



# **A Guide to Judging National Style Debate**

This document is an amalgamation of the World School adjudicator guide (compiled by Christopher Erskine (Australia) with Rosemary Dixon and Andrew Stockley (NZ), Elizabeth Virgo (Bermuda) and David Pritchard (Wales)), and of the Canadian National Style criteria written by Chris George.

## **Introduction: The National Style**

The rules of this style of debate were established in Calgary in 2003. The objectives were to blend Canadian Parliamentary Style and the style at the World Schools Debating Championship. It is a unique blend of rules.

Each debate has two teams. Each team has two debaters, who each speak once. After each speaker has spoken once, each team has one reply speech. This will be given by the first speaker on the team. The reply speech is half the length of the main speeches. During the main speeches the opposing team can offer points of information (see section 3). However, no points may be offered during the reply speeches.

The motions that the team are debating are general issues rather than specific programs or proposals. Thus the government team may have to argue in favour of voluntary euthanasia as a principle: it would not have to put forward a specific legislative proposal to implement euthanasia except, perhaps, to define the motion or demonstrate that regulating euthanasia is practical. The emphasis is upon the principle, not the specifics. IE: No Model needs to be proposed, this is not BP or CP!

The debate is between teams, not individuals. Each team member has a specific part of the team case to present, and must also attack the other side and defend the team from attack. As the debate progresses, more and more time must be spent dealing with issues already raised in the debate, and less and less time must be spent on new argument and issues.

Each team must persuade the audience that its argument is superior. To do this it must present sound logical arguments, it must present them in an interesting and persuasive speaking style, and it must structure and prioritise its arguments. All three aspects of debate are given emphasis. This competition does not encourage just pure argument or pure rhetoric on their own, but an effective blend of both. (This is not American Parliamentary!)

The competition includes teams of vastly different background. While each team nurtures the hope that it may win the Grand Final, mere participation is a worthwhile experience in itself for all the teams. Success in the competition can be measured according to who wins the Grand Final: success can also be measured by exposure to new ideas and development of personal skills. Both aspects of success must be given due allowance by judges.

Before discussing specific matters, let me outline three fundamental principles:

- 1. A good argument is a good argument, no matter where a team comes from.*
- 2. Everybody else except you has a funny accent.*
- 3. Just because teams back home wouldn't do it doesn't make it wrong.*

The first principle says that logic is universal: your province doesn't have a monopoly on it. To put it another way, don't prejudge debates by the provincial background of the teams.

The second principle says that you should be prepared for major differences from what you are used to back home - accents, terminology, even the examples used to illustrate an argument. Your first national debate can be a real culture shock.

The third principle says that not everything that we do back home is essential to good debating. Each province has its own style of debating, which leads to particular provincial rules about what debaters can and can't do, but in the different style at a national competition, some of these rules from back home or from CUSID might be inappropriate. So leave your rule books in your suitcase and concentrate on the essentials of good debating.

## **1. The Marks**

Marks are awarded to each speaker as follows:

Content	40
Style	40
Strategy	20
Total	100

### **1.1 Content**

Content covers the arguments that are used, divorced from the speaking style. Judging content can be summarised as looking at:

- a] quality of argument
- b] quality of counterargument or rebuttal and
- c] the depth of the substantiation of each of a] and b].

It is as if you are seeing the arguments written down rather than spoken. You must assess the weight of the arguments without being influenced by the magnificence of the orator that presented them. Do all of the speakers for the team present a unified, co-ordinated, consistent case? Has the debater thoroughly researched the topic? Does he or she introduce adequate and relevant facts, examples, statistics, authorities and other such material? Does the debater choose a reasonable means to substantiate his or her assertions and is there sufficient documentation of all important assertions and evidence? Does the debater demonstrate ingenuity and imagination in the selection of materials? Does the debater understand the whole question being debated, the essence of his or her opponent's objections to his or her arguments, and how the particular issues that emerge during the debate relate to one another? Is the logic of the debater sound? Does he or she recognize and expose weaknesses in opponent's evidence and reasoning? Does the debater understand the crucial issues in the debate? Does he or she distinguish between substance and rhetoric? Are the definition of terms and the interpretation of the resolution sound and reasonable?

#### **1.1.2 Logical Argument**

There are two ways to prove that a proposition is true.

1. You can look at every known instance and show that in each case the proposition holds good.
2. You can analyse the proposition and show that it is supported by other known principles.

In debating it is usually impossible to use the first type of reasoning, because we debate generalisations with millions if not billions of known instances. So, we have to use the second type of reasoning. However, an amazing number of debaters don't seem to understand the difference.

### **1.1.2.1 A Hypothetical Example**

Suppose that two teams are debating the motion that "this house believes that we are all feminists now". The government chooses to interpret the motion reasonably literally: How does it prove its case?

