, a group of six.
2. Have each member of the group write ten names on small pieces of paper and fold each piece in two. The names cannot be fabricated—they must actually belong to people who are relatively well known! Limit who those people are depending on how seriously you are playing the game. For example, if you are playing for fun, allow television characters or movie stars—if you are playing for the most debate-worthy purposes, limit the names to those people who are likely to arise in debates.
  3. Put all of the names into a container. In our example, therefore, there would be sixty folded pieces of paper in the container.
  4. Divide the group into pairs. Each pair becomes a team. For reasons that will become apparent shortly, the game is usually more competitive if the players are divided into teams *after* they have written their names.
  5. Randomly choose an order for the teams. In our example, we will assume that Team One will go first, Team Two will go second, and Team Three will go third.
  6. Team One chooses a player to ask first. Pass the container to that player.
  7. That player takes one folded piece of paper from the container and tries to prompt his or her teammate to say the name written there. However, he or she cannot say any part of the person's name. Phonetic descriptions (“sounds like . . .”) are acceptable, as long as the compared word is real! For example, the player asking could say:
    - “The United States’ Secretary of State,” or,
    - “Wife of the previous Democratic American President,” but could not say,
    - “Wife of Bill Clinton,” nor,
    - “Rhymes with ‘Clillary Hinton!’”
  8. The player has one minute to prompt his or her teammate to say the name. If the teammate correctly identifies the name, the player

discards the folded paper and picks another piece from the container. When one minute is up, the player returns the current unidentified name to the container, and passes the container to the chosen player from Team Two.

9. The process continues. Players on the same team must alternate turns asking and responding. For example, after Team Three has had its minute, the container passes to the member of Team One who answered the first time.
10. The game finishes when there are no more pieces of paper in the container. A team wins by having correctly identified more names than any other team.

## Style Skills

There are many ways of improving your style—for example, by practicing your speech in front of a mirror or by paying special attention to the adjudicator's comments.

In many sports, participants train by working separately on the various elements of their technique—for example, swimmers will often use a kickboard to concentrate only on their kick, and baseball players will use a batting cage to work on their hitting. It is difficult to separate the elements of style without doing specific exercises. If you try to improve your style merely by debating, you will find yourself trying to improve your stance, gesture, eye contact, vocal variation, and pause—all while thinking about what you're actually saying! This is a general activity that can easily be varied to work on different components of style individually.

### ELEMENTS OF STYLE

***Aim:*** To separate the various elements of style and to make the speaker conscious of them.

***What to do:***

1. Work with a relatively small number of participants—for example, six or fewer.
2. Give each speaker a motion. This may be a debating motion, or it may simply be something to talk about (for example, “what I did on my vacation”). If you wish, allow the participants to choose their own motions.
3. Each speaker will be required to speak for one minute on that motion. Give the speakers a short amount of time (for example, between one and five minutes) to prepare.
4. Ask each participant to deliver his or her speech in turn. Have the group give constructive feedback after each speech.
5. *However*, don’t merely allow the participants to stand up and speak! Instead, isolate one or more components of their style. For example,
  - Work on vocal and verbal presentation by having the participants deliver their speeches seated, and with their hands clasped or by their side. Remove the distraction of walking around and gesturing—force the speakers to think about their vocal and verbal presentation only.
  - Work on gesture by having the speakers think consciously of the gestures that they are using. You may wish to have each speaker deliver the same speech twice—first with deliberately exaggerated gestures, and second with natural gestures. This exercise should encourage the speakers to be aware of the gestures they use.
  - Work on vocal presentation by having the speaker deliver the same speech twice—first in a small room with the audience sitting close, and second in a large room or hall with the audience sitting in the back. In the small room, speakers will need to work on their conversational style; in the large room, speakers will need to project their voices and give a more powerful impression. The point is not really to have the speakers practice a distinct small-room and large-room style—rather, it is

to encourage the speakers to think about varying their style according to the context of the debate.

- Work on emotive delivery by giving each speaker an emotive issue (for example, an issue concerning life and death, such as capital punishment). Of course, an emotive delivery need not mean crying or screeching—ultimately, the challenge is to present the issue sincerely, while trying to use the moral high ground for persuasive value.
- Work on a speaker’s habit of “wandering” by placing a mark on the ground and insisting that the speaker deliver his or her entire speech while standing on that spot. There is no need to do this in debates themselves, but this exercise will make the speaker aware of just how much he or she wanders.
- Work on a speaker’s overall presentation by videotaping his or her speech and playing it back. Many speakers have never watched themselves speak, so this can be a very effective technique. Specifically, it often highlights style problems (such as mumbling, annoying mannerisms, or wandering) in a way that the speaker never sees them—from the audience’s perspective!

