

The Basics of British Parliamentary Debating

STRUCTURE

- 4 Teams (two Government (Affirmative), two Opposition (Negative)).
- Each team has two speakers
- Speaking times are 6-7 minutes
- Points of Information (see below) may be given between the 1st and 6th minutes
- Knocks will be given at 1 minute and 6 minutes to signal the end and start of protected times (i.e. time when Points of Information are not allowed), and at 7 minutes to signal the end of speaking time

SPEAKING ORDER

- 1st speaker of Opening Gov (Prime Minister)
- 1st speaker Opening Opp (Opposition Leader)
- 2nd speaker Opening Gov (Deputy Prime Minister)
- 2nd speaker Opening Opp (Deputy Opposition Leader)
- 1st speaker Closing Gov (Government Member)
- 1st speaker Closing Opp (Opposition Member)
- 2nd speaker Closing Gov (Government Whip)
- 2nd speaker Closing Opp (Opposition Whip)

WINNING AND LOSING

Teams are ranked 1-4 and receive points: 4 for first, 3 for second, 2 for third and 1 for fourth. To win a BP debate you have to:

- Convince the adjudicator that your side of the house (affirmative/negative) is stronger than the other side. If you are Gov, you want to demonstrate why the Opp is wrong.
- Convince the adjudicator that you were the stronger team on your side of the house. You cannot openly pay out the other team on your side, so instead try to 'outshine' them.

ROLES OF DIFFERENT TEAMS

Each team in British Parliamentary has a different role, as do individual speakers.

Opening Government (OG)

- Defines the topic and provides a positive case.
- Both speakers are the same as the first two speakers in a 3-on-3 debate.
- OG should try and cover as much matter as possible in the debate, so as to leave little room for the CG to distinguish themselves.

- *Prime Minister* defines the topic, states what the split will be between the 1st and 2nd speakers, and then produces positive Matter.
- *Deputy PM* rebuts the Opp Leader and produces more positive matter.

Opening Opposition (OO)

- Responds to the Gov team and produces their own case.
- Should try and cover as much matter as possible in the debate so as to leave little room for the CO team to distinguish themselves.

- *Opp Leader* rebuts the PM, provides the negative split, produces matter.
- *Deputy Opp Leader* rebuts the OG case and produces positive matter.

Closing Government (CG)

- Rebuts Opposition teams and produces a case extension (see below).

- *Government Member* rebuts the OO then outlines their teams case extension. Then produces positive matter.
- *Government Whip* basically delivers a 3rd speaker speech. However, they should do this with particular reference to their team's case extension. Should avoid introducing new matter.

Closing Opposition (CO)

- Same as CG
- Under no circumstances can the Opposition Whip introduce new matter.

DEFINITIONS

The first distinguishing feature of British Parliamentary Debating is the definition. The Opening Government team can define the topic how they like. Having said that, if the definition is unreasonable and destroys the debate, the Opening Gov will likely lose. Thus, define a topic fairly. The best debates are when the Opening Gov defines the topic so as to set up a clear debate which all sides were expecting.

CASE EXTENSIONS

The second half of the debate is where BP differs from 3 on 3 debating. The 2nd Affirmative and Negative teams have to produce a 'Case Extension': they each must produce a new positive case that is consistent with the 1st team's case, but provides a different perspective on the issue. A case extension must not contradict the 1st team's case.

Suppose in the debate that we should abolish the death penalty the 1st affirmative team argues that the death penalty is inhumane, and does not deter crime. The second affirmative team could run any of the following case extensions,

- (a) That the death penalty should be abolished because it targets racial minorities.
- (b) That the death penalty should be abolished due to the possibility that innocent people may get convicted.

If the 1st team covers everything in the debate, the second team should take a small part of the 1st team's case that wasn't covered in enough depth, and make that their case extension. So in a debate about the Death Penalty if a 1st affirmative team only just touches on the death penalties inhumane aspects a 2nd affirmative could use that as a case extension.

Rules to remember about case extensions:

- (a) Your case must be clear.
- (b) Must be different from 1st team's case.
- (c) Must not contradict 1st team's case.

POINTS OF INFORMATION

Points of Information (POIs) may be delivered any time between the 1 minute and 6 minute bells. A speaker may reject or accept a point of information.

POIs should be brief, and clear. They should last no longer than 10 seconds.