Obviously it cannot ask everybody in the world whether or not they are feminists. Nor can it rely upon opinion polls: if the motion was as simple to prove as that, it wouldn't have been set for debate. Instead, it is going to have to make some generalisations about the motion in order to present a coherent argument within the time allowed.

For example, it could look at the public attitudes of important institutions in society such as governments big businesses, schools, religions, the media and sport. Part of its reasoning process would be that when the major institutions change their attitudes they either reflect the views of the general public or, perhaps, lead the general public towards new attitudes.

The first government speaker could outline a central thesis that went something like this: "In today's society the major institutions generally adopt feminist attitudes. These institutions either lead society (such as the media) or reflect the views of the majority in society (such as parliaments and big business).

From that point onwards we know what the government team is going to prove. When it discusses the role and attitudes of each major institution in society we can see why it is doing it and where the argument is going. The same thesis will run through the two government speakers so that all of them have made their contribution to proving the government case.

We don't want to get side-tracked into an argument whether this is a winning case or not. Rather, we want to illustrate the point that the government team has to present a generalised case and prove it logically, rather than relying upon large numbers of examples in the hope that these will do the job instead.

### **1.1.2.2 One Case or Several?**

If we accept that a case has to be a central thesis supported by each speaker, it is obvious that a team cannot be internally contradictory in its team case, it is a debate between teams, not a discussion between 4 individuals. All speakers on a team must be contributing to the same case, not to different ones.

Using the feminist example above, suppose that the first government speaker had outlined the case set out above. The second speaker could not present an argument that said that we were all hypocrites who merely gave lip-service to feminism. While this is a valid government case it is quite inconsistent with the case presented by the first speaker, if we were all hypocrites, then the major institutions in society would not be reflecting any general attitude in support of feminism.

### **1.1.2.3 Rebuttal or Clash**

The use of generalised cases has consequences for rebuttal or clash. The opposition team cannot concentrate on attacking the examples used by the government. The examples might be weak, but the central case might still be sound. Instead, it will have to concentrate on attacking that case, because that is where the debate actually lies.

In the feminist motion above, suppose that the government team used as an example the pro-feminist attitudes of one newspaper from a small country town. If the opposition team attacked just that example, it would show only that the government has chosen a particularly weak example to illustrate its argument. But the government case might still be sound. It might be true that the media generally had feminist attitudes, even if the example it chose to illustrate the point was a poor one.

Therefore, to succeed in this part of the debate, the opposition would have to show that the media generally did not have pro-feminist attitudes. Of course: It could ridicule the government: "Is such a trivial example the best that you can find to illustrate your case?". But this would merely be part of the process of attacking the general proposition that the media is pro-feminist rather than an end in itself.

There is another consequence for rebuttal. It may be that the government has used a number of examples to illustrate the same point. If they can all be disposed of with the same piece of rebuttal, the opposition does not have to attack each of the examples individually as well.

For example, suppose that the government in the feminist debate looked at the attitudes towards feminism in the major religions of the country. The opposition could respond in two ways to this argument. It could rebut the supposedly pro-feminist attitudes in each of those religions. Alternatively it could argue that religion plays such a minor role in society that the feminist attitudes of religions are largely irrelevant to the debate. Thus it would be unnecessary for it to deal with each example of a major religion dealt with by the government, because *all* of them are irrelevant according to its arguments.

### **1.1.2.4 The Reply Speech**

The thematic approach to argument outlined above becomes critical in the reply speeches. These have been described as "an adjudication from our side" and really amount to an overview of the major issues in the debate.

A reply speaker does not have time to deal with small arguments or individual examples. The speaker must deal with the two or three major issues in the debate in global terms, showing how they favour the speaker's team and work against the opposition team. As a general rule, a reply speaker who descends to the level of dealing with individual examples probably doesn't understand either the issues of the debate or the principles of good argument.

## 1.2 Presentation

Adjudicators should not be looking for speakers who are *stylish*, but rather they are looking at the *presentation* of the speakers. Judging presentation can be summarised as looking at the degree to which the presentation complements the argument.

Presentation covers the way the speakers speak. Does the debater present material in a clear, fluent, organized and coherent manner? Develop his or her ideas and case well? Does the debater enable the listener to understand the relevance of and the transition between arguments? Has the speech an effective introduction and conclusion and sound internal organization? Is the delivery smooth and spontaneous or stilted? Consider pose, posture, ease and effectiveness of gestures, enunciation, quality and use of voice, emphasis, variety, and other mechanics of good speaking. Does the debater display a command of language, use good grammar and employ appropriate vocabulary? Has the debater developed an effective style? Does he or she project intelligence, confidence and sincerity? Penalize for mere reading or memorization of a speech.

