

## ENDERUN COLLEGES

### Guide to British Parliamentary Debate

by Allan Roi C. Roño

*Working Premise: This guide for debaters is simply that, a guide. It has been noted that there is quite a proliferation of debate leagues both local and international and that there are as many debate formats as there are variations and interpretations of these formats. This handout attempts to guide students through the rudiments of debate that they may be able to apply these basics to whatever debate format or form of academic discourse they may encounter in their studies.*

### BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

British Parliamentary (BP) debating is extemporaneous in nature. It mimics the way debates are done in the actual British Parliament (the government of the United Kingdom). Extemporaneous in this handout means that the debaters are given only a limited amount of time to prepare their speeches. Usually debaters are given fifteen minutes to about an hour. For matter loading, the topics are given ahead of time (optional) so that the debaters may read or research about them. This ensures that the participants are on more or less the same ground. The motion or proposition will then be derived from the topics.

### BASIC ELEMENTS OF A DEBATE

TOPIC – This is given by the teacher for matter loading purposes. (optional)

MOTION – This is also determined by the teacher and announced to the debating groups during the Pre-Debate Conference (PDC). Debaters will then draw lots to determine their teams: Opening Government, Closing Government, Opening Opposition or Closing Opposition. The respective members will decide on their positions.

DEFINITION –The Prime Minister has the privilege of defining the motion. The definition of the motion may be thematic or issue-based. The definition must be in the *spirit of the motion* (the gist or essence of the motion). It should clearly state the issue (or issues) for debate arising from the motion and state the meaning of any terms in the motion which require interpretation. The definition must be reasonable and/or debatable. The Opening Government must establish the link between the definition and the motion at the beginning of his/ her speech.

The definition must:

- ✓ Have a clear and logical link to the motion – this means that an average person would accept the link made by the member between the motion and the definition (where there is no such link, the definition is sometimes referred to as a “squirrel”)
- ✓ Not be self-proving – a definition is self-proving when there is no reasonable rebuttal. A definition may also be self-proving when a certain state of affairs does not exist and there is no reasonable rebuttal (these definitions are sometimes referred to as “truisms” or “truistic” in nature).
- ✓ Not be time set – this means that the arguments are in the present and that the definition cannot set the debate in the past or the future (these definitions are referred to as “TPS” or “Time Place Setting”).
- ✓ Not be place set unfairly – this means that the definition cannot restrict the debate so narrowly to a particular geographical or political location that a participant of the tournament could not reasonably be expected to have knowledge of the place (also referred to as “TPS”).

### *Challenging the Definition*

- The Leader of the Opposition may challenge the definition if it violates any of the above-mentioned guidelines of a good strong definition. The LO should clearly state that he/ she is challenging the definition.
- After challenging the definition of the PM, the LO should offer an alternative definition and negate it (being in the opposition team).

### *Assessing the Definitional Challenge*

- The definition is “unreasonable” if it violates any of the simple guidelines of a good strong definition.
- When the definition of the Opening Government is unreasonable and an alternative definition is substituted by the Opening Opposition, the Closing Government may introduce matter which is inconsistent with the matter presented by the OG and consistent with the definition of the OO.
- If the OO has substituted a definition that is also unreasonable, the Closing Government may challenge the definition of the OO and substitute an alternative definition.
- If the CG has substituted a definition that is also unreasonable (in addition to the unreasonable definitions of the OG and OO), the Closing Opposition may challenge the definition of the CG and substitute an alternative definition.
- In assessing definitional debates or hung debates, the points will be given to the team with the definition which falls *closest* to the spirit of the motion.

### CASE PLAN

*ARGUMENTS* – This is the *matter* of the speeches. The debaters will set up arguments or claims supporting their side of the case.

*EXAMPLES* – Each argument must be accompanied by examples. These examples are brought up to prove or strengthen the case in the same way evidence does. This is where matter loading comes in. The quality of examples reflects how much research the students have done.

