the Oxford Union

GUIDE TO SCHOOLS' DEBATING

Text

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INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

When the Oxford Union Society set up its Schools' Debating Competition in 1994 it was an attempt to extend what was, at least at the time, a predominantly university student activity to school pupils across the country. Over the last decade the number of schools involved in the competition has continually increased: each year, the competition now helps pupils from more than 250 schools to develop their debating skills, by providing opportunities to compete against those from other schools.

Simultaneously, the competition's convenors have sought to present competitors with more than simply an arena in which to debate, pioneering debating workshops that are open to every competing school and providing advice to schools seeking to establish debating societies.

However, many schools have asked for something more permanent than a workshop, to serve as a reference work and give continuing coaching assistance. This guide is intended to provide comprehensive coverage of debating in general and the British Parliamentary style in particular. Whilst it does cover the basics of debating and the British Parliamentary style in some detail, we hope there is also enough depth to help even the most experienced school-age debaters.

In writing this guide we are indebted to the coaching and advice we ourselves have received over our years of debating. In particular we would like to thank Richard Allnatt, Michael Birshan, Sandy Crole, Diana Gotts and Lyndsey Turner. We are also grateful for the huge support that we have had from Westminster School, Robert Gordon's College, the English-Speaking Union, the Scottish Schools' International Debating Council and the Oxford Union Society in providing us with environments in which to debate.

Lastly, we would like to thank Tom Shinner for reading the whole text in draft and making many valuable suggestions for improvement.

Jonathan Bailey and George Molyneaux
Oxford, September 2005

PREFACE TO THE 2008 PRINTING

More than three years have passed since we wrote this guide and co-convened the Oxford Union Schools' Debating Competition. In the meantime the competition has gone from strength to strength with a greater number and wider range of schools entering. The guide has also reached a wide audience and we hope that readers have found it useful.

As we re-read the first edition of the guide, we were struck by how consistently the core principles of what makes a good debate and a good debater have stood up to the passage of time. Certainly some of the examples we used will be seen in a different light as a result of recent events – we did not expect that a financial crisis would make the nationalisation debate such an important issue, nor did we anticipate that the debate on whether or not to execute Saddam Hussein would end so grotesquely – but ultimately we felt the Second Edition needed no major content changes.

We wish you the best of luck with your debates.

Jonathan Bailey and George Molyneaux
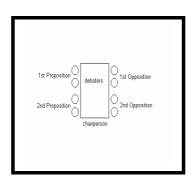Kigali and Oxford, October 2008

AN INTRODUCTION TO BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY DEBATING

This short chapter is intended to explain the rules of British Parliamentary debating, the format of debate used in all rounds of the Oxford Union Schools' Competition.

The topic for debate is the **motion**. Examples of motions include "This House would reintroduce capital punishment", "This House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government" and "This House would legalise all drugs". "This House" refers to everyone at the debate, including the speakers, the adjudicators and the audience. A motion will always have arguments on either side: there is no "correct" answer to the controversy.

One side of the debate – the **proposition** – will support the motion and the other side – the **opposition** – will argue against the motion. Speakers do not choose on which side they argue so it is sometimes necessary to argue a position with which one disagrees. In the Oxford Union Schools' Competition, the motion is released to all the speakers fifteen minutes before the debate starts.

Four teams, each made up of two debaters, compete in a British Parliamentary debate. Two teams speak on the proposition (**1st proposition** and **2nd proposition** or **opening proposition** and **closing proposition**) and two teams speak on the opposition (**1st Opposition** and **2nd Opposition** or **opening opposition** and **closing opposition**). The debaters sit as indicated in the diagram below.

The speakers speak in the following order, and are referred to by their position; for example, the speaker speaking in third proposition is called 'third proposition':

> First proposition (i.e. first speaker of the 1st proposition team)
> First opposition (i.e. first speaker of 1st opposition team)
> Second proposition (i.e. second speaker of 1st proposition team)
> Second opposition (i.e. second speaker of 1st opposition team)
> Third proposition (i.e. first speaker of 2nd proposition team)
> Third opposition (i.e. first speaker of 2nd opposition team)
> Fourth proposition (i.e. second speaker of 2nd proposition team)
> Fourth opposition (i.e. second speaker of 2nd opposition team)

Whichever speaker is speaking at a particular time is described as "holding the floor". In the Oxford Union Schools' Competition, each speaker has five minutes in which to speak; this increases to seven minutes each in the semi-finals and the Grand Final.

After the first minute of each speech, a single audible signal (e.g. a knock, a ring of a bell) is given; the same signal is given when one minute is remaining. When the total time has elapsed, a double audible signal is given. Between the two single audible signals, members of the other side may offer "points of information" to the speaker holding the floor.

A point of information is a brief comment, usually no more than about fifteen seconds, which are offered by standing up and saying "a point of information". The speaker holding the floor may accept or reject points of information. Points of information may not be offered during the first and last minutes of a speech, which are known as "protected time". These are the formal rules about points of information; guidance about offering and answering points of information is on page 21.

After the motion has been announced, speakers must not consult anyone other than their partner: coaching during preparation time is prohibited. Teams prepare separately, which means that the two teams arguing the same *side* of a motion do not cooperate. Indeed, all the teams are competing against each other, since the adjudicators rank the teams from first to fourth. It is entirely possible, for example, for the opening proposition team to win a debate in which the closing proposition team comes last.

The debate is controlled by the **chairperson**, who will often be one of the adjudicators. The chairperson is responsible for introducing the motion and the speakers and calling each speaker to speak at the appropriate time. The chairperson is responsible for maintaining order during the debate, ensuring that the speakers and other members of the House observe the rules. In particular, the chairperson should take immediate action (i.e. saying "order!") to prevent:
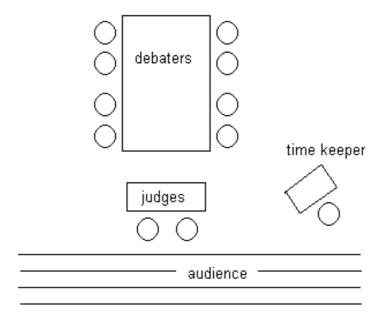- members of the audience causing disruption (e.g. by excessive noise or movement during speeches)
- speakers causing disruption (e.g. by talking loudly to their partner during another speech or interrupting the speaker inappropriately)
- speakers offering points of information during protected time
- speakers continuing to make a point of information after the speaker holding the floor has indicated that they wish them to cease
- speakers continuing for more than about thirty seconds after the double audible signal
- discourteous behaviour, including (but not limited to) racist, sexist and homophobic remarks, by any member of the House

The **timekeeper** is responsible for timing each speech and making audible signals at the appropriate times. The chairperson or one of the adjudicators sometimes also acts as timekeeper.

The **adjudicators** watch the debate, making notes on what all the speakers say. Unless one of the adjudicators is chairing the debate or feels the need to restore order to the House, the adjudicators will not say anything during the debate. After the debate, they award places to teams. After some rounds, the adjudicators announce the result of the debate and give a speech to explain the decision; at other times, the results are withheld. Adjudicators in the Oxford Union Schools' Competition are always willing to give constructive feedback to any speaker who wishes to enquire

about their performance after the debate, even if the result cannot be disclosed. Seeking advice from adjudicators is strongly recommended.

The room in which a debate is held is usually set up something like this:

BASIC DEBATING SKILLS

Debating is about persuading an audience (whether it is made up of members of the public or adjudicators) that the particular side of an issue for which you are arguing should be supported. Comparable situations occur frequently, whether when trying to persuade parents that we need a mobile phone, for example, or when arguing over which film to see at the cinema with friends.

In debating these native skills of argument are used in a much more structured manner with particular roles, rules and regulations (see the following chapter for a more detailed explanation of these). These rules vary for each style of debating and each competition that you enter; it might be as simple as there being two speakers on a team in British Parliamentary (the style used in all rounds of the Oxford Union Schools' Debating Competition) as compared to three in the World Schools' Debating Championships. Alternatively, it might be a more subtle difference in the judging priority given towards, for example, the style of speaking over the arguments themselves or in the level of respect and politeness teams are expected to pay to each other (a noticeable difference between schools' level and universities' level debating).

Whatever the differences, however, the basic debating skills outlined below will always apply; in all formats, you must strive to make a **stylish speech** with **strong, well backed up arguments**, that **fulfils the obligations** of your specific position at the table.

Whilst this chapter is entitled '*Basic* Debating Skills', the skills outlined can always be carried out more effectively: content can be fuller and deeper, style is rarely perfect and good strategy often comes from experience. Even speeches that win World Universities' Debating Championships could be improved, so it is wise to consider these skills every time you debate and always get feedback from adjudicators afterwards so that you know how you can improve them next time.

Style

Style refers to the manner in which you make your speech, whereas content and strategy refer to what you say and how you organize your material. Whilst style is rarely the deciding factor when adjudicators are considering who has won a debate, making a speech that is persuasive and entertaining is an easy way to mark yourself out from the other debaters and means that you are more likely to sound convincing.

There are many different examples of stylish speaking; think of the varieties of style used by politicians when making speeches, from the demagogic Democratic Unionist Leader, the Reverend Ian Paisley, to the deliberately buffoonish Boris Johnson and the accentuated Austrian public accent used by Arnold Schwarzenegger to underline his claim to represent immigrant Americans. Style also has to be appropriate to the surroundings and the audience that is listening (see page 13 for a fuller discussion of dealing with audiences). The importance of this is seen in the makeover of the British National Party (BNP) in the late 1990s. Members put on suits rather than boots, styled their hair rather than having it shaved and discussed European expansion and taxation policy in relatively sober, controlled tones rather than propounding the forced deportation of all immigrants in inflammatory language. Whilst recent investigative journalism has made it clear that the fundamental beliefs of the party have not changed, the new style has helped its leaders portray themselves as being more than simply a racist choice at the ballot box.

There are times when you will have to debate motions that might be treated in a relatively light-hearted manner (e.g. "This house would ban school uniforms") and thus where humour and a relaxed approach is ideal. Others require more sensitivity and so a more serious tone and approach would be more appropriate (e.g. "This house would ban the wearing of the *hijab* in schools", or "This house would tear down the Israeli security fence").

Probably the most useful principle to apply to all of the techniques discussed below is that every individual will have their own style with particular strengths and weaknesses. It is both difficult and inadvisable to try to adopt a completely new style; you are far better working with your natural style and improving elements of it where possible

Some teams have found that pairing an aggressive, funny and loud speaker with someone calm, logical and restrained creates a better overall impression; other successful teams have been made up of speakers with similar styles. If there are a lot of debaters at your school, you might want to try pairing different individuals together in practice debates to see how different styles complement the team as a whole.

Speed

This is one of the most obvious aspects of style and yet is the one that adjudicators pick up on most because speakers do not think about it enough. Most speakers tend to speak too fast and do so either because they are nervous (and so want to get through their material as quickly as possible so they can sit down again) or because they feel (often correctly) that they have too much material to fit into their speech (and so

sometimes finish too early). The problem with speed is compounded by the fact that speakers are usually unaware that they are speaking too fast and only find out when, once the debate has finished, someone who was listening tells them.

Debating often involves putting across complex arguments and examples which means that, whilst you want to speak fast enough to sound intelligent, you need to give the adjudicators, audience and other debaters enough time to hear clearly what you are saying and to understand what you mean. Adjudicators have a third problem, since they have to make notes on what you are saying to help them make their decisions once the debate has finished. If you speak too fast they may miss crucial parts of your speech. Pay attention to the reaction from your adjudicators and audience; whilst they may not mouth "slow down" to you, it is often possible to pick up visual clues (such as judges having to note manically) if they are having trouble keeping up. As a guide, a debating speech should be slower than you would speak in a normal conversation.

As with almost all elements of style, speed should be varied and used to emphasise particular points. Your audience will instinctively listen more carefully if you slow down, and this can be used to your advantage as a method of stressing important points. Speeding up to a dramatic conclusion can also be effective. Pauses are an ideal way to show that you are moving from one point to another or to allow the audience to think about the significance of what you have just said.

Tone

Even more so than with speed, your speech will become boring if you maintain a constant tone throughout. Calm monotony can be unintentionally soporific, but relentless aggression can be overbearing, makes explaining complicated ideas difficult and often produces a fast speech. The key is to vary the tone of your speech in order to emphasise particular points.

Rebuttal of the opposition's arguments lends itself well to aggression, humour and limited sarcasm. If the other side seems to be ignoring an important, vulnerable group by all means be outraged and lambast them for not thinking about the children/ethnic minority/old aged pensioners/animals etc, but do remember that this is debating rather than acting. You will not get extra marks by spending a minute being outraged, but only by rebutting the point – a task that might be done effectively enough in 10 seconds. If you are using sarcasm (some debaters are prone to using it a little too much) do remember that the audience may not have been listening as carefully as you have been. Consequently, they may not immediately see why the opposition argument is so obviously flawed with the embarrassing result that your sarcasm may backfire.

Your own material is probably better presented in a more controlled, measured tone with occasional shifts building up to the conclusion of crucial arguments or to stress particularly emotive points; anything to do with children or innocent people being harmed by a policy or status quo lends itself easily to this (e.g. "This house would invade Iran" has humanitarian arguments on both sides where a plea to the heartstrings might make the point more effective). Be wary of going too far. It is unnecessary for a debater to spend a minute asking the adjudicators to imagine a scene in Kosovo after a town had been attacked by Serb forces; while one image

might have aided his point and only taken ten seconds, spending a minute going into detail about the small girl holding the kitten in the rubble of her home wastes time and creates a pile-up of clichés. This undermines the strength of the original image.

Volume

It is pretty obvious that when debating you need to speak loudly enough for everyone in the room, particularly the adjudicators, to hear you. The volume required will vary depending on the room you are in; the Chamber of the Oxford Union requires more amplitude than a small school classroom.