- any debater who lowers the tone of the debate should be penalized

## 1.3 Strategy

Strategy covers three concepts:

1. The **structure and timing** of the speech, and
2. Whether the speaker understood the **issues** of the debate.
3. The **role of the speakers**

### 1.3.1 Structure and timing

A good speech has a clear beginning, middle and end. Along the way there are signposts to help us see where the speaker is going. The sequence of arguments is logical and flows naturally from point to point. Good speech structure, therefore is one component of strategy.

Timing is also important, but it must not be taken to extremes. There are two aspects to timing.

1. Speaking within the allowed time limit, and
2. Giving an appropriate amount of time to the issues in the speech.

A speaker should also give more time to important issues. If there is a critical point that buttresses the whole of that team's case, it ought to get a fair amount of time so that it can be properly established. But if there is a point that is fairly trivial, it doesn't deserve more than a trivial amount of time. So the adjudicator must weigh not only the strength of the arguments in the content category, but also the proper time and priority that was given to them in the strategy category.

### 1.3.2 Understanding the issues

Closely related to the last point is that debaters should understand what the important issues were in the debate. It is a waste of time for a rebuttal speaker to deal with trivial points if crucial arguments are left unanswered. Such a speaker would not understand the important issues of the debate, and should not score well in strategy. By contrast, a speaker who understood what the important issues were and dealt with them thoroughly should score well in strategy.

It is very important that adjudicators understand the difference between strategy and content. Imagine a debate where a speaker answers the critical issues with some weak rebuttal. This speaker should get poor marks for *content*, because the rebuttal was weak. But the speaker should get reasonable marks for *strategy*, because the right arguments were being addressed.

### 1.3.3 The Role of the Speakers

Essential part of strategy is the role the speakers must fulfill;

**The first government** defines the motion, outlines the government case, announces the case division, and presents the case for the government.

**The first opposition** deals with the definition if it is a problem, explains the important differences between the two team cases, and either outlines the opposition case, and presents the opposition case, outlines the opposition's rebuttal case (i.e. the broad themes the opposition will use throughout the debate to rebut the government case) and expands on it.

The difference between these two approaches depends on whether the opposition is content just to present a rebuttal case, or takes the stronger route and presents its own alternative case as well.

**The second government** is going to spend a large part of her or his time attacking the other side, including defending the Government case from the Opposition rebuttal arguments. However, she or he can have a small part of the government case to present - Perhaps 1 or 2 minutes at the most.

**The second opposition** is going to spend most of her or his time attacking the other side, rather than presenting significant new arguments, She or he can have an even smaller part of the opposition case to present, but again this is not obligatory. Note that the opposition reply follows straight on from this speech, so it is better for the third opposition to deal with the detail of the government case and leave the broad overview to the reply speech.

**The reply speeches** are not going to delve into fine detail, but will take a broad approach to the issues of the debate. They should also summarise their own case either as part the analysis of the issues or towards the end of the speech as a separate section. For obvious reasons the reply speeches cannot introduce new arguments except by the proposition debater who is exercising his/her right to reply to new arguments tendered during the final Opposition constructive speech. he/she can not introduce new lines of reasoning. The counter argumentation and counter example (or even counter illustration) must be in 'close and direct' opposition to the opposition points.

## **2. Motions**

### **2.1 Weighted motions**

In the 1992 Worlds School Championships most teams debated the motion "that this house would ban all alcoholic drinks". The consensus among the judges was that the motion was heavily weighted against the government. Yet look what happened in three different debates on this motion when the judges grappled with the weighting of the motion:

In the first, the judges weighted the debate to the government because the motion was weighted the other way - in other words, they compensated the government in marks for having such a tough side to argue;

In the second, the judges felt that weighting was impossible to assess, and did not try to redress the balance;

In the third, the judges decided not to redress the weighting because the government team had actually chosen to be the government and thus voluntarily taken the harder side.

The problem here is the inconsistency. If the opposition team which narrowly lost the first debate had had the judges from the second debate, it would have won convincingly.

It is very hard for judges to assess just what advantage one team has because of the motion. It is better not to try to compensate for perceived advantages, and leave it to those who set the motions to choose reasonably balanced ones.

The motions are set by the board of governor, a collective of coaches from around the country, and a thorough reflection is given on the motions.

### **2.2 General Motions - From What Perspective?**

In provincial debating it is sometimes legitimate to take a motion that is expressed very broadly and debate it in the context of some local issue of the day. At the national level however, such a limitation is generally not acceptable. The competition includes a diverse range of provinces. This means that general motions have to be taken in the context of the whole country, not one particular region.

Once again, we have to rely upon those who set motions to be sensible.

Time-setting and place-setting are not allowed. Time-setting puts the motion in a particular era in history. Place-setting puts the motion in a particular place. Thus we could time- and place-set the motion "that God is dead" in Israel shortly before the birth of Christ and argue the motion as if we were alive in that place at that time. But in National Style rules we can't, because this is not allowed.

