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DEBATING

A Basic Introduction



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 presentation 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.

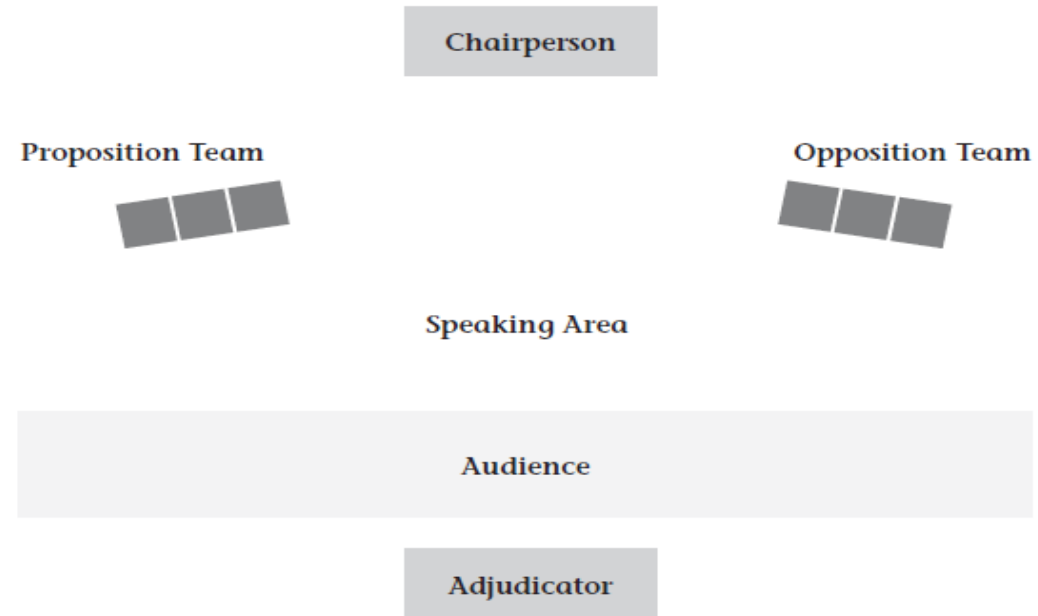
For example, debaters might speak of the first proposition (the first speaker of the proposition team), or the third opposition (the third speaker of the opposition team). Every speaker except the first proposition (the first speaker in the entire debate) is expected to rebut his or her opposition. The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



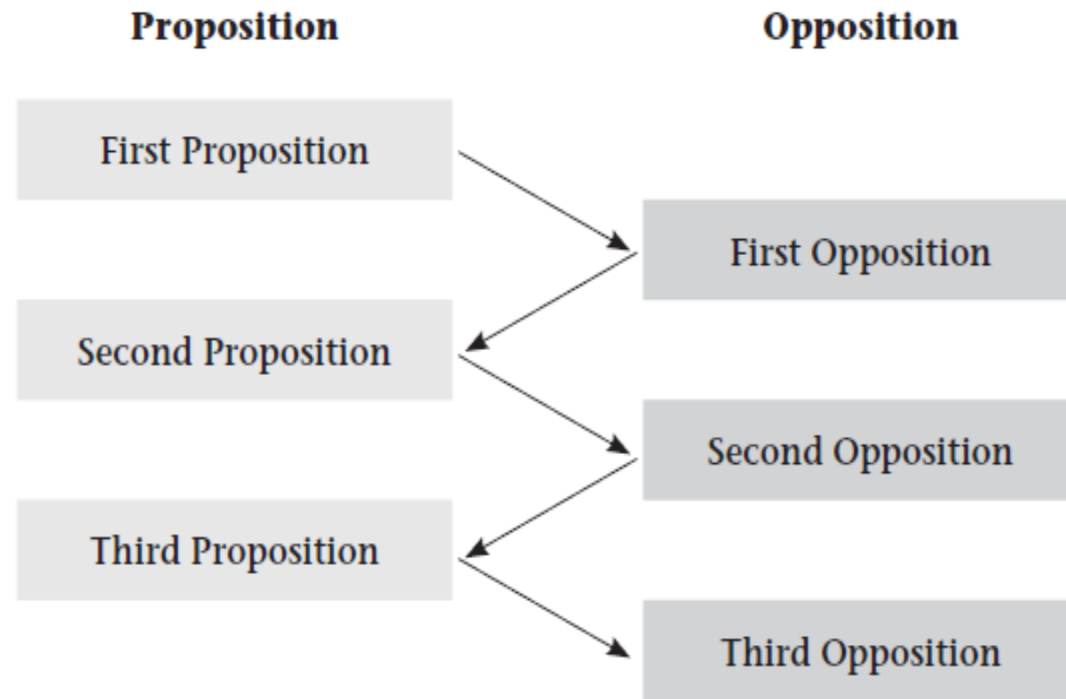
The debate is controlled by a chair, also referred to as a chairperson. Debaters should always start their speeches by acknowledging both the chair and the audience. A male chair is usually referred to as Mr. Chairman; a female chair as Madame Chair. A common way of starting a debating speech is therefore, “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.”



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:

- 1.Style**
- 2.Content**
- 3.Strategy**



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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, It should be divided into what is considered 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.



Thank you!