## Preparation and Delivery Skills

These activities are designed to improve a team’s ability to prepare together. Usually, they are most useful in coaching a team to do short preparation debates effectively.

### SHORT PREPARATION PRACTICE

*Aim:* To practice short preparations.

***What to do:***

1. Give the team a motion and a side (for example, “The motion is ‘This House believes that the United Nations has failed,’ and you are the proposition.”)
2. Have the team prepare the motion. This should take 35 minutes—10 minutes for brainstorming and 25 minutes for case development. (This timing was explained in Chapter One—there is no need to have the team members write their speeches when practicing like this.)
3. At the end of 35 minutes, ask the team members to explain their case to you, the observer. Ensure that every team member understands the case in the same way—if they do not, this is a technical flaw in the preparation process, which the team needs to improve.
4. Have a discussion with the team members about how well the preparation went. For example, is the case strong? Did the team members work well together? What needs to be improved?

Sometimes, the simplest approach is the best! If a team wants to learn how to do short preparations well and under pressure, it simply has to do many short preparations. The team is often helped by a coach or supporter watching as they prepare, in order to give constructive feedback.

## **VERY SHORT PREPARATION DEBATES**

***Aim:*** To encourage debaters to identify the issues behind a motion quickly and efficiently.

Separate your participants into two teams of three people each, but they can also be teams of two (that is, you can ignore the role of the third speakers).

1. Announce a motion and the sides for the debate.
2. Give the teams only 15 minutes to prepare, then start the debate.

Most teams do quite poorly at this, at least initially. However, very short preparation debating can have significant benefits for a debater's techniques—for example, debaters need to spot the main issues quickly, need to develop a simple case, and will not have the time to write their speech out fully on their note cards. These are all important skills for any form of debating, particularly for short preparation debates.

## **MIXING THINGS UP**

***Aim:*** To improve debaters' ability to think on their feet and to focus on the big issues.

***What to do:***

1. As before, form two teams and announce sides and a motion.
2. Have the teams do a short preparation. This could be a regular one-hour short preparation, or it could be much shorter—for example, 15 minutes.
3. Immediately before the debate, surprise the participants by mixing things up. For example, change the order of the speakers on each team, or swap each team's side of the motion (that is, the team who prepared the proposition becomes the opposition, and vice versa).

This exercise, like very short preparation debating, emphasizes the basics—it forces the participants to think quickly and work efficiently under pressure. It also encourages participants to think about the other side of the motion during preparation—a good team will not be troubled by arguing the other side of the motion, because it will have identified the main issues of the debate and will have thought about what *both* teams should say about those issues.

## SCRAMBLE DEBATES

*Aim:* To improve debaters' ability to do short preparation during the debate (as we examined in Chapter One).

*What to do:*

1. Separate the participants into teams and announce the sides.
2. Take the proposition team aside and announce the motion.
3. Give the proposition team 15 minutes to prepare its side of the motion.
4. Announce the motion immediately before introducing the first proposition speaker to start the debate.
5. The opposition team is therefore required to prepare a case and rebuttal while the first proposition speaks. As we discussed in Chapter One, this is essentially what the opposition team must do if it is required to abandon its case in an actual debate.

This style gives an obvious advantage to the proposition team, but that is beside the point—the opposition team gains experience in short preparation during the debate, while proposition team practices very short preparation debating.

## SURPRISE-CASE DEBATES

*Aims:*

- To force debaters to think about the assumptions underlying their case.
- To encourage debaters to be flexible and respond directly to an opposition's challenge.

*What to do:*

1. Separate the participants into teams and announce the sides and motion.



2. Send the teams off to do a short preparation (that is, one hour).
3. Interrupt the preparation of one team.
4. Tell that team what to argue, and make it a particularly radical approach. For example, if the motion is “This House believes that feminism has failed,” have the proposition team argue that men and women should not be equal, and that feminism has failed because it has taken women from their rightful place in the home. If the motion is “This House believes that the war in Afghanistan is justified,” have the opposition team argue that the war in Afghanistan is not justified because the September 11 attacks (which were the stated justification for that war) were themselves justified.
5. Proceed to debate the motion.

