

INSTRUCTIONS FOR DEBATE MODERATORS

Always remember that your role is simply to maintain order and enforce the rules, NOT to take an active part in the debate. While you should be completely impartial and intervene only where this is necessary to protect the rights of an individual debater, don't hesitate to step in if a debate is getting out of hand.

If a debater is making it difficult for the judges or audience to hear what another debater is saying (for instance, by shuffling paper, tapping toes, or whispering loudly), say to him or her: "You are making it difficult for us to hear the debater who has the floor. Would you kindly desist."

Under General Rule 3, your decisions are final and cannot be appealed. Since debaters are required to accept and abide by your rulings without question, if a debater continues to object after you have made a decision, say firmly: "You are out of order. Please sit down and be silent."

Before the Debate Begins

1. Study and know the General Rules of Debate and the rules of the particular style of debating that you will be using. Have a copy of all pertinent rules with you during the debate in case you need to refer to them.
2. Have the appropriate Script and Debate Report form ready to read. Check the Script to be sure that it is for the right style and the proper number of debaters. Read the Script over in advance so that you know what to expect and so that you can find out how to pronounce any unfamiliar words in it. Do not fill in the blanks on the Script; rather fill this information in on the Debate Report so that the Script can be used again. In an exhibition debate or the first round of a tournament, have the Summary of General Rules of Debate ready to read.
3. Find out from the judges, debaters and timekeeper how they wish to be introduced. At the same time, ensure that they are all properly seated (that is, affirmative debaters to your right, negative to your left, the judges apart and throughout the audience, and the timekeeper in a position where he or she can be seen by all the debaters).
4. If possible, write the exact resolution and the names of debaters on a blackboard or other conspicuous place. Check to see that the judges have listed the debaters in their proper speaking order and whether they require a pause between speeches to complete their scoring notes.

After the Debate is Underway

1. Follow the Script and try to avoid interruptions. Debating should be continuous as far as possible: if you pause between speeches so judges have additional time to score debaters, pause for the same period each time. Such pauses should not exceed one minute.
2. Do not permit any overtime. When the timekeeper sits down after a debater's period of grace has expired, cut him or her off immediately - even if it is in mid-sentence!

In Academic Style Debates

Call debaters to order immediately if they break the rules. If they persist in doing so, warn them that they may be penalized by the judges if they continue. If permitted by the Tournament Director, allow heckling or World Schools Debating Championships Points of Information. Do not interfere with such interruptions unless they are clearly excessive.

In Cross-Examination Style Debates

If an examiner brow-beats a witness, say to him or her: "Please just ask one question at a time" or "Please give the witness a reasonable opportunity to answer your question".

Do not intervene when an examiner makes a speech or argues with a witness: the judges have been instructed to penalize such misconduct and to ignore the content of any such remarks, so the debater is hurting only himself or herself.

If an examiner tries to prevent a witness from attaching reasonable qualifications to his answer, say to him or her: "Please give the witness a chance to complete his/her answer."

If an examiner asks you to cut a witness short for stalling or answering at unreasonable length and you feel that the request is justified, say to the witness: “You have had ample time to answer that question. Please let the examiner put his/her next query.”

If a witness refuses to answer a question or answers it with another question, say to him or her: “You are required to answer the question.” (The only question that a witness may ask is for clarification of an ambiguous or confusing query.)

If a witness gives an irrelevant answer to a question, say to him or her: “Please provide a direct answer to that question.” Witnesses may answer that they don’t know the answer to a question posed, though they do so at their peril if the judges believe that they do or should know the answer and that the question is relevant.

If one debater belittles another, immediately direct him or her to refrain from doing so.

In Parliamentary Style Debates

Parliamentary Rule 05 prohibits “unparliamentary language” and provides examples of it. If a debater uses such language, say forcefully: “Your remarks are not worthy of a member of this House. Please apologize and moderate your language.”

When a Point of Order or Privilege is raised, you should immediately recognize the objector by saying: “Would you please explain your Point, with particular reference to (the rule infringed / the statement objected to).” If two such Points are raised simultaneously, rule on one first, then consider the other. Generally speaking, you should not permit any debate on a Point but you may give the criticized debater an opportunity to explain his or her conduct. Rule immediately whether a Point has been “Well taken” or “Not well taken”; in the case of doubt, rule against it. Try to discourage frivolous Points such as, “Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. The member is referring to us as ‘they’.”

Points of Information are no longer permitted. If a debater tries to raise one, you should interrupt and say: “Order. Points of Information are not permitted.”

If a debater is using improper heckling to disrupt the delivery of an opposing speech, say pointedly: “The judges are to penalize any debater who is interrupting another excessively or thoughtlessly or who is lowering the level of debate.” If the interrupted debater is handling the heckling well, however, you probably should not interfere.

If heckling or other conduct is lowering the level of debate, call for “Order in the House”. If this doesn’t succeed, call the offending side to order. For example, say: “Will the Government please come to order.” You should not permit cross-bench heckling (that is, heckling of seated debaters).

If a debater is unruly or refuses to obey you, you can have him or her removed from the House under Parliamentary Rule 02. This extreme action should be taken only if a debater persists in breaking the rules after repeatedly being called to order and being warned of imminent expulsion. To have a debater so removed, simply say: “Would the Sergeant-at-Arms please escort (debater’s name) from the House.” Note: If such an expulsion is appealed to the Tournament Director, you should await his or her ruling before proceeding with the debate.

Generally

It cannot be over-emphasized that you should refrain from interfering in a debate any more than is absolutely necessary: the best moderator is usually the one least often heard. The slightest reprimand you give a debater is liable to influence the judges very strongly.

At the same time, remember how frustrating it is to debate when the moderator is weak, and be firm.

Your job is vitally important, but don’t let that make you feel too self-important or let power go to your head and act officiously! Above all, do your best to be fair.