

A Guide to Parliamentary Debate: the Rules of Parliamentary Debate

Section Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [Order and Timing of Speeches](#)
- [New Arguments](#)
- [Points of Information](#)
- [Points of Order](#)
- [Points of Personal Privilege](#)
- [Cases and Resolutions](#)
- [Tight Cases and Tautologies](#)
- [Specific Knowledge Cases](#)
- [Time/Space Cases](#)
- [Cases and Casing](#)
- [Counter-Cases](#)

Introduction

A debate round has two teams with two debaters each and a Speaker. The Speaker serves as both the judge and arbiter of the rules during the round. Note here that "Speaker" always refers to the judge from this point forward. One team represents the Government, while the other represents the Opposition. The Government team is composed of a Prime Minister, who speaks twice, and a Member of Government, who speaks once. The Opposition team is composed of a Leader of the Opposition, who speaks twice, and a Member of the Opposition, who speaks once. The Government proposes a specific case statement, which the government team must demonstrate to be correct. The Opposition does not have to propose anything, but must demonstrate that the case statement is not correct. The Speaker decides at the end of the round, based on the arguments made in the round, whether the Government has proved its case or whether the Opposition has disproved it. The team which met its burden more convincingly wins.

Order and Timing of Speeches

- Prime Minister Constructive (PMC): 7 minutes**
- Leader of the Opposition Constructive (LOC): 8 minutes**
- Member of the Government Constructive (MG or MGC): 8 minutes**
- Member of the Opposition Constructive (MO or MOC): 8 minutes**
- Leader of Opposition Rebuttal (LOR): 4 minutes**
- Prime Minister Rebuttal (PMR): 5 minutes**

- Note: Each speech has a thirty second grace period.

New Arguments

New arguments can be made at any time during the first four speeches. These speeches are called constructives. New arguments cannot be made during rebuttals, the last two speeches of the round. The Prime Minister can, however, respond to new opposition arguments that were made during the MO. So the PMR may contain new responses, but not new arguments.

Points of Information

During the PMC, LOC, MG, MO debaters may rise to ask the debater who is speaking a question or insert a short statement. The procedure for this is as follows:

1. The debater who wishes to ask a Point of Information (POI) rises from his or her seat, places one hand on top of his or her head and extends his or her other arm to signal that he or she has a point.
2. The debater who is speaking may choose to recognize the point or not. If the debater does not want to recognize the point, he or she simply says "No thank you," or waves the questioner off. The questioner then sits down. A debater may not simply interrupt if his or her point is not taken.

3. If the debater who is speaking recognizes the point, then he or she says "On that point" and allows the questioner to give their point. At any time, the debater whose speech it is may stop the POI and tell the questioner to sit down.

▫ The debater who is speaking does not have to recognize or refuse the point immediately. She/he can leave the questioner standing until it is convenient for the debater who is speaking to indicate whether the point will be entertained. Some debaters ask a special form of POI called a point of clarification. Clarification means that a debater does not understand the case or a particular argument. If possible, the speaker should try to answer the clarification to ensure a confusion-free debate round. Do not abuse the idea of clarification by asking too many clarification questions or disguising arguments as clarification.

Points of Order

▫ A point of order is raised when a competitor believes that one of the rules of debate is being broken. There are two circumstances during a debate round under which a debater should raise a point of order. The first is when the debater who is speaking has exceeded her/his grace period. The second is when a debater introduces a new argument during one of the two rebuttal speeches. The procedure for either point is as follows:

1. The debater rises from his or her seat and says "Point of Order."
2. The debater who is speaking stops their speech.
3. The debater who rose on the point indicates what rules violation they are raising the point on by saying "the speaker is overtime" or "the speaker just made the new argument _____ which is new in rebuttal."
4. The speaker of the round, who has been judging the debate, will rule the point "Well Taken" or "Not Well Taken." A well taken point means that the speaker must conclude their speech if they are over time or that the new point will not be considered as it was offered during a rebuttal. A not well taken point means that the speaker disagrees with the point and will allow the debater to go on speaking or will consider the argument as not being new. The speaker, not the debater who is speaking, may also rule the point "under consideration," which means that the speaker will determine whether the point is true at a later time. "Under consideration" only applies to new arguments in rebuttal, not to time limits.

▫ Although debaters may break other rules, for example, the Government may run a specific knowledge case, debaters do not need to bring up these violations on points of order. These violations should be mentioned during a regular speech. A debater may not argue about a point of order. Once a debater has stated a point, all debaters must remain quiet while the speaker rules on the point.

Points of Personal Privilege

▫ These are almost never used. Do not rise on a point of personal privilege unless you have been deeply insulted on a personal level by an intentional attack on your person. The procedure for a point of personal privilege is:

1. Rise and say, "Point of personal privilege."
2. The speaker will say "Point well taken" or "Point not well taken."
3. The debate continues, while the speaker notes down any serious offences.

▫ Points of Personal Privilege may also be used for a personal emergency.

▫ *Note:* Speakers will take into consideration extremely rude behavior without any debater raising a point, so there is no need to do so.