Speaking too loudly (or even shouting) does not make your arguments sound more convincing; in fact, lowering the volume of your voice when explaining more complicated logic can be more effective. This is because, assuming that your audience is still awake, when you lower the volume of your voice slightly they are forced to listen more carefully and so may concentrate harder on that crucial point. Thus, as with tone and speed, varying your speaking volume can be an effective way to stress important material, but obviously only as long as it remains within the audible range.

Language

For one reason or another, some competitors feel that because they are debating they have to use polysyllabic words and use a posh accent. However, it is most important that the ideas and arguments that you are using are comprehensible to the audience to which you are speaking.

Scientific or technical jargon is particularly worth avoiding, but if jargon is really necessary to make an argument, ensure you explain its meaning carefully. For example, debates on relatively complex scientific topics, such as on genetically modified food, late-term abortions or IVF, often need some understanding of the science involved. Similarly, technical terminology may be appropriate in many economics debates, such as on free trade or the EURO. It is often effective to introduce the idea by saying "what economists/scientists/doctors/accountants refer to as…" and then explain it in layman's terms, as this makes it clear that you are aware of the risk of confusing the audience and are avoiding doing so.

For similar reasons it is best to avoid acronyms, unless they are really necessary and you introduce the organisation or idea before explaining what its acronym is (it may even be sensible to do this the first couple of times you use the acronym). You can probably expect an audience to know what the UN, EU, BBC etc. are; however I have attended debates on international trade where speakers have introduced three or four acronyms one after another, referring to "less developed countries" as LDCs, "structural adjustment policies" as SAPs and talking about the IMF and WTO. This simply confused the audience. Acronyms are only worth using if the audience is likely to identify instinctively the organisation/policy/idea by its acronym, rather than having to work out to what the acronym refers every time it is used.

Clarity

Clarity means being able to put across the complex idea of which you are thinking concisely and in a way that is readily understood. This is probably the most important element of style and where good speakers are most able to differentiate themselves from novices.

When ideas are written down there is an opportunity to go back and look over the text again if you begin to get lost in a clause or sub-clause. When listening to a speech, that opportunity is not there: for an idea to be understood by the audience, it has to be conveyed effectively first time (or you can repeat it several times and waste time). Simple, short, precise clauses can often be far more effective than long rambling sentences full of examples and references.

Fluency

A loss of fluency is often the result of a loss of clarity as a speaker runs to the end of their 'train of thought' and begins to descend into stuttering and "ums and errs". Clearly standing up and arguing a point can be intimidating, particularly when you have to do it in front of an audience (for more on dealing with audiences see page 13). Many people actually speed up when nervous, thus making them lose their natural fluency and descend into the very stuttering about which they were so worried in the first place. Try to relax and take a few deep breaths before beginning so that you can calm yourself and focus on what you are going to say. If your brain is working about two seconds ahead of what you are saying then you will normally have no problems with fluency. A full discussion of speaking from notes can be found on page 12; for now let it suffice to say that if you try to read a prepared speech you are far more likely to descend into "ums" and "errs" than if you are working from notes and can be flexible.

Openings and Closings

Ideally, your speech should grab the audience's attention from the start and should come to a natural climax at the end. This is particularly important if you are the third proposition or opposition speaker, since these speakers must stamp their contribution to the debate onto the adjudicators' minds especially clearly. Whilst it is absolutely advisable to not write out your speech (as discussed on page 12), there is some sense in writing your opening and closing couple of sentences or at least having decided what you are going to say before you stand up to begin.

Standard openings like "Good evening ladies and gentlemen…" are fine, but there is no need to spend 30 seconds or more thanking everyone profusely for being wonderful; a speaker that thanks the two proposition teams, the other opposition team, his partner, all three adjudicators individually, the timekeeper, the Chair, the audience, the pupils in the audience, the school for hosting and providing "delicious sandwiches" and the school cleaner who wanted to clean the room is simply wasting time. Opening with the motion can be useful, although is clearly unnecessary if the Chairperson has just done so. The opening "Ladies and gentlemen, I have three points…" is perhaps a little overused (with 8 speeches in a debate it is nice to have

some variation) but is functional enough. For variety try thinking about opening with a joke (but ONLY if you are good at being funny – see next section), by picking up on something the previous speaker has said or done, or use a particularly salient statistic, fact or example that forms the basis for your arguments. For example, I once saw a speaker arguing for an integrated European solution to immigration open his speech by shocking the audience: he told them firstly how large the total number of economic migrants entering the EU was and then told them how high the percentage that were coming to the UK was, compared to the small percentage going to Portugal.

You ought to build up to your final sentence so that you can leave the audience with something to remember your speech by. Again, humour or a memorable phrase can work, but so can making a strong summary of the points you have made and ending with "and that is why we need to do x." There is nothing worse than a speech that just peters out.

Humour

Humour is a difficult topic to cover: it can be an excellent addition to a speech that makes your arguments stick in the minds of the audience and adjudicators, but it can also drag a speech down to the level of painful embarrassment. The first rule with humour is to be aware of your own capabilities and limitations in terms of how funny you are and the ways in which you can be funny. The second rule is to avoid scripted jokes (they are the ones most likely to fall embarrassingly flat) unless you are very good with humour and have judged that the audience to which you are speaking will find the joke funny. Finally think about using humour to wake audiences up or attacking other teams' arguments rather than to strengthen your own; this is most easily done when rebutting the other side's arguments. Be wary, particularly at schools' level, of **making fun of the opposition rather than their arguments**; it is generally acceptable to make some restrained jokes pointing out the weakness of an argument, but it is unacceptable to make jokes about the person who made that argument in the first place.

Humour can occasionally win debates and will certainly lift a good speech into being an excellent one, but you need to be able to sense when humour is appropriate and when it is not, and actually be funny too. Different styles of humour will fit different speakers (self deprecation versus sarcasm, for example). This is an area in which you simply need to find out what your comic potential is and then have the confidence to use it.

Body language

Debating is not acting, so body language only really becomes an issue if you have distracting behaviour. Hand gestures should emphasise points in and of themselves (counting out the arguments, pointing to the opposition and proposition, stressing conflict and community etc.) or by adding weight to key points. There is no need to wave a hand around to keep time. Equally there is no need to pace backwards and forwards, sway from side to side or shift from foot to foot. Hand movements can be controlled more easily than these others; simply put one hand in a pocket and think carefully about what you are doing with the other for a few speeches. One of the best

techniques for making you aware, and deterring you from, random irritating movements is to have yourself filmed speaking and then fast forwarding the tape through your speech; repetitive movements become far more obvious when viewed like this. Once observed, you can try to limit them in future.

As with your speaking voice, there are different styles of body language that work well for different people; some dominate space through gesture and movement, others take a more relaxed approach. The main thing is to look confident, not clutching a lectern or notes as if for support and not pacing around (although this can occasionally be necessary if you can't see your entire audience from one position, as is the case in the Chamber of the Oxford Union). Do respond to points made by the opposition (roll your eyes, smile at the right times, raise your eyebrows, laugh, look as if you are engaged with what the other speakers are saying) as the adjudicators will be aware of what you are doing even when you are not speaking. This is particularly important for teamwork, since watching the way two speakers work together when the opposition is speaking can be quite revealing; some don't talk or pass notes, others will argue aggressively with each other. Ideally you want to project an image of a happy, communicative team that knows where it is going and how it is going to deal with the opposition.

Using notes

As has already been mentioned, there are numerous downsides to reading a prepared speech, not the least of which is that with only fifteen minutes to prepare in the Oxford Union Schools' Debating Competition you would be hard pressed to come up with anything particularly good if you spend all the preparation time writing, rather than thinking. Other problems with fully written speeches include eye contact (see the section on audiences below for a fuller discussion on page 13), being thrown by losing your place and struggling to find it again. Fully written speeches reduce your flexibility in responding to points of information and arguments that the other side has brought up.

Instead of writing a full speech it is advisable to use notes. There are no bonus marks for speaking without any notes at all and I have yet to see any debater speak unaided effectively. Whilst they should take whatever form you find most helpful, your notes need only include a few headings for the two or three arguments that you are going to make, the basic logic that explains them and perhaps a few words or numbers to remind you of key statistics or examples which support your arguments.

For example, if you were opposing the motion "This house would legalise cannabis" your notes might look something like what is outlined below (you would probably put your rebuttal on a separate sheet of paper).

Opening: Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Were you aware that a New Zealand study found that people who smoke cannabis are 27 times more likely to have throat, mouth and tongue cancer than people who don't smoke this illegal drug? Every time the proposition tries to tell you that cannabis is harmless remember that fact.

Summary: Me: Argument 1:   Medical harms of cannabis
                          Argument 2:   Addiction means loss of free choice
             Partner: Argument 3:   Gateway to hard drugs
                          Argument 4:   Provide legitimate front for criminals

Rebuttal: Leave a space blank to write your responses to the previous speaker

Argument 1:   Medical harms of cannabis
              Damaging both in short term and long term
              e.g.
              New Zealand, 27x throat, mouth, tongue cancer & 3x more likely than
              just smoking tobacco
              UK, high schizophrenia rates in middle aged ex-users, leading to
              mental instability, self-harm

Argument 2:   Addiction means loss of free choice
              Cannabis is addictive
              e.g. BMA study 2002
              we allow people to put themselves at risk but only when acting freely
              e.g. sky diving
              if cannot stop you are not <u>choosing</u> to harm yourself so the state has a
              duty to protect you by stopping you getting into that position in the
              first place

Closing: Because this drug is dangerous to your health and your mind, exercise
              your free will whilst you still have it - oppose the legalisation of
              cannabis.

Exactly what you use to make your notes on is up to you; most UK schools' debaters use A4 paper, although there is a risk that waving A4 paper around as you try to gesture will distract from your speech (just as holding a stopwatch or clipboard will). Many successful debaters have used the clipboard/stopwatch/A4 combination but this is not the only way of using notes effectively. One alternative, which has long been favoured by Australian schools' debaters and which makes them look particularly slick, is to use cue cards. Cue cards have the advantage of not becoming cluttered (unlike A4) and of clear segmentation (each card can be used for an argument, with a card for your opening and closing and another for each of the key arguments you are going to rebut. However, their limited space does make them harder to use when you are trying to listen to the opposition speaker, write down rebuttal and edit your own speech during the heat of the debate.

Audiences

Whatever the size of your audience, even if it is only the other debaters and a single adjudicator, consider to whom you are directing your speech. Whilst you do not want to spend an entire debate staring at the adjudicator (they may begin to feel uncomfortable), remember that you need to engage with your audience. Eye contact is one of the easiest ways of doing this. Don't focus on the wall at the other end of the room way above everybody's head! If you do find it intimidating to make eye contact,

try looking at the foreheads of people in the audience; they still feel as though you are engaging with them.

You are only likely to encounter large audiences in the Oxford Union Schools' Debating Competition in the semi-finals and Grand Final at Finals' Day, but when debating at school or in other competitions you may be confronted by them. Firstly consider volume, clarity and speed; with large audiences you will need to speak louder and will probably have to make things slower and clearer in order to ensure that everyone understands what you are saying. Think carefully about humour, ensuring that it is appropriate to the audience and that they will find it funny. Whilst the adjudicators are the only people who will decide who wins and loses a debate at the Oxford Union Schools' Debating Competition, having the audience on your side, laughing at your jokes and applauding your points, will help to intimidate the opposition and persuade the adjudicators that you are winning.

Speaking in front of thousands of people can be terrifying, but so can speaking in front of ten when you are a novice. Just remember how you relaxed and got over your fears the first few times you debated; hopefully, you will then be fine with a few hundred more people listening in!

Dress

Dress should not matter to the outcome of the debate but most of us will subconsciously add more credence to things that are said by somebody who is dressed smartly than someone in a pair of shorts and a t-shirt. Equally a team made up of one person in school uniform and another in a suit will probably come across as having less effective teamwork than two speakers wearing similar outfits.

For Regional Rounds school uniform is fine; most rounds start at the end of the school day so most debaters will be wearing them anyway. At Finals' Day, school uniform, a suit or simply smart-casual clothes are fine. Teams have won the Competition fitting all of these dress codes and ultimately the most important thing is that you need to wear something in which you feel comfortable.

A note on the importance of style

Do remember that style is rarely a deciding factor in debates; as long as you can be heard and understood, you are able to win debates simply on the basis of having good content and strategy. Once you have learnt to make eye contact, not wave your hands around and not speak in a single monotonous tone, you can devote the vast majority of your attention to what you are going to say rather than how you are going to say it!

Content

Content covers the most important part of debating: the arguments that you make. Strategy covers how you deploy those arguments, but without the arguments there in the first place you will find it very difficult to win debates.

Argumentation (SEXI)

So what is an argument? You probably know that the sentence "We should invade Iran." is a statement, whereas "We should invade Iran because it has Weapons of Mass Destruction" is an argument. The difference is that the second sentence provides an explanation for the statement. Fundamentally that is what you need to do in debating; the motion (e.g. "This house would invade Iran") and the definition (for a fuller discussion of definition see the chapter on the role of the 1st proposition speaker on page 30) provide you with what you are arguing for ('We should invade Iran.") and your job is to argue why that statement is correct.

One useful technique for thinking about arguments is known as SEXI. It stands for State, EXplain and Illustrate. 'State' means simply to say what your team believes, 'EXplain' means providing the logic and reasoning for why that statement is true and 'Illustrate' means providing evidence to show that the 'EXplanation' is not just theoretical but that there are instances where it is so. The illustration could be in the form of statistics, an example of where a policy has been implemented elsewhere in the world or a comparison to another policy that is successful.

