

An Introduction to Academic Debate

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Introduction

Basic Academic debate (that is, without the options of heckling or Worlds Style Points of Information), which proceeds without interruption from Parliamentary opponents or from cross-examination, is the purest form of debate. When all else is stripped away, Academic debate remains. It is suitable for novice debaters, who might be intimidated by the prospect of Parliamentary interruptions or cross-examination. But it comes alive in the hands of an experienced debater, who, free from interruption, makes effective use of his time to bring his remarks to a powerful and moving conclusion. It is particularly important that debaters make a conscious effort to reply to opponents' arguments, because the absence of Parliamentary interruptions or cross-examination questioning makes it easier for the debate to become merely a series of unrelated public speeches.

How it differs from other styles

Basic Academic debate consists of a series of alternating speeches in favour of, and against, a resolution. It differs from other debate styles in that there are no embellishments, merely speeches: unlike Parliamentary debate, there are no Parliamentary interruptions (Points of Order or Privilege), and (unless specifically permitted) no heckling; unlike Cross-examination debate, there is no opportunity to question opponents or be questioned by them (unless Worlds Style Points of Information are permitted). Because there is no opportunity for Parliamentary interruptions, debaters are given a chance at the end of the debate to identify rules violated by their opponents, etc.

Procedure in a basic Academic debate is much the same as in a Cross-examination or Parliamentary debate. A chairman moderates the debate, introduces each debater at the beginning of his or her remarks, and thanks the debater at the conclusion of his or her remarks. Speaking times will normally be similar to those used in other styles of debate, with all debaters receiving an equal amount of speaking time (except for the complaints session at the end).

In Canada, Academic high school debates follow one of two rebuttal models, the Oxford format or the Cambridge format (and the types of debate are often called Oxford debate and Cambridge debate as a result). The association with the two universities may not be exactly correct but the terms are now well established. In basic Oxford debate, each debater speaks only once, with the exception of the first affirmative debater. In that single address, each debater is expected to incorporate both constructive and rebuttal remarks. The first affirmative debater, however, cannot incorporate his rebuttal in his original address (as no negative debater has then spoken) and so is given a final rebuttal period. In a Cambridge debate, each debater speaks twice, once to deliver his constructive remarks and later to make a rebuttal speech.

(Those familiar with other styles of debate will note that Parliamentary debate usually uses an Oxford rebuttal while Cross-examination debate normally employs the Cambridge rebuttal format.)

A typical **Oxford format** Academic debate proceeds as follows:

| | (sample maximum speaking times) |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1st Affirmative (constructive speech) | 5 minutes |
| 1st Negative (constructive and rebuttal speech) | 8 minutes |
| 2nd Affirmative (constructive and rebuttal speech) | 8 minutes |
| 2nd Negative (constructive and rebuttal speech) | 8 minutes |
| 3rd Affirmative (constructive and rebuttal speech) | 8 minutes |
| 3rd Negative (constructive and rebuttal speech) | 8 minutes |
| 1st Affirmative (rebuttal speech) | 3 minutes |
| Complaints of rule violations, misquotations, etc. by either team. | |

A typical **Cambridge format** Academic debate proceeds as follows:

| | (sample maximum speaking times) |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1st Affirmative (constructive speech) | 5 minutes |
| 1st Negative (constructive speech) | 5 minutes |
| 2nd Affirmative (constructive speech) | 5 minutes |
| 2nd Negative (constructive speech) | 5 minutes |
| 3rd Affirmative (constructive speech) | 5 minutes |
| 3rd Negative (constructive speech) | 5 minutes |
| 1st Negative (rebuttal speech) | 3 minutes |
| 1st Affirmative (rebuttal speech) | 3 minutes |
| 2nd Negative (rebuttal speech) | 3 minutes |
| 2nd Affirmative (rebuttal speech) | 3 minutes |
| 3rd Negative (rebuttal speech) | 3 minutes |
| 3rd Affirmative (rebuttal speech) | 3 minutes |
| Complaints of rule violations, misquotations, etc. by either team. | |

The advantage of Cambridge format is that it emphasizes rebuttal skills; there should not be several disconnected speeches because during the formal rebuttal period, the audience expects a direct refutation of an opponent's arguments. This is a particularly good style to use in teaching rebuttal skills.

A major disadvantage of Cambridge debate is the rigid division between constructive and rebuttal functions. It is often most effective to rebut an opponent's speech at the beginning of one's remarks, before proceeding with your own constructive speech; the Cambridge format does not encourage that. Although a debater is permitted to devote part of his or her constructive remarks to rebuttal in a Cambridge debate, this can be done only at the expense of his or her constructive time. As well, it is usually inappropriate (and sometimes prohibited by the rules) to make constructive arguments during the formal rebuttal period. You may rebut in both speeches but build your case only during your first speech.