### **MATTER**

- Matter is the content of the speech. It includes arguments and reasoning, examples, case studies, facts and any other material that attempts to further the case.
- Matter includes positive (or substantive) material, and rebuttal (arguments specifically aimed to refute the arguments of the opposing team(s)). Matter includes POI's.
- Matter should be relevant. It should relate to the issues of the debate: positive material should support the case being presented; and rebuttal should refute the material being presented by the opposing team(s). The member should appropriately prioritize and apportion time to the dynamic issues of the debate.
- Matter should be logical. Arguments should be developed logically in order to be clear and well-reasoned and therefore plausible. The conclusion of all arguments should support the members' case.
- Matter should be consistent. Members should ensure that the matter they present is consistent within their speech, their team and the remainder of the members on their side of the debate.
- All members should present positive matter (except the final two members in the debate) and all members should present rebuttal (except for the first member in the debate). The 2<sup>nd</sup> Deputy Prime Minister or Government Whip may not present new matter.

### **MANNER**

- Manner is the presentation of the speech. It is the style and structure a member uses to further his or her case and persuade the audience.
- The elements of style include eye contact, voice modulation, hand gestures, language, the use of notes and any other element which may affect the effectiveness of the presentation of the members.

- Eye contact will generally assist a member to persuade an audience as it allows the member to appear more sincere.
- Voice modulation will generally assist a member to persuade an audience as the debater may emphasize important arguments and keep the attention of the audience. This includes the pitch, tone and volume of the member's voice and the use of pauses.
- Hand gestures will generally assist a member to emphasize important arguments. Excessive hand movements may however be distracting and reduce the attentiveness of the audience to the arguments.
- The use of notes is permitted, but members should be careful that they do not rely on their notes too much and detract from the other elements of manner.

## **METHOD**

- Method is simply speech organization.
- Logic and sequence of attack.
- Sign posting.

CONCLUSION – Like in any debate, each student must provide a good conclusion that will drive home their point.

## **POSITIONS IN A BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE**

A BP debate consists of four teams with two members each. Other debate formats usually just have two sides with one team per side; the affirmative and the negative. In BP, there are two sides, the government (+) and the opposition (-) with two teams on each side of the motion. Thus you have the Opening Government (OG), the Closing Government (CG), the Opening Opposition (OO), and the Closing Opposition (CO). Each team is represented by two debaters. There are variations of what the debaters are called, but for the purpose of clarity and simplification, the debaters will be referred to by the following names or titles:

The Opening Government will consist of the:  
*Prime Minister* (or *First Government member*) and  
*Deputy Prime Minister* (or *Second Government member*)

The Opening Opposition will consist of the:  
*Leader of the Opposition* (or *First Opposition member*) and  
*Deputy Leader of the Opposition* (or *Second Opposition member*)

The Closing Government will consist of the:  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Prime Minister* (or *Third Government member* or *Member of the Government*) and  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Deputy Prime Minister* (*Fourth Government member* or *Government Whip*)

The Closing Opposition will consist of the:  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Leader of the Opposition* (or *Third Opposition member* or *Member of the Opposition*) and  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Deputy Leader of the Opposition* (or *Fourth Opposition member* or *Opposition Whip*)

Opening and closing teams of either side are NOT team mates. They are merely two teams on one side of the motion. It can be likened to two different political parties on one side of an issue. The debaters' duty is simple. They must build a case plan independent and distinct from each other. These case plans are what they develop in the course of their individual speeches.

## SEQUENCE of SPEECHES

1. Prime Minister
2. Leader of the Opposition
3. Deputy Prime Minister
4. Deputy Leader of the Opposition

5. 2<sup>nd</sup> Prime Minister
6. 2<sup>nd</sup> Leader of the Opposition
7. 2<sup>nd</sup> Deputy Prime Minister
8. 2<sup>nd</sup> Deputy Leader of the Opposition

### SPEECH STRUCTURE

- Speech structure pertains to the assigned topic.
    - ✓ It begins with the motion
    - ✓ Then the definition
    - ✓ Arguments
    - ✓ Examples
    - ✓ Ends with a conclusion
- } Establishes THEME or TEAM LINE
- *Team Split* refers to the distribution of arguments and examples within the team. It is basically working on the framework:
    - ✓ What will I say?
    - ✓ What will my partner say?
  - Speech structure can be outlined in many ways:

What are we saying?	Feasibility (Can it be done?)	Side of the motion/ Theme	Tell/ Inform
Why are we saying it?	Necessity (Should it be done?)	Reasons/ arguments	Say/ Explain
What makes us right?	Beneficiality (Who will benefit?)	Examples	Tell/ Convince

- The structure for a speaker's *rebuttal* will be:
  - ✓ What did they say?
  - ✓ Why are they wrong?
- The structure of the Closing teams' *Elevation* will be:
  - ✓ What are we saying?
  - ✓ Why are we saying it?
  - ✓ Why/ What makes us different?
  - ✓ Why/ What makes us right?
- The structure for the Whips/ last speakers of the debate will be:
  - ✓ Where did the debate start?
  - ✓ Where did it go?
  - ✓ How did it get there?

