

# Judging Parliamentary Debate

From the New York Parliamentary Debate League and Columbia Ivy League Parliamentary Judge Instructions:

**Basic Overview:** Parliamentary Debate features a Government team and an Opposition team, each with two debaters. The Government strives to convince the judge the given motion should be adopted, the Opposition to show the motion should be defeated. Teams should expect to stand for the both Government and the Opposition in different rounds on different motions. They will not remain (in general) the Government or the Opposition for the entire tournament. During the debate, each team gives three speeches. A judge will evaluate both the arguments and the speaking skills of each debater. The team that best supports their side wins.

**The Motions:** The motion is a short statement that serves as the topic of debate. The motions will concern issues that should be familiar to the average high school student. Some Sample Motions;

- *This house believes that social media does more harm than good.*
- *This house would allow foreign-born citizens to be President of the United States.*
- *This house would use force to spread democracy internationally.*
- *This house believes wealthy countries have an obligation to support poorer ones.*
- *This house regrets participating in the Paris Climate Accords.*

\*\*\* Many tournaments will use **abbreviations** → Common ones: “THW” means “this house would” and THR means “this house regrets.” The wording of the motion as well as the abbreviation immediately preceding it is important to the round.

Three motions will be provided before each round, directly to the judge. A different set of motions will be used for each round.

The motion is chosen as follows:

- If the motions have not been provided publicly, the judge reads the three motions to the two teams.
- The judge flips a coin, and one team calls it in the air. The winner of the coin flip decides whether that team would prefer choice of motion or choice of side.
- The team that has the right to choose the motion as the result of the coin flip picks the motion.
- The team that has the right to choose the side then makes its choice of Government or Opposition.

Choices should be made promptly, the whole process taking no more than a minute or two. The teams then have fifteen minutes to prepare their cases.

**The Cases:** During the fifteen minute prep time each team should prepare a short “case” with several reasons (2 – 4 are typical) why their side of the motion is correct. Research materials, prepared briefs, or use of the Internet may not be used. Statistics, expert quotes, and remote facts are discouraged because they cannot be readily verified. However, both teams are encouraged to use information that one would expect to be familiar to a well-read person, or that they explain in detail.

**The Government has the right to set the terms of the debate and should provide a brief interpretation of the motion and/or a definition of key terms** (very similar to Lincoln-Douglas Debate). They may interpret the motion more narrowly than give (e.g., “Court penalties should be determined by judges, not juries” may be applied only to civil cases, rather than criminal cases). The Government interpretation may be novel, but should respect common usage and must leave the Opposition reasonable grounds to argue against it. **It should not rely on specific facts or information that the Opposition or the Judge are not likely to know.**

The Opposition should prepare for what they expect the Government to present. However, they will likely have to adapt their cast to the specifics of the Government’s interpretation and the Government’s actual case.

**The Positions and Speeches:** On each team, one debater is the lead speaker and the other is the member. The leader delivers the opening and closing speeches for their team. The member presents the middle speech. For the Government, the leader is known as the Prime Minister (PM) and the member is called the Member of Government (MG). On the Opposition team, the debaters are the Leader of the Opposition (LO) and the Member of the Opposition (MO).

Each speaker has a **30 second grace period** at the end of their allotted time to finish their speech, after which they are out of order. There is **no preparation time** or pause between speeches other than a reasonable allowance for one speaker to be seated and the next to rise.

**Constructive:** Each team presents its case and responds to their opponent's case. New arguments may be introduced into the debate, either as independence points or responses to a previous argument.

**Rebuttals:** Each side should summarize the debate, emphasizing the team's strongest points and explaining why they should win the debate. New arguments cannot be raised in the rebuttals unless it is the PM's first opportunity to respond to a new point made in the MOC. New explanations and examples to illustrate previous arguments, and connecting and contrasting points already made are encouraged.

