

SPOKEN WORD FESTIVAL DEBATING GUIDE



Acknowledgements: The Ontario Student Debating Union

The following material is adapted from the OSDU guide for debating in the province. The entire guide addresses both cross examination and parliamentary styles of debate. We reproduce a simplified version of the ODSU material on debate in general, and on *cross examination debate*, which is the chosen style for the 1999 festival. Details of the debate protocol have been changed to be in keeping with younger students and with the particular objectives of the Spoken Word Festival.



GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO DEBATE

A debate is a structured argument between two teams of speakers and teaches principles of argument (research, speaking and refutation) in an atmosphere of good sportsmanship.

The Basic Elements

- Topic** Should be controversial and worded as an affirmative statement (of fact, value or policy).
- Teams** Two or three-person teams called the Affirmative, Pro, or Government, and the Negative, Con, or Opposition.
- Tools** Facts, charts, pictures, logic, humour, homilies, emotional appeals, dramatic delivery. Words, words, words.
- Debaters** Collect information on the topic; then meet to discuss what each member has found and to divide points and responsibilities according to “issues” that are likely to drive the debate (e.g. in a debate about the death penalty, an *issue* will certainly be the cost of putting killers in prison for life). Debaters arrange points in order and on index cards, assembling sufficient proof for each point (better three points with proof than ten without). They should refrain from memorizing arguments, but rehearsing them enough to be comfortable. They should imagine they are the opposition and consider the reply to their own arguments. They should make eye contact with their audience, pause between

points, and address fellow debaters by title (the Prime Minister, the second opposition).

Objective The affirmative must prove the resolution. The negative refutes it.

Styles of Debate Two styles of debate are popular in Ontario: Parliamentary Style, and Cross Examination style.

In Parliamentary style, every student gives a constructive speech. Speeches include a refutation of the preceding speech. The first affirmative debater has a final rebuttal to reply to the remarks made by the final negative debater. Debaters also assume Parliamentary roles (e.g. Prime Minister)

In Cross Examination style, speeches alternate as before. There is an additional period after each speech in which debaters become *witnesses* to be cross-examined by an opponent.

Speaker, Moderator, or Chair Announces the topic, introduces the debaters, judges and timekeeper; advises the audience of the rules; asks judges to consider and (when desired) announce their decision; maintains order at all times; congratulates the debaters and thanks the judges.

Timekeeper Advises debaters (with cards or hand signals) how much speaking time remains; signals judges (usually by standing up) when a debater's speaking period has expired.

Address The Chair or Speaker and any other member of the audience may be addressed either directly or generally. It is common to refer to the audience as "Ladies and gentlemen". Debaters refer to each other by title (e.g. "The first opposition says..."), or as "my colleague."



CROSS EXAMINATION DEBATE

An Introduction

The cross-examination style mimics the courtroom where lawyers question witness in order to establish their case. While the courtroom seeks the truth, the lawyer wants to hear witnesses confirm ideas and details that make the case - prosecution or defense. After each speech (in which debaters deliver the basic content of their arguments) debaters are examined by their opponents. In this way, the clash between the two teams is emphasized, and students are rewarded for being thoroughly prepared and able to think and speak on their feet.

The *examiner's* questions are designed to do any of the following:

1. Secure admissions of fact;
2. Lay the groundwork for an argument yet to be made;
3. Determine whether the *witness* has adequate evidence;
4. Reveal lack of preparation;
5. Demonstrate that a proposed plan is either not doable or desirable;
6. Reveal lack of logic;
7. Reveal the cost of the plan.

The purpose of asking questions is to obtain admissions. Those admissions are wasted unless good use of them is made: either within the cross examination period itself (questions building on questions) or in a later speech.

Cross examination debate emphasizes being able to think and speak in the moment. Debaters must answer questions immediately without destroying their own case or aiding the opponent's. They must conceal damaging admissions behind a facade of indifference, and be able to pull the right facts together to answer an unexpected query. The cross examination portion of the debate forces a debater to respond to his opponents' argument, pins him down to particular views, and exposes his own argument to a fairly searching analysis.

The procedures that prevail at a cross examination debate are much the same as those present in a parliamentary house, with a chairman moderating, and introducing each debater at the beginning of his remarks (but not introducing the debater conducting the cross examination; that follows directly on the conclusion of a constructive speech without interruption).



Speaking Times

Each debater's speaking time is divided into 3 parts:

1. **Constructive Speech:** During this time the debater delivers his argument and supporting information.
2. **Examination period:** (immediately following the constructive remarks), during which the debater (as a witness) is questioned by an opponent examiner on the content of the speech or on any general aspect of the topic.
3. **Question Period:** During this time the debater is an examiner and questions an opponent witness.

Rebuttal and Summary (2 minutes at the conclusion of the debate). Only the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition receive this time. These leaders outline the admissions that were gained during question period, refute opponents' arguments, and summarize the key points of the team's presentation.