### BASIC SPEECH OUTLINES

1. **Prime Minister of the Opening Government (OG)**–
  - What am I saying? (Argument/Claim)
  - Why am I saying it? (Reason/s)
  - What makes me right? (Examples/Evidence)
2. **Leader of the Opening Opposition (OO)** –
  - What did the speaker before me say?
  - Why is she wrong? (Rebuttal)
  - What am I saying? (Argument/Claim)
  - Why am I saying it? (Reason/s)
  - What makes me right? (Examples/Evidence)

3. **Deputy Prime Minister of the OG –**  
 What did the speaker before me say?  
 Why is she wrong? (Rebuttal)  
 What am I saying? (Supporting arguments for OG case)  
 Why am I saying it? (Reason/s)  
 What makes me right? (Examples/Evidence)
  
4. **Deputy Leader of the OO –**  
 What did the speaker before me say?  
 Why is she wrong? (Rebuttal)  
 What am I saying? (Supporting arguments for the OO case)  
 Why am I saying it? (Reason/s)  
 What makes me right? (Examples/Evidence)
  
5. **2<sup>nd</sup> Prime Minister (Closing Government) –**  
 What did the speaker before me say?  
 Why is she wrong? (Rebuttal)  
 What am I saying? (Case for the CG)  
 Why am I saying it? (Reason/s)  
 What makes my case different? (Elevation)  
 What makes me right? (Examples/Evidence)
  
6. **2<sup>nd</sup> Leader (Closing Opposition) –**  
 What did the speaker before me say?  
 Why is she wrong? (Rebuttal)  
 What am I saying? (Case for the CO)  
 Why am I saying it? (Reason/s)  
 What makes my case different? (Elevation)  
 What makes me right? (Examples/Evidence)
  
7. **2<sup>nd</sup> Deputy Prime Minister (Closing Government)–**  
 Where has the debate gone so far? (Summation of the entire Government case and  
 rebuttal of the entire Opposition)  
 What have said so far? (Supporting case for the CG)  
 What else are we saying? (Other arguments)  
 Why are saying it? (Reason/s)  
 What makes our case different? (Support the elevation)  
 What makes us right? (Examples/Evidence)
  
8. **2<sup>nd</sup> Deputy Leader (Closing Opposition)**  
 Where did the debate start? (Review)  
 Where did it go? (Analysis)  
 How did it get there? (Synthesis)  
 What have they said? Why are they wrong? (Rebuttal)  
 What have we said? (No new arguments)  
 What makes us different? (Reiteration/Support the elevation)  
 What makes us right? (Reiteration/No new examples)

### **MODERATOR/ SPEAKER of the HOUSE**

Debates are facilitated by a moderator. In BP, the moderator is called the Speaker of the House. He/she simply calls or summons the debaters to deliver their respective speeches one after the other. In some debates, the chief adjudicator or one of the adjudicators assumes this role.

### **ADJUDICATORS**

Adjudicators decide the outcome of the debate. They decide on the winning team based on their capacity as average or ordinary reasonable persons (ARP or ORP). This means that an adjudicator must not make use of his expertise (if any) as a debater to judge an outcome. A chief adjudicator may be pre-selected or elected. There are three adjudicators per debate, and this panel shall be composed of the debaters who have debated previously.

The adjudicator must:

- ✓ Take notes and discuss the debate with the other adjudicators,
- ✓ Determine the rankings of the teams, and
- ✓ Determine the team grades.

The adjudication panel should attempt to agree on the adjudication of the debate. Adjudicators should therefore confer in the spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. Adjudicators mark the teams at their discretion within the ranges specified in the Enderun adjudication forms. A team needs two out of three votes to win. A debater also needs two out of three votes to be best debater, however adjudicators may vote differently as to best debater. In this case, no best debater will be declared.