Let us take the motion "This house would legalise prostitution" as an example. In proposition, we might argue that by legalising prostitution we can reduce the amount of abusive, under-aged or bonded prostitution occurring. We would State the argument: "Legalising prostitution reduces the amount of abuse occurring in the system". We would then EXplain the logic for this: "When prostitution is illegal, prostitutes cannot, or are too frightened to, go to the Police when they are being abused or see it happening. This is because they fear they will simply be arrested or told to stop being a prostitute rather than supported by the Police. By legalising the industry we can extend legal protection to prostitutes and so make them much more likely to report abusive pimps or illegal underage sex, thus reducing the amount of abuse occurring in the system." Finally, we need to prove that this is not just an argument that appears logically correct but one that actually works in the real world by Illustrating the point: "This can be seen if we compare surveys carried out by the Sex Workers Support Agency in Sydney (where prostitution is legal) and in Paris (where the act of prostitution itself has been criminalized) which show that in Sydney 28% of sex workers say they have seen abuse whereas 68% say they have in Paris, and that 76% of sex workers in Sydney would feel safe enough to report abuse to the Police whereas only 5% would in Paris." Obviously it is hard to come up with statistics in a fifteen minute preparation session (more details on preparation can be found on page 24) but you might be able to think of similarities in other areas of life, for example: "A similar situation can be seen with the US Government's decision to grant residency to all resident illegal immigrants in the USA; as soon as immigrants felt they were not going to be deported if they reported abusive people-trafficking to

the Police, they were able to do so with the result that seven people-trafficking groups have been closed down in California this month alone."

If you are able to go through the stages of Stating the argument, EXplaining the logic behind it and then Illustrating that this logic can be true in the real world, you will be able to create strong arguments.

Structure

Once you are able to produce individual arguments you need to know how to fit them into a speech. When you have debated for a while you will probably become fed up of adjudicators telling you how important it is that you structure your speech, but they say it so often for a reason; it is probably the easiest way for a novice debater dramatically to improve their speeches. Structuring a speech means that you lay out what arguments you and your partner are going to make, make those arguments distinctly one after another and then summarise the arguments that you have just made.

If you do not structure your speech in this way, you are at risk of producing a rambling series of arguments that lack an overall sense of direction. This does not only make it far harder for an adjudicator to follow your speech; it also makes it easier for you to forget crucial points, waste time by repeating things or simply get lost in your notes.

Let us take the example of the opening opposition team's speeches in a debate on the motion "This house would legalise cannabis" from earlier in this chapter. We identified four arguments that the team wanted to make:

Argument 1:   Medical harms of cannabis
Argument 2:   Addiction means loss of free choice
Argument 3:   Gateway to hard drugs
Argument 4:   Provide legitimate front for criminals

The choice of which arguments to make and when to make them is something that will be discussed further in the next section on Strategy, but assuming we had settled on the order and division above, the first proposition speech should run like this:

Introduction: (as in the section on 'Openings and Closings' on page 10)
Outline of arguments: "I will firstly be arguing why the medical harm that cannabis causes means that it should not be legalised and then go on to explain why cannabis blocks the free will of the user. My partner in her speech will go on to show how cannabis can be a gateway to harder, more dangerous drugs and how legalisation would only provide a legitimate front for criminals."

Argument 1:
"My first argument is that cannabis has demonstrable medical harms and so should remain illegal."
Make the argument
"So because of these medical harms and the resultant obligation that the state has to protect its citizens, we oppose the legalisation of cannabis."

Argument 2:
"My second argument is that by becoming addicted to cannabis the user loses their free will and so the state must protect them."
Make the argument
"So that was my second argument about why using cannabis is not a free choice."

Internal summary:
"So, ladies and gentlemen, what have I told you today? I've explained why the dangerous medical harms of cannabis mean that the state should dissuade citizens from using it, and secondly, that individuals who use cannabis are not acting freely because of the addictive nature of the drug and so the state must protect them by stopping them becoming addicted in the first place. This means that the state must keep cannabis use illegal."

The use of this system of introducing a list of arguments at the start of a speech and then introductory and closing remarks for each argument is sometimes referred to as 'flagging' or 'signposting'. Flagging is not just limited to saying that you will make arguments, you can also add emphasis by using pauses and intonation as outlined in the section on Style. Do remember that whilst flagging is essential and will help make you a better debater, it does mean that if you miss out an argument because you forget it or run out of time it is much more noticeable: make sure you do actually make the arguments you say you're going to make!

Rebuttal

Debating and public speaking are often referred to in the same breath and the popular misconception that they are all but interchangeable is not helped by the sorts of 'debate' that the public sees on television (the US Presidential Candidate Debates for example) or in parliaments around the world. Public speaking and these 'popular debates' rely far more on a pre-prepared speech complete with sound bites and one line gags. Debating, in the competitive sense that this guide is intended to explain, relies far more on responding to what other people say than on a pre-prepared spiel. There are a couple of important elements to debating that allow you to engage with what the rest of the people in the debate have said; these are points of information (which are dealt with on page 21) and rebuttal.

Rebuttal is a bit like a game of insults; the first proposition speaker says something contentious, the first opposition speaker comes up with something that makes it sounds stupid or wrong, the second proposition speaker comes up with something else which makes the first opposition speaker's arguments sound silly and so on. In every speech, apart from that of the first proposition speaker, a significant amount of time should be devoted to showing why the speaker before you is wrong. The aim is to 'win' the argument either because the other side can't think of a rebuttal to the argument that you have presented or because you manage to show why all their rebuttals are wrong or seriously flawed. At the end of the debate the adjudicators have to decide which team 'won' each argument and then decide which arguments were the most important (an issue that will be dealt with more fully in the Strategy chapter) and thus who won the debate.

If, for example, George W. Bush stood up in a competitive debating competition and said "Iraq is getting safer and becoming a bastion of democracy in the Middle East", Michael Moore might rebut his argument by saying "The CIA's best hope for the future of Iraq is that it will be unstable for at least the next two years: that does not sound like it is getting safer or a bastion of democracy." Unless George W. Bush could come up with a rebuttal to that rebuttal (a 'counter-rebuttal') he would lose the argument about Iraq's safety level.

Ideally, each speaker should rebut in the opening few minutes of their speech all the major points from the speech that has come before them. As the debate moves down the table speakers will have more things to rebut and so the proportion of their speech taken up by rebuttal should also increase. Whilst some speakers pick up on individual arguments and examples and rebut them somewhat randomly (a 'scattergun approach') it is better to structure rebuttal, ignoring some of the more stupid examples and concentrating upon the key arguments, so that the adjudicators can follow it. Identifying the 'key arguments' is discussed in the section on 'Three Levels' on page 25.

Rather than opening their speech with rebuttal, some debaters weave their rebuttal into their constructive arguments. For example, in a debate on the motion "This house would change the Japanese constitution to allow a standing army", the proposition may have argued that a standing army would allow Japan to add muscle to its diplomatic role in Asia (particularly over North Korea). If, as first opposition speaker, you had intended to make the argument that Japan had a specific diplomatic role to play by the very fact that it was not perceived as a direct military threat by countries in the region, rather than rebutting the proposition argument and then going on to repeat yourself in your constructive matter, you might want to interweave the two by pointing out how your constructive argument also rebuts the proposition's argument.

Interweaving, when done skilfully, can save time and make you look particularly stylish. However it is much easier to miss arguments or to intend to rebut an argument and run out of time when you are making the constructive argument. It is also absolutely essential that you 'flag' interweaving both at the beginning of your speech and when making the individual rebuttals as judges may be less used to hearing interwoven rebuttal and so may miss it. In reality, you are unlikely to find that the arguments that need to be rebutted fit perfectly with the arguments you are going to make. You are therefore far more likely to do a mixture of straight rebuttal at the beginning of your speech with some interweaving than interweaving all of it.

Rebuttal techniques

There are usually several ways of rebutting an individual argument; it may be factually, logically or morally flawed. It may be based on misinterpretations or reveal contradictions between speakers on the same side, or it might simply be irrelevant or unimportant. For example:

1. **"Murder rates are rising in the UK. This is because we have got rid of capital punishment."**
   Firstly, you could argue that murder rates aren't rising (a <u>direct factual error</u>), or if they are rising this is only because a greater proportion of murders are

now reported which masks the real trend (an <u>indirect factual error</u>). Secondly, you could dispute the causal link with capital punishment and argue that the evidence shows that state-sanctioned killing can appear to condone violent crime and lead to a rise in its incidence rather than deterring it (<u>misinterpretation</u>).

2. **"Compulsory euthanasia at age 70 would save the country money in pensions and healthcare."**
   This is true, but is <u>morally flawed</u>, since the lives of elderly people are more important than the financial savings that would be made.

3. **"Banning cigarette product placement in films will cause more young people to smoke because it will make smoking more mysterious and taboo."**
   This is <u>logically flawed</u>: it could be argued that the ban would be more likely to stop the steady stream of images which make smoking seem attractive and glamorous and actually reduce the number of young people smoking.

4. **"Free entry to public museums in a country would boost its international tourist industry."**
   This is simply <u>not important</u>: the waiving of an entry fee will not entice very many people from abroad to spend hundreds of pounds on flights and hotels who would not otherwise have done so.

5. **"We should not join the Euro because I don't want to share a currency with the likes of the French, who eat too much garlic."**
   The dietary preferences imputed to the French, as well as the speaker's personal feelings, are <u>not relevant</u> to a debate about the advantages or otherwise of joining the Euro.

6. **"Although this would cost the taxpayer a lot of money it will be worth it in the end"**

   "This will not cost the taxpayer a penny as all the funding will come from the National Lottery."
   Regardless of the truth of either of these remarks, they <u>contradict</u> each other and a lot of mileage can be got from the fact that the speaker or team in question are not clear about their case.

7. **"I will then look at the economic issues... " "Blah, blah, blah [five minutes later and still no mention of the economic issues]."**
   This is a clear <u>failure</u> to explain a major part of the case and attention should be drawn to it. Even better is when a speaker starts with, **"to win this debate there are three things I must do"**. If the speaker fails to do any of those things you can then hang him in his own noose by repeating his words to him – by his own admission he cannot have won the debate.

There is almost no circumstance in which you can't rebut an argument in some way (even if the rebuttal is very weak). Adjudicators will be far more impressed with a debater who attempts to rebut the hardest arguments, even if they do not do so very successfully, than a debater who simply ignores them. I have seen adjudicators simply

add up all the arguments left unrebutted on each side of the debate and award the debate to the team with more arguments standing; this is not how a debate should be judged, but the example should make it clear how important it is that debaters do not 'drop' arguments. See 'The Bubble' on page 39 for more ideas on how to produce rebuttals.

Strategy

At the highest levels of debating it is through strategy – the most technical part of debating – that teams tend to distinguish themselves from each other. Strategy covers relatively straightforward things like teamwork, timing and points of information. However, it also includes the most complicated aspects to debating, such as role fulfilment, engagement and opposition strategy.

Teamwork

Debating is a team activity despite the individual speaker tabs and best speaker prizes that are on offer at many tournaments. One amazing speaker will not be able to 'carry' a weaker speaker very far. This means that you both have to support each other in the team's overall goal, winning the debate.

Firstly ensure that the arguments that the two of you are going to make fit together without contradictions and that they work towards a 'team line'. This simply means that your team as a whole has a clear view on the issue for debate that might be summed up in a single sentence. On "This house supports co-educational schooling", the proposition might have a team line that 'it is necessary for experience and equality'. On "This House would legalise prostitution", the proposition might approach the debate from the standpoint that 'prostitution is a legitimate occupation and so, as with any other occupation, the burden is on the state to make it as safe and healthy as possible'. It is often helpful to work out what your overall 'line' or philosophy is before you begin speaking in order to avoid contradictions when rebutting opposition arguments.

Within the individual speeches, refer to each other and the arguments that you have made to impress upon the adjudicators that you are presenting your case as a team rather than as two separate speakers who happen to be arguing the same thing. This also means that if you are speaking after your partner you must remember to support her arguments if they have been rebutted, by coming up with counter-rebuttals. As your partner was the one that made the original argument, she may have a better grasp on it than you so this is where communication during a debate comes in. Some debaters cannot talk during debates; others find writing notes on paper too slow and cumbersome: find a way of communicating that works for you as a team and make sure that you do communicate. You should be discussing how you will deal with arguments that the other side is bringing up, sharing rebuttals and points of information that you have each come up with and working out what the key parts to the other side's case are and thus how you can win. Obviously it helps if you and your partner get on well, particularly if you get to the stressful later stages of competitions, but do remember that neither of you will fulfil your potential if you waste time snapping at each other.

Points of Information

Points of information (or POIs as they are often referred to) are one of the key strengths of British debating (they are lacking from most Australian and some

American formats); they stop a debate speech from becoming a public speaking event by allowing the other side to offer interjections. These interjections can either be useless or deadly (speakers have been known to hear a point of information, accept that the entire basis for their case is flawed and sit down in defeat): they are key strategic tools.

In most British debating styles there is a period of 'protected time' at the beginning and end of a speech when points of information may not be offered. This allows a speaker to introduce their arguments and bring their speech to a close without interruptions. In British Parliamentary style (the style used in the Oxford Union Schools' Debating Competition) speeches normally last five minutes with the first and last minute protected. During the middle three minutes of the speech, debaters from the opposite side can offer points of information by rising to their feet and saying 'On a point of information' or 'On that point'. It is cheating to try and get your point in without being accepted by using any other phrase to offer your point (e.g. "On China", "On the Rwandan genocide" etc.) and such behaviour should be penalised by the adjudicators. The speaker can accept or decline points of information as they choose (either by saying 'No thank you' or, less politely, by waving speakers down). In a five minute speech a speaker should accept one or two points of information but no more. Debaters on the opposite side should be offering points at least once every minute but should be careful not to be too enthusiastic by offering them every 20 seconds or so (this is known as 'badgering' or 'barracking' and should be penalised by adjudicators). You should tailor this to the level of your opponents: if they are obviously debating for the first time you will look aggressive and mean if you offer points of information loudly every 30 seconds; against a strong team who is doing the same to you such behaviour is probably acceptable.

If you are accepted you should make your point in about 15 seconds or less. If you take too long the speaker can ask you to stop (although unless the point is taking more than 20 seconds it is usually seen as rude to stop a point of information) but more importantly the speaker has time to think up a response. The best points of information are short and snappy. Whilst accepting and dealing with points of information may seem intimidating at first, it will soon become second nature once you gain some confidence and experience.