This exercise should force one team—the team whose preparation was not interrupted—to substantiate its assertions on a much deeper level. For example, most teams would argue that feminism has succeeded because it has improved women’s opportunities—this activity forces a team to explain clearly why that is a good thing.

## **INTERROGATION DEBATE**

***Aim:*** To encourage debaters to consider opposition arguments while preparing, and to respond to those arguments effectively during the debate.

### ***What to do:***

1. Separate the participants into teams and announce a motion and the sides. You really only need two speakers on each side for this activity.
2. Have the debaters prepare the motion, either as a short preparation debate (one hour) or a very short preparation debate (15 minutes). Explain the activity in its entirety before the debaters begin their preparation.

3. The premise of the debate is that you, as the judge, will decide whether or not the motion is true. For example, if the debate is about a war with Iraq, suppose that you as the judge have the sole power to decide whether or not to go to war; if the debate is about whether feminism has failed, suppose that you as the judge have the sole power to rule on the success of feminism. (Of course, you do not actually need to make any ruling at the end!)
4. The order of speeches is first proposition, second proposition, first opposition, second opposition.
5. During each speech, interrupt the speaker as much as necessary to test the argument. For example, if the speaker makes an unsubstantiated assertion, ask, “Why is that the case?” If the speaker is not dealing with an important issue, raise that issue and ask for the speaker’s response. There is no need for rebuttal as such, but you may ask speakers how they respond to arguments raised by the other side.

This activity should encourage debaters to anticipate attacks on their argument during preparation—essentially, it encourages speakers to rebut themselves. It also encourages speakers to defend their argument forcefully during the debate itself.

# Motions

Despite all the challenges of debating technique, the most frustrating part of organizing a debate can sometimes be finding a good motion! A good debating motion, for our style of debate, is generally one in which the issue is clear and tangible, and for which both teams can make strong and simple arguments.

What follows is a list of 500 suggested debating motions. They are arranged in categories, and sometimes in sub-categories. They relate to a wide variety of issues, at various levels of debate. Most of the motions are very general, although not all of these motions will be relevant to all debaters in every country.

This is hardly a perfect or definitive list of debating motions. Hopefully, you will find these motions relevant and useful, whether you set them as an organizer, use them as a coach, or peruse them as a debater.

## **Censorship and Freedom of Expression**

This House believes that there is no place for censorship in a democracy

This House would ban websites that glorify eating disorders

This House believes that pornography should be banned

This House believes that freedom of expression should not extend to flag burning

This House believes that hate speech should be outlawed

This House believes that racial vilification should be a crime

This House believes that Holocaust denial should be a crime

This House believes that fascism should be outlawed

This House believes that defamation law is a remedy for the rich

This House believes that we should legislate for tolerance

## **Crime, Punishment, and the Legal System**

This House believes that we are too soft on crime

This House believes that we should understand less and condemn more

This House believes that we care too much about criminals and not enough about victims

This House believes that we should criminalize the payment of ransom

This House believes that criminal trials should be televised  
This House believes that drunk drivers should lose their licenses for life  
This House believes that convicted criminals should never lose their right to vote  
This House believes that the sentences for any attempted violent crime should be the same as if the crime had been completed  
This House believes that prisoners should be banned from publishing accounts of their crimes  
This House believes that we should bring back the boot camp  
This House believes that banning handguns gives criminals the upper hand  
This House believes that we should abolish trial by jury  
This House believes that illegal immigrants should be treated like criminals  
This House believes that all illegal immigrants should receive amnesty  
This House believes that the sexual history of rape victims should be admissible in court  
This House believes that criminal trials should never be televised  
  
This House believes that capital punishment is never justified  
This House believes that executions should be televised  
  
This House believes that following orders should be no excuse  
This House believes that international crimes should always be tried before an international court  
This House believes that the United States should ratify the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court  
This House believes that old dictators should not have to face the music  
This House believes that the International Criminal Court will ultimately fail  
This House believes that the International Criminal Court should prosecute crimes against the democratic process  
This House believes that we should continue to prosecute World War II war criminals  
  
This House believes that juvenile criminals should be strictly punished  
This House believes that strict punishment is the best way to decrease juvenile crime  
This House believes that we are too soft on juvenile crime

This House believes that teenage criminals should be prosecuted as adults

This House believes that judges should be elected

This House believes that the judiciary should not be a tool for social change

This House believes that there is a different law for the rich

### **Culture**

This House believes that a language that needs protecting isn't worth protecting

This House believes that cultural treasures should be returned to their places of origin