The following order and times will be used in the 1999 Spoken Word debates:

- 3 minutes 1st Affirmative constructive speech
- 2 minutes 1st Affirmative examined by 1st negative debater
- 3 minutes 1st Negative constructive speech
- 2 minutes 1st Negative examined by the 2nd affirmative debater
- 3 minutes 2nd Affirmative constructive speech
- 2 minutes 2nd Affirmative examined by the 2nd negative debater
- 3 minutes 2nd Negative constructive speech
- 2 minutes 2nd Negative examined by the 1st affirmative debater
- 2 minutes 1st Negative rebuttal
- 2 minutes 1st Affirmative rebuttal

This means 24 minutes speaking time. The speaker also gives a minute between each constructive speech and examination for the teams to confer. Total time for the debate then rises to just over a half hour when the speaker's introductions are taken into account.

Resolutions

Resolution for Debate, 1999 Spoken Word Festival

Is the pen mightier than the screen?

In a Cross-ex debate the topic is usually worded as a question. A parliamentary resolution might read: "Be it resolved that capital punishment for murder be reinstated in Canada." The corresponding cross-ex question might read: "Should capital punishment be the penalty for murder?" Although a cross-ex debate is usually on a resolution of value, it may occasionally be on a resolution of fact or policy as well. Here are some examples:

1. **Fact:** "Did the Vikings discover North America?"
2. **Policy:** "Should the Censorship Board take immediate steps to further censor scenes of violence in the entertainment media?" Resolutions of policy create a debate about the advisability of a particular course of action. Policy resolutions require a clear plan of implementation.
3. **Value:** "Is a policy of nuclear deterrence more effective than a policy of nuclear disarmament?" Resolutions of value create a debate on a matter of opinion. Evidence is still brought to bear, but the question can never be objectively resolved.

Special Nature of Cross Examination Debate

The same need for a clear, well-delivered speech exists in Cross-ex as in parliamentary debate, but in Cross-ex there is the peculiar need to make use of the admissions you get during the question period, and there is, of course, the need to be a skilful examiner and witness. Other features of Cross-ex are:

- ☺ the obligation to summarize and rebut in the final three minutes
- ☺ the cross examination itself is both rebuttal and new argument
- ☺ the first debater for each team must outline the team's interpretation of the resolution and identify those portions of the resolution on which argument will be made.
- ☺ the first negative challenges definitions that are unsatisfactory
- ☺ the second affirmative debater responds to the important contentions of the negative
- ☺ the burden of the affirmative rebuttal falls principally on the second speaker in his main address
- ☺ the final speech for each team must be saved principally for summarizing the debate

The purpose of asking questions

- ☺ to obtain admissions
- ☺ to put these admissions to work
- ☺ by following up with further questions during the examination period
- ☺ by recalling admissions during constructive or rebuttal speeches

It does little good to obtain admissions which are then lost or forgotten. If the opposition conceded one of your vital points in response to questioning, that should be followed up in the next constructive speech. Failure to do so is bad technique. Judges may not appreciate the significance of your earlier line of questioning unless you tie it into your speech this way, and you may allow your opponents to retreat from, or explain away a valuable admission that you have not "nailed down" in this way.

Strategy of Cross Examination

Witnesses rarely confess to murder in court, and even more rarely in cross examination debate. Your purpose as an examiner is more modest. You want to paint your opponent into a corner, so that the judges realize you are right because of the questions asked and responses given.

This simple goal governs the entire strategy for witnesses and examiner. The successful witness will never be defensive or surly: that tells the judge that the examiner is asking damaging questions and makes the judge sit up and take notice. Similarly, examiners are not frustrated when a witness denies questions which must obviously be answered "yes." The judge knows the correct answer to the question, and he is the only one you are seeking to convince.

A. Preparation

In Cross-examination, your opponent has the opportunity to demonstrate to the audience that you have not prepared for the debate. Sloppy preparation may be concealed in other styles of debate; it will not avoid detection here. You must prepare the case factually so that when you are asked factual questions you can respond, and so you may ask (and if necessary, contradict) your opponent. You must prepare the issues so that your team is in agreement before the debate on what the essential issues are, and what the team's position on each is to be. In a debate on unemployment, you should decide in advance - not while under questioning - what an appropriate level of unemployment is, and how much you are prepared to spend to prevent it from increasing beyond that level.

You must also prepare your lines of questioning and the nature of answers you will give in advance. This may frequently grow out of your team's advance discussion of the issues in

the debate. It is difficult to frame good cross examination questions under any circumstances - and almost impossible to do it on the spur of the moment. It is similarly difficult to respond to good questions without conceding your case - especially on the spur of the moment. The exact wording and sequence of questions need not always be set in advance, but the general nature should be.

