

Introduction to University-Style Debating

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Although there are many similarities between the format of debate used at High School tournaments and the kind that one should expect to see at University tournaments, the two formats have a number of very important differences. CUSID, the Canadian University Society of Intercollegiate Debate follows the University-Style Canadian Parliamentary system. This package will outline all of the basic roles in the debate and explain the types of cases that may be run in a University debate.

There are two teams in every Canadian Parliamentary debate:

the Government

- *Prime Minister (PM)*
- *Minister of the Crown (MC)*

the Opposition

- *Member of Opposition (MO)*
- *Leader of Opposition (LO)*

There are also a **Time Keeper** and a **Speaker of the House**. Sometimes there may be one person acting as both positions. It is the job of the Speaker to introduce each member before he/she speaks and to thank him/her after the speech. The Speaker may also be called upon to make a ruling if one team thinks that the other team has broken a rule. The Speaker must at all times be referred to as “**Mr. Speaker**” or “**Madame Speaker**”, unless the case is a time-place set, which will be explained later.

Each speaker has a specific amount of time for his/her speech and a specific order in which to speak:

<u>Speaker</u>	<u>Time</u>
Prime Minister (PM)	7 minutes (constructive)
Member of the Opposition (MO)	7 minutes
Minister of the Crown (MC)	7 minutes
Leader of the Opposition (LO)	10 minutes (7 constructive and 3 rebuttal)
Prime Minister (PM)	3 minutes (rebuttal)

The Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition each have 10 minutes, but the PM’s time is divided up into two separate speeches – one for “constructive” (known as the PMC) and one for “rebuttal” (known as the PMR).

It is the job of the Government to develop a case before the debate begins, and they can run any type of case that their hearts desire. The Opposition has no idea what case will be run (therefore, no idea what the debate will be about) until the PMC. A “squirrelable” **resolution** is given out before the round – usually a silly catchphrase, line or lyric. The resolution will always begin with the words “Be It Resolved That” (BIRT), even if they don’t relate to the actual resolution. Examples of resolutions:

BIRT: Show me the money!

BIRT: The grass is greener on the other side.

BIRT: What’chu talkin’ ‘bout, Willis??

As you can see, the resolution will not actually have anything to do with the case. The idea of the resolution is for the PM to make a very loose link (preferably somewhat witty) in the first 15 seconds or so of his/her speech

to the case that the Government is running. After this point, the resolution is completely abandoned and the case statement replaces it. Example:

Resolution: BIRT: Show me the money!

Case: The European Union should sanction Austria in light of Jorg Haider's election to office.

Link: "Ladies and gentlemen, as you can see, the resolution we have before us is "BIRT: Show me the money!" and we think it's time that somebody stopped talking and planning and put their money where their mouth is. We have a very serious case to present today about the European Union and some of the political changes we see happening abroad. And what we, the Government, firmly believe, is that the European Union should show us the money and actually sanction Austria for allowing Jorg Haider to be elected into office."

Case construction is very important. There are three different types of cases that may be run:

The Policy "Needs Plan" Case

The Philosophy/Values Case

The Time-Place Set

Policy: A policy case is one that outlines a specific problem and change that is needed in order to remedy the problem. These cases are often International Relations (IR) cases or related to Politics in some form, but they can also be about many other topics. The main idea behind a policy case is to change the status quo in some form, usually with a set plan.

Examples:

Women should be allowed to participate in submarine warfare.

Canada should politically sanction Vietnam.

All volleyball players should be made to wear short-shorts.

Blood donations should be mandatory.

Oscar Night should be discontinued.

Even though all the cases in the above examples are completely different and can range from political to downright silly, they are all policy cases.

Philosophy/Values: A philosophy or values case revolves around a moral or ethical issue rather than a hardcore policy. Keep in mind that just about every case should have some type of **underlying philosophy** anyway, but this type of debate is centred on that idea.

Examples:

This house believes in Affirmative Action.

This house supports same-sex unions.

This house would support the Arts.

Time-Place Set: A time-place set changes the role of the Speaker and the House for the round of debate in order to change the perspective on the case, although the Speaker must still make an unbiased decision, regardless of the bias placed on him or her. The Opposition can

choose to place themselves in a particular position as well, but the Government cannot do it for them. All speeches must remain within the parameters set out by the Government. For instance, if the Government defines the case as taking place the night before the breakout of World War I, no references to any events taking place after that night can be mentioned.