This House believes that governments should subsidize the traditional arts of minority cultures

This House believes that the arts should fund themselves

This House believes that governments should subsidize the arts

This House believes that we should regret the influence of Hollywood

This House believes that Hollywood should stop trying to teach history

This House believes that the blockbuster has ruined the art of cinema

### **Democracy**

This House believes that democracy is the best system of government for every nation

This House believes that democracy is so good that everyone should be made to have it

This House believes that democracy should never be compromised for progress

This House believes that democracy has failed the developing world

This House believes that developing nations need strong dictatorship

This House believes that dictatorship is justifiable

This House believes that strong dictatorship is better than weak democracy

### **Drug Policy**

This House believes that alcohol is a greater problem than cigarettes

This House believes that marijuana should be treated the same as alcohol and cigarettes

This House believes that the war on drugs is not worth the fight

This House believes that the war on drugs is a war on the poor  
This House would fight the war on drugs at home and not abroad  
This House believes that we should legalize all drugs  
This House believes that we should legalize soft drugs  
This House believes that governments should provide heroin addicts  
with safe injection facilities

This House believes that we should ban alcohol  
This House believes that we should ban the advertising of alcohol  
This House believes that smoking should be banned in public places

This House believes that the government should ban smoking  
This House believes that tobacco companies should compensate  
individual smokers  
This House believes that we should ban all tobacco advertising  
This House believes that tobacco companies should not be allowed to  
sponsor sports

### **Economics**

This House believes that the costs of capitalism outweigh the benefits  
This House believes that we should ban discretionary bonuses for  
corporate executives  
This House believes that we should blame the regulators for the  
financial crisis rather than the banks  
This House believes that we should blame the financial crisis on  
Main Street, not Wall Street  
This House believes that the resignation of senior management  
without severance pay should be a prerequisite for receiving  
government bailouts

This House would refuse to bail out failed banks  
This House believes that the euro will ultimately fail  
This House believes that trading hours should be unrestricted

This House believes that the only fair trade is free trade  
This House believes that we have gone too far down the path of free  
trade  
This House believes that we still need trade barriers  
This House believes that we should subsidize traditional industries  
This House believes that we should support free trade  
This House believes that we should regret the existence of trade blocs  
This House believes that the World Trade Organization is a friend of  
the developing world

This House believes that free trade harms the developing world

This House believes that we should support absolutely free

movement of labor across national borders

This House believes that we need a single world currency

This House believes that banking should be nationalized

This House believes that the government should buy back major

public utilities

This House believes that we should privatize the lot

## **Education**

This House believes that all education should be free

This House believes that all school exams should be replaced by other

forms of assessment

This House believes that money spent on sending students to foreign

countries is money well spent

This House believes that the government should spend more on

education

This House believes that corporatization of universities harms the

cause of knowledge

This House believes that homeschooling should be banned

This House believes that all schools should be coeducational

This House believes that homework should be banned for primary

students

This House believes that interschool competitive sports do more

harm than good

This House believes that school attendance should be voluntary

This House believes that school days are the best days of our lives

This House believes that school days should be longer and fewer

This House believes that school uniforms should be compulsory

This House believes that school uniforms should be scrapped

This House believes that schools should focus on preparing students

for jobs

This House believes that schools should not give assignments over the

school holidays

This House believes that high school students' right to privacy is

more important than their parents' right to know

This House believes that all high schools should be required to install

condom machines

This House believes that high school should be optional

This House believes that high school proms should be banned

This House believes that there is a crisis in boys' education  
This House believes that we should abolish public funding for private schools  
This House believes that we should bring back corporal punishment in schools  
This House believes that we should have to learn a foreign language at school  
This House believes that schools should focus more on reading, writing, and arithmetic  
This House believes that schools should be prohibited from selecting students on the basis of academic ability  
This House believes that schools should never be allowed to use faith-based admissions policies

### **Employment and Labor**

This House believes that we should support the right to strike  
This House believes that strikers should be sacked  
This House believes that the strike is a fair weapon  
This House believes that providers of essential services should have the right to strike

This House believes that trade unionism threatens democracy  
This House believes that trade unions have become irrelevant  
This House believes that trade unions have too much power  
This House believes that we should support compulsory unionism  
This House believes that trade unions impede progress

This House believes that we should abolish the minimum wage  
This House believes that we should support a maximum wage  
This House believes that the minimum working age should be increased  
This House believes that there should be a mandatory retirement age  
This House believes that we should be required to work for unemployment benefits  
This House would require people to work in return for welfare payments

