

Impromptu Debate

CATEGORY OBJECTIVE

Assess the formal debate skills of competitors.

FACILITIES REQUIRED

- 1-2 amphitheaters/conference rooms per day

PERSONNEL REQUIRED

- 3 judges per room: The judges must determine the winners of each debate.
- 1 timekeeper per room: The timekeeper is responsible for ensuring that the competitors stay within the time allotted.
- 1 chair per room: The Chair of the debate ensures the rules of the debate are upheld and structures the event.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

- 1 table per team
- 1 large table for judges per room
- 1 overhead projector to display debate topics per room
- 1 timer per room
- A coin

DEBATING RULES AND ELEMENTS

Competitors must use analytical techniques to present a reasoned point of view of a resolution that has not been disclosed beforehand and with 5 minutes of preparation time. The goal of the event is to assess the competitors' ability to convey ideas and develop arguments. The purpose is not to assess competitor knowledge of parliamentary procedure or their grasp of formal debating rules. Therefore, the rules normally used in debates have been modified and relaxed to enable students with no formal debate experience to take part.

TEAMS

The debate is between two teams, each with two members. The proposition will be given the task of presenting an initial set of ideas and arguing their validity. The opposition will then proceed to show how these ideas are undesirable. Before the resolution is revealed, a coin toss is held. The team that wins the toss gets to pick the side that they want to represent. Teams are expected to act responsibly at all times. Inappropriate language or

offensiveness towards the other team, the officials, or the audience is not acceptable. Teams are expected to direct all of their speeches towards the audience.

RESOLUTIONS

The resolutions will be assigned by the organizing committee. They will be related to an issue that the average engineering student should have a defensible opinion on without any preparation. The resolutions will not be truisms. Absolute words such as "all," "everyone," and "always" will also be avoided (eg, "Be it resolved that all engineers are good at math" is not a good resolution, since there are always exceptions). Once both teams are informed of the resolution, they are given ten minutes to prepare for the debate.

THE OFFICIALS

The Chair

The Chair of the debate ensures the rules of the debate are upheld. He or she grants the right to speak (introduces the debater) and enforces the time limits. Most importantly, the Chair makes rulings on the "points of procedure" (Section 8.10) put forward by the debaters. The decisions of the Chair are final and offensiveness towards him or her will not be tolerated.

Timekeeper

The Timekeeper will use hand signals to indicate the number of minutes a speaker has left. The Timekeeper will also give a ten-second final countdown. If a question is asked in the first or last minute of the speech, the Timekeeper will indicate this to the Chair so that it can be stopped.

Time Allotted to Debaters

The speaking order and times will be as follows:

- First speaker of the proposition: 5 minutes
- First speaker of the opposition: 5 minutes
- Second speaker of the proposition: 5 minutes
- Second speaker of the opposition: 5 minutes
- Rebuttal by the first speaker of the opposition: 2 minutes
- Rebuttal by the first speaker of the proposition: 2 minutes

If a debater is over the time limit, the Chair will allow a 15-second grace period. Upon the exhaustion of speaking time, loud pounding on tables will suffice.

ROLE OF THE PROPOSITION

The proposition must narrow down the resolution so that the debate will be about one major topic. The resolutions must not be squirreled or converted into truisms. Squirreling is the act of redefining the resolution so that it has a meaning different than the one intended by the resolution. The proposition must also avoid specific knowledge debates where the average engineer has no familiarity with the topic. The proposition can follow one of two different strategies in the debate:

THE PRINCIPLE CASE

In a principle case, the proposition presents a principle and a contention. The principle is a general statement that is debatable based on facts, experience, or morals. Examples include "engineers need to be well rounded" and "Canadians abuse the free health-care system." The contention is the application of the principle to a particular situation relating to the resolution. The contention must be about one major topic and may be a re-statement of the resolution. Example contentions for the above principles would be: "Engineering students should be required to take more complementary studies classes" and "People should be discouraged from going to a doctor unless necessary."

THE PLAN CASE

In a plan case, the proposition still identifies a principle and a contention. Once this is done, they present a plan for implementing the contention and changing the status quo. They must identify the need for change and how the plan will induce this change. Example plans for the above contentions would be: "Students should be required to take two years of general studies before entering an engineering program" and "Individuals should be charged a fee every time they visit a doctor." The plan case is the most effective when the principle and contention are almost non-debatable. For example, if the resolution is "Be it resolved that waste management should become more stringent," the contention is almost unquestionable. However, the proposition can intensify the debate by adding, "Thus, we propose that any household that produces more than a certain quota of waste be severely fined." In a plan case, it is important that the plan does not become too specific since preparation time is limited and the technical knowledge necessary to develop the plan is non-existent.

THE FIRST SPEAKER

The first speaker of the proposition must explain the interpretation of the resolution, clearly state the principle and contention, and clarify any definitions. If a plan case is introduced, the entire plan must be outlined in the first speaker's speech. Finally, the first speaker must initiate the argumentation for the contention and plan.