An Academic debate will normally be on a question of fact ("UFO's exist", "Vikings discovered North America") or a question of value ("Women are better than men", "Canadian television programming is more worthwhile than American television programming"), rather than on a question of policy ("The government limit medicare", "The government increase police powers"). The resolution may, however, be a question of policy, and if so, the affirmative team may wish to introduce a Plan for implementing the policy they propose. (More information on policy debates may be found in *An Introduction to Parliamentary Debate*.)

Forms of Address

The debaters, regardless of the style of Academic debate, are referred to in the third person by their position in the debate: “the first affirmative debater”, “the second negative debater”, or as the case may be. The debaters may refer to the audience directly in their remarks (“... and so, ladies and gentlemen, I conclude ...”) and a common opening, instead of the Parliamentary “Mr. Speaker”, is “Mr. Moderator, honourable judges, worthy opponents, ladies and gentlemen”. In fact, it is only necessary to refer to “Mr. (or Madam) Moderator (or Chairman)”, and debaters are free to dispense with the longer address if they wish.

Strategy

Two of the best debaters in Canada have described the Academic debate style as the “preferred” style. In saying this they were probably slightly mistaken, as it offers the potential to be the best or the worst. Your objective as a debater is to make it the best. Let us consider the particular advantages it offers.

In the first place, no one may interrupt you, unless heckling or Worlds Style Points of Information are allowed or the Moderator calls you to order. (See the addendum at page 6 for a description of Worlds Style Points of Information.) This means that during your speech, you are entirely in control: you can be at times very calm, at times very agitated - without worrying that as you reach the climax of your remarks you will be interrupted by a Point of Order designed to destroy the dramatic effect of your speech. You should take full advantage of the opportunities presented to make your points in the most effective way. Polish your language and give attention to your delivery. Free from interruption, your speech can be rehearsed until the prepared portion of your remarks is perfect.

The absence of interruptions has a number of drawbacks, however. Interruptions often maintain audience interest, especially if they are witty. Without interruptions, your speech alone carries the burden of sustaining the audience’s interest. By contrast, cross-examination is a means of tying together opposing arguments and showing how they relate to one another. In the absence of cross-examination, your speech has a special burden to answer directly each opposition argument and refute clearly the particulars as well as the generalities of the other team’s case. Your success in this style of debate will largely depend on your ability to shoulder these two burdens.

Cambridge debate offers a further challenge: although much of your rebuttal comes at the end of the debate in the rebuttal-defence-summary period, you must rebut some particular points your opponents make immediately - a challenge to definitions, for example, cannot wait until the end of the debate. And even though it is permitted, it would be bad strategy not to outline immediately your fundamental objections to the other team’s argument. If you sketch that objection at the first opportunity, the judges can understand how the two arguments fit together. If you wait until the end, the judges may be confused, or worse, already persuaded by your opponents’ earlier remarks.

Your final rebuttal period is precious and short. In that time you should try to present your remarks with particular clarity. Organize them carefully. Unlike the situation that prevails in most styles of debate, in Cambridge debate each debater has a substantial time in which to prepare his or her rebuttal. Make good use of that time. The final speakers for each side should make a special effort to summarize the course of the debate as well. So that they can find time to do this, the other debaters should make a special effort to do more than their share of rebuttal. Team members may divide up the rebuttal-defence-summary functions.

Heckling

Heckling is sometimes allowed in Academic style debate. For advice on this skill, please refer to its treatment in *An Introduction to Parliamentary Debate*.

The Judging Ballot

At the National Seminar and in most provincial competitions, debaters will be judged using a score sheet similar to that used for other styles of debate. The Judging Ballot has a separate category in which to evaluate “Debate Skills” - one’s knowledge of the debate rules, courtesy, rebuttal and listening skills, and the ability to use humour and rhetorical devices appropriately.

Revised by
John D. Filliter
October 2004

Brian P. Casey
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Corrections
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Academic Style Debating featuring Worlds Style Points of Information

During the 1990’s, the Canadian Student Debating Federation began to use the same Points of Information in Academic Style debates as are used at the Worlds Schools Debating Championships, in an effort to prepare our students to compete successfully at the international level. This style is not recommended for novice debaters.

The C. S. D. F. Rules Committee has attempted to codify the rules of these “Worlds Style Points of Information” in Rule 07 of the C. S. D. F. Rules for Academic Debate, which may evolve further as we become more familiar with the style. The Director of a tournament should decide whether or not to permit such Points under Academic Rule 07 and indicate this decision in the tournament invitation.

