

Toronto Metropolitan University

Engineering Competition Fall 2024

Debate Rulebook

1.1 Goal

Parliamentary Debate Competitors must use analytical techniques to present, with minimum preparation, a reasoned point of view of a resolution that has not been disclosed beforehand. The goal is to assess the competitors' abilities to convey ideas and develop arguments. The purpose is not to assess competitors' knowledge of parliamentary procedure and 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. The debate will be conducted in a shortened Canadian National Style debate format.

1.2 Team Composition

The team must consist of two (2) members.

1.3 Language

A team may choose to debate in either English or French. Both members from the same team must debate in the same language for the entire round.

1.4 Resources

1.4.1. Facilities Required

* Two (2) amphitheaters
* Two (2) rooms for judge’s deliberation
* Rooms for debater’s preparation

1.4.2. Personnel Required

*1.4.2.1. Judges*

A minimum of three (3) judges (in any excess, an odd number of judges) per room are required to assess the problem-solving abilities, proposed solution, communication skills and team dynamics of each competitor. Judges must come from a variety of backgrounds. In addition, it is not necessary for judges to have technical experience related to the topic, but it is suggested that judges have knowledge and/or experience in debating.

*1.4.2.2. Competition Lead*

The debate coordinator and the VP Competition(s) are responsible for the entire implementation of the Debate competition. The competition coordinator must develop debate topics and schedule and organize the overall competition procedure. It is recommended that the competition coordinator have previous experience in debates, preferably at the OEC or an internal qualifier.

*1.4.2.3 Debate Mediator/Debate Chair*

The Debate Mediator, otherwise known as a Debate Chair, is the expert in debate procedure and interpretation. The Mediator acts as an impartial judge and ensures that the judges understand the rules of the debate.

The Chair of the debate ensures the rules of the debate are upheld. They must grant the rights to speak (introduces the debater) and enforces the time limits. Most importantly, the Chair makes rulings on the “points of procedure” put forward by the debaters. The decisions of the chair are final.

*1.4.2.4 Timekeeper*

The Timekeeper is responsible for ensuring that competitors stay within their allotted time limits. The timekeeper will inform speakers of specific time intervals. The Timekeeper will use hand signals to indicate the number of minutes a speaker has left to conclude their argument.

The first and last thirty (30) seconds of a speech will be marked by the Timekeeper banging on the table, with the first bang indicating that Points of Information (POIs) are now permitted and the second bang indicating that POIs are no longer permitted. The Timekeeper will also give a ten (10) seconds final countdown on their hands. 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. If a member of the debater team knocks on the table during the final ten (10) seconds, the Timekeeper will permit an extra and final fifteen (15) seconds of grace.

1.4.3 Equipment Provided by MEC

The following equipment will be made available to all competitors during the competition time period:

* One (1) display board, projector, chalkboard or whiteboard is required to display the debate topic during the debate
* One (1) to three (3) stopwatches (a stopwatch for each speaking team is optional but encouraged)
* Two (2) tables
* One (1) podium with microphone
* One (1) microphone for each team table and one (1) for judging table, for a total of three (3) microphones

The layout of the room should place the tables and podium at the front of the room. The first row of the room will be reserved for the judges, Moderator, and Timekeeper. During preparation prior to each debate, the Government team will prepare in the room, while the Opposition team will prepare in the hallway located outside the room.

1.4.4 Allowed External Resources

External resources such as stopwatches, writing pads and other tools are allowed at the discretion of the debate mediator and judges. Props and any other external resources except those expressly mentioned previously are prohibited.

1.5 Debating Rules and Elements

1.5.1. Teams

The debate is between two teams, each with two members. The government 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 always expected to act responsibly. Inappropriate language or offensiveness towards the other team, the officials, or the audience is not acceptable. Teams are expected to direct all their speeches towards the Chair.