Preparation Time	15 minutes	Both teams will prepare their cases, <b>without using any technology</b> . They may split into different rooms or a room/hallway to do this.
Prime Minister Constructive (PMC)	7 minutes	Provides an interpretation of the resolution and lays out the Government's case.
Leader of Opposition Constructive (LOC)	8 minutes	Lays out the Opposition case and replies to the Government case.
Member of Government Constructive (MGC)	8 minutes	Responds to previous arguments, and <b>may introduce new points while doing so</b> .
Member of Opposition Constructive (MOC)	8 minutes	Responds to previous arguments, and <b>may introduce new points while doing so</b> .
Leader of Opposition Rebuttal (LOR)	4 minutes	Summarizes the debate from the Opposition perspective, while responding to previous arguments.
Prime Minister Rebuttal (PMR)	5 minutes	Summarizes the debate from the Government perspective, while responding to previous arguments.

**Questions and Questioning:** There is no cross-examination during Parliamentary debate. The non-speaking team interrupts the speaker with three types of questions;

- (1) **Points of Clarifications (POC):** At the beginning of the PMC right after the Prime Minister has presented the Government interpretation of the motion, the PM may pause briefly and ask the Opposition if the interpretation is clear and acceptable, essentially asking if the Opposition wishes to raise a POC. Alternately, the Opposition may rise and ask for clarification. **The clock stops while the opposing team briefly asks the speaker for further details about their case.** The speaker must accept these questions. These questions should be intended to make the terms of the debate clear, not to introduce arguments or rebuttal.
- (2) **Points of Information (POI):** The clock **continues** while a member of the opposing team stands, traditionally with one hand on their head (to keep their wig in place) and the other arm outstretched. The speaker may accept the question, wave it off, or take it after finishing a point. The questioner asks a short question or makes a statement intended to undermine the argument being made. The speaker responds and continues speaking. There is no right to follow up with another question, though the opposing team may stand for another POI.

POIs are permitted **ONLY during the constructive speeches**, and are not permitted during the first or last minute of the speech (called "protected time"). A speaker may refuse or defer a POI, but it is considered poor form not to accept some POIs if offered, and poor form for opponents not to offer any POIs.

- (3) **Point of Order:** A Point of Order is raised if a team believes the speaker has violated a rule of debate, for example, exceeding the 30 second grace period at the end of a speech, or presenting a new argument in rebuttal. The questioner stands, states "Point of Order," to the judge, and briefly explains the issue. The speaker has no right to reply. The judge may say "Point well taken" if they agree. "Point not well taken" if they do not agree, or "Point under consideration" if they are still deciding. **Time stops during a Point of Order** and resumes after the judge's decision when the speaker continues.

# PARLIAMENTARY JUDGE INSTRUCTIONS

## Basics:

The judge (or Speaker of the House) has three basic duties: see that the debate moves along expeditiously, rule on certain issues that arise during the debate, and decide the round by returning a completed electronic ballot.

## Starting the Round:

Three motions will be AT THE INFO/BALLOT TABLE for each round. A different set of motions will be used for each round, and will only be available at the ballot table. Please pick them up BEFORE starting the round.

The motion is chosen as follows:

- If the motions have not been made public (as in this tournament), the judge reads the three motions to the two teams.
- The judge flips a coin, and one team calls it in the air. The winner of the coin flip **decides whether that team would prefer choice of motion or choice of side.**
- The team that has the right to choose the motion as a result of the coin flip picks a motion.
- The team that has the right to choose the side then makes its choice of side.

The teams should make their choices promptly, the whole process taking no more than a minute or two. The teams then have **fifteen minutes** to prepare their cases. They are not permitted to use **electronic research materials**.

## Script:

The Judge may follow a script, patterned after English parliamentary practice.

## Constructives:

- To begin the round: "I call this house to order and call upon the honorable Prime Minister to deliver the first speech of the round not to exceed seven minutes."
- Before the LOC: "I thank the honorable Prime Minister and call upon the Leader of the Opposition to deliver the first speech of the round, not to exceed eight minutes."
- Before MGC: "I thank the honorable Leader of the Opposition and call upon the Member of Government to deliver a speech not to exceed eight minutes."
- Before MOC: "I thank the honorable Member of Government and call upon the Member of Opposition to close out the constructive portion of the round in a speech not to exceed eight minutes."