Points of information can be delivered in three basic ways:

1. An Argument (phrased as a question)

This format is basically delivering an argument as a question. For example in the death penalty debate a POI could be phrased as, “Don’t you think that the death penalty actually deters murder by increasing the consequences?” or “What do you say to the argument that the death penalty deters crime by increasing the consequences of crime?” This type of POI is essentially an attack on the speaker’s case. The important point to remember is that these POIs are arguments.

2. A factual POI (phrased as a question)

Often a team may be relying on a certain example or factual piece of information to support their arguments. If you have information that would stop them in their tracks this is worth delivering. For example if an individual is arguing that “The United States military is superior in every capacity and therefore would never lose...”, a POI along the lines of “What about the Vietnam War?” would be quite devastating.

3. Exposing a weakness in their case (phrased as a question)

POIs are useful to expose where a team’s argument is lacking, where their arguments are contradictory, or where they have failed to rebut a key argument. Suppose a team is debating that we should invade Iraq, and they are talking about all the benefits of having the UN administering Iraq after the invasion. A POI may point out that, “You’re talking about all these benefits of invasion, but have failed to address our core argument that invasion itself will not be possible. How are these benefits relevant given that invasion is impossible?”

There are also three basic ways POIs can be used:

1. Foreshadowing your case.

In a BP debate in particular it is important for the second teams to get their case seen as early as possible. The way they do this is by delivering points of information that refer to their case.

2. Keeping your case relevant.

In terms of the 1st Affirmative and Negative teams points of information are vital to keep their case relevant during the second half of the debate.

3. Attacking the other team's case

When using POIs, DO NOT:

- Do not use POIs to nitpick examples, unless the example is important to their case and you have matter that will destroy them.
- Do not use POIs to clarify what you said. That is if you feel that someone is misrepresenting you do not use a POI to defend yourself.
- Do not 'badger' a debater, by offering too many POIs or offering them after they have said something along the lines of "I'm not going to take one for a minute", it's rude and basically just not cricket!

How to Deal with Points of Information:

Only accept 2-3 points in your speech. Accept more if you're hot stuff, or if you're short on time. However, it is important to keep control of your speech. Accepting more than 3 wastes a lot of valuable speaking time.

Don't let someone delivering a POI push you around. If they take longer than 10 seconds to deliver their point, sit them down. If they haven't made a point, cut them off and make one for them: "Thank you. I think what you're trying to ask is..."

Don't let them have a conversation with you; once they've made their point that's it.

There are three techniques to deal with POIs once they've been made.

1. **Respond to it.** This is the best option.
2. **Say I'll cover it later.** If you have a section in your speech that relates to the point tell them you will cover it later. When you do cover it explicitly, remind the adjudicator.
3. **Dodge.** Sometimes you are going to be stumped by a POI; it happens to everyone. If you are stumped don't waffle for 30 seconds. You can restate your caseline, provide token rebuttal, or say you'll cover it later. Do not allow a POI to make you lose your concentration!

How to Prepare a BP Debate

A brief outline of how individual teams should spend prep.

OG: Be absolutely focused. Set up the definition, your model, and arguments. Make sure your split and arguments are clear. You are expected to have the clearest case.

OO: Usually, you'll be able to prepare like any other debate. However, if the topic is open, it is worth preparing a couple of cases. Make sure you have something vague thought out in case the Aff decides to take a narrower or odd approach.

CG: Like the 1st Neg, you should try to prepare one topic for most of the 30 minutes but be ready for a shift. At 2nd Aff you need to try and pre-empt the case from the 1st affirmative team, and thus, prepare an extension you don't think they will cover. For example in the debate "That we should invade Iraq" the affirmative may not spend much time analysing the benefits to the Western world of such an invasion. Thus, it may be advisable for the second affirmative to prepare such a case extension.

CO: This team should like the other teams focus on their most likely case extension but make sure they are prepared for any curve-balls they get thrown by the 1st Aff or 1st Neg. Remember if the 1st Neg runs your case extension you have to change it. Moreover, if the 1st Neg runs a case that is inconsistent with your extension you have to change your extension as well.

A BP prep is likely any other debate. You need to be ready for the possibility that one of the teams may change the dimensions of the debate.

CONCLUSION

British Parliamentary debating is an exciting style. However, it is also challenging. Do not be devastated or hurt if you lose your first couple of debates badly. You will slowly get used to speaking on your feet and dealing with 4 teams. The benefits of BP are numerous. It improves your ability to think on your feet because you often have to change your case in the debate. It also improves your ability to come up with creative arguments because when you are a 2nd Aff or 2nd Neg your case needs to be different and distinguishable.