1.5.2. Resolutions

The resolutions will be assigned by the organizing committee and will be validated by the Debate Chairs before the competition begins. 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 (e.g. "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 (10) minutes to prepare for the debate.

1.5.3. Time Allotted to Debaters

The speaking order and times will be as follows:

* First speaker of the government: five (5) minutes
* First speaker of the opposition: five (5) minutes
* Second speaker of government: five (5) minutes
* Second speaker of the opposition: five (5) minutes
* Rebuttal by the first speaker of the opposition: two (2) minutes
* Rebuttal by the first speaker of the government: two (2) minutes

If a debater is over the time limit, the Chair will allow a fifteen (15) second grace period. Upon the exhaustion of the speaking time, loud pounding on tables will be deemed appropriate.

1.5.4. Role of Government

The government 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 government must also avoid specific knowledge debates where the average engineer has no familiarity with the topic. The government can follow one of two different strategies in the debate:

*1.5.4.1 The Principle Case (This House Believes That)*

In a principle case, the government 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 situation relating to the resolution. The contention must be about one major topic and may be a restatement 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."

*1.5.4.2 The Plan Case (This House Would)*

In a plan case, the government 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.

1.5.5. The First Speaker

The first speaker of the government 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.

1.5.6. The Second Speaker

The second speaker of the government 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.

1.5.7. Role of Opposition

The opposition’s task is to convince the judges that the government’s views are fallacious. If the case presented by the government is a truism or requires specific knowledge to debate, the opposition can point this out in their first speech and will be rewarded accordingly by the judges. If the point is well taken, then the opposition must redefine the resolution in a debatable manner. If the government presents a principle case, the opposition is left with little more to do than attack the principle. If the government 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 that the original plan. The first speaker of the opposition must introduce counter plans.

1.5.8. Rebuttals

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

1.5.9. Questions (Points of Information)

Questions, also known as Points of Information or POIs, are a secondary means of refuting arguments. They can promptly point out deficiencies in ideas, put speakers on the spot and hog time. 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 and extending an arm forward. If the debater does not wish to take the question, he or she can 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 fifteen (15) seconds during which the speaker must yield the floor.

The debater who holds the floor, or their team member, 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 questions. Three attempts at asking a question in one speech constitutes an honest attempt. Questions will not be allowed in the first or last thirty seconds of a speech, or during rebuttal speeches.

1.5.10. 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.

1.5.11. 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
* 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 government 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. Points of Procedures are commonly seen to detract from a debate when offered incorrectly. Points of Procedure which take away from the flow of a debate unnecessarily will be penalized by the judges.

1.6 Procedure/Timeline

1.6.1. Pre-Competition

Prior to the competition, information about the rules of the competition will be available on the competition website, metengcomp.com.

1.6.2. Presentation Order

The debate schedule will be prepared at random and presented at the pre-competition briefing (at least thirty (30) minutes prior to the first debate). This schedule will remain visible and updated systematically throughout the competition. The schedule should also illustrate the path which a team will follow depending on wins and losses.

1.6.3. Double Elimination

The debate competition will follow a double-elimination format, which ensures all teams will get to participate in at least two (2) debates. The competition begins with matches between randomly assigned pairs of teams. Once each team has debated once, the losers from the matches will face each other in a second "tree". (Note: in the case of an odd number of teams, all but one team will debate before the second tree commences.) The debates then proceed in the same format, with the first tree being those teams that have not lost a match, and the second tree for those that have lost a single match. Once a team has lost two (2) matches, they are out of the competition. The final match is between the top teams from each tree, and the third-place team is the one with the most wins that didn't make it to the final.

Teams may have to debate two (2) or more times in a row due to the dynamic nature of the format, however, the Debate Competition Lead should do their best to ensure teams are given reasonable breaks between debates. Double elimination is used to ensure a minimum level of team participation, therefore, if a team proceeds unbeaten until the final round only to lose to another team, there will not be an additional final debate.

