

# **Introductory Guide to Parliamentary Style Debate**



**Alberta Debate and Speech Association**

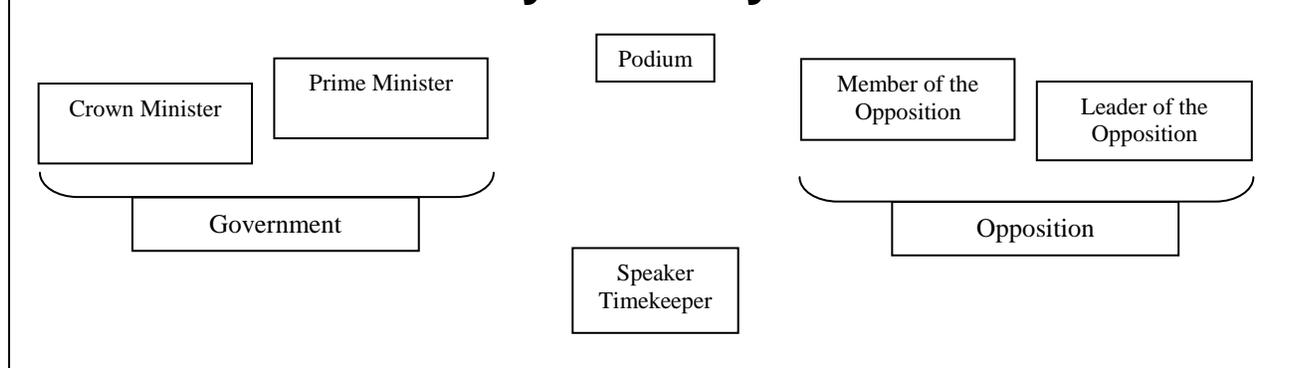
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## Summary

<p>Parliamentary debate is a standard style derived from the rules and conventions used in Parliament.</p> <p>It is a more formal style than other forms. Only one person may have the floor (stand) at one time and NO offensive or profane language may be used.</p> <p>Members cannot refer to each other by their names but only by their position and in the third person. All remarks are addressed to the <b>Speaker</b> and never directly to the other person.</p>	<p><b>Examples:</b></p> <p><b>Wrong:</b> “You were wrong when you said there will be no benefits from Hibernia”</p> <p><b>Right:</b> “Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was wrong when he/she said there will be no benefits from Hibernia”</p> <p>Heckling is permitted (short, witty and to the point and only against opponents please) along with Points of Order (rule infractions) and Points of Personal Privilege (personal insults, misrepresentations etc.)</p>	<p>There are two teams of 2 people:</p> <p>The Government has a Prime Minister (PM) and a Crown Minister (CM) and their roles are to introduce the Resolution, define the terms, and present their case/plan.</p> <p>The Opposition has the Member of Opposition (MO) and the Leader of the Opposition (LO). Their role is to rebut and refute the Government case and points.</p> <p>Speeches should never be read and props cannot be used.</p>
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## Physical Layout



Speaker	Roles; Times and Debate Order for Both Beginner and Open Debaters	Time
PM	Has the Burden of Proof and must show why the government side must be adopted. Introduces resolution, defines major terms, presents the basic government case (position) along with three or more constructive points (reasons) in favour of the House adopting the resolution.	5 min.
MO	Outlines why the government case is flawed/wrong. Refutes the government case (specifically attacks all government points presented by the PM) and, if there is time, introduces new Opposition constructive rebuttal points (specific additional reasons raised by the Opposition for why the Government case is wrong).	8 min.
CM	Backs up the PM and rebuilds the Government position and the points introduced by the PM, rebuts and refute the Opposition points.	8 min.
LO	Constructive: Backs up the CM and rebuilds the Opposition position by reinforcing the Opposition points. Attacks the Government position.	5 min.
	Rebuttal: <b>PROTECTED TIME</b> Summarizes the Opposition side and restates the opposition points. No new evidence or points may be used here.	3 min.
PM	Summarizes the Government side and restates the Government case and points. No new evidence or points may be used except in direct attack to the LO. <b>PROTECTED</b>	3 min

## OVERVIEW:

*Once you have mastered an understanding of cross-examination debate, you will be able to easily apply many of the same skills to parliamentary style debating. This unit outlines the specific structures and nuances which make the parliamentary format such a popular and exciting debate alternative!*

Parliamentary debate is modeled on the customs and traditions of the British and Canadian parliaments. Unlike cross-examination debate, it assumes a fictitious setting for the debate: The House of Commons. As a debater, you are called upon to use your imagination and pretend that you are a Member of Parliament whose duty it is to engage in debate about whether or not a particular bill should be passed into law.