### **The Environment**

This House believes that dams should be damned  
This House believes that environmental treaties do more harm than good  
This House believes that recreational fishing and hunting should be banned



This House believes that there is not enough gold to go green  
This House believes that economic growth is the solution to climate change  
This House believes that we should sacrifice economic growth for the good of the environment  
This House believes that modern agriculture is bad for local communities  
This House would make the development of clean industry a condition for receiving nonemergency aid  
  
This House believes that we should still support the Kyoto agreement  
This House believes that the United States was justified in abandoning Kyoto  
This House believes that we should support international trading of pollution permits  
This House believes that global warming should be our No. 1 priority  
This House believes that we should abandon fossil fuels  
This House believes that we should pay developing countries not to log their rainforests  
  
This House believes that eco-tourism has failed  
This House believes that we should not allow commercial tourism in national parks

### **Feminism and Gender Issues**

This House believes that feminism has failed  
This House believes that feminism is corrupting the family  
This House believes that feminism is dead  
This House believes that the West should treat state-sponsored sexism as apartheid  
This House believes that we should regret feminism  
This House believes that we should reserve seats in Congress for women  
This House believes that women should fight in the front line  
  
This House believes that large companies should be required to implement gender quotas for executive positions  
This House believes that housewives should be paid for their work by the government  
This House believes that marriage is an outdated institution  
This House believes that the law should treat married couples and unmarried couples in exactly the same way

This House believes that the bride should wear black  
This House believes that we should make divorce easier

This House believes that every company should be required to  
provide paid parental leave

This House believes that the government should pay women to have  
babies

This House believes that parents should have the final say on medical  
treatment of their children

### **Gay Rights**

This House believes that we should “out” gay celebrities

This House believes that we should legalize same-sex marriage

This House believes that same-sex couples should be allowed to  
adopt children

### **Globalization**

This House believes that all borders should be open

This House believes that globalization is killing local cultures

This House believes that globalization marginalizes the poor

This House believes that it would be better to live on a desert island  
than in the global village

This House believes that high fences make good neighbors

This House believes that multinational corporations are the new  
imperialists

This House believes that multinational corporations do more harm  
than good

This House believes that we should protest against McDonald’s

This House believes that the nation-state is out of date

### **Human Rights**

This House believes that there are no such things as universal human  
rights

This House believes that we should pay compensation for the  
injustices of past generations

This House believes that torture is justified

This House would refuse to see any intelligence that may have been  
obtained through torture

This House believes that aid to developing nations should be tied to  
human rights

This House believes that child labor is justifiable in the developing world

This House believes that human rights are a luxury the developing world cannot afford

This House believes that “economic, social, and cultural rights” should not be recognized as human rights at all

This House believes that rice is more important than rights

This House believes that the only human right is the right to good governance

This House believes that the one-child policy is justifiable

This House believes that we should boycott companies that use child labor

### **The Individual and Society**

This House believes that capitalism provides for a better society than socialism does

This House believes that we should regret the demise of communism

This House believes that the nation’s problems are better solved by the private sector than by government

This House believes that we should give Marxism another try

This House believes that public services are best run by private companies

This House believes that we should have universal health care

This House believes that a fairer society needs higher taxation

This House believes that the government that governs least governs best

This House believes that equality is the benchmark of society

This House believes that equity is more important than efficiency

This House believes that low taxes are preferable to extensive government services

This House believes that “equal opportunity” is unfair

This House believes that taxation is theft

This House believes that the welfare state is a right

This House believes that there must always be the poor

This House believes that we should abolish direct taxation

This House believes that we should support affirmative action

This House believes that wealth is the only legitimate basis for affirmative action

This House believes that civil disobedience is justifiable in a democracy

- This House believes that private organizations should not be allowed to exclude members on the basis of race
- This House believes that the Boy Scouts of America should be prohibited from excluding members on the basis of sexuality or religious belief
- This House would ban homosexual “re-education” camps and publications
- This House believes that national security concerns justify the restriction of civil liberties
- This House believes that we should not compromise civil liberties in the interests of security
- This House believes that victimless crimes should not be crimes at all
- This House believes that prostitution should be legalized
- This House believes that the government should stop protecting citizens from themselves
- This House believes that polygamy should be legal
- This House believes that all gambling should be banned
- This House would ban smoking in public places
- This House believes that we should reintroduce national service
- This House believes that governments should not be allowed to use prisoners as laborers in the community
- This House believes that individualism is dead
- This House believes that national service should be compulsory
- This House believes that we should break a bad law
- This House believes that extremism in the defense of liberty is justifiable
- This House believes that we should break the law in the interests of justice
- This House believes that we should break the law to protect the rights of animals