B. Questions

The first rule of questioning is: *Ask little questions in a series*. There are important reason for this:

- ☺ your purpose is to convince the audience; if you jump around you may lose them
- ☺ by asking questions in a series you allow judges to identify your ability to think logically
- ☺ by focussing on three or four important lines of questioning, you signal to the judge that you can distinguish between important and trivial matters
- ☺ you break each series of questions into individual questions, each one trying to make a single point

Rules of Thumb for Questioning

- ☺ have between three and ten questions in a given line of questioning
- ☺ spend about a minute on each line of questioning you pursue
- ☺ listen carefully to your opponent's speech, decide what admissions you wish to obtain, and determine which lines of questioning to rely on
- ☺ cover the most important areas of your examination first
- ☺ end on a strong note - create at least the impression of success
- ☺ stop early rather than starting a line of questioning you will not be able to finish
- ☺ control the examination without being rude (judges will sympathize with the witness)
- ☺ only interrupt an answer when it is clearly irrelevant
- ☺ move from general to specific questions
- ☺ move from neutral to loaded questions

Be direct - ask focussed, leading questions, not vague open-ended questions. Do not ask, "What do you think..." or "How do you explain..." Such questions do not show the judge where you are going and invite an answer approaching book length in which your opponent uses up your time. Instead ask, "You think-----, don't you?" This normally forces a "yes" or "no" answer. Good questions are short and contain a statement that you put to the witness. So, in a debate on "free" university tuition, one does **not** ask "What proportion of a student's income is spent on tuition?" Instead, say, "The average student spends about 25% of his income on tuition, doesn't he?"

When you have the answer you want, or when the witness begins to go onto another topic, or ask questions, bring him back to the subject tactfully by saying such things as: "Thank you witness; all I asked was..." or, "I think that answers the question," or, "I'll ask the questions now thank you."

Being a Witness

Your objective as witness is the same as your objective as examiner: to create a favourable impression with the audience. To do that, you should:

- ☺ appear cooperative and helpful
- ☺ avoid becoming defensive
- ☺ answer promptly
- ☺ never answer a question with a question (it reveals poor knowledge of the rules)
- ☺ be well prepared
- ☺ cue cards with the necessary information readily at hand may prove invaluable

Terms of Address:

- ☺ The teams are called the "affirmative" and the "negative".
- ☺ The audience is addressed as "ladies and gentlemen".
- ☺ The moderator is known as the "chairperson" or the "moderator".
- ☺ the opponent should be referred to in the third person. ("He told you that ..." or, "the witness said ..." or, "my friend thinks ...")
- ☺ Never use a negative or defamatory reference.

Major Rules:

1. Definitions (and plans or counterplans if dealing with a resolution or policy) must be introduced in the first speech by each side.
2. The witness must give direct, honest answers to questions. The witness should not ask questions except to clarify a query. The witness may refer to source materials and notes, but may not confer with or receive any assistance from a colleague.
3. The examiner may not make statements unless they are very brief and expressed as part of a question. The examiner should never argue with a witness.
4. The examiner may not insist on a "yes" or "no" answer but must allow the witness

time for a reasonable answer of several sentences. The examiner may, however, cut off an unreasonably long answer.

5. There must be no browbeating or attempts to belittle an opponent. Debaters must treat each other with courtesy.
6. Each side has an opportunity to point out briefly any infraction of the rules of debate by the other side at the end of the debate.

The Purposes of Questioning

To demonstrate an opponent's lack of logic.

To demonstrate a contradiction in the opposing side's case.

To illustrate a lack of evidence to support the contention made by an opponent.

To reveal a lack of information and preparation on the part of an opponent.

To expose a basic weakness in the opposition's position.

To introduce information you may wish to use later in the debate.

To demonstrate to the judges your grasp of the question being debated.

How To Handle Questioning - The Examiner

1. Do your research well. Be organized.
2. Determine the three to five areas (ISSUES) which are the weakest in the opposing side's case. Plan a series of questions to expose each weakness.
3. Each series should contain three to ten questions.
4. Move from the general to the specific, the neutral to the hostile.
5. Avoid negative questions and questions to which you do not know the answers.
6. Having developed several series of questions, use those which evolve from lines of reasoning which **have actually been presented** in the debate.

7. Phrase your questions carefully. They should contain one point only and should be significant. Short questions are best.
8. Be polite, but firm. Allow the witness to answer, but not to make a speech. Be fair; being rude or pushy only tells the judges you are losing control.
9. If a witness does not give an answer you want, rephrase your question once and try again. If the witness is still uncooperative, move to your next series of questions. Don't argue with the witness.
10. If a particular question is really critical to your case, frame it as a "leading question", that is, make a short statement giving the answer you want, and then ask the witness to agree.
11. Use the information you have gained in your rebuttal speech.

How To Handle Questioning - The Witness

1. Do your research well - be prepared. Have adequate evidence to support your major contentions.
2. Be sure to understand the question. If the question is vague or contains more than one part, ask the examiner to be more specific.
3. Be aware of where the series of questions is leading. Present evidence to support your contention rather than trying to avoid the issue.
4. Phrase your answers carefully. Give one clear, specific answer to each question. Give only the information asked for.
5. Avoid stalling, irrelevant answers, flippancy and answering a question with a question. Be neither rude nor unnecessarily evasive.
6. Be polite and co-operative, not defensive. If you are well-prepared the question period may be to your advantage. Relax! Getting upset only tells the judges that the examiner is scoring points on you.
7. If you are going to qualify your answer, state the qualification first so that you cannot be cut short before making it.
8. Use your rebuttal speech to contest your opponent's contentions and to rebuild your arguments which have been heavily attacked during questioning.