Though many of the basic principles of cross-examination debate still apply, some important variations exist. In parliamentary debate, each member is permitted to speak for a total of eight minutes. Speakers are now referred to as members. The affirmative team has become the Government and now consists of the Right Honorable Prime Minister, who speaks first for five minutes, and also delivers the last rebuttal in the debate, for three minutes, and a Government Minister, who speaks third. Instead of arguing that the resolution must stand, they assert that the bill must be passed. Conversely, the negative team is the Opposition. The second speaker in the debate is an Opposition Member from any riding in the country and, as such, is often addressed as “The Honorable Member from [riding]”. The Leader of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition delivers the fourth constructive speech, followed by the Opposition rebuttal. As there is no break for rebuttal preparation in parliamentary debate, these two speeches are delivered consecutively and, to ensure that the judges assess each portion appropriately, the transition between them must clearly be defined. As this rebuttal is not announced, it is the responsibility of the debater to be attentive to the chairtimer’s signals.

As well as requiring a chairtimer, parliamentary debate also includes a person who chairs the debate: The Speaker of the House. The Speaker, as in Parliament, is the central focal point of the debate and, as such, must be treated with great respect. As you will see, in addition to performing the familiar duties of introducing the debaters and collecting the judges’ ballots, the Speaker has numerous other crucial responsibilities which are exclusive to parliamentary debate.

The responsibilities of each debater varies according to the strategy chosen, as outlined in Unit 4. The Prime Minister must define the essential terms of the bill, being careful not to claim a competitive advantage which is not inherent in the resolution. The Government exists in a “fantasy” parliament where it is only required to prove the feasibility of the bill, not the legality or constitutionality of that bill. The Opposition may propose a counterplan, providing that it is significantly different and demonstrably more desirable than the Government proposal.

Although parliamentary debate does not allow for formal cross-examination periods, it does introduce four other variables to the proceedings which allow for direct confrontation: points of order, points of personal privilege, questions, and heckles.

### A) Points of Order

Points of order are complaints raised by a member due to some contravention of House custom or decorum by an opponent. These complaints may interrupt the proceeding at any time, and must be directed through the Speaker of House as follows:

1. As soon as the breach of procedure occurs, stand up and say, “Mister/Madame Speaker, I rise on a point of order.”
2. The member you have interrupted will surrender the floor by sitting down, and the Speaker will ask you to cite the infraction. You should then be seated, and make no further injections until the point has been ruled upon.

3. If you are correct, the Speaker will announce that the point is well taken, and your opponent will have to apologize to the House. He may then continue with his speech, having lost the time consumed by this interruption. However, if the speaker rejects your appeal, the point will be declared not well taken, and the chairtimer will increase the duration of the speech by the consumed amount of time. In the rare instance in which the Speaker cannot rule on decision, it will be “tabled” and the judges will have to decide for themselves.

A point of order may involve misconduct by a debater other than the one holding the floor, and the Speaker may call any member to order on his own initiative even though no other debater has objected to that member’s conduct. The following official rules of decorum govern parliamentary debate.

- All debaters must address the Speaker at the outset of their speeches.
- Rather than referring to “Ladies and Gentlemen”, all comments must be directed through “Mr./Madame Speaker”.
- Only one debater at a time may command the floor of the house. As soon as another member rises and addresses himself to the Speaker, the interrupted debater must sit down. The member standing may proceed to speak only when recognized by the Speaker.
- No person may interrupt the line of sight between the Speaker and the member on the floor.
- Government and Opposition shall reside on separate halves of the floor. No member may cross the floor unless permission has been granted by the Speaker.
- When the speaker rises, all debaters must immediately cease speaking and resume their seats.
- Debaters must always refer to one another in the third person, preferably by title. Referring to members as “you” or by name is not permitted. Behaviour must be of a standard befitting the House.
- Debaters shall refrain from using unparliamentary language, including any foul, profane or offensive language, or any words which insult the House, any member thereof, the Queen, or any government official.
- Members will, at all times, be dressed in a dignified and proper manner. Males must wear ties, and no member may rise with his head covered.
- Members shall not conceal their hands from the House.
- Members shall refrain from pointing or making threatening gestures with finger, pen or any contrivance thereof.
- Debaters shall not exceed their allotted speaking times.
- The speaker is the final authority in the House. His decisions can not be questioned or insulted. An experienced judge will know when a Speaker has made a poor ruling, and will compensate accordingly.