There are a few things that will help you deal with them more effectively. Do not take them right at the start of your speech (a strong point of information can divert your entire speech), chose to take them when you are on strong arguments that you are confident with, feel free to accept a point of information with "in a moment" to allow you to finish making your argument before dealing with the interjection, and do not take two points of information in close succession or you risk losing all drive to your speech. Never break off what you are saying mid-sentence to accept a point, and don't get flustered or put off if the opposition keep standing and offering points – remember that during your speech, you are in charge and choose when you want the other debaters to speak!

If the POI is weak or stupid deal with it quickly; if it is strong and relevant to what you are arguing at that moment deal with it whilst continuing your argument. If the POI is strong but relevant to an argument you have made earlier you should stop, deal with it but be careful not simply to repeat yourself. Finally, if it is strong but about a

point you are going to make later you can either deal with it then or leave it until you get to that argument; if you do the latter you must deal with it later and explicitly tell the adjudicators that you are dealing with the POI when you do. Avoiding a POI by pretending you will deal with it later looks as bad as ignoring it completely. As with most parts of debating, adjudicators will be more favourable to a speaker that take on a difficult point of information and doesn't manage to deal with it completely than a debater who refuses to engage with difficult material.

Points of information are like mini-rebuttals, with the added bonus of being able to throw them into the middle of someone else's speech, thus making them stronger or weaker depending on your timing, and using up their allocated time rather than yours. The key is to work out what will be the most effective way of using the two fifteen second shots you should have during each speech (and remember that in British Parliamentary debating there is an entire other team on your side of the debate which is also trying to get those two shots). This means that you should be trying to get strategic, killer POIs in as much as possible to drag the debate onto the terms and issues that you want it to be about and to damage the other side not simply on one fact or one argument but on the entire basis of their case. One of the most effective points of information I've seen offered was: "Your partner said that all abortion is murder, you've just said that in some cases it is ok. Who's right and why?" Of course offering POIs that are responses to the arguments being made at the time is also important. If anyone ever says "I challenge the proposition/opposition to come up with one example…" they are not only very silly, as there is almost always one example of whatever it is they are refuting, but are also going to look very silly if you and your partner stand up, offer a point of information and either prove them wrong or make them look as though they've conceded the point if they turn you down. Ideally you would never offer a POI that you do not already know the possible answers to and to which you know that whatever the speaker's response he will look weak. In practice, it is more important to be offering plenty of points, even if some of them will not totally destroy the other side's case. The major exception to the rule that you should attempt to use POIs to strike at the heart of the other side's case is that sometimes you will need to ask a speaker to clarify a definition if they have missed out some crucial parameters. For example, in debates on legalising euthanasia it can be quite important that the opposition know whether a patient can go to another doctor if they are turned down for euthanasia by the first: if the first proposition does not make this clear, it would be appropriate to offer a POI to ask them to clarify the ambiguity.

As POIs are so much stronger if they are made clearly and succinctly try writing them down before you make them (particularly if they are strategic, killer POIs), meaning that both you and your partner can ensure that you are both trying to get that crucial question in.

Timing

Timing in and of itself is rarely a deciding factor in debates but it looks bad to be finishing more than about 15 seconds early or late. The real problem with people who finish early or late is that it will mean that their internal timing is flawed; either because they have spent too much time rebutting or on their first argument and so have had to rush through their later arguments or because they did not spend enough time developing their rebuttals or arguments and so are left with nothing to say for the

last minute of their speech. After about five minutes and fifteen seconds adjudicators are quite within their rights to ignore any arguments or comments that a speaker makes so it is really not worth arguing beyond this point.

When you hear the audible signal one minute before the end of your speech, you should not attempt to introduce a new argument as there is no way you will explain it properly; either simply drop it and hope the adjudicators don't notice or say that your partner will deal with it (and make sure that they do). You need to spend the last 30 seconds or so summarising what you have said and finishing with something emphatic: it is not the time to be racing through a third argument.

If you find that you have poor timing, think about using a stopwatch and including in your notes an estimate of how long you want to spend on the various bits of your speech (e.g. definition and introduction – 1 minute, first argument 2 minutes, second argument – 1 minute 30 seconds, summary and close – 30 seconds). By keeping track of your progress as you complete your speech you can cut examples or speed up in the middle of your speech rather than realising you're not going to have enough time as you come to the end. It is worth practising trying to make the same argument in 2 minutes, 1 minute, 30 seconds, 15 seconds and one sentence; obviously at under 1 minute you will end up with too little material for a real speech but it will make you realise how easy it is to cut things down during a speech if you plan it early enough.

Preparation

In the Oxford Union Schools' Debating Competition you will only have fifteen minutes to prepare for each debate. This means it is worth thinking about how you are going to spend that time. Teams should find preparation time (or 'prep' as it is often referred to) routines which work for them but usually a good prep session will involve three to five minutes of silent brainstorming where both debaters write down as many arguments for and against the motion, then a short discussion of the definition (if required – see page 30 for more on definitions) and a comparison of the arguments each debater has come up with. By about seven or eight minutes into the prep session you should have broadly decided what your case is and what arguments you are going to make so that you can divide them between the two speeches and start thinking of the examples and logic that you will need to make them. During this period you can look up examples and arguments in any pre-prepared material that you have brought along. However, it is essential to have the brainstorming session first as pre-prepared debating cases (such as those found in "Pros and Cons") will not be comprehensive and are only likely to have the most obvious arguments; think of them as a checklist to make sure you don't miss a key argument rather than the starting point for your case. A copy of *The Economist* or that day's newspaper, if you've already read it and know what's in it, may help you with finding some statistics or examples that will help your arguments, but be wary of wasting five minutes searching through them in vain as you are probably better off trawling your memory for examples instead.

If you have time you should also come up with a list of rebuttals of key arguments that the other side is likely to make and another list of questions that you want answered about the other side's case (these can then be used as points of information or as rebuttal as you see fit during the debate).

Engagement

Ultimately all of the things discussed in this chapter so far will put you in a position to make a good textbook speech, but to beat the best teams you need to do more than simply make the arguments, offer points of information and rebut what has come before you. With only a few minutes speaking time to play with you need to prioritise what you are going to say. That is why staying engaged with the debate throughout is so important. Your involvement in the debate doesn't start and finish when you stand up and sit down; it is seen in the way you work with your partner and the points of information that you offer for the rest of the debate. Adjudicators can often spot the people who are likely to be the strongest speakers in a round before they have even started their speech because they are the ones regularly offering points of information which, when accepted, are incisive.

When everyone is making well timed and structured speeches that have good arguments backed up by strong examples, adjudicators have to make their decisions based on the strategic calls that teams make. Firstly this means the fulfilment of their role on the table; this is a subject discussed in much more detail in the next chapter. Secondly, it means having an understanding of the debate as a whole and what is needed to win it; this is often referred to as 'Opposition Strategy'. Despite its name it applies equally to the proposition and opposition in how they deal with setting up their own arguments and dealing with those brought up by the other side.

Opposition Strategy

You can 'win' every argument in a debate except one and still lose the debate if that single argument is the most important; opposition strategy is basically working out what that single argument is and therefore how you can win. Both sides need to consider this: the opposition must work out which arguments they need to defeat, and the proposition must fortify the arguments crucial to their case. This is not something that will necessarily come easily and is certainly where experience will count, but there some things you can do to improve your chances. There is a full discussion of this on page 37 as part of the section on the role of first opposition.

Three levels

It can be helpful to think about debating and argumentation on three levels; level one being a fact or statistic, level two being an argument which is supported by a fact or statistic and level three being a series of arguments (each supported by facts or statistics) which combine to prove that side of the debate. It is usually easy to find something at level one which you can use to support your side, offer as a point of information or use as a rebuttal but this is not particularly strong; there is a risk the debate may turn into "example tennis" where teams try to win by producing more examples than each other – all this shows is who has read the right parts of the newspaper! A far better tactic is to undercut the level one material by showing the logic that makes those examples prove a point (i.e. making a level two argument); this means that you do not have to go into the detail of every single example that is produced but can show why logic dictates that the majority of cases will fall on your side of the debate.

Thus if you are proposing 'This house would allow the death penalty in the trial of Saddam Hussein' and you argue that the majority of the Iraqi people want the death penalty to be imposed (providing evidence in the form of a poll), the opposition could oppose by providing other surveys or polls that show the majority of the Iraqi people do not want him executed – this would be a level one approach and could be made by offering a point of information like "But the *Economist* poll of June 2004 shows that 65% of Iraqis do not want him executed" or as rebuttal "The proposition claim that we should execute Saddam because the majority of Iraqi people want him to be given the death penalty but the *Newsweek* poll…". Whilst the proposition should stand by their original evidence, their best tactic is not to quote three other polls that prove the Iraqi people want Saddam to be executed, but to shift to level two argumentation. The proposition should explain why the Iraqi people would want Saddam executed (retribution, the cultural framework of *Sharia* law and Islam etc) and then briefly quote the three polls that support them. The proposition can dismiss the opposition poll either by pointing to difficulties in sampling in Iraq (this does not significantly undermine the credibility of their own polls because they have provided logic and argumentation to explain why the polls should fall on their side of the debate) or simply claim the opposition poll is an anomaly.

Level three is what each side usually has to prove or disprove in order to win the debate. This is often easier understood when abstracted. If you are proposing a policy change, as the proposition will have to do in the majority of debates, then you have a burden to prove that there is a need for the policy change and that your change is practically possible, morally defensible and has no significant negative outcomes. The key things for the proposition to prove will vary depending on the precise case being debated and may well shift in the debate depending on the line taken by the opposition. The opposition has the advantage of being able to choose the line of attack (or "opposition strategy") that it will use. If the opposition can prove the proposal is morally indefensible then it doesn't matter if it can be made to work or that some sort of change is needed. In order to prove that the proposal is morally indefensible the opposition will need to win the level two arguments that make up the section of the debate on morals.

Obviously the opposition will look stronger if they can destroy every argument that is produced but a strong team will work out which arguments are most important within their level three strategy and so target those. To return to our example about Saddam Hussein and the death penalty; the key point in the debate is not at the level two argument over whether the Iraqi people want execution or not, but rather is over whether Western or local values of justice should be used in the sentencing. The proposition needs to prove that the death penalty is wanted by the Iraqi people and that it fits into local values of justice (see above) and that by following these there will be benefits (a sense of closure on the past, a foundation for new Iraqi government and justice, the idea that the Iraqi people have taken charge of their destiny etc.). The opposition is unlikely to win the debate if they simply cast doubt on the proposition's argument that the majority of Iraqis want the death penalty for Saddam. It would be more sophisticated for them to argue why the death penalty is not culturally appropriate (in a secular society, a break with violent past). Alternatively, the opposition could accept that the death penalty might recently have been culturally appropriate in Iraq but contend that it is not appropriate now (the start of liberal civil society, a basis for tolerant society as beacon to the region etc).

Sometimes what each side needs to prove at level three will be fairly obvious. For "This house would legalise prostitution" the level three clash is not really over whether prostitution is morally defensible – the proposition can simply accept that it is not very nice but that there will always be a demand for it. Rather, it is probably over whether legalisation will protect sex workers and clients or increase the amount of abuse by conferring legitimacy upon the trade whilst not rooting out its more illegal side (such as underage prostitution, sex trafficking, drug abuse etc.). In other debates it may be more complex, but by starting to think of debates as a group of examples supporting arguments which support or destroy a principle (rather than just as a series of examples or arguments) you will be well on the way to being a very successful debater.

Besides the case itself, a team can lose on strategy for a variety of reasons. A 'hung case' is where a team only proves their side of the motion if both their speeches are viewed together. For example on the motion "This house would put women on the front line" the first proposition speaker might spend his five minute speech explaining that inequality existed in society and that this was bad but never prove why putting women on the front line would change things. The second proposition speaker would then add the explanation of why the policy would reduce societal inequality. The first opposition speaker can simply stand up and accept that inequality exists in society and that this is bad but that they saw no reason why putting women on the front line would change anything and then present their case for why it would be actively detrimental. Watch out also for teams that 'knife' each other by directly contradicting each other. It is important to pick up upon inconsistency, as well as direct contradiction. An example of inconsistency is that one speaker might argue that women should have to pass the same physical tests as men to get into the army whilst their partner might argue that women bring a completely different set of skills which would make the army more effective; neither of these is a poor argument in itself, but a team that makes both of these arguments has not thought its case through clearly.

SPEAKER ROLES IN BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY DEBATING

The previous chapter examined style, content and strategy, the three main areas in which a debate is judged. This chapter looks in more detail at the most important, but also most complex, aspect of strategy, role fulfilment. Each speaking position in a debate has an allotted role and a speaker is likely to be very heavily penalised if they fail to fulfil that role properly.

The points made in the previous chapter would apply to most styles of debating; indeed, much of the chapter discusses transferable skills that would be important in many types of oral presentation. This chapter deals specifically with the British Parliamentary debate format, which is used in all rounds of the Oxford Union Schools' Debating Competition.

Overview of speaker roles

In giving a detailed description of what each speaker should do in different circumstances, there is a danger that one may lose the "bigger picture" of how the debate as a whole should flow. This section gives the bare outlines of the speaker roles: it is suggested that you refer back to this section while reading the more detailed discussion later in the chapter.

The **first proposition** speaker should define the motion, set out the case that s/he and his/her partner will argue and develop two or three points.

The **first opposition** speaker should challenge the definition if it is unreasonable. S/he should set out the case that s/he and his/her partner will argue and rebut the points of the first proposition speaker. S/he should develop two or three of his/her team's points.

The **second proposition** speaker should defend the definition if it has been challenged. S/he should rebut the arguments of the first opposition speaker and develop two or three points of the proposition case, as his/her partner has outlined.

