**How to Judge Parliamentary Debate**

This is the quick-and-dirty guide to judging parliamentary debate if you've never done it before. It's not as hard as it sounds. This guide has everything you absolutely must know to be a respectable judge.

**The basics**

You should hang out in the General Assembly between debate rounds. Fifteen minutes before a round, the Judging Director will do a roll call to find out which judges are present. A few minutes later, someone will read a list of debate pairings. For each pairing, there will be two teams, a judge, and a room. If your name is called, pick up a debate ballot and go to the room you've been assigned.

If, for some reason, you cannot judge the round (because you’ve already judged one of the teams before, or because one of the teams is from your school), you should inform a tournament representative *immediately*.

When you get to your room, two debate teams (a total of four people) will show up. One of the teams will be called "the Government." That means they will be arguing in favor of a proposition. The other team will be called "the Opposition." Their job is to argue against the Government. You are called "the Speaker of the House." The Government team will leave the room for 10 minutes to prepare their arguments. DO NOT ALLOW THEM MORE THAN TEN MINUTES. Then they'll come back, and the round will begin.

**The format of the round**

The debate will consist of 6 speeches. The first four speeches are called "constructives." The last two are "rebuttals."  The order is as follows:

1. Prime Minister (PM) Constructive -- 7 minutes

2. Leader of the Opposition (LO) Constructive -- 8 minutes

3. Member of the Government (MG) Constructive -- 8 minutes

4. Member of the Opposition (MO) Constructive -- 8 minutes

5. Leader of the Opposition Rebuttal -- 4 minutes

6. Prime Minister Rebuttal -- 5 minutes

Note that the Prime Minister (PM), the first speaker for the Government, both starts and finishes the debate, while the Opposition gets two speeches in a row (speeches 4 and 5).

NO NEW ARGUMENTS OR RESPONSES MAY BE PRESENTED IN REBUTTALS, although new examples and extensions are okay.  There is only one exception to this rule:  Since the Member of the Opposition (MO) may present new arguments in his speech, the Government team’s only chance to respond to those arguments is in the Prime Minister Rebuttal. You should allow the PM to make new responses to new arguments raised by the MO, but otherwise he is prohibited from making new arguments and responses.

**The topic of the debate**

Each round, the Government team will have a choice of two resolutions, which will be given to them before the round. The first will be a "straight" resolution. That means the Government team must defend the statement as a whole, with a minimum of interpretation. The second will be a "linkable" resolution -- usually a quotation, proverb, or something similar. The Government team has broad discretion to interpret a linkable resolution almost any way it wants. For instance, they might use the resolution "Thou shalt not kill" to argue the case in favor of gun control. If a team uses the linkable resolution, do not punish them for the weakness of their link to the resolution.

The Government team must present a debatable case -- in other words, there must be some reasonable ground for the Opposition to stand on. There are three ways in which a case might fail to be debatable:

(1) It is a "truism" -- meaning a case that no honest, thinking person would oppose. For example, "Child abuse should be illegal" and "Racism is bad" would be considered truisms.

(2) It is a "tautology" -- meaning that it is logically true, given the framework supplied by the Government. For example, "Bill Clinton is the best Democratic president since 1981" is a tautology, since he is the *only* Democratic President we’ve had since 1981.

(3) It requires the Opposition to possess "specific knowledge" that the intelligent layman could not be expected to have. For example, "The Air Force should decommission the V-22 Osprey helicopter because of its low flight-thrust ratio" requires specific knowledge. Competitors are expected to have a working knowledge of current events, history, the social sciences, and so forth, but extensive knowledge is not required.

If the Opposition thinks the Government has presented a truism, tautology, or specific knowledge case, the Leader of the Opposition (LO) should say so in his speech and explain his reasons for thinking so. The LO may then alter the Government's case in some way to make it debatable. If the Government team refuses to accept the Opposition's alteration of the case, you'll have to decide the round on the basis of whether the case was acceptable. If you agree with the Opposition that the case was a truism, tautology, or specific knowledge case, the Government should lose the round.

So long as the Government's case doesn't fall into one of these three categories, it is okay. Be forewarned: the Government may run some very unusual cases. Sometimes they will run a simple policy case ("The death penalty should be abolished"); sometimes they will run something funny ("Batman is a better superhero than Spiderman"); and sometimes they will run what is called a "time-space" case ("The year is 1861, and you are President Lincoln; do not make war on the South"). All of these are acceptable kinds of case. If the Government runs a time-space case, neither side may use argumentation that relies on knowledge that people at the specified time and place could not have had (i.e., a debater couldn’t use the example of the Vietnam War to demonstrate that Lincoln’s war on the South will end in disaster).