## **B) Points of Personal Privilege**

While points of order are used to monitor house procedures, points of personal privilege are applied by members to protect themselves from slander, misrepresentation, or insult. Only the member who is the subject of such abuse can raise the objection. As their name implies, points of person privilege pertain to some sort of personal abuse. An affront to your evidence, sources, arguments, reasoning, or point-of-view is not considered personal unless it blatantly misconstrues something that you have said, or insinuates something that you have not said. If you are misquoted or derided, or your position distorted, points of personal privilege provide an opportunity for immediate clarification or reparation. When raising such a complaint, you can only refer to statements which have already been made in the debate; no new material may be introduced. The same procedures and time adjustments which govern points of order apply.

## **C) Questions**

During an opponent’s speech, a debater may rise and inquire of the Speaker whether or not a member is willing to entertain a question. If the member agrees to consider the query, he will be seated while the question is posed; otherwise, the member may resume his speech. Questions and answer should each be no more than one minute in length, and each debater may ask no more than four questions per debate. Neither the time taken to pose the question nor the period required to answer it shall be included in the speaking time of the interrupted member.

Parliamentary questions, like cross-examination questions, can be used for construction, refutation, or requesting information (see Unit 5), and may be serious or humorous in tone. However, because only a single question can be posed, it is more difficult to succeed in making a point; once the question has been asked, the examiner is not allowed to interject.

If, while you are speaking, a member of the other team interjects to ask a question, you have three possible responses. You can consent to the question, decline to hear it, or declare your intention to answer all questions at the end of your speech.

Of course, as in cross-examination style debate, you may also decide to incorporate question into your own speech. Although you can pose as many questions as you see fit in this way, you do give your opponents more time to consider their responses. However, this approach can be useful if an opponent consistently refuses parliamentary questions. Be aware, though, of the fact that if the first opportunity to respond to such questions is in a rebuttal speech, new contentions are admissible, providing it is made clear that they are required to answer these questions.

#### **D) Heckles**

Heckling is one of the most potentially enjoyable and colorful aspects of parliamentary debate. Any debater, from a seated position can call out a heckle, a brief, witty, and pertinent remark, at any stage in the proceedings. Heckles are used to poke fun at your opponents or their claims, and can be fairly biting, since points of personal privilege cannot be used for retaliation.

Rhetorical questions invite heckles but, in responding, try to provide a clever retort rather than merely a contradiction of the implied answer. As well, do not rely on thoughtless, standard fare heckles such as, "Source! Source!" or, "So what!" The best heckles distract the judges from an opponents speech while allowing you, through humor and sarcasm, to make a point by implying significant weakness in the other team's presentation. Heckles are not something that can be planned or rehearsed. One memorable, well-timed heckle per speech is far better than several verbose, floundering attempts.

Aside from avoiding lengthy pauses, there is little you can do to discourage a heckler. If you are heckled while speaking, try to retain your train of thought. Repeat any words which may have been drowned out and continue with your speech. If you are able to incorporate a pointed response into your speech, do so. Nothing feels better than getting the best of a heckler while maintaining the flow of your speech.

Although you are allowed to contribute verbal encouragement during your partner's speech, avoid being excessively noisy or distracting. A well-placed "Here! Here!" can sometimes be effective in filling in pauses, but heckling should never be allowed to escalate into a shouting match.

**If you want to gain the judges' favour, use parliamentary procedure cautiously. Although it may seem beneficial to be able to apply such techniques to distract an opponent, there must appear to be a good reason for such disruptions. Debaters who use parliamentary procedure just to stifle the flow of a debate will be severely penalized. On the other hand, if you do detect a rule violation or think of a valid question or heckle, do not procrastinate. Act with confidence, before the moment is lost!**