The **second opposition** speaker should support his/her partner's stance on the definition, if this has been an issue. S/he should rebut proposition arguments, particularly those of the second proposition speaker. S/he should develop two or three points of the opposition case, as his/her partner has outlined.

The **third proposition** speaker should extend the proposition argument, introducing substantial new analysis. S/he should also rebut the opposition's arguments, particularly those of the second opposition speaker.

The **third opposition** speaker should extend the opposition argument, introducing substantial new analysis. S/he should also rebut the proposition's arguments, particularly those of the third proposition speaker.

The **fourth proposition** speaker should summarise the debate as a whole, explaining why the proposition has won; s/he should not introduce new arguments. S/he should address the third opposition's extension at some point.

The **fourth opposition** speaker should summarise the debate as a whole, explaining why the opposition has won; s/he must not introduce new arguments.

The first proposition speaker

The first proposition speaker can be fairly sure what they are going to say before the debate starts; all other speakers have to respond to previous speakers. However, it would still be inadvisable for the first proposition speaker to write out a complete speech: it is unlikely that there will be enough time to think through the arguments, if one attempts to write out a speech. It is better to make notes (note-taking skills are discussed on page 12): notes tend to produce a more fluent delivery and also allow more freedom to address points of information than a fully written speech.

Defining the motion

The first proposition speaker should begin by defining the motion: this means that they should set out what the debate will be about. It is essential that this is done clearly and fairly, so that the audience, the other speakers and the adjudicators understand what the first proposition intends to propose. This is one of the most difficult, complex and controversial aspects of debating, which perhaps accounts for its lengthy treatment below. This explanation is geared to what will be expected in the Oxford Union Schools' Competition; other competitions have quite different definitional conventions. Indeed, some of the advice below would be entirely inappropriate for other competitions, particularly the World Schools' Debating Competition.

What is a debating definition?
One should not give a dictionary definition of the words of the motion, although it may sometimes be appropriate to explain what is meant by certain technical terms, such as "therapeutic cloning", "genetic modification" or "the Common Agricultural Policy".

If the definition is not principally about defining words, what is it about? The definition should explain what policy the proposition intends to advocate. The key features of this policy should be outlined briefly.

In a debate on the motion "This House would legalise euthanasia", the first proposition would have to explain what they meant by "euthanasia". This would not be a dictionary definition (e.g. "the act or practice of putting painlessly to death, especially in cases of extreme suffering"), but an explanation of a system that could be implemented. Who would be eligible for euthanasia? What kinds of illnesses or suffering would patients have to be experiencing? Would there be a minimum age? Would patients have to be of sound mind? What would the method of death be? What safeguards would there be, to ensure that only those who were eligible and wished to die would be killed?

It is vital that questions like this are addressed in the definition, or the two sides will not know exactly about what they are arguing. In particular, it is important to explain any aspects of the definition that are likely to neutralise opposition arguments based upon practicalities. In the example of the debate about euthanasia, the safeguards would have to be outlined. Would there be verification by an independent doctor? Would the patient need to have made a "living will"? Would the process have to be

reviewed by a lawyer, to ensure that all the appropriate checks had been made? Would a patient who was refused euthanasia by one doctor be able to go on applying to others until they could find a doctor who would authorise euthanasia? Including these points in the definition helps to minimise niggling practical objections from the opposition.

Choosing a model
The system outlined in the definition is very often known as "the model". In the euthanasia example, there would be numerous possible models that the proposition could propose. When choosing a model, there are several considerations to bear in mind. First, it must correspond to the motion set: the first proposition could not start talking about abolishing the monarchy if the motion was "This House would legalise euthanasia", even if they claimed that they were interpreting the motion metaphorically and proposing a painless end to a moribund institution. Second, there must be a problem for the model to solve: if there were nothing wrong with the status quo, there would be no reason to introduce changes. Third, the model must solve this problem, producing a better end result.

The first proposition speaker should pay particular attention to explaining aspects of the model that are crucial to its efficacy in solving the problem or problems that the proposition has highlighted, without inducing greater problems. In the euthanasia example, the safeguards to prevent abuse of the system would be likely to be particularly important. A good model is likely to remove many of the nit-picking objections that the opposition might make, but the definition is not a tool to preclude all opposition arguments. A good definition will address many potential practical objections, but it should not remove the opposition's more principled arguments: there must be room for the opposition to argue.

If you have sufficient knowledge, it is often good to use a model that has been used (successfully!) somewhere or at some time: a system that has been implemented in "the real world" was probably designed to minimise practical problems. In setting up a model for euthanasia, one could refer to the systems that are in place in The Netherlands, Switzerland or Oregon, or the one that used to be legal in the Northern Territories of Australia. Nevertheless, one must still explain the salient points of the model: you cannot simply state that you will propose that "the Oregon model" be implemented in the UK, since it is quite probable that not all the speakers, adjudicators and members of the audience will be familiar with its intricacies unless you explain them.

The proposition may choose the geographical area to which the model applies. Occasionally, the motion will make this clear: "This House would reintroduce corporal punishment in schools in the UK" could only be proposed with reference to the UK. Similarly, "This House would abolish the Common Agricultural Policy" would have to be discussed with reference to the European Union as a whole. It is, however, more common for motions not to specify a particular location: a motion like "This House would ban gambling" could be discussed with reference to the UK, the EU or as a general principle applicable to everywhere. In most cases in competitions in the UK, it is best to define motions like this in terms of the UK. There are a few exceptions, where one might consider it preferable to address an issue on a

supranational basis: for example, it might be better to define a debate about immigration in terms of the EU.

Analysis and policy debates
Motions are usually framed in terms of "This House would…" or "This House believes that…" A motion containing the word "would" or a construction like "This House believes that…should…" clearly implies some kind of action: such motions are known as policy debates, and the proposition will argue for a particular course of action. The first proposition speaker should set up a model, which is the "policy" they want to implement.

When defining a motion, one assumes that the proposition is in a position with power to adopt this policy. Often, the proposition is effectively pretending to be Parliament, with power to legislate or act for the United Kingdom, for example by legalising cannabis, banning abortion or supporting the United States of America in Iraq. On other occasions, the proposition may be assuming the role of the European Union, the World Trade Organisation or one of countless other bodies. It can sometimes be convincing for the opposition to argue that the body would not be able to implement the policy; in a debate about banning abortion, the opposition could say that this would never be completely achieved and that some women would have back-street abortions as a result. However, it is rarely a strong argument for the opposition simply to say that the body in question would be unlikely to choose that policy because of its current opinions or prejudices. After all, there is an element of pretence in debating: there is very little that a room-full of debaters could do, in practical terms, to force their decisions upon the rest of the world. In a debate on the motion "This House believes the Roman Catholic Church should change its stance on contraception", the proposition effectively pretends to be the Pope, giving arguments why there should be a change. The proposition does not need to suggest ways to force the Roman Catholic Church to change its stance, such as infiltrating the College of Cardinals or invading the Vatican! This does not, however, mean that the proposition should advance arguments that are only germane to the Pope as an individual, such as any ulterior motives he might have. Similarly, one might argue about whether the United States *should* adopt the Kyoto Protocol: the fact that it is well known that most Congressmen (the equivalent of MPs) oppose the Kyoto Protocol is not, in itself, an argument against this proposition.

Some motions may seem to invite an analysis of whether or not something is the case, rather than immediately suggesting a policy. These motions frequently start "This House believes…" For example, "This House believes that the Olympic ideal is dead" might appear to invite an argument about whether or not "the Olympic ideal" (whatever this is – it would need to be defined) still exists. In many competitions, this would be the approach that the proposition would be expected to adopt. In the Oxford Union Schools' Competition, it is anticipated that teams will convert "analysis debates" into "policy debates". In this case, the proposition would argue that the Olympic ideal, suitably defined, was dead and that this was a problem that needed to be solved. The first proposition speaker should establish a model to solve the problem that has been identified: this might be a stricter programme of drug testing, a cap upon how much countries could spend upon their Olympic team or a ban on commercial endorsement of Olympic athletes. Similarly, first proposition to the motion "This House supports regime change in Iran" would not be expected simply to argue that it

would be desirable to have another regime in Iran, but should propose a way to effect a change in regime (e.g. tightening sanctions, dropping sanctions, giving money/equipment to pro-democracy movements or launching an invasion).

Open and closed motions
In debates like "This House would legalise euthanasia", "This House would ban boxing" and "This House would make voting compulsory", the first proposition team has relatively little freedom in defining the motion: they can choose a particular system of euthanasia (for example), but the issue for debate is clear. Motions of this kind are known as "closed motions" and will be the most common ones in the Oxford Union Schools' Competition.

In some competitions, motions like "This House would put its foot down" are set: such motions can be defined in almost any way that the proposition chooses. The proposition could "put its foot down" by refusing to adopt the European Constitution. Equally, it could "put its foot down" by refusing to accept any more delays in the European Constitution and ratifying it immediately. These are known as "open motions", and will NOT be set in the Oxford Union Schools' Competition.

There is a spectrum in between, where the issue at stake is clear from the motion, but the proposition still has a great deal of latitude to choose what model they will propose. "Semi-closed" motions may be set in the Oxford Union Schools' Competition. An example would be "This House supports nationalisation". This could be debated as a broad principle, with the proposition arguing that State ownership of the means of production and exchange is desirable. It would probably be expected, however, that the proposition would adopt a policy that a particular industry should be nationalised. It would be entirely legitimate for the proposition to confine the debate to being about the rail industry in the UK, the power generation industry in the UK, or many other things. There would be no theoretical bar to the proposition arguing that Uganda's water supply should be renationalised (the opposition could not challenge such a definition), but this is not recommended. First, it is considered bad debating etiquette (especially at schools' level) to define a motion in a way that is likely to be entirely unfamiliar to "the average intelligent person"; although the opposition should not challenge such a definition, the adjudicators are likely to be sympathetic towards the opposition's situation. Second, if you define a motion in this way, you will end up having to spend a great deal of time simply explaining what the situation is (so that the other speakers and the adjudicators know) and the specifics of the obscure issue you have selected; this will reduce the amount of time you have to argue your case.

Unreasonable definitions
There are some definitions that would be considered unreasonable: if the proposition adopts such definitions, they can expect to be heavily penalised. Most simply, the definition must be in the spirit of the motion: you cannot have a debate about capital punishment if the motion is about tariffs on vegetable imports.

Furthermore, the proposition should not propose the status quo, but must propose a policy to change the status quo. On the motion "This House believes that a woman's rights are more important than the rights of an unborn child", the proposition should not argue that the current, relatively liberal, abortion laws in the UK are good and that we should just continue with the status quo. Instead, they should argue either that

similar laws to those pertaining in the UK should be implemented elsewhere (e.g. in many Catholic countries) or that the laws in the UK should be liberalized further (e.g. by allowing foetuses to be aborted later in a pregnancy).

A definition must not be tautological or truistic: there must be a reasonable opposition case, or there is simply not a debate. You cannot propose something that is factually true, such as that the Sun rises in the East. This is more of a risk in analysis than policy debates, but it can sometimes occur in the latter. For example, the motion "This House would dance on the grave of marriage" should not be defined as that marriage should be abolished *if it were to become obsolete in the future*. Whilst abolishing marriage would be a reasonable definition (i.e. arguing that marriage is now obsolete), the clause in italics makes the debate somewhat tautological. It would be unreasonable to expect the opposition to argue that something should be retained *if* it were obsolete.

The proposition cannot propose something that no reasonable person would oppose. For example, the proposition should not argue simply that genocide is bad or that gratuitous suffering is undesirable. Nevertheless, an opposition could be required to defend things that many people find difficult, distasteful or repellent, such as stem cell research, child soldiers and terrorism. This is quite a grey area: the best advice for the proposition is that they should not run a case if they cannot think of some sensible arguments that the opposition could make against it.

When defining, inexperienced debaters often try to be as timid as possible without being unreasonable. However, it is often easier to propose something bold, rather than being too cautious and trying to change as little as possible. If you can argue the principle behind your case successfully, it would seem odd only to apply your principle in very limited circumstances. In debating terms (though probably not in "the real world"), it is arguably easier to propose that all drugs should be legalised than that cannabis (but not heroin) should be legalised. This may seem counter-intuitive, but, if you only want to apply your principle in a limited way, it casts significant doubt upon that principle. In the case of a debate about drugs, the principle would be that people should be allowed to do whatever they want to themselves, providing they do not harm others.

In British Parliamentary debating, it is never permissible to construct a future or past world and then propose what we ought to do if we lived in it. This is sometimes done in American Parliamentary Debating Association style, with debates about fighting aliens in a concocted future world and about what the League of Nations should have done when Italy invaded Abyssinia.

General advice about definition
As stated above, definition is one of the most complex and controversial aspects of debating. The best guide to definition is undoubtedly experience. Until one has considerable experience of debating, it is probably best always to choose the definition that "an ordinary intelligent person" would expect from the motion, rather than trying to do anything clever. Even for those who have a great deal of experience, it should be remembered that the definition is a tool to allow the debate to take place, not a tool to allow the proposition to win the debate before it has really begun.

Setting out the proposition case

Despite the length of this section about definition, the first proposition speaker must aim to begin their argument as soon as possible. After all, the proposition has a case to prove. For a very closed motion (such as "This House would ban smoking in all enclosed public places in the UK"), the definition should take less than thirty seconds. A minute is adequate for most motions and the maximum time that should normally be spent on definition is about two minutes, in a five-minute speech; one might sometimes spend slightly longer in a longer speech.

The members of the first proposition team must formulate a case together: they must identify a <u>problem</u> and a <u>desirable result</u>, which is achieved through their <u>mechanism</u>. This case should be divided between the two speakers, and the first speaker should outline a structure for what both he and his partner will say. Each speaker should probably have two or three points. The basic techniques of how to structure a team case and make arguments persuasively are explained in the previous chapter.