## Rebuttals:

- Before LOR: "I thank the honorable Member of Opposition and call upon the Leader of Opposition to deliver the first rebuttal speech of the round not to exceed four minutes, reminding them that while new examples are welcome, new arguments are not."
- Before PMR: "I thank the honorable Member of Opposition and call upon the Prime Minister to deliver the final speech of the round not to exceed five minutes, reminding them that while new examples are welcome, new arguments are not."

**There is no prep time between speeches, and speakers should rise in turn with only a reasonable delay to collect their papers and move to the podium/speaking space.**

NO NEW ARGUMENTS OR RESPONSES MAY BE PERMITTED 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 their speech, the Government team's only chance to respond to those arguments is in the Prime Minister's Rebuttal. You should allow the PM to make new responses to new arguments raised by the MO, but otherwise they are prohibited from making new arguments and responses.

## Questions:

There are three types of questions: Point of Clarification, Point of Information, and Point of Order. Please see above for descriptions of the questions. The judge should be aware that **time stops during a POC and a PO, but not during a POI**. The POC and the POI are managed by the debaters, but the judge is required to make a decision if a Point of Order is raised.

## Keeping Time:

Debaters will usually time themselves and their opponents, and raise a Point of Order if a speaker exceeds their grace period. The judge may want to also keep time to monitor the round. Remember, **time stops** during a Point of Clarification (POC) or a Point of Order (PO), but not during a Point of Information (POI).

## After the Round:

After the final speech, the judge should promptly decide the round and fill out the e-ballot. To keep the tournament on time, the balloting should take no more than 15 minutes total. The ballot should always include a clear reason for the decision and a justification for any excessively low or high speaker points.

## Making the Decision:

We suggest the following approach to deciding the round:

- First, decide which side won. Make your decision based on which team carried the more important issues in the round. The teams should tell you which issues they think are most important during rebuttals, why they believe that they won those issues, and why they are more important than issues they may have lost. If they fail to do so explicitly, then you must use your discretion. In a tie, the decision should go to the Opposition.
- Second, assign each debater points from 25 to 30. You may use ½ points.
  - 25 points – offensive debate
  - 26 points – needs improvement
  - 27 points – fair debate
  - 27.5 points – this should be an “average” round
  - 28 points – good debate
  - 28.5 points – very good debate
  - 29 points – excellent debate
  - 30 points – AMAZING, changed your life debate
- Third, 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.
- Finally, please **do not tell the debaters the outcome of the round**. The ballot should always have a clear, written reason for the decision.

## Evidence:

Debaters are not given the motions or subject areas prior to the tournament, and are not permitted to use research material or prepared briefs during their case preparation before a round. This does not mean they cannot use facts, data, quotations, or other information to support their arguments, only that what they use wither be generally known or clearly explained. The evidentiary standard is “what a well-read person should know” or “The New York Times Standard,” that is, what someone who regularly reads any national newspapers should know. Debaters may introduce more obscure facts provided they explain them thoroughly, including any aspects that may weaken their usefulness and benefit their opponents. As this is difficult to enforce, using obscure information is discouraged.

Debaters may often present “facts” that their opponents will claim are false, or that the judge does not believe are true. We all innocently present such facts every day. As noted, there is no research prior to the round, and no opportunity to check facts prior to the decision. A judge has no choice but to use discretion in these cases whether and how to consider these facts in awarding the ballot.

Our suggestion is that debates are won by arguments that are clearly explained, illustrated, and weighed in terms of importance against those presented by the other side. In our experience, debates rarely come down to the truth or falsehood of specific data presented by either side.

### **Final Things to Remember:**

Tabula Rasa: “Blank Slate.” Try NOT to bring personal feelings, knowledge, or biases into any round whatsoever. This may seem obvious, but it’s important to emphasize. You are judging base solely on what the teams in the round tell you and your judgement on which one was more compelling, based on the content of the arguments and, to a somewhat lesser extent, how they were delivered.

Holistic Judging: Even if a team makes a small mistake and gets called on a new argument, that in and of itself should NOT be enough to “drop” the team (have them lose). You must take everything that has happened in the round to this point into consideration, including all the speeches, content, style, confidence, teamwork, humor, etc. **Do not judge on one thing alone.** Look at the entire shape of the round and judge based on that.