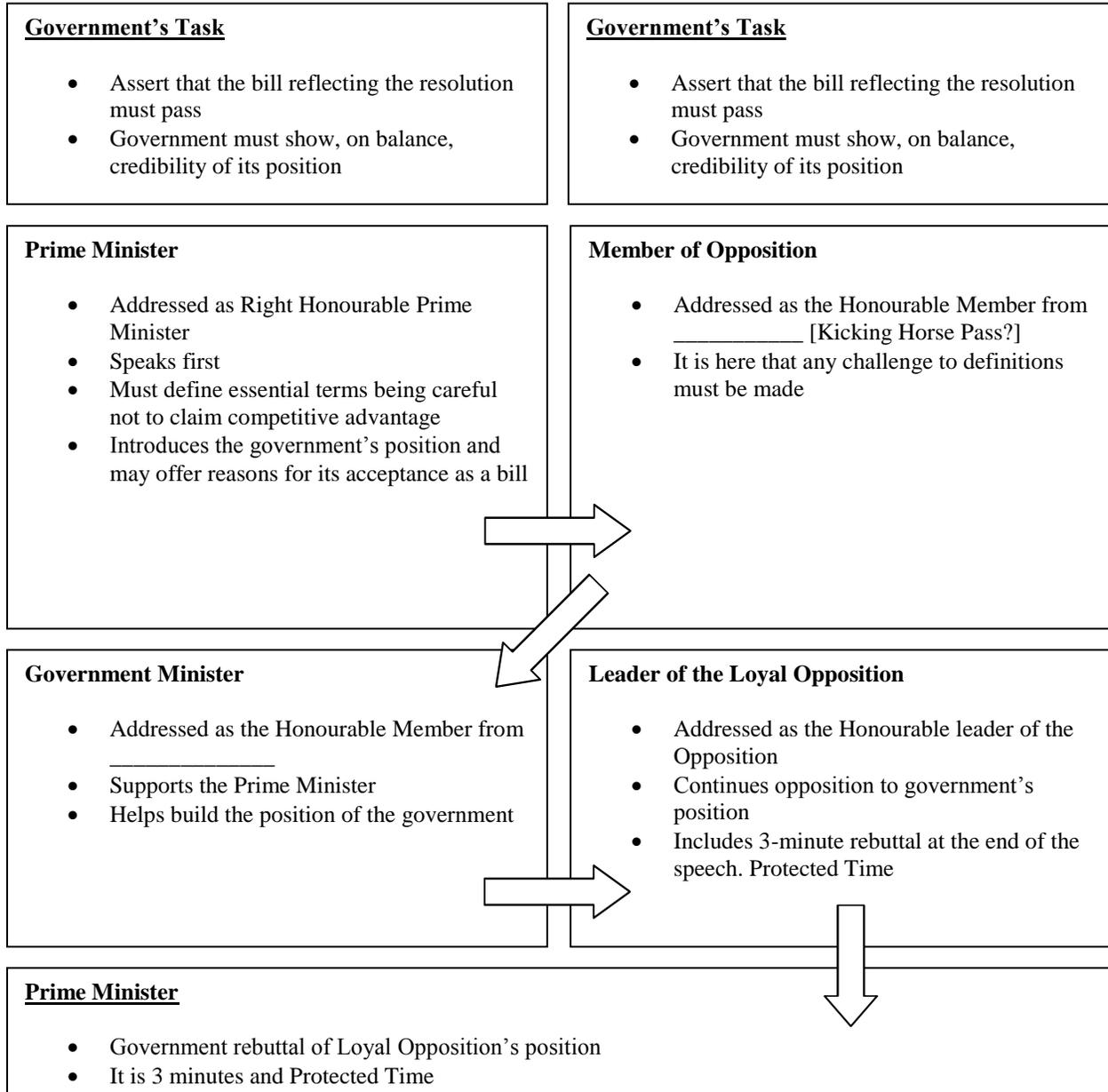
#### **E) Voting Issues**

Voting issues are the reasons each team provides the judges to persuade them to accept their position. The Government should seek to provide two or three powerful voting issues. In policy debate, this usually involves major benefits arising from the plan. A few well-developed contentions emphatically delivered are far more impressive than an abundance of brief generalized points. Depending on the strategy chosen, the Opposition may also contribute voting issues of their own, but more important than this is the way in which they respond to Government contentions. It can be extremely advantageous if the Opposition can establish which postulates the government case hinges on, and then proceed to prove the falsehood of these basic premises.

Canadians are only too aware of how in the House of Commons, the different parties like to constantly hurl accusations at each other, sometimes to excess. In parliamentary debate such accusations are permitted as long as they are not used for character defamation. Following is a list of certain “tried and true” phrases representing the language of parliament. Notice how they are worded so that they discredit an opponent’s approach, not his personality. And remember, if you are describing something an opponent has said, be sure you have your facts straight, or a point of privilege may be raised.