It is important that the proposition has a case established at the end of the first speech; the first speaker cannot simply do "preparatory work". In particular, the first speaker should not simply describe the problem that he intends to solve: it is necessary to link this to the model, and thereby address the question of why the policy should be implemented. In a debate on the motion "This House would place condom machines in schools", the first proposition speaker must do more than just outline the existence of problems, such as teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. It is relatively rare that the problem is disputed (unless the proposition has chosen a very timid case): one must concentrate upon the contentious matters, not those that the opposition will concede. This does not mean that the problem should not be mentioned (it is a good idea to state it explicitly, if briefly) or that the first proposition speaker should take all the arguments, leaving none for his partner. However, it is important that the first proposition speaker has enough arguments about matters that are likely to be contentious to have established a strong case by the end of his speech: it is usually best for the first speaker to take the most important arguments, leaving the subsidiary parts of the case to the second speaker.

The first opposition speaker

In some ways, the first opposition speaker mirrors the first proposition speaker: they are responsible for addressing the definition and setting up their team's case; they must, however, also rebut the previous speaker's arguments.

Definitional challenges

If the first proposition speaker has given a good, fair definition, this section is entirely unnecessary. In the vast majority of debates, the opposition implicitly accepts the proposition's definition; <u>there is no need to state this acceptance</u>. If the definition provided by the proposition is reasonable (it usually is), the opposition has no right to define the motion in another way, and will be heavily penalised for doing so. Even if the definition is unexpected, it must be debated if it is fair: if the proposition has defined the motion "This House supports nationalisation" as being about the UK rail industry, the opposition cannot decide that it would rather argue against the nationalisation of electricity generation.

There are three occasions upon which a definition should be challenged:
1. If the proposition has simply failed to define the motion in any way, the first opposition speaker must point this out and supply a definition, if possible using any "clues" given by the first proposition speaker as to what they presumed the definition would be. It is important that there is a definition, or the debate will be a mess: it would be very hard to debate the motion "This House believes that reparations should be paid for slavery", without any idea who was to pay to whom an amount decided by an unknown process. If the proposition has neglected to provide a definition, the first opposition speaker should therefore give a clear, fair definition, much as the first proposition speaker should have done.
2. If there is no opposition to the definition that the proposition has given; this may be because the proposition's definition is tautological or morally truistic. In such situations, the first opposition speaker should explain why the definition is unreasonable and then substitute a fair definition. It must be explained why the proposition's definition is unreasonable: one cannot simply state this or assume that the audience and adjudicators agree about this. Indeed, in a definitional debate, the definition is usually the most important argument for debate. Nevertheless, one should note that such a challenge is a last resort, and the opposition may reasonably be expected to argue things that many people would find distasteful or even repugnant. An opposition could probably challenge if they were being expected to defend genocide or the gratuitous mutilation of innocent children, but should be prepared to defend (in certain circumstances) things like terrorism, abortion and the use of child soldiers.
3. If the definition has strayed significantly from the motion. Again, the reason for the challenge must be clearly explained and a fair definition substituted. Generally, this situation occurs when the proposition tries to be too clever and "squirrel" the motion. An example would be if "This House would legalise prostitution" were defined as that the United Nations should be allowed to use mercenaries (since mercenaries effectively sell themselves, albeit not in the

way that "prostitution" is usually understood). However, it is almost always best to avoid a definitional debate, since these are boring and tedious. If the model set up in the definition given can be argued against, the opposition should complain briefly (pointing out that the proposition has squirreled the motion or defined it as the status quo) but then magnanimously accept the definition anyway and proceed to argue against the proposition's case (e.g. explaining why the UN should not use mercenaries). This will win the sympathy and support of the audience and adjudicators, who will be glad to have avoided a definitional debate and will be impressed by the spontaneity and confidence of the first opposition speaker. Anyway, a proposition that has spent all its time working out how to squirrel the motion is unlikely to have spent long working out strong arguments for their case: squirrels are often less difficult to demolish than one might think. If the definition is very narrow or obscure (e.g. defining "This House supports nationalisation" with reference to renationalising the water supply in Uganda), it is generally best to whine briefly and then oppose the motion from first principles (e.g. the principles behind nationalisation and privatisation, which can be applied to Ugandan water just as much as to British railways or coal mining).

The golden rule is to avoid a definitional challenge unless a debate would otherwise be impossible. In the event of a challenge, the opposition should remember that they are still opposing the motion and should argue against the definition that first opposition has given. Nevertheless, first opposition must be careful not simply to give the definition against which they would most like to argue: it must be a fair and reasonable definition, like the one the proposition should have given.

Laying out the opposition case

The first opposition speaker should state what arguments she and her partner will make, unless an unexpected definition has rendered teamwork effectively impossible. Even in such cases, it is good to try to work out a team case during the first proposition speech. The first opposition speaker must attack what the first proposition has said (rebuttal techniques are discussed on page 18) and will usually also develop some substantive points, although it is sometimes possible to run a "purely rebuttal" opposition case. The rebuttal may all be discussed at the beginning of the speech, or it may be integrated into the first opposition speaker's structure.

The structure of the first opposition speech (particularly the balance between rebuttal and constructive) will be heavily influenced by the opposition strategy that is selected. Since the proposition must provide a present problem, a better state and a mechanism to achieve that better state, the opposition strategy is determined by which points of this logical chain are most open to attack. The different approaches below may often be combined and the list is not exhaustive; however, it is vital that the opposition avoids inconsistency in its case (e.g. by arguing that there is no problem and then saying that there is a better way to solve the problem).

1. There is no problem
This can be a very effective opposition strategy, particularly if the proposition has built an elaborate case without ever identifying a reason for doing so. If there is nothing wrong with the status quo, there is no reason to change it. If the proposition

proposed a massive expansion in the UK's armed forces, the opposition could base their case on the argument that the UK's current armed forces are entirely adequate to fulfil their known and foreseeable duties.

2. The situation that the proposition wants to reach is not better than the status quo
It is rare that the proposition's goal will be totally undesirable, but it is common for parts of it to be dubious, particularly if there are unwanted side effects. If the proposition proposed that reproductive cloning be used to provide donors for those requiring transplants to avert pain and suffering, the opposition would not (presumably) see the alleviation of illness as undesirable. However, the opposition could argue that the proposition were unwittingly reaching an undesirable state, where personhood could be devalued, with people being created as means to an end, not an end for themselves. It is important to explain why the negative effects are so great that they outweigh any beneficial effects.
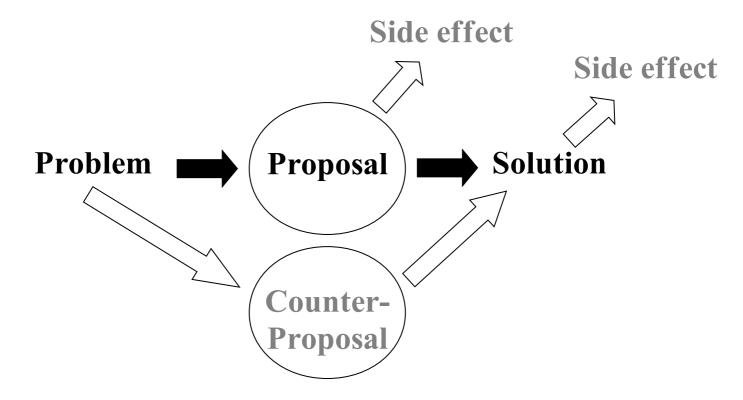
3. There is a problem but this is the wrong way to fix it
Here, the opposition effectively argues that the proposition's mechanism will not work. It is generally unwise to rely solely on this strategy: it is often better to say that the model would not work, but would be a bad thing even if it did. If one accepts that there is a problem, it is often a good idea for the first opposition speaker to provide a better way to fix it, unless the problem cannot reasonably be solved. Even if the proposition's mechanism would work, such a counter-case can be useful, if the opposition can show that it would solve the problem more effectively (e.g. at a lower cost, more quickly, with fewer negative side-effects etc). It is never incumbent upon the opposition to produce a counter-case (the proposition cannot demand that they do), but it can make the opposition's case significantly more persuasive.

It is important to be sure that a counter-proposal is substantially different from what the proposition is suggesting, or it is likely that both sides will end up agreeing upon a great deal. The opposition must also be wary of "affirming the affirmative", an American expression which refers to a counter-proposal that would simply be another way of defining the motion. In the motion "This House would introduce proportional representation" the opposition should not propose an alternative method of proportional representation (e.g. the Alternative Member System rather than the Single Transferable Vote), but could have an entirely different counter-proposal, such as redrawing constituency boundaries.

The Bubble

One way to visualise the process above is to use 'The Bubble'. In the diagram below the black words and arrows indicate what the proposition will be trying to prove. The proposition must show that there is a problem and that they have produced a proposal that results in the solution that is wanted. The grey words and hollow arrows are possible strategies that the opposition might use.

Side effect

Side effect

Problem ➡ **Proposal** ➡ Solution

Counter-
Proposal

Let us take the example of the motion "This house would put condom machines in schools". The proposition should identify a problem with the situation as it stands (the

'status quo') and claim that Britain has a high rate of teenage pregnancy. Their proposal (to put condom machines in schools) would need a few provisos in the definition. Would they be voluntary or would Faith-based schools have to take them? What age groups would be exposed to them? Would there be information/greater stress on teaching children how to use condoms in sex education? Would parents be consulted? The proposal would, however, be largely straightforward. The proposition would claim that by making access to condoms easier and less embarrassing, more young people would use condoms when they had sex and so there would be fewer teenage pregnancies (the solution).

The opposition could argue that there is no problem, but in this case all the statistics suggest that the Britain has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Europe and most people would accept that teenage pregnancies are not ideal. The opposition could attack the proposal for not leading to the solution: condoms are pretty readily available already so is teenage pregnancy really a result of children not having access to contraception? Additionally, they could follow one of the grey arrows on the diagram above; there could be negative side-effects: perhaps putting condom machines in school would make them 'un-cool' and so decrease use. Moreover, there is evidence that government campaigns about sexual health actually lead to more people having sex – in this case could the presence of condom machines encourage schoolchildren to have more sex? They might argue that people decide to have sex and that if they don't have a condom with them many of them will just carry on anyway. The opposition could provide a counter-proposal to the use of condom machines, arguing that greater education of an abstinence policy might be more successful in reducing teenage pregnancy. There are a huge number of possibilities, but by remembering this diagram (and adding more arrows and possible side effects as you see fit) you can work out where to attack a case or where you need to make sure you provide arguments to prove one.

The second proposition and opposition speakers

The second speakers very much follow the lead of the other speaker on their team; their roles are less clearly prescribed than those of the first speakers.

The definition

The second speakers should almost always have nothing to do with the definition. However, if there has been a definitional challenge, the second speakers should support the stance of the other speaker on their team, the second proposition speaker by explaining why the proposition definition was legitimate and the second opposition speaker by countering this, explaining why the proposition definition is unreasonable. Again, it is vital that the reasons for one's view of the definition are explained, not simply stated. The reason why definitional debates are undesirable becomes apparent at this stage in the debate: the two sides will by now probably be arguing about totally different things, with little or no actual argument (other than about what they should argue about).

The second opposition speaker is NOT permitted to challenge the definition if the first opposition speaker has not done so.

Continuing the case

If the members of the team have worked well together, the first speaker will usually have intimated what areas the second speaker will cover. It is vital that these issues are actually addressed: it is very weak if the second speaker omits chunks of the case that were allotted to them. It is necessary to strike a balance between rebuttal and the constructive case; one way to do this is to rebut the other side's points first and then proceed to one's own points. Depending upon the number and size of the points that the second speaker has to address, they should probably spend no more than two to two and a half minutes out of five on rebuttal. Alternatively, one can integrate the rebuttal into the case (see page 18).

The third proposition and opposition speakers

The third speakers have an interesting and difficult role, since they are effectively part of two different teams. They are a part of the whole proposition or opposition team, and must be consistent with the speakers of the first team on their side, even though the teams will have prepared separately. Third speakers that contradict (or "knife") the other speakers on their side are heavily penalised. However, they are also part of a team with their partner, and must seek to make a distinctive mark upon the debate. Teamwork is generally less immediately apparent on the lower half of the table, since it is unnecessary for the third speaker to state that their partner will summarise the debate; it is still important, however, that the third and fourth speakers cooperate, helping each other to formulate persuasive speeches. Essentially, the third speaker must support the case of the previous team on their side, but debate better.

The definition

It must be hoped that the definition is not an issue by this point. If there has been a definitional challenge, the third speakers can decide which definition they think is fairer and debate that one. The only time when a third speaker may disregard the arguments of the other team on their side is when that team has been debating an unfair definition and that unfair definition has been challenged by the opposition (see page 36 for definitional challenges). The closing proposition team could then ignore what the opening proposition had said (although as much of their case as possible should be salvaged) and argue in favour of the definition that first opposition had set up and opposed. Similarly, the closing opposition could accept a proposition definition that they believed the opening opposition had challenged inappropriately. If closing proposition has accepted opening opposition's definitional challenge, closing opposition should not deviate from the stance taken by opening opposition.

Where possible, though, it is probably better to look for common themes running through the two definitions (they usually are not entirely separate) and address both thematically. It should be stressed that these situations are rare and it is probably not worth discussing extensively what should be done in them.

The third opposition speaker is not permitted to challenge the definition, unless this has already been done by the first opposition speaker.

Assuming the definition is reasonable, the third and fourth speakers are not permitted to add to it. It is usually legitimate for the proposition to suggest small practical "patches" to opposition objections (e.g. a possible safeguard in a debate about euthanasia), but wholesale amendments or additions to the definition are unacceptable. The motion "This House believes the government needs more power to combat terrorism" could be defined as that the Home Secretary should be able to detain without charge British citizens (as well as foreign nationals) who are suspected of terrorist offences. The closing proposition team should not then spend their time arguing that there is a need to introduce mandatory identification cards, although this would have been a legitimate definition for the first proposition team to have provided.