1.7 Assessment and Judging

1.7.1. Judging

The debate is judged based on the most convincing argument, communication skills, and ability to follow outlined procedures. Each judge will decide individually, and the debate chair will tally the decisions and announce the winner. The winning team will then move to the next round.

1.7.2. Feedback

Feedback forms shall be provided to each team following the announcement of winners but prior to the end of MEC.

1.8 Key Points to Review

* Late teams will lose their opportunity to debate.
* Teams will have ten (10) minutes to prepare for their debate.
* Debaters must always direct their speech to the audience and not the opposing team. They will be warned for their first offence and deducted points for subsequent infractions.

**Judging Matrix:**

| **Criteria** | **5 points** | **4 points** | **3 points** | **2 points** | **1 point** | **Total**  **Points** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Respect for**  **Other Team** | All statements, body language, and responses  were respectful and used  appropriate  language (with the exception of minor heckling) | Statements and responses were respectful and  used appropriate language, but  once or twice  body language was not (with the exception of  minor heckling) | Most statements and responses  were respectful and in  appropriate  language. There was one  inappropriate  remark or minor body language issue | Statements,  responses and/0r body language were borderline inappropriate. Some  inappropriate  remarks or  actions | Statements,  responses and/or body language  were consistently not respectful |  |
| **Information** | All information presented in the debate was clear, accurate and  thorough | Most  information  presented in this debate was clear, accurate and  thorough | Most  information  presented in this debate was clear, accurate but was not thorough | Some  information was accurate, but  there were some minor  inaccuracies | Information had some major  inaccuracies or was usually not clear |  |
| **Rebuttal** | All  counter arguments were accurate, relevant, and  strong | Most  counter arguments were accurate, relevant, and  strong | Most  counter arguments were accurate, relevant but  several were  weak | Some  counter arguments were weak and irrelevant | Counter arguments were not  accurate and/or irrelevant |  |
| **Use of**  **Facts/Logic** | Every major  point was well  supported with several relevant facts and/or  logical  explanations | Every major  point was  adequately  supported with several relevant facts and/or  logical  explanations | Every major  point was  supported with facts and/or  logical  explanations but the relevance of some were  questionable | Some points  were supported well, others were not | All points were not supported |  |
| **Organization** | All arguments  were clearly tied to a common  idea(premise)  and organization in a tight, logical fashion | Most arguments were clearly tied to a common  idea(premise)  and organization in a tight, logical fashion | Most arguments were loosely tied to a common  idea(premise)  and organization in a somewhat  logical fashion | Some arguments were loosely tied to a common  idea(premise)  and organization in a somewhat  logical fashion | No arguments  were ties to a  common  idea(premise) and organized in any fashion) |  |
| **Understanding**  **of topic** | Team clearly  understood the topic in depth  and presented  their argument forcefully and  convincingly | Team clearly  understood the topic in depth  and presented  their argument with ease | Team seemed to understand the main points of  the topic  presented those with ease | Team seemed to understand the main points of  the topic but  didn't seem to  present with ease | The team did not show an adequate understanding of the topic |  |
| **Total Points:** | | | | | | |
| **Comments** |  | | | | | |

**Penalties:**

| **Violation** | **First Offense** | **Repeated Offense** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Unprofessional/Offensive behavior** | **A penalty of -1 to total score for team on each Judging matrix** | **An additional penalty of -1 to total score for each repeated offense** |
| **Misquotations** | **Misquoted point of argument will be struck from record** | **Misquoted point of argument will be struck from record** |
| **Speaking to opposition instead of the audience** | **A warning from the debate moderator** | **A penalty of -0.5 to total score for team on each judging matrix for each repeated offense** |
| **Presenting new arguments in the rebuttal** | **New argument will be struck from record and not allowed to be used further** | **New argument will be struck from record and not slowed to be used further** |
| **Introduction of parts of a plan by the second speaker** | **Part of plan will be struck from record and not allowed to be used further** | **Part of plan will be struck from record and not allowed to be used further** |