THE SECOND SPEAKER

The second speaker of the proposition continues the argumentation of the first speaker and reaffirms concepts that have been attacked by the opposition. New parts of a plan may not be introduced and terms in the resolution may not be defined. New lines of argumentation and new evidence, however, may be introduced.

ROLE OF THE OPPOSITION

The opposition's task is to convince the judges that the proposition's views are fallacious. If the case presented by the proposition is a truism or requires specific knowledge to debate, the opposition can appeal to the judges with a "point of procedure" at the beginning of the first speech from the opposition. If the point is well taken, then the opposition must redefine the resolution in a debatable manner. If the proposition presents a principle case, the opposition is left with little more to do than attack the principle. If the proposition presents a plan case, the opposition can attack the principle, the contention or the arguments for the plan. The opposition can also show how the plan will not work or identify the undesirable side effects that it will create. Finally, the opposition may propose a counter plan that is more effective than the original plan. The first speaker of the opposition must introduce counter plans.

REBUTTALS

In the rebuttals, the most prevalent elements of the debate must be summarized in a concise and convincing manner. No new arguments or facts may be presented unless they directly refute what has already been discussed.

QUESTIONS

Questions are a secondary means of refuting arguments. They can promptly point out deficiencies in ideas. The debater who currently holds the floor has the authority to take or ignore questions. The opponent who wishes to ask a question indicates their desire by simply standing up. If the debater does not wish to take the question, he or she can so indicate by a wave of the hand or a simple "no, thank you." If this occurs, the inquiring party must sit down. If the current debater wishes to entertain the question, it must be stated by the opponent in less than 15 seconds. Both team members may take part in answering the question. The time used to ask and answer the question comes out of the current debater's allotted time. Each debater must accept one question during his or her speech, if the opponent is making an honest attempt to ask a question. Three attempts at asking a question constitutes an honest attempt. Questions will not be allowed in the first or last minute of a speech, or during rebuttals.

HECKLING

Often, the speaker can contradict himself/herself or make an absurd assumption. Heckling at this time will point out the error and add to the debate. Heckling is acceptable if it is short, to the point and preferably witty. If excess heckling becomes disturbing, the Chair may intervene.

POINTS OF PROCEDURE

If a team believes that one of the rules of the debate have been broken, they must immediately alert the Chair of the violation by standing and saying "Point of Procedure." The Chair will then respond with, "Make your point." The team will then proceed to explain how the debate rules have not been followed. Finally, the Chair will rule on the point by saying, "Point well taken" or "Point not taken." If it is obvious that the Chair is incorrect, the team should not argue with the Chair; but expect the judges to compensate for the Chair's shortcomings. The time it takes to rise and rule on a point is not included in the speaking time of the team currently debating. The following are violations that warrant a point of procedure:

- unprofessional behavior;
- offensive behavior;
- truism;
- presentation of a specific knowledge case*;
- misquotations;
- speaking to the opposition instead of the audience;
- presenting new arguments in the rebuttal;
- introduction of parts of a plan by the second speaker.

**If the proposition has presented a truism or specific knowledge case, the opposition must wait until the end of the first debater's speech to point this out.*

Moreover, if the officials have failed to follow the rules of debate (incorrect speaking order, too much speaking time allowed, etc.), it may be politely pointed out to them with a Point of Procedure.

JUDGING

An odd number of judges are required for each debate. Each judge will choose a winner for the debate and the team with the most votes will win the debate. The decision of the judges should not depend on personal biases or beliefs. The judges should focus only on what has been said, and how effectively it was presented. In the end, they should be able to answer the question, "Who convinced me the best?" Judges should also consider the abilities of the competitors in following the debate rules. Judges should not have any communication with anyone until their decision has been reached. Once the judges have conveyed their decision about the winning team to the Chair, they can deliberate. Deliberation serves to fill out comment forms and enables the judges to discuss the debate. While the judges are deliberating in another room, the speaker may want to open up the debate to speeches from the floor. These speeches should offer insight into the debate. Once the speeches from the floor have come to an end, the Chair reveals the name of the winning team.

TIMEKEEPING

- The Timekeeper is responsible for ensuring that the competitors stay within the time allotted (both preparation and speaking times). A 15 second grace period will be allowed.
- The time shall be stopped when the Chair is talking.
- The time shall be stopped when a question is asked in the first or last minute of a speaker's time.
- The minutes left in a speaker's time will be indicated with hand signals.
- A visual countdown shall be given during the last 10 seconds of each speaker's time.
- When a question is asked during a debaters speaking time, the question must be asked in 15 seconds or less.
- The timekeeper should review his/her responsibilities with the chair before the competition commences. Any change in these timekeeping procedures will be stated at the beginning of the debate.

THE COMPETITION

- The competition shall follow a “double-elimination” format.
- First round debate times are selected randomly.
- For rounds two to seven, the teams' debate times are based on how the team has performed so far.

ASSESSMENT AND JUDGES

- The judges should have basic experience in debating.
- The panel must have an uneven number of judges.
- The panel must comprise a minimum of three judges. There is no maximum number of judges.
- The debates shall be held in front of an audience.