An oral adjudication will be conducted by the teacher after the debate.

### **TIME ALLOTTMENTS**

- Speeches should be seven minutes in duration.
- POI's may only be offered between the first minute and the sixth minute mark of the speech (This period is signaled by one a bell).
- A timer will be assigned to signal the debaters.

### **POINTS OF INFORMATION**

Points of information (POI) are allowed in BP debates. POIs are interjections in the form of a statement or question directed toward the debater on the floor. It may be likened to interpellation only more instantaneous. POI's may only be offered between the first minute and the last minute mark of the speech. The debaters have the first minute free to establish their case plans. At the second till the sixth minute, opponents may raise POIs. The final minute however is again left free for the debaters to conclude their speeches.

Anybody on the government side may raise POIs against anybody on the opposition. You may not point out anyone who is on your side of the house. This may be termed as shafting.

Traditionally, POIs are raised by standing up, one hand on your head and the other (palm up) extended toward the debater on the floor and saying, "Point of information." This may vary. You may also just stand up and raise your hand like in a recitation. POIs must be brief and may be witty or humorous, but they must be appropriate and not rude. POIs must have direct bearing to the debate at hand in order to gain ground or that you be able to destabilize your opponents' case or team line.

The debaters have the option to take or ignore the POI being raised. The simple guideline to follow here is that you should offer as many POIs as you can against your opponents, but you should take a moderate number. Don't refuse all POIs. It shows a weakness in your case. It may make you look like you're afraid of questions and that you may not be able to answer. Don't take all POIs either. It makes you look like you really have no real case and even less to say and that you're just waiting for POIs to make side comments on. Maximize your first minute. State your case. If you feel you've already established a good claim and a point is being raised, then take it. Keep in mind that it may actually help you strengthen your stand.

### **MEMBERS of the HOUSE**

The audience is referred to as the *members of the house*. In BP, the members are allowed to participate and react to the debaters by saying *hear* or *shame*. You say *hear* if you agree with what is being said and *shame* if you disagree. The members applaud by lightly pounding on their desks or tables.

### ADDITIONAL TERMS

1. SQUIRRELING: is “running away with the topic” where the speaker specifies time, place, and setting of an issue. This is also done when the team presents a one-sided issue which works only to their advantage.
2. SHAFTING: when you purposely disagree or negate a member on your side of the house.
3. SLIDE: when a team shifts arguments or changes their team line in the course of the debate. This is when the arguments of the speakers are inconsistent and even somewhat contradictory.
4. DEFINITIONAL DEBATE/ HUNG CASE: when the arguments of the two teams do not meet or there is no clash of ideas. This is bad matter because it does not tackle the issue directly. This often happens when there is more than one definition of the motion.
5. BURDEN of PROOF: each team must provide evidence/ examples to support their arguments. Each team must prove their own case.
6. ARGUMENT by EXAMPLE: examples are brought up to strengthen or prove an argument and should not be used as an argument in itself.
7. NEW MATTER: the closing speakers (Government and Opposition whips) may not bring up any new matter.
8. INVALID CASE: the arguments put forward fail to address the issue of the debate. In short, this is bad matter.
9. PLAUSIBILITY of CASE: examples brought up must be valid and verifiable (no fabricated data)
10. MISREPRESENTATIONS: this is basically misinterpreting the arguments presented by the opposing team, and making it sound unreasonable and illogical. This is highly discouraged, as it is a bad method of attacking the opposing case.

### *TEAM and INDIVIDUAL SPEAKER DESCRIPTORS*

**Excellent to flawless.** The standard you would expect to see from a team at the Semi-Final/ Grand Final level of a tournament. The team has many strengths, and few, if any, weaknesses.

**Above average to very good.** The standard you would expect to see from a team at the finals level or in contention to make it to the finals. The team has clear strengths and some minor weaknesses.

**Average.** The team has strengths and weaknesses in roughly equal proportions.

**Poor to below average.** The team has clear problems and some minor strengths.

**Very poor.** The team has fundamental weaknesses and few, if any, strengths.

Reference:

D’Cruz, R. (n.d.) *World parliamentary debating rules*. World Universities Debating Championship.