Basically the Worlds Style requires each debater to raise at least one Point of Information of each opponent, and to accept at least one such Point from each opponent, while her or she is delivering the constructive speech.

Points of Information may be raised only *between* the first and final minute of a debater’s constructive speech; they may not be raised during rebuttal speeches or during the first or final minute of a constructive speech. The interrupted debater has sole discretion when to accept a Point and how long to let it go on, and whether to accept more than one Point from an opponent. However, it might not be prudent to refuse the first Point from an opponent, because he or she might not raise another! A debater whose only attempt to raise a Point has been rebuffed should complain of this infraction during the complaints period at the end of the debate.

Points of Information may take the form of a question to the interrupted debater or a remark addressed through the moderator, and they must be brief. The time taken to raise and respond to Points is included in the speaking time of the interrupted debater.

The procedure for raising a Point of Information is simply to stand and say, “Point of Information” or words to this effect. The interrupted debater should respond by:

- (a) refusing to entertain the Point and cutting off the opponent and asking him or her to sit down; or
- (b) accepting the Point immediately; or
- (c) deferring the Point (that is, indicating that it will be dealt with later during the speech).

If more than one opponent raises a Point at the same time, the interrupted debater may refuse to entertain any of them or may accept one.

A debater whose Point is not accepted must immediately sit down; however, this does not prevent him or her from attempting to raise another Point later on.

If a debater speaks for more than one minute less than his or her maximum speaking time, any opponent who has not raised a Point of Information is permitted to raise it at the conclusion of the speech. To do so, the debater seeking to raise the point should stand and say, “Mr./Madam Moderator, may I raise my Point now? The honourable member spoke for more than a minute less than his/her allotted time.”

Judges are instructed to penalize the raising of excessive Points of Information. The practise of “barracking” (team members raising Points simultaneously to disrupt or intimidate their opponent) is not encouraged.

Judges are also instructed to penalize debaters severely for failing to raise, or for refusing to accept, Points of Information.

Timekeepers should be instructed to keep careful track of time and to signal to all debaters when a constructive speech is one-minute long, and also when it is in the final minute of maximum speaking time.

This style of debating is very challenging and exciting, though the interruptions may seriously impede the flow of the debate. It certainly forces debaters to clash and remained involved throughout the contest.

John D. Filliter
October 2004

Rules for Academic Debate

1. Academic style debating is sometimes referred to as "Classical" or "Platform" style debating. In this style, each debater is expected to deliver a constructive speech and to rebut. In Cambridge format, each debater enjoys a separate rebuttal speech; in Oxford format, only the first affirmative debater has an official rebuttal and all other debaters should incorporate rebuttal into their constructive speech.
2. The moderator grants the right to speak by introducing a debater. Once he or she has the floor, a debater is obliged to surrender it only when ordered to do so by the moderator. Usually this occurs only after a serious breach of the rules or when the debater has exceeded his or her allotted time.
3. Debaters should always preface their remarks by addressing the moderator ("Mr. [or Madam] Moderator"); they may also acknowledge the presence of "Honourable Judges, Worthy Opponents, Ladies and Gentlemen", though this is not mandatory. All references to other debaters should be made in the third person.
4. Moderators should be quick to call debaters to order for any breaches of the rules and judges should not hesitate to penalize debaters for remarks made in bad taste or any violations of the rules.
5. Since there are no Points of Order or Privilege, at the conclusion of each debate the moderator will give each debater an opportunity to point out any infraction of the rules or misrepresentation of his or her position by his or her opponents. When alleging such an infraction, a debater must identify the specific debate rule that has been broken or his or her remark that has been misconstrued and the debater accused of the violation or misrepresentation should be given an opportunity to defend himself or herself. The Moderator shall not rule on any such objections.
6. Unless the Director otherwise prescribes, heckling of a speaking debater is permitted except for debates where World's Points of Information are being used. When allowed, heckling should be pertinent, humorous, brief and infrequent, and it should not be used just to disrupt the delivery of an opponent. Judges will severely penalize debaters who lower the level of debate through excessive or thoughtless interruptions.
7. Where permitted, Points of Information as used at the World Schools Debating Championships shall be entertained. Such a Point of Information may be in the form of either a question to the debater making a speech or a remark addressed through the moderator. All debaters are required to raise at least one such point with each opponent during each contest and while the debater who is interrupted is required to accept at least one point raised by each opponent, he or she has sole discretion whether and when to accept them and how long to let them go on. Points of Information must be brief and may not be raised during the first or final minute of a constructive speech or during a rebuttal-defence-summary speech. To raise a Point of Information, a debater shall stand and say "Point of Information"; the interrupted debater may decline to take the point and cut off or ask the interrupter to sit down, accept the point immediately, or defer it until later in the speech. If several debaters raise such points simultaneously, the speaker with the floor may refuse to accept any of them or may entertain one. A debater whose point is not accepted shall immediately sit down. Excessive raising of such points shall be penalized. The time taken to raise and reply to such Points shall be included in the speaking time of the debater with the floor. If a debater speaks for more than a minute less than his or her allotted time, any unraised Point of Information may be asked at the conclusion of the speech.

