

A Summary of the General Rules of Debating

Burden and Standard of Proof

The burden of proof lies upon the affirmative, except when the negative proposes a Counter-Plan. Ties are impossible: the team which bears the burden of proof must discharge that onus or lose.

Except in a mock trial in which an accused person must be proven guilty “beyond a reasonable doubt”, the standard of proof required to prove a proposition is “on the balance of probabilities” (that is, such evidence and argument as would convince a reasonable person that the proposition is more likely to be true than false).

Definitions

The terms in the resolution should be defined at the outset of the debate. The affirmative is responsible for interpreting the resolution in such a manner as not to produce a truism or tautology; the negative may challenge definitions for these reasons or for being unfair or unreasonable, but only if the challenge is made in the speech following delivery of the definitions. If the affirmative fails to define terms in its first address, it must accept any reasonable definitions offered by the first negative speaker. If both first (or succeeding sets of) speakers neglect to define terms, this privilege and responsibility devolves upon succeeding pairs of speakers. “Squirreling” (abnormal interpretation of terms) is permitted only in impromptu rounds and only if a clear link to the resolution is made. When there is a dispute about definitions, judges should accept the interpretation of terms best supported by reasoning and evidence. If this is the only issue on which the teams clash, the winner of the contest must be decided on this point alone.

Except in Cross-Examination style, an affirmative team must also present a **Plan** in any prepared debate on a proposition of policy. Such a Plan must be introduced during the first affirmative address and be completely described before its last speech. Likewise any **Counter-Plan** must be introduced during the first negative speech and be completely described before its last address. A Counter-Plan must be shown to be an alternative solution to the problem addressed by the resolution, significantly different from the Plan, and demonstrably superior to the approach taken in the resolution.

Debaters may speak on any subject they want, though they must not make **personal comments** about other debaters and they must stay within **legal limits**. However, you need not attach any weight to their remarks unless they demonstrate the **relevance** of such comments to the resolution. You must consider all contentions advanced by debaters, but you may decide to reject unsubstantiated assertions or purely emotional appeals or to accord little **weight** to unsupported arguments. If one team poses serious **questions** relevant to the resolution and the other side neither satisfactorily answers them nor justifies its failure to do so, you may consider these points to have been won by the team which asked the questions.

Except for reasonable role-playing, all **assertions of fact** by debaters must be accurate and you should severely penalize students for using inaccurate evidence. Debaters are required to be ready to cite exact sources for their assertions, if challenged to do so. (This documentation requirement is considerably relaxed in impromptu debates.) If you are certain that a debater has deliberately fabricated or falsified evidence, you should report this to the Tournament Director as quickly as possible.

Rebuttal is not restricted to official rebuttal periods, but during a final affirmative rebuttal, no new constructive argument or evidence may be introduced.

Except for heckling, debaters must always **stand** to speak.

Debaters may read verbatim quotations or speak from notes but should be penalized for **reading** a speech.

Memorization should also be penalized if it results in stilted, unnatural or distracting delivery.

While debaters are expected to utilize their maximum speaking times effectively, they should be penalized if they resort to unnecessary **repetition** to use up their time. It is acceptable, however, for a debater to introduce, state and then review a point.

No **coaching** is allowed during a debate and judges will harshly penalize debaters who prompt or consult with a colleague who is speaking, or solicit such assistance while they are speaking. Apart from this, co-operation, co-ordination and teamwork among colleagues should be rewarded.

Debaters may use **visual aids** in support of their assertions but once such exhibits are introduced, they become available for the use of opponents during the debate.

Debaters must always be **courteous** and must not disrupt opponents' speeches.

Judges should disregard any illegally introduced evidence and penalize debaters for any violations of the rules, unfair tactics or discourtesy.

A Summary of the Specific Rules of Debating

Academic Style

In this style, each debater delivers a constructive speech; in the Cambridge format, he or she also has a rebuttal-defence-summary speech but in the Oxford format, only the first affirmative debater has a second speech for these purposes. Heckling OR Worlds' Style Points of Information may or may not be permitted: the script will say. Unless these are allowed, no interruptions are permitted, but following all speeches, debaters will be invited to complain of rule violations or any misrepresentation of their remarks by opponents. Debaters should refer to officials and other debaters in the third person. Under Worlds' Style, every debater should raise at least one Point of Information to, and accept at least one such Point from, each opponent, during a main speech.

Cross-Examination Style

In this style, each debater delivers a constructive speech and both questions and is questioned by an opponent. Rebuttal-defence-summary speeches may be delivered by all debaters (Cambridge format) - in which case they may share these functions or each may try to perform all three - or only by the first affirmative speaker (Oxford format).

Debaters should treat one another with dignity as Judges will penalize debaters guilty of rudeness, flippancy, brow-beating or any attempt to belittle another debater.

While cross-examining, debaters should ask fair questions on relevant subjects, though these need not arise out of the preceding speech. Examiners will be penalized for arguing with witnesses or making speeches instead of asking questions. They are required to give witnesses a reasonable opportunity to answer questions, though they may ask the moderator to cut short witnesses who stall or answer at unreasonable length.

While being cross-examined, witnesses must give direct, honest answers; they are not to evade questions put to them but they may impose reasonable qualifications on their answers. The only question they may ask is for clarification of a confusing query; they may not refuse to answer a question, even if it appears to be irrelevant; if an answer to a question is not relevant, however, the moderator may order the witness to answer it directly.

No heckling or other interjections are in order but at the conclusion of speeches, all debaters will be invited to complain about rule violations or any misrepresentation of their remarks by opponents.

Debaters may refer to one another directly by name but should address the moderator by formal reference to his or her office. The resolution may be worded in the form of a question, in which case, the affirmative must answer it "Yes".

Parliamentary Style

In this style, debaters play the role of today's federal M.P.'s: hence they must direct all of their remarks through the Speaker, refer to one another in the third person or by office (e.g., "the honourable member", "the Prime Minister"), use Parliamentary jargon ("the House", "the Bill", etc.) and avoid unparliamentary language (e.g., "liar").

Each debater will deliver a speech and, depending on whether the Cambridge or Oxford format of rebuttal is used, possibly a separate rebuttal as well. Traditionally only a Prime Minister (the first affirmative speaker) has enjoyed an Official Rebuttal. Debaters may proceed to speak only after being recognized by the Speaker. Only one debater at a time may hold the floor, so a speaking member should sit down immediately when a Point of Order or Privilege is raised. All debaters must defer to the Speaker and abide by his or her rulings or they may be expelled by being "named".

Verbal heckling is permitted, indeed encouraged, as long as it is brief, witty, incisive and infrequent. Excessive or thoughtless heckling should be penalized harshly.

Any debater may interrupt another's speech to raise a Point of Order or Point of Privilege. A Point of Order must be raised immediately to complain that a rule (other than those against repetition and irrelevance) has been broken. A debater who has been misquoted or misrepresented, slandered or improperly referred to may raise a Point of Privilege. Neither type of point is debatable: the objector must be specific about his or her complaint, the Speaker will rule the point to have been "Well taken" or "Not well taken", and the debate will proceed. The time taken for these and any other interruptions of a speech will be added on to the speaking time of the interrupted member. Only these two points and heckling enjoy the right of interruption.

Points of Information are no longer permitted in this style.