Examples:

“Mr. Speaker, you are Preston Manning. You have been thinking about getting rid of the Reform Party and creating a new party called the Canadian Alliance. We say you should leave the Reform Party as is.”

“Mr. Speaker, it’s the year 2003 and you are the President of the United States of America. An alien spaceship has landed in the Grand Canyon while fifteen people were watching. We say you should dispose of the fifteen witnesses and cover up the alien encounter.”

“Mr. Speaker, you are Barbie, as in the Barbie Doll, and we’re going to give you 5 very strong reasons as to why you should dump Ken.”

Opposition’s Role in Debating the Government’s Case

Regardless of whether or not the Opposition wants to debate a certain topic, the Government’s case must be debated. If the Opposition is hit with a case that they do not know too much information about, don’t understand very well, or is poorly explained by the Government, it can often put the MO in a very difficult position. If the case is unclear, then the MO should criticize the PM’s setup and suggest that the MC explain the case further in his or her speech. The best thing to do in a situation where the MO does not know very much about the topic, is to try to think of the underlying assertions or implications, and general arguments that might be applicable, such as the effect on the general public, etc.

Ultimately, the Opposition must “play ball” and debate the topic at hand, regardless of whether or not they want to or have a lot of knowledge about it.

Types of Cases that you should NOT run:

Truism: A truism is when the issue up for debate is not debatable. There could be several reasons for a case to be considered undebatable:

- a) it merely supports the status quo (ex. “People should drive cars if they want to.”)
- b) it is a **tight case** that places the Opposition in an incredibly unfair or undefendable position (ex. “We feel that the Nazis were wrong to execute millions of people”, which leaves the Opposition to defend Nazi behaviour)

Tautology: A tautology is a statement that is inherently true, based on the way it is defined.

Examples:

“Women are better than men, with ‘better’ being defined as the ability to bear children.”

“Children have not reached the age of majority.”

Specific Knowledge: If the Government runs a case that is not reasonable common knowledge, it is referred to as a specific knowledge case and unfair to the opposing team. Things like current events in international and local news, basic knowledge of the political systems, United Nations, the Canadian Charter, etc. are all fair game, however.

Examples of Specific Knowledge:

“You are John-Bob Billyman, the scientist who discovered the 10th allele in the Humane Genome. We say, don’t let Mary Jo-Phillips chart this as the same type of disease-causing cell as in the 42nd allele.”

“You are Jesse Ventura, the Governor of Minnesota. Based on your libertarian convictions and the line you uttered in a speech last year, we say that you should split your state’s Electoral College vote at the next election.”

Any Government who runs a case that is a truism, a tautology, or specific knowledge will be heavily penalized. Although the Government is allowed to run a **Gov-strong** case (a case that leans more in the Government’s favour, in the same way that they could choose to run an **Opp-strong** case) a debate is supposed to be contentious. If the contention is removed, there is no reason to have a debate.

Roles in a Debate

- PMC:* The Prime Minister must explain the Government’s case, outline the 4-6 constructive points for the Government team (known as “road-mapping”), give any necessary background information, explain each constructive point in detail, and then state why this case should stand.
- MO:* The Member of Opposition must do two things: have 1 or 2 constructive points for the Opposition’s side, and also rebut all of the points brought up by the Prime Minister. Always start with the constructive points first, then rebut, and then summarize why the Government’s case must fall.
- MC:* The Minister of the Crown must do three things: bring up 1 or 2 new constructive points for the Government’s case, rebut the constructive points brought up by the Opposition, and then rebuild the Government’s case after the MO’s rebuttal. Summarize by explaining why the Government’s case still stands.
- LO:* The Leader of the Opposition has 7 minutes in which to bring up new constructive points (generally 3-5) that take the debate to a higher, usually more philosophical, level. After bringing up all of the new constructive points, the LO then has the last 3 minutes (minimum) in which to rebut the new point(s) brought up by the MC, rebuild the MO’s points, rebut any remaining Government points, and explain why the Government’s case must ultimately fall.
- PMR:* The Prime Minister has 3 minutes to rebut and explain why the Government’s case must ultimately stand. No new information can be introduced at this point, except in direct refutation to something brought up by the LO. It is best to pick 2-3 main arguments and show why they either still stand for the Government, or make the Opposition’s case fall, rather than trying to hit everything in just 3 minutes.

Happy Debating!