### **International Relations and Conflict**

- This House supports the “Responsibility to Protect”
- This House believes that a government has no duty to protect the citizens of other nations
- This House believes that an ethical foreign policy is no foreign policy
- This House believes that might is right
- This House believes that we should ban all landmines immediately
- This House believes that we should plan for peace by preparing for war

This House believes that we should support missile defense  
This House believes that we should trade land for peace  
This House believes that espionage is immoral  
This House believes that funding insurgencies in totalitarian regimes  
is a legitimate tool of foreign policy  
This House believes that the world is facing a clash of civilizations

This House believes that economic sanctions are preferable to war  
This House believes that economic sanctions do more harm than  
good

This House believes that NATO is no longer necessary  
This House believes that Russia should join NATO  
This House believes that the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia was  
justified

This House believes that the world was better with the Berlin Wall  
This House believes that two superpowers are better than one

This House believes that the United Nations should take a greater  
role as a global enforcer  
This House believes that the United Nations has failed  
This House believes that the United Nations should have a standing  
army

This House believes that political assassinations are a legitimate tool  
of foreign policy  
This House believes that the assassination of dictators is justifiable

This House believes that the second war with Iraq was justified  
This House would partition Iraq  
This House believes that President Karzai is part of the problem  
This House believes that NATO will go the way of the Soviets in  
Afghanistan  
This House would arm local militias to fight the Taliban in  
Afghanistan

This House believes that the world needs America to be its  
policeman  
This House believes that the United States is not needed in Southeast  
Asia  
This House believes that we should support United States military  
bases in Asia

This House believes that we should intervene militarily in other people's wars

This House believes that we should invade in the interests of democracy

This House believes that we should never bomb for human rights

This House believes that we should keep peacekeepers out of civil wars

### **The Internet and Communications Technology**

This House believes that Marx would approve of the Internet

This House believes that kids spend too much time on the Internet

This House believes that the Internet will be the death of intellectual property

This House believes that we should welcome big business to the Internet

This House believes that we're caught in the web

This House believes that Internet search engines should boycott

China until it allows its citizens unrestricted access to the web

This House believes that Google is too powerful

This House believes that we should fear Google

This House supports Google's policy on China

This House believes that there should be no right to privacy on the web

This House believes that Microsoft is too big

This House believes that Microsoft should be broken up

### **The Media**

This House believes that the media has become too powerful

This House believes that the media is more powerful than government

This House believes that the media is more powerful than the church

This House believes that we should tame the tabloids

This House believes that we should trust the media

This House believes that freedom of the press is limited to those who own one

This House believes that television news coverage is too violent

This House believes that the right to a free press is more important than the right to a fair trial

This House believes that reality TV reinforces demeaning social stereotypes

This House believes that governments should regulate the media

This House believes that the state should have no formal role in broadcasting

This House believes that the media plays too great a role in modern politics

This House believes that the media exerts too much influence over young people

This House believes that Hollywood celebrities are a poor role model for our youth

This House believes that advertising does more harm than good

This House believes that advertising is a curse

This House believes that there is too much advertising in our society

This House believes that public figures have the right to private lives

This House believes that the private lives of politicians should be public business

This House believes that the private lives of public figures should not be public property

This House believes that the public's right to know outweighs a candidate's right to privacy

### **Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Energy**

This House believes that non-nuclear nations should stay that way

This House believes that we should regret the nuclear age

This House believes that every nation should have the right to defend itself with nuclear weapons

This House believes that we should abolish the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

This House believes that we should ban all nuclear weapons

This House believes that we should support the nuclear deterrent

This House believes that coal and oil are a greater danger than nuclear power

This House believes that we should support the use of nuclear energy

This House believes that we should abandon civilian use of nuclear energy

### **Politics and the Political Process**

This House believes that small parties and independents impede the parliamentary process

This House believes that the two-party system has failed us

This House believes that there is too much secrecy in government

This House believes that politicians should follow popular opinion over personal judgment

This House believes that a good political leader is more decisive than responsive

This House believes that parliaments should have only one chamber

This House believes that election campaigns should be fully financed by the state

This House believes that the media should be required to limit political advertising during election campaigns