- The Government/Opposition (or “the honorable member opposite”) has relied on sweeping, unsupported generalizations.
- The Government/Opposition has referred to isolated cases as though they are the rule.
- The Government/Opposition has exaggerated the significance of a statistic/fact/opinion.
- The Government/Opposition has attempted to mislead the house by distorting the facts of this issue.
- The Government/Opposition case smells of hypocrisy.
- The Government/Opposition case is riddled with contradictions.
- The Government/Opposition has adopted an attitude that smacks of pessimism or even bigotry.
- The Government/Opposition has wasted too much time quibbling over trivial matters and dodged the real issues at hand.
- Some of the points presented by the Government/Opposition are inane to this debate.
- The Government/Opposition has lowered the quality of this debate by sinking to vulgarity in their language/humour/abuse of parliamentary procedures.
- The Government/Opposition has insulted the intelligence of this house by asking it to accept what is, in effect, nonsense.

## Values Debate Judge's Flow Sheet: Parliamentary



**Alberta Debate and Speech Association Debate Judge's Ballot (Judges may not discuss the debate with one another until they complete their ballot).**

**Step 1**

Please complete the information below

a) Judge's name \_\_\_\_\_

b) Room # \_\_\_\_\_

c) Category of debate (please check)

- Jr. Beg.
- Jr. Open
- Sr. Beg.
- Sr. Open

d) Format of debate (please check)

- Discussion
- Cross-Examination
- Parliamentary

e) Round

- (please check)
- 1<sup>st</sup> round
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> round
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> round
  - 4<sup>th</sup> round
  - Semi-final
  - Final

**Step 2** Fill in the names of the debaters and if applicable, their team code. Then go to step 3.

Affirmative/Government Team code _____			Negative/Opposition Team code _____	
Name	Name		Name	Name
1 <sup>st</sup> Affirmative Prime Minister	2 <sup>nd</sup> Affirmative Gov't Member	Criteria for individual evaluation A scale of 1 to 5, 1 is poor and 5 is excellent	1 <sup>st</sup> Negative Opp. Member	2 <sup>nd</sup> Negative Leader of Opp.
1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5		1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	<b>Organization:</b> The speech should be well structured, logical & coherent, containing and effective introduction and conclusion	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	<b>Evidence/Logic:</b> Facts, statistics & authorities offered in support of contentions must be sound. Credit should be given for thorough and relevant research.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	<b>Delivery:</b> Poise quality & use of voice, combined with emphasis, variety and enunciation. Effectiveness and ease of gestures, and eye contact should be assessed.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	<b>Refutation/Clash:</b> The ability to apply logic and evidence in refuting the opponents' contentions while defending your own.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	<b>Format: Cross-Examination Parliamentary Discussion</b>	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
/25	/25	Totals (please double check addition)	/25	/25

**Cross-examination:** Does the examiner develop a series of questions which draw admissions? Does the Examiner remain in control? When answering questions does the witness show an understanding of the issues? Is the witness cooperative?

**Parliamentary:** Does each debater demonstrate and understanding of parliamentary procedure & adhere to the rules of the house/ Are points of order & privilege appropriately used? Are heckles short, witty & relevant?

**Discussion:** Each student is expected to participate. Questions & answers should be concise & well phrased revealing a sound understanding of the issues. The students should be courteous & cooperative.

**Step 3**

Use the flowsheet on the following page to take notes on the debate & record your impressions of the debate.

**Step 4**

In the space provided **below please check which team you believe has won the debate.** (Your decision should be based on an objective appraisal of the arguments (clash), evidence/logic & refutation which you have witnessed in the debate).

The winning team is:

- Affirmative Govt.
- Negative Opp.

**Step 5**

In the space to the left, please complete the individual evaluations.

**Step 6**

If time permits, the chairperson will call on you to make constructive and positive remarks.

*Thank you!*

**Policy Debate Judge's Flowsheet (Judges may not discuss the debate with one another until they complete their ballot)**

**Step 3**

Use the flowsheet to take notes on the debate and record your impressions.

**Evidence/logic and contentions**

New evidence/logic may be introduced at any point during the debate.  
New contentions may be introduced at any point in the debate, except during the rebuttals and during the discussion part of a discussion debate. The last Aff./Gov't debater may introduce new contentions in response to new contentions introduced in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Neg./Opp.

**Step 4**

Return to the first page & check off the winning team.