Extension

The critical part of the third speaker's role is to make a novel, distinctive contribution to the debate for their team: there is no point in simply repeating or repackaging what the first team on that side has said. This novel contribution is known as an "extension", and it is sometimes useful to state that one will "extend the case" in a particular way, making it clear to the judges what the new material is.

There is no hard and fast rule as to what does and does not constitute an extension; it can sometimes be very difficult to find something new to say, if the first team on one's side has addressed all the major arguments comprehensively. There are, however, some ways in which extensions can often be found.

1. Is there still a major argument that has not been made?
It is a good idea for the third speaker to use much of their preparation time to make a list of arguments, which their side of the debate could make. The third speaker will probably cross many of these arguments out as they are addressed by the first and second speakers, but a major argument is sometimes overlooked by the earlier team: this is an ideal situation for the third speaker. Sometimes, there are a number of smaller arguments that have been omitted by the first and second speakers. The third speaker can address a few of these, but it is usually preferable to look at one or two crucial issues, rather than several trivial points.

It is often possible to come up with an extension by thinking of all the different groups that might be affected by the proposal, and then analysing the effect upon a significant group that has been omitted. For example, the effect upon doctors is often omitted by the top half of the table in debates about medical ethics. As a member of the closing opposition team debating the motion "This House would legalise consensual non-intergenerational homosexual incest," it was very hard to find a reasoned extension in this most obscure debate, when the first opposition team had taken all the arguments about the damage that incest (whether heterosexual or homosexual) can do to family life and arguments about the effect of incest upon the gene pool are irrelevant when one is debating homosexual incest. However, we considered all the parties that might be affected by such a change, and wondered whether the homosexual population (against which society is probably already prejudiced) as a whole might be disadvantaged if such legislation was enacted, since there could be a perception that homosexual people had a disproportionate desire to participate in incest, against which society is strongly prejudiced. The result could be an increase in homophobia: this made a successful extension to the case. Such a narrow motion would be most unlikely to be set at schools' level; this example is included to show how lateral thinking can produce convincing arguments in very difficult positions.

Extensions can sometimes also be made by considering the "wider implications" of the proposal. Does it undermine important principles, such as the right to a fair trial or the authority of the United Nations? Does it send out a positive signal, thereby encouraging further change? Has the debate focussed too much on the Developed World, excluding Developing Countries?

2. Is there a potent example that has not yet been deployed?
If there has been little exemplification from the first half of the debate, some well-chosen and carefully explained examples could constitute an extension. On the other hand, one or two mundane examples to support a point that had already been established would probably not be regarded as an extension.

In a debate on the motion "This House would abolish the House of Lords", in which the first opposition team argued that the House of Lords has an important role in reviewing legislation, without ever giving examples of when this had actually been done, the third speaker would be able to extend by looking in detail at two cases where the Lords intervened (probably with widespread public support), namely to ensure that rape within marriage was a crime and to block some of the draconian powers sought by the Government after the September 11th 2001 attacks. By demonstrating that the Lords could have an important practical (rather than merely theoretical) role in shaping legislation, the closing opposition team could win the debate.

3. Is there a crucial point of controversy requiring deeper analysis?
Probably the majority of extensions, however, involve looking at a key point upon which the debate turns: the third speaker should consider the arguments of both sides and add NEW ANALYSIS to explain why their side's argument wins. It is vital that the third speaker does do something original to clarify this controversy, rather than simply reiterating the rebuttal and arguments of earlier speakers.

This kind of extension was used successfully in a debate on the motion "This House would withhold State medical treatment from those who refuse to modify unhealthy lifestyles". The first proposition team had argued that efficiency of treatment was compromised if people continued to eat unhealthily and exercise insufficiently: finite resources should be targeted at those who take action to maximise those resources' effect. The opposition countered by arguing that the State had a responsibility to treat all, regardless of what harm they did to themselves. Essentially, the debate boiled down to the questions of who had a right to expect treatment and whether there were any conditions upon this "right". The third proposition speaker took on these questions, looking at how responsibilities are intimately connected with rights, and arguing that those who consume State resources have a duty to ensure that they maximise their efficiency, thus allowing more people to be treated.

The balance of rebuttal and extension

The third speaker needs to do a fairly comprehensive demolition of the other side's case, although it is not necessary to reiterate points that other speakers have successfully rebutted. This means that most of the rebuttal will be against the points of the immediately preceding speaker. If one is separating "rebuttal" and "extension", the extension ought to have been started well before the third minute of the speech, or it is unlikely to be developed at sufficient length. If one is examining a few crucial points of controversy, it is probable that rebuttal and extension will be interwoven, although it is important that both are obvious to the adjudicators. When rebuttal is interwoven, there can be no timing guide; the important things are to have a clear structure and to ensure that enough time is left to cover all the points adequately.

The fourth proposition and opposition speakers

The last speaker on each side must summarise the debate, explaining why their side has won. This is not an impartial report about the debate, but a biased overview, much like the closing statement of a barrister. Since the role involves summarising the debate that has happened, not a debate that might have happened, the summary speakers should not attempt to write any kind of speech before the debate begins: it is best to use preparation time to help one's partner think of possible extensions and rebuttals of the arguments that the other side is likely to make. Preparing a whole speech during a debate (while remaining involved through points of information) may seem daunting, but, with a little practice, the main challenge is to condense a whole debate down to a mere five minutes of summary. It is often possible to prepare the bulk of a summary during one's partner's speech: since the summary speaker should know in advance what his partner will say, they can concentrate upon preparing the summary rather than listening closely to the speech.

Ways to organise a summary

The simplest approach to a summary is to go through the debate in chronological order, reiterating the arguments that have been made an offering some comment upon them. However, such a technique is confusing for the audience and it is unlikely that the major issues will be highlighted and discussed in sufficient detail. It is also possible to summarise the case of the other side (explaining its shortcomings), before reiterating one's own side's case. This approach can be useful in very messy debates, where there are few areas of direct argument. However, it is unlikely that there will be enough time to address both sides' cases in sufficient depth.

The most sophisticated way to structure a summary is to look at the debate thematically, discussing the crucial areas of disagreement and explaining why your side has won those points. If these areas of "clash" can be won, then it is likely that the debate will also be won.

In a debate on the motion "This House would legalise euthanasia", the proposition might have two main points: that those suffering extreme pain and indignity should not be forced to continue to live against their will and that legalising euthanasia would also help those (e.g. relatives and doctors) who are currently prevented from carrying out the wishes of others who desire euthanasia. The opposition could argue that humans never have a right to remove another person's life since life is sacred (arguably), that the procedure could be abused (e.g. by unscrupulous relatives) and that legalising euthanasia could effectively force doctors to carry out procedures that they might find morally repugnant. A summary could look at the proposition's first point and the opposition's first point together, examining whether there should be a "right to die". It would then be possible to pair off the proposition's first point and the opposition's third point, looking at the effect upon those who would be connected to the dying person. The last area of summary could be the efficacy of the safeguards (presumably outlined in the definition), with reference to the objections raised by the opposition's second point. These points are not necessarily the best points to make in this debate and this is only one possible way to summarise them: it is merely intended as a demonstration of how a thematic summation can be constructed.

When looking for ways to organise a summary, it can be helpful to think about all the logical steps that the proposition would need to prove in order to win the debate. A proposition summariser could progress through these, showing that they have been successfully demonstrated and defending them from attack. An opposition summariser could select one or more of the proposition's "burdens of proof" and explain why it/they had not been fulfilled.

In any summary, a structure, explicitly stated at the beginning of the speech, is to be recommended: this makes things much clearer for the audience and adjudicators; after all, the summary role is really all about making the debate clear (in a biased way) to those who are watching. If possible, the points introduced by one's partner should be placed prominently in the summary speech, to show that they were indeed central to the debate: this is an important aspect of teamwork. The arguments made on the top half of the table cannot, however, be omitted or marginalized, unless they really were inconsequential.

The role of rebuttal

If one is giving a thematic summary, rebuttal should be woven into the speech and addressed as part of every point. It is usually best to avoid having a section at the beginning of the speech devoted to rebuttal, since this suggests that the wrong "clash structure" has been chosen. The major exception to this would be for the fourth proposition speaker if the third opposition speaker has introduced a powerful extension that does not readily fit into the clashes from the rest of the debate. Labelling such a point as an "area of clash", would give it too much credence, suggesting that the speaker's extension was strong enough immediately to become one of the key issues in the debate. At such times, it is best to address the extension fully (it absolutely must be rebutted) but succinctly at the start of the speech, before moving on to the controversies that have dominated the debate.

New material

Summary speakers are not allowed to advance new arguments during their speeches; they may, however, give new examples to reinforce points that other speakers have made and make novel rebuttals. New arguments are prohibited because the other side would have insufficient opportunity to respond to them. If a summary speaker thinks that there are important points that ought to be introduced, they should let their partner know, so that these points can be made as extensions by the third speaker. Indeed, the presence of new arguments in a summary speech can be an indication of poor teamwork.

HOW A DEBATE IS JUDGED

The adjudication process is often quite mysterious for inexperienced debaters; I can recall having little idea what judges actually did or how they did it. However, it is useful to understand how a debate is judged: this makes it more likely that one will be successful as a debater. This chapter is therefore included, in the hope that it will go some way towards demystifying adjudication.

The "mechanics" of adjudication

It must be stressed that judges do vary to some extent: while the criteria upon which they base their decision are standardised within a competition (each competition has its own rules), the methods that they use may not be identical to those outlined here.

Notes
All good adjudicators make relatively extensive notes throughout the debate they are judging. They may note aspects of what is said (and how it is said) that they would particularly praise or particularly criticise. However, notes are not really a series of metaphorical "ticks and crosses": judges very much write an account of the debate, to be able to remember clearly what has been said. Judges tend to note each point (whether a rebuttal or a constructive argument) that a speaker makes and each major area of analysis within that point. Significant examples, points of information offered and accepted and timing are also usually noted. It is clearly impossible for judges to write a transcript of the debate while it is taking place, but the purpose of notes is to ensure that there is an impartial account of what has been said: this allows judged to discern misrepresentation, arguments that have not been rebutted and potential contradictions within cases.

These notes will form the basis of the judge's decision. It is therefore advantageous for speakers to do all they can to aid judges in their note-taking: the main advice here is that a clearly structured speech is usually easy to record. Using an explicit structure is not simply an artificial technique to make life easier for judges; it will also make one more persuasive for an audience, since the points will be more readily remembered.

Deliberation
Once the debate has finished, the adjudicators decide the result. If there is only one adjudicator, they will simply make up their mind, using the criteria in this Guide. If there are two or more adjudicators, the Chair of the adjudicators will usually ask each adjudicator for their opinion about how the teams should be ranked. If there is disagreement, the adjudicators will argue about how the teams should be ranked, until a consensus is reached; this consensus is not necessarily the view that had most support at the beginning of the discussion. Sometimes, it is not possible for the adjudicators to reach a consensus; in these cases, the result is decided by a majority. In such cases, the Chair's vote is of equal weight to that of any other judge. The adjudicators use the same processes to award speaker points to individual speakers. The team with the greatest total speaker points must be the team which wins the

debate, the team with the second greatest total speaker points must be second and so on.

Speaker points

Individual speaker points are only awarded at Finals' Day in the Oxford Union Schools' Competition. The marking scale normally used in this competition is a variant of the World Schools' Debating Competition marking scale. Each speaker is theoretically marked out of one hundred, but marks actually vary between sixty and eighty. The following criteria are only a simplified guide, but may help to put marks into context. Comments about rebuttal do not refer to the first proposition speaker, who has no opportunity for rebuttal, other than responding to points of information.

> 60: Stood up and sat down again, saying little or nothing.
> 65: Used most/all of the time, deploying arguments of at least partial relevance to the motion. Arguments are unlikely to have been particularly well developed and the role on the table may have been only superficially fulfilled. Relatively few points of information offered.
> 70: A good average for the competition. Some relevant arguments, showing some evidence of careful thought, were made. The role on the table was understood, but may not have been fully fulfilled. A reasonable attempt at involvement in the debate, through points of information and rebuttal, was made.
> 75: Strong and relevant arguments were consistently deployed, with good fulfilment of the role on the table. Engaged extensively with the other side, through rebuttal and points of information.
> 80: An outstanding speech, excellent in all respects.

The result and feedback

After some rounds of the Oxford Union Schools' Competition, neither the team rankings nor individual speaker points are announced; this is decided at the discretion of the organisers and the amount of time available is a major consideration. However, speakers are always welcome to approach adjudicators, who will be happy to give constructive feedback.

After some rounds, the order in which the teams were placed is announced and one of the adjudicators will give a brief speech to justify the decision, highlighting things that were done well and areas upon which speakers can improve. This feedback will usually be of a general nature, concentrating on points that would be important for several speakers; it would normally be inappropriate to single out individuals publicly. It is therefore still advisable for speakers to approach adjudicators individually to ask for more personal feedback.

How the criteria in this Guide are applied

This Guide contains a mass of advice about how to debate, and therefore a mass of criteria as to how a debate is to be judged; it is important to have some sense of the relative importance of these criteria.

No automatic lasts
There is often a perception that there are certain grievous debating sins that warrant a last place, without any further thought. However, there is nothing that a team can do that will automatically lead to them being placed last in a debate. Indeed, an unfair definition, an illegitimate definitional challenge or a speech which only lasts thirty seconds or is suffused with derogatory abuse cannot immediately result in a team coming last, since another team might do something even more unfortunate. However, teams doing any of the aforementioned things make it significantly less likely that another team will do anything worse: it is likely (but not certain) that they will come last.

The relative importance of content, style and strategy
It is usual to consider content, style and strategy in the ratio 2:2:1, although separate marks for each element are not given in the Oxford Union Schools' Competition.

This ratio is not particularly helpful, however, since the effective marking range for style is much smaller than that for content and strategy. If we were to imagine separate marks being awarded for each element, most speakers' "style marks" would be within two or three points of each other. Content and strategy "marks" might vary by ten or more points. This effectively means that content and strategy are almost certainly going to be the issues that decide the result of the debate.