This House believes that voting should be compulsory

This House believes that “parliamentary privilege” should be abolished

This House believes that proportional representation serves better than “first past the post”

This House believes that presidential nominees should be elected through a single, one-day primary

This House believes that our leaders are not equal to the challenges of tomorrow

This House believes that our leaders have failed us

This House believes that political courage is dead

This House believes that our politicians deserve more respect

This House believes that we should regret the rise of career politicians

This House believes that our political leaders worry too much about the next election

This House believes that we should regret the influence of political polls

This House believes that politicians should only be allowed to serve in office for a limited period of time

This House believes that politicians who lie should always lose their jobs

This House would allow special interest groups to sue political parties for broken electoral promises

This House believes that politicians should be paid more

This House believes that political correctness has gone too far

This House believes that political correctness is necessary to achieve social justice



## **Poverty and Development**

This House believes that developing nations should not follow the western model

This House believes that sustainable development is a myth

This House believes that developing nations should nationalize their energy resources

This House believes that the World Bank is part of the problem

This House believes that trade is better than aid

This House believes that foreign aid is a barrier to development

This House believes that we should forgive third-world debt

This House believes that we should remove patents on pharmaceutical drugs for the developing world

This House believes that we should regret the end of the population explosion

This House believes that we should support increased population control

This House believes that we should support population control by legislation

This House believes that population control should be a prerequisite of foreign aid

This House believes that universal primary education in developing economies is a waste of money

## **Race, Immigration, and Indigenous Affairs**

This House believes that we should allow more immigration

This House believes that multiculturalism is a mirage

This House believes that the melting pot has failed

This House believes that we should support indigenous claims to self-determination

This House believes that hunting without licenses should be allowed for indigenous people

This House believes that racial minorities should have reserved seats in Congress

## **Religion**

This House believes that religion has no place in schools

This House believes that all schools should be required to teach the theory of evolution

This House would not allow “intelligent design” in any school science curriculum

This House believes that the church should pay more attention to the opinion polls

This House believes that the Pope should get married

This House believes that science has made god redundant

This House believes that governments should leave cults alone

This House would ban government funding of religious schools

This House would ban religious symbols in state schools

This House believes that the church should stay out of politics

This House would require all those in positions of religious authorities to be licensed by the state

This House believes that religious believers should be allowed to submit to the binding jurisdiction of religious courts

### **Science**

This House believes that science and technology are advancing at a rate too fast for the good of society

This House believes that science is the enemy of the people

This House believes that we let technology do too much

This House believes that medical technology has outstripped morality

This House believes that governments should not place limits on which questions scientists may research

This House believes that intellectual property should not be property at all

This House believes that patenting of gene technology should be banned

This House believes that patenting of medical findings is justified

This House believes that the results of scientific research should be free for use by everyone

This House believes that companies and researchers should not recognize clinical trials conducted with poor participants in developing nations

This House would legalize current technologies for choosing human embryos on the basis of their genetic characteristics

This House believes that genetic screening should be banned

This House believes that insurance companies should be able to do genetic testing

This House believes that we should support compulsory AIDS testing

This House believes that employers should be allowed to drug-test their employees

This House believes that we should allow surrogacy for profit  
This House believes that we should allow surrogate motherhood

This House believes that cosmetic surgery should be banned  
This House would ban the use of models who are below a healthy weight

This House would permit the sale of medical organs for profit  
This House would prioritize organ donations to those who have lived a healthy lifestyle

This House believes that we should ban reproductive technology  
This House believes that the father should always be present at conception

This House believes that we should clone humans  
This House believes that we should send in the clones

This House believes that we should genetically engineer farm animals  
This House believes that we should support genetic engineering  
This House believes that the benefits of genetic engineering outweigh the risks

This House believes that we should ban genetically modified products  
This House would make use of genetically modified crops to feed the world

This House believes that the sanctity of life ought to be valued over the quality of life

This House believes that we place too much faith in the medical profession

This House believes that we should allow research on fetal stem cell tissue

This House believes that we should have a comprehensive DNA database

This House believes that we should legalize voluntary euthanasia

This House believes that there is no such thing as a right to die

This House believes that we should outlaw genetic discrimination

This House believes that we should ban all experimentation on animals

This House believes that abortion is justifiable

This House would ban abortion except in cases where the mother's health is at risk

This House believes that every woman has an absolute right to an abortion

This House believes that Mars should wait

This House believes that space exploration should be left to private enterprise

This House believes that the cost of space exploration is justified

This House believes that the international space station should never have been built