**What to do during the round**

(1) Listen to the arguments of each side carefully, and try not to let your own biases about the topic under discussion influence you. It’s a good idea to take notes, to keep track of what each debater has said.

(2) As the Speaker of the House, it's also your job to introduce each debater before his speech. Before each speech, say something like, "I thank the last debater for his comments, and I welcome the next debater to address the house."

(3) You may also have to rule on certain points raised by the debaters during the course of the round:

(A) Point of Information: A debater may rise during another debater's speech to ask the debater who is speaking a question. The debater who is speaking does NOT have to respond to any point of information, although it is good form to respond to one or two. NO POINTS OF INFORMATION MAY BE RAISED IN THE FIRST OR LAST MINUTE OF A SPEECH. NO POINTS OF INFORMATION MAY BE RAISED DURING REBUTTALS. If a debater's points of information (or responses to them) are particularly good or bad, you may adjust their speaker points as you see fit.

(B) Point of Order: A debater may rise on a point of order if she believes a rule of debate is being broken. For example: "The speaker is 30 seconds over his time limit and shows no signs of stopping." Or, "The speaker is presenting a new argument in rebuttals." THERE IS NO ARGUMENT ON A POINT OF ORDER! The debate stops while YOU decide what to do. If you agree that a rule is being broken, say "Point well taken," and the offending debater should cease the unacceptable behavior. If you do not agree, say "Point not well taken," and the debater who is speaking may continue. If you're not sure, say "Point under consideration." Then the debate continues.

(C) Point of Personal Privilege: A debater wishes to ask a favor. For example, "May I leave to use the restroom?" You may grant or deny the request, at your own discretion. A debater may also rise on a point of order if the debater who is speaking is engaging in direct personal attacks, such as "The Member of the Opposition is clearly a heartless Nazi." Again, the decision is up to you; if you agree with the debater who rose on the point of personal privilege, say "Point well taken," and otherwise say "Point not well taken."

**What to do after the round**

(1) Decide which team has done the better job of debating. "Better" is, of course, subjective, but you should consider quality of argumentation, rhetorical skill, and wit. Again, try not to allow your own biases to taint your decision. DO NOT BASE YOUR DECISION ON ARGUMENTS THAT WERE NOT PRESENTED IN THE ROUND. DO NOT BASE YOUR DECISION ON ANY NEW ARGUMENTS BROUGHT UP DURING THE REBUTTALS. After the round, decide which side -- Government or Opposition -- won the round, and write that on the decision line of your ballot.

(2)  Then assign 1 to 30 speaker points to each debater based on how well they spoke in the round. Here are some guidelines for giving speaker points:

1 -15 points Don't give anyone points this low.

16 - 20 points The speech was downright offensive.

21 - 22 points The speech was really, really bad.

22 - 23 points The speech was bad.

24 points The speech was decent.

24 - 25 points The speech was good. THIS IS THE AVERAGE SCORE.

26 points The speech was very good.

27 points The speech was truly excellent.

28 points The speech was outstanding, in the top 2 or 3% of the tournament.

29 points The speech changed your life forever.

30 points Don’t give anyone this score.

You will be asked to justify speaker points of 28 or 29. A score of 29 will almost certainly be adjusted down.

(3) Add up each team's points, and MAKE SURE THE TEAM THAT WON THE ROUND HAS THE HIGHER POINT TOTAL. In a very close round, you can tie the two team’s total points.

(4) Then give the debaters ranks corresponding to their points (the debater with the highest points is 1, next highest is 2, etc.). MAKE SURE THE TEAM THAT WON THE ROUND HAS THE LOWER RANK TOTAL. For example, a winning team might have the 1st and 3rd best debaters, for a total of 4 ranks, while the losing team has the 2nd and 4th debaters, for a total of 6 ranks. You can also tie the teams for total ranks, if one team had the 2nd and 3rd best debaters while the other team had the 1st and 4th best debaters.

(5) Once you have done (1) through (4), return immediately to the General Assembly and give the top sheet of your ballot to a tournament representative. You may then write any comments you have on the bottom sheets. You should be sure to write down a brief reason for your decision on the ballot (for example, "The Government's argument about equality of opportunity was not refuted by the Opposition"). Further comments are optional. DO NOT TELL THE DEBATERS THE OUTCOME OF THE ROUND.

If you have questions about anything in this packet, or anything else related to judging, just ask the Judging Director or any other tournament personnel.