I call this debate to order. I am pleased to welcome you all to this ____ round of the 200__ Provincial Impromptu Debating Workshop. The topic under debate today is "Be it resolved that _____".

Seated on my right are the affirmative debaters, namely: _____ To my left, and supporting the negative side, are:
Their first speaker: _____ Its first speaker: _____
and _____ and _____
Their second debater: _____. Its second debater: _____.

The Judges for this debate are _____, _____ and _____.

Our Timekeeper is _____ and I, _____, am your Moderator.

Each debater will make a ____-minute constructive speech and later a ____-minute rebuttal-defence-summary. I will grant debaters the right to speak by introducing them and they may then hold forth until either they sit down or I demand that they relinquish the floor, whichever occurs first. Finally, after all speeches have concluded, I will invite all debaters to complain of any rule violations or any misquotation or misrepresentation of their remarks by their opponents, though I won't rule on any such objections.

Would the Timekeeper please explain what system will be used to indicate the amount of speaking time remaining to debaters.

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(DURING THE FIRST ROUND ONLY, SAY:) To review the general rules of debating briefly: **(READ A SUMMARY OF THE GENERAL RULES OF DEBATE FOR IMPROMPTU DEBATES.**)

Because I cannot entertain Points of Order or Privilege, I will be alert to call debaters to order for any improper or unbecoming conduct or other breaches of the Rules of Debate and, at the conclusion of the contest, I will give both teams an opportunity to complain of any rule violations and misquotations by their opponents. Also, I encourage the Judges to penalize debaters for any remarks made in bad taste or for other violations of the rules.

I will allow heckling (or World Championship-style Points of Information) as long as the privilege of indulging in this is not abused. Wit is welcome, especially if it is brief, pertinent and infrequent, but the Judges should not hesitate to penalize a debater for deliberately disrupting an opponent's speech or for lowering the level of debate through excessive or thoughtless interruptions.

Are there any questions regarding the Rules?

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(ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS THAT ARE RAISED.)

I call upon the **first affirmative** debater to deliver his/her constructive speech, including a definition of the terms in the resolution. In impromptu debating, no Plan is required, but if the affirmative team desires to introduce a Plan, it must be completely described during this address.

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I thank the first affirmative speaker for his/her remarks and remind the Judges that they should not finalize any debater's score until they have heard all the speeches. We shall now hear the constructive address of the **first negative** debater. If the negative intends to dispute the affirmative definitions [or to introduce a Counter-Plan], this must be done now. [Any Counter-Plan must be completely described during this speech.]

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Thank you. I call upon the **second affirmative** debater to present his/her constructive remarks.

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Thank you. The **second negative** speaker will now deliver the last constructive address.

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Thank you. Each debater will now have ___ minutes to rebut, defend and summarize, though these functions may be divided between the members of a team. I call upon the **first debater from each team** to present his/her final speech, **beginning with the negative**.

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Thank you. Next I call upon the **second debater from each side**, again **commencing with the negative**. The affirmative debater may introduce no new constructive arguments or evidence at this time.

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Has any debater any complaints of rule violations or misquoting or misrepresenting of his or her remarks by his or her opponents?

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(IF ANY COMPLAINTS ARE RAISED, ASK DEBATERS TO BE SPECIFIC AND GIVE A CRITICIZED DEBATER A BRIEF OPPORTUNITY TO RESPOND TO THEM, BUT DO NOT RULE ON THE VALIDITY OF ANY OF THE COMPLAINTS.)

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Thank you. Would the Judges please complete their scoring (**AFTER THE SECOND ROUND SAY:** of both debates and turn their Score Sheets in to the Timekeeper). Judges should not confer with one another until after they have scored the debate.

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[IF THERE IS TIME FOR CRITIQUES, SAY: Would the Judges please deliver their critiques in a constructive, encouraging manner. I remind the judges that they should not reveal any debater's scores or the winning team.]

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(AFTER ALL JUDGES HAVE DELIVERED THEIR CRITIQUES, SAY:) On behalf of the debating organization, I thank the Judges and the Timekeeper for their assistance; I congratulate all of the debaters on their performances; and I hope that all spectators enjoyed the event. Would the debaters please report to the

Tournament Director for their next assignments; please be quiet in the halls, since other debates may still be in progress. I declare this debate officially concluded.