Many inexperienced judges are preoccupied with style, and make highly subjective decisions about the merits of a speaker, on the grounds that their tone of voice was pleasing or otherwise. This is problematic, since such matters are really based upon person intuition. I once chaired a adjudication panel, upon which two inexperienced judges wanted to argue at length about whether a speaker sounded arrogant or not: there was no correct answer, since this is really a fairly irrational matter of how a speaker is perceived by different listeners. In the Oxford Union Schools' Competition, style is really about whether or not a speaker can be readily understood: so long as a speaker expresses him or herself audibly, using appropriate vocabulary, it is likely that they will receive about the same "style mark" as almost everyone else. Style is possibly most significant at the very top end of the spectrum: the difference between a speech scoring 78 and a speech scoring 80 is often down to advanced stylistic features, such as the use of humour. It is less likely that humour would affect the mark given to a speech that was otherwise mediocre.

Content and strategy are the deciding factors in the majority of debates: most judging decisions boil down to a discussion of which team most clearly fulfilled their role and won the argument. Adjudicators must consider the debate rationally and logically, ignoring personal feelings about the issue, to decide which team made the most persuasive case. Although fewest "marks" are notionally allocated to strategy, this is perhaps the area in which there is the greatest spectrum of "marks". The best teams

are often separated only by one of two points, the difference being in how well they selected and concentrated upon the issues that were critical to the debate.

It is very difficult to explain adjudication in an abstract sense, as I have attempted to do here. Perhaps the reason why adjudication is often mysterious is that it is very much something that one learns by experience. Unfortunately, there are relatively few opportunities for school students to try judging debates, though senior pupils are sometimes allowed to judge junior debates, held within a school. This is an excellent opportunity to gain a different perspective on debating, and should improve one's performance as a debater. It is also important to talk to judges after a debate: even if they cannot disclose the result, they can highlight those aspects of one's speech that had a particular bearing (both positive and negative) upon the result.

A very approximate hierarchy of judging priorities
This "hierarchy" may give the impression that judging a debate is a very mechanical process; this would be incorrect, since adjudicators have a degree of discretion and must use their own judgment. It is hoped, however, that this will help to summarise what the judging priorities in most debates would be.

1. Did anyone speak for less than about three minutes, speak entirely inaudibly, totally ignore the motion or say anything highly offensive? Such a team does not automatically come last, but if no other team does these things, this team almost certainly will.
2. Did any team fail at least to attempt to fulfil its role on the table? This is probably the next factor that would seriously lower a team's placing.
3. Which team made the strongest and most appropriate arguments and rebuttals for their position in the debate? This is essentially about content and strategy: most good debates will be decided on this factor.
4. If everything else is really totally equal (this is very, very rare), which team was the most stylish?

This hierarchy must not be regarded as an absolute rule. For example, an experienced judge may reasonably decide that a three-minute speech that makes several strong, well-explained points is superior to a five-minute speech that is a rambling mess, with few discernable points.

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR DEBATING

Most people are not amazing debaters immediately; some will have confidence with public speaking but not the logic and argumentative skills necessary to win a debate. Others will know huge amounts of information but lack the flair with which to keep an audience's attention. Almost no debater understands the strategy of debating for some time. Experience is the first, and most important, way of improving your debating. The rest of this chapter will give you some other suggestions.

Debating Societies

If you are debating within school you will probably belong to some sort of debating club or society already. Take advantage of this by debating against as many people as possible and working with as many different debaters as you can. Different debaters will approach the same issues from different angles and the more debaters you come across the better prepared you will be. Working with different partners will let you practise your teamwork and find out what styles of debate work best with yours.

Try to organise debates in front of other members of your society. They are likely to be enthusiastic and at least vaguely friendly: this should help you become more confident with speaking in front of audiences.

Arguments

As you compete in more and more debates you will start to debate the same topics again and again. Some debaters create 'case files' where they write down the good arguments that they have made on popular topics. This is less useful as competition organisers try to choose new, interesting and topical motions rather than relying on old, tried and tested ones. However you can begin to draw links between debates: many debates can be won using the same logic but with appropriate examples and arguments to the motion itself. For example, think of what the proposition and opposition have to do to win a debate on legalising something – whilst the arguments may vary they will have to prove similar things for legalising prostitution as for legalising drugs. This approach should mean that you can get to grips with unfamiliar motions more easily.

Style

Get members of your debating society to watch you debate and to write down everything they notice about your style and nothing else. This will help you pick up on distracting pacing or hand gestures as well as ways in which you might be able to improve the way you speak (particularly on speed). If you have access to a video camera, arrange to have yourself filmed whilst debating, then fast forward through the video to watch for any repetitive movements (hand waving or shifting from foot to foot are quite common), which may distract from your speech. Once you had identified things you want to change about your style, write down the most important

and remind yourself before you are about to speak to "slow down" or "do not wave my hands".

Knowledge

A lot of people who debate do so because they are interested in what is happening in the world; that means they tend to read newspapers. If you don't already read a broadsheet or the compact edition of what used to be a broadsheet (*The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent* etc.) most days of the week then this is the easiest step to making yourself more knowledgeable about the issues that will come up in debates. A lot of debaters read *The Economist* for a weekly digest of the international news; as a result a lot of the motions at competitions tend to come from whatever *The Economist* runs as its leaders in the week or two before the competition. *Prospect* for British political current affairs, *New Scientist* for science and *Foreign Affairs* for US focused international relations are all worth the occasional read as well. A brief selection of books and websites can be found in the Additional Resources section on page 56.

If you study geography, history, politics, religious studies or economics you will find that a lot of the issues that come up in debating are things that you have studied in class. Scientists may be at a distinct advantage on medical ethics and science motions, and even if you simply like watching football there are usually motions on which you will have some specialist knowledge. Don't be afraid to borrow examples from school in debating – you might suddenly think that the geography lesson on Egyptian irrigation were actually quite useful after all! There are two words of warning though. First, spouting knowledge is rarely enough to win a debate: you must exploit your knowledge to form clearly-explained arguments. Second, just because you have studied Hitler in GCSE history does not mean that you should automatically use the Nazi regime as an example in a debate: there are almost always better examples, which means that you will look irrational and the adjudicators will become bored.

Watching debates and Adjudicating

Whilst actually debating is probably the best way to improve, watching and adjudicating are a close second best. Don't simply watch a debate passively; make notes on the first proposition speech and then work out how you would have rebutted the arguments and what you think would be needed to win the debate. Note your way through the whole debate and you will get a better idea of which arguments, in terms of the debate as a whole, were more important and which were the killer arguments that won the debate. This sort of overview will help your strategy and give you a greater understanding of the sort of things you need to do to win debates rather than individual arguments. Whilst there are probably not many opportunities to adjudicate within school debating societies you may get the chance to judge debates between younger students. Adjudicating will make you realise what makes life harder or easier for a judge and so should make you speak slowly enough and structure your speech. It will also help develop your strategy as you will be noting the debate as a whole and deciding what the winning (and losing) issues were.

Competitions

Enter as many debating competitions as you can. As you are reading this guide, you may well have entered the Oxford Union Schools' Debating Competition. This competition includes a regional workshop that will teach you many of the things in this guide and a variety of exercises you can use to improve your debating skills. Competitions run by the English-Speaking Union, the Cambridge Union Society, the Durham Union Society and many others give you other opportunities to debate. There is a resources section at the end of this guide with details on how you can find out more about debating competitions.

Feedback

Always ask for feedback from the adjudicators after a debate. Occasionally the adjudicator will not say anything useful, but understanding the reasons for the result will help you improve. Adjudicators at the Oxford Union Schools' Debating Competition will always be willing to give you feedback, as will most adjudicators at most competitions. Try not to argue with adjudicators, even if you think they made the wrong decision; after all they cannot change the result. At the end of the day, unless you win debates by enough 'clear blue water' that even a monkey would give you a win, there is probably room for you to improve.

STANDING ORDERS

The Standing Orders are the formal rules for debates in the Oxford Union Schools' Competition, and must be observed by speakers and anyone watching a debate.

1. The Chairperson shall decide any question regarding these Standing Orders.

2. When the Chairperson rises to address the House or calls "Order!" all other members of the House shall immediately fall silent.

3. The Chairperson should be addressed as "Mr/Madam Chair", unless he or she advises otherwise.

4. No amendment may be moved to the motion.

5. The Chairperson shall introduce all speakers at the start of the debate and each speaker before he or she begins to speak.

6. The speakers shall be called upon in the following order: first proposition, first opposition, second proposition, second opposition, third proposition, third opposition, fourth proposition, fourth opposition.

7. All speeches shall be of five minutes in length, except in the Semi-Finals and the Grand Final of Finals' Day, when speeches shall be of seven minutes in length, unless the Organisers decide otherwise. Any speaker who fails to draw their remarks to a close within thirty seconds of the end of their allotted time should be required to finish immediately by the Chairperson.

8. A point of information may be offered during a speech by standing and saying "point of information" or "on that point" only. Points of information may only be made by members of the side opposing the speaker and may not be made during the first and last minutes of any speech.

9. A speaker has the absolute right to accept or reject any points of information. Until a point is accepted, the speaker offering a point may say nothing more than "point of information" or "on that point". If a point is declined, the speaker offering it must resume his or her seat immediately without comment.

10. A single audible signal shall be given after one minute of each speech, indicating that points of information may be offered. The same signal shall be given one minute before the end of each speech, indicating that points of information may no longer be offered. A double audible signal shall be given when the time allotted to the speaker has elapsed.

11. The motion shall be released to all speakers fifteen minutes before the beginning of the debate.

12. Speakers may consult any printed materials that they wish in preparing for the debate, but must not consult any electronic materials (including but not limited to

a laptop computer, mobile phone or personal organiser) or any person other than their debating partner.

13. No speaker shall use any props or visual aids.

14. The audience must not do anything likely to distract the speakers. Members of the audience are not permitted to offer points of information.

15. Photography, video recording and sound recording are prohibited, unless the permission of all those to be photographed or recorded has been obtained in advance by the person wishing to take photographs or make a recording. Members of the House aged less than sixteen years cannot themselves consent to be photographed or recorded: no such person may be photographed or recorded unless the consent of their parent or legal guardian has been obtained.

16. All Members of the House must ensure that mobile phones, stopwatches and other apparatus do not make audible signals that might disrupt the debate.

17. Food, drink and smoking are prohibited from the Chamber of the Oxford Union at all time. Food and drink may be permitted, at the discretion of the organisers and the host of the debate, in other rooms in which a debate is taking place; smoking is not permitted in any room in which a debate is taking place.

18. All Members of the House must conduct themselves in a decent and courteous manner throughout the debate. In particular, no speaker shall be harassed by any Member of the House.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books

Pros and Cons: A Debater's Handbook, Trevor Sather (ed.) (18th Edition, 1999) – Contains arguments for and against a large number of issues as well as a basic guide to debating. Despite the authors' boasts about winning their first competition using only an earlier edition of this book, it should be viewed as a starting point ideal for beginners rather than an exhaustive list of all the possible arguments. Good debaters should be able to come up with the arguments in 'Pros and Cons' simply by brainstorming. The statistics quoted are problematic, since there is rarely any indication of their provenance.

The Oxford Union Guide to Successful Public Speaking, Dominic Hughes & Benedict Phillips (2000) – Whilst written about public speaking rather than debating per se, it does have a whole host of useful information and tips on how to make a debating speech more stylish (and thus more likely to persuade a judge and audience). Everything from eye contact to modulation to structuring a speech is covered.

Bad Thoughts: A Guide to Clear Thinking, Jamie Whyte (2003) – Although not specifically designed for debaters, this highly readable and entertaining book discusses the use and misuse of logic: much of it is relevant when considering debating technique.

More Damned Lies and Statistics: How Numbers Confuse Public Issues, Joel Best (2005) – Joel Best's second book on statistics and their misuse (his first is 'Damned Lies and Statistics: Untangling Numbers from the Media, Politicians and Activists') provides a series of pithy examples of where statistics have been used to support public policy decisions without them being truly applicable. A useful guide for debaters who get flummoxed by opponents throwing numbers at them and want to know how to show that numbers aren't everything.

Critical Reasoning: A Practical Introduction, Anne Thomson (2001) – The AS Critical Thinking textbook that helped one of the authors on his way up the debating ladder. An excellent primer for how to formulate arguments, understand logic and use evidence. While focused on written material like reviews, op-ed pieces and articles rather than debates, the skills it teaches are definitely applicable.

Websites

www.oxfordschools.org.uk
The Oxford Union Schools Debating Competition website contains details of the competition and hosts a range of debating materials and resources as well as useful contact details.

www.britishdebate.com
The website for British debating, run by the English Speaking Union, contains the only national tournament calendar as well as more guides and resources for debaters.

www.esu.org
The English-Speaking Union (ESU) which runs the International Schools' Mace Debating Competition, the London Debate Challenge, the annual Debate Academy and the England Schools' Debating Team.

www.icyd.com
The website for the International Competition for Young Debaters (formerly the National Competition for Young Debaters, formerly the Oxford Junior Schools' Competition).

www.njdc.org.uk
The website for the new Northern Junior Debating Championships which is run with support from the Oxford Union and the Durham Union.

www.idebate.org
The International Debating Education Association (IDEA), which runs its own camps and workshops primarily aimed at English as a Second Language (ESL) debaters.

www.debatabase.org
Run by IDEA, this website contains arguments for and against literally hundreds of issues. Whilst using this alone will not make you win the competition, it is a useful resource and contains more cases and is more up-to-date than 'Pros and Cons'. One must still be sensitive to the date at which any particular topic was written.

www.schoolsdebate.com
The World Schools Debating Competition (WSDC) website. Many former winners of this competition have represented their country at the World Championships, as have many of the Oxford Union debaters who judge and lead workshops for this competition.

www.oxford-union.org
The Oxford Union Society, which runs the Oxford Union Schools' Debating Competition, as well as many events for Oxford students.