This House believes that we should go back to the moon

This House believes that we should support space exploration

This House believes that we should welcome space tourism

### **Specific Nations and Regions**

This House believes that the United States of Africa would be a good idea

This House believes that all development aid for Africa should be provided through the African Union

This House believes that Australia has a shameful human rights record

This House believes that Australasia should have a court of human rights

This House believes that Asia should take the liberal path

This House believes that ASEAN should adopt East Timor

This House believes that ASEAN should have its own parliament

This House believes that Australia should play policeman in the South Pacific

This House believes that Australia should stop being Uncle Sam's nephew

This House believes that East Timor's blood is on Australia's hands

This House believes that the world has failed East Timor

This House believes that Indonesia should turn its back on democracy

This House believes that West Papua should be independent

This House believes that China should free Tibet

This House believes that we should recognize an independent Taiwan

This House believes that democracy has failed India

This House believes that we should condemn Singapore's human rights record

This House believes that we should fear China

This House believes that we should fear Pakistan

This House believes that the West should end military cooperation with Pakistan

This House believes that Japan should have a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council

This House believes that the European Union should have its own army

This House believes that the European Union is a triumph for bureaucracy over democracy

This House believes that Europe should have a single foreign policy

This House believes that Israeli incursions into Gaza are justified

This House believes that the United States should match its military aid to Israel with an equal amount of humanitarian aid to Palestine

This House believes that the Middle East peace process will never succeed

This House believes that the West should stop excusing Israel

This House believes that the West should leave the Middle East alone

This House believes that the United States should bomb Iran now

This House believes that democracy is the best way forward for Russia

This House believes that Canada should become the 51st state

This House believes that Canada should not be fighting America's wars

This House believes that NAFTA should be abolished

This House believes that the American dream has become a nightmare

This House believes that the Statue of Liberty is anything but

This House believes that the United States should be condemned for its human rights record

This House believes that Obama will fail

This House believes that the United States is in decline

This House believes that Uncle Sam is a bad relative

This House believes that the United States should withdraw from its military bases in Asia

This House believes that the United States should immediately end its embargo on Cuba

This House believes that the sun is sinking on the West

## **Sports**

This House believes that we are too obsessed with sports

This House believes that we pay too much attention to sports

This House believes that our sporting heroes don't deserve our admiration

This House believes that sports and politics should not mix

This House believes that sports teams should be responsible for the illegal actions of their players

This House believes that ice-hockey players who fight on the ice should be more severely punished

This House believes that television networks should be required to broadcast men's and women's sports equally

This House believes that sport has become too competitive

This House believes that salary caps should be prohibited in professional sports

This House believes that one city should be designated to host the Olympics permanently

This House believes that only democratic countries should be allowed to host the Olympics

This House believes that the Olympic ideal is dead

This House believes that we should do away with the Olympic Games

This House believes that professionalism has ruined the Olympic Games

This House believes that commercialism has ruined sports

This House believes that there is too much money in sports

This House believes that sponsorship is ruining sports

This House believes that we should ban boxing

This House believes that we should ban hunting with hounds

This House believes that we should legalize performance-enhancing drugs in sports

## **Terrorism**

This House believes that the world has changed for the better since September 11

This House believes that United States foreign policy deserves to be blamed for September 11

This House believes that we should limit the reporting of terrorist attacks

This House believes that the world has learned nothing from  
September 11

This House believes that social injustice justifies political violence

This House believes that terrorism is never justified

This House believes that there is a time for terrorism

This House believes that environmentalists should use terrorism in  
support of their goals

This House believes that long-term negotiation is the best response  
to terrorism

This House believes that negotiation with terrorists is justified

This House believes that we should talk to terrorists

This House believes that the war on terror is Al-Qaeda's greatest  
victory

This House believes that the best war on terror is the war on poverty

### **Young People**

This House believes that children should play less and study more

This House believes that kids today have it too easy

This House believes that parents should have the right to spank their  
children

This House believes that the voting age should be lowered

This House believes that parents should be allowed to cast proxy  
votes for their children

This House believes that youth icons make poor role models

This House believes that child beauty pageants should be banned

This House believes that we are the lost generation

This House would ban all physical punishment of children by their  
parents

### **Miscellaneous**

This House believes that country life is better than city life

This House believes that it's not whether you win or lose but how  
you play the game

This House believes that the government should do more to support  
traditional families

This House believes that we should restrict vehicle access to the city

This House believes that zoos should be closed