

Parliamentary Debate

The National Parliamentary Debate Association has never approved a set of rules or guidelines for the conduct of a debate. In the meantime, the following may serve to introduce Parliamentary Debate to those unfamiliar with the event. Again, we stress that neither these nor any other set of guidelines have the official sanction of National Parliamentary Debate Association. Any use of this document must include this disclaimer.—written by Robert Trapp and Cheron McGuffey

I. Format of the Debate

A. General Format

1. Parliamentary Debate is a formal contest of advocacy which theoretically occurs in a House of Parliament. Participants are the Government and Opposition teams, and the moderator is Madam or Mister Speaker of the House.
2. A motion or resolution is a sentence or phrase which provides the subject of debate. The Government Team has a limited amount of time, usually fifteen minutes, to prepare a case centered around this topic.
3. Published materials, or other resources for the debater's use in the round, may not be brought into the debating chambers.
4. The following are typical formats for Parliamentary Debate.

Prime Minister Constructive	7 min.
Leader of the Opposition Constructive	7 min.
Member of the Government Constructive	8 min.
Member of the Opposition Constructive	8 min.
Leader of the Opposition Rebuttal	4 min.
Prime Minister Rebuttal	5 min.

OR

Prime Minister	7 min.
Member of the Opposition	8 min.
Member of the Government	8 min.
Leader of the Opposition	12 min.
	(8 constr and 4 reb)
Prime Minister	5 min. (rebuttal)

If the Opposition wishes to use the latter form, they will inform the Speaker of the House orally or by writing "no split" on the board, indicating that they will not split the second speech and rebuttal.

B. Speeches

1. Constructive and Rebuttal Speeches: The purpose of constructive speeches is to introduce arguments for and against the

motion. Rebuttal speeches summarize the major points and responses. No new arguments are permitted except in the case when the Prime Minister is responding to Opposition arguments raised for the first time by the Member of Opposition.

2. Brief Descriptions of Each Speech:

Prime Minister Constructive (PMC):

Defines the resolution and outlines the major points supporting the Government's case.

Leader Opposition Constructive (LOC):

Outlines the Opposition's major philosophy and attacks the Government's case. If the Opposition objects to the Government's interpretation of the resolution, they should do so early in this speech.

Member Government Constructive (MGC):

Supports the Leader Opposition's arguments by refuting the Government case and/or introducing new points.

Leader Opposition Rebuttal (LOR):

Summarizes major points and philosophy. May not introduce new arguments.

Prime Minister Rebuttal (PMR):

Summarizes major points and philosophy. May only introduce a new arguments to answer objections raised for the first time by the Member of the Opposition.

C. Points of Information, Order, and Personal Privilege

1. Points of Information

Points of Information are commonly used by debaters to ask questions of their opponents. Points of Information can only be offered after the first minute and before the last minute of any constructive speech. The decision to yield to the Point of Information or to decline the Point is at the discretion of the speaker.

To make a Point of Information, a person rises and says "point of information, please," then waits to be recognized by the speaker. If the debater holding the floor does not wish to take the point of information, he or she usually responds, "No, thank you," at which time the person

wishing to make the point sits down. If the debater holding the floor wishes to take the point, he or she should recognize his or her opponent by saying, "Your question please," or some similar phrase to show the opponent that he or she is being recognized. The debater making the Point of Information then has a maximum of 15 seconds to ask a question of his or her opponent.

2. Points of Order

Points of Order are breaches in parliamentary proceedings. To raise a point of order, a speaker should stand and say "I rise to a point of order." At this time, the judge will then stop the time and ask the person to state the nature of the violation. When recognized by the judge, the speaker should then state the breach of order, then be seated. If the judge agrees with the point of order, he or she will respond "Point well taken." If the judge does not agree that a violation has taken place, he or she will respond, "Point not well taken." The judge can also rule "Point taken under consideration later."

3. Points of Personal Privilege

Points of Personal Privilege are charges of personal assaults against a participant in the debate, offensive and tasteless assertions, or charges of gross misrepresentation of a speaker's argument. As with a point of order, the judge will rule immediately on the accuracy of the charges.

II. Responsibilities of the Debaters

A. Responsibilities of the Government

The responsibility of the Government is to define and defend the resolution. The Government can choose to prove the resolution in general or in particular. A general proof of the resolution (often called a "straight" interpretation) argues that the resolution is true in a principled, philosophical, or theoretical sense. A particular proof (often called a "linked" case) presents one or more salient examples suggested by the resolution and argues that these examples are sufficient as proof of the resolution.

1. The Government has the responsibility to present a case which is not a truism.
2. The subjects for debate should be within the realms of knowledge of liberally-educated persons. Specific knowledge (information not in the public domain) ought not be necessary to participate in or judge the debate.

3. Several types of cases may be run.

- a. Need/Plan/Benefit: The government asserts that a given group must do something to improve the status quo. Examples include:
 - 1) Seat belts would be installed on school buses.
 - 2) Puerto Rico should become a state.
- b. Value/Comparison: Two related objects or ideas are compared and contrasted, or moral/practical advantage is placed upon one item. Examples include:
 - 1) Silk flowers are better than real flowers.
 - 2) Capitalism has failed.
- c. Time-Space: The Government team defines the resolution in terms of an alternative spatio-temporal setting. The appropriateness of the alternative time-space setting is, of course, a matter of debate and is a part of the burden of proof for the Government team.

B. Responsibilities of the Opposition

The responsibility of the Opposition is to dispute the truth of the resolution. They may do this by clashing with the Government's case and/or by showing independent reasons that the resolution is false.

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Sample Resolutions:

This house agrees that I think, therefore I am.

This house believes that freedom of information should be guaranteed in cyberspace.

This house believes that order is more important than freedom.

This house believes that universal democracy is the destiny of humanity.