## **2.3 Objectivity in Judging**

It goes without saying that judges have to be as objective as possible. But in the national context this causes some interesting problems, because provincial perspectives on issues can be so different.

Objectivity in national debating is much harder than in provincial debating. Our views on the nation are shaped to a large extent by our local media.

Judges also have to recognise that some motions require teams to take hard options in argument rather than soft ones. If the motion were "that we should abolish third world debts", the opposition would almost certainly have to argue the need for international financial responsibility by governments, no matter how tough and unfeeling this may sound. The best debates are often ones between two strongly opposed arguments, rather than between two wishy-washy cases that try to compromise at every opportunity.

## **3. Points of Information**

A point of information is offered in the course of a speech by a member of the opposing team. The speaker may either accept the point or decline it. If accepted, the opponent may make a short point or ask a short question that deals with some issue in the debate (preferably one just made by the speaker). It is, if you like, a formal interjection.

### **3.1 Debating is More than a Speech**

Points of information bring about a major change in the role of speakers in a debate. In this style each speaker must take part in the debate from beginning to end, not just during their own speech. A first speaker for the government continues to play an active role in the debate even when the second speaker for the opposition is speaking. Equally, the second speaker for the opposition must play an active role in the debate when the first speaker for the government is speaking.

The speakers play this role by offering points of information. Even if the points are not accepted, they must still demonstrate that they are involved in the debate by at least offering. A speaker who takes no part in the debate other than by making a speech should lose marks for content and strategy - content for failing to take advantage of opportunities, strategy for failing to understand the role of a speaker under this style.

Equally, speakers must ensure that they accept at least some points of information during their speech. In an 8 minute speech, taking at least 2 would be expected (depending, of course, on how many are offered). A speaker who fails to accept any points of information must lose marks for content (failing to allow the other side to make points, thus reducing the amount of direct clash between the two teams) and particularly strategy (for not understanding the role of the speakers in this style - or, to put it another way, for cowardice!). Of course, a speaker who takes too many will almost certainly lose control of the speech and thus lose marks for style and probably also for strategy (poor speech structure) and content as well.

### **3.2 The Etiquette of Points of Information**

A point of information is offered by standing and saying "Point of information;" or something similar. The speaker on the floor is not obliged to accept every point. She or he may - ask the interrupter to sit down finish the sentence and then accept the point, or accept the point then and there.

More than one member of the opposing team may rise simultaneously. The speaker on the floor may decline all or some, and may choose which one to take. The other then sit down. Opposing speakers must sometimes tread a fine line between the legitimate offering of points of information on the one hand, and barracking on the other. The fact that points must be offered makes the style more aggressive and more prone to interruptions. However, continuous offering by a team really amounts to excessive interruption and is barracking. This should incur penalties in style for the team members involved.

It is impossible to put a figure on how many points of information a team may offer before its behaviour constitutes barracking. Judges should determine when the offering of points of information, far from adding to the debate, begins to infringe on the right and/or ability of the speaker to address the audience. This determination requires sensitivity to the context of the particular debate: two well-matched and highly-skilled teams may offer each other many points of information without disrupting the debate or unsettling the speaker on the floor, but points offered at this same high rate to a speaker who is less confident may constitute barracking. In general, speakers should not offer points of information only a few seconds after a previous offer has been declined or while the speaker on the floor is clearly in the early stages of answering a point of information she just accepted: frequent violations of these principles might reasonably be penalized.

The point of information may be in the form of a question to the person making a speech, or it may be a remark addressed through the person chairing the debate. Some teams tend to use the latter format, while most teams tend to ask a question. Let it be clear that either format is perfectly acceptable.

The point of information must be brief. 10 to 15 seconds is the norm, and over that the interrupter should be told to sit down by the speaker. As well, when the person making the speech understands the point, she or he can tell the interrupter to sit down - the speaker does not have to let the point get right through to the end in all cases. Always remember that the speaker who is making the speech has complete control of points of information - when to accept them, whether to accept them and how long they should go on for.

This, of course, puts a premium on clear simple points. In one debate the interrupter began by saying "I may be particularly dense..." and paused, whereupon the speaker said "yes you are" and continued with his speech. This was a waste of a good opportunity, all because the interrupter chose to indulge in pompous oratory rather than a crisp clear point.

### 3.3 Marking Points of Information

It is relatively easy to mark the *responses* to points of information, because each response is incorporated into the speech and that is where it gets marked.

The problems come in marking the *offering* of points of information, because speakers will offer points other than during their own speech, at a time when the judge is making notes about another speaker altogether.

To begin with there is a practical problem. Judges must have some system of recording points of information from the beginning of the debate even for speakers who will not speak until the end of the debate. In other words, during the first speaker for the government, a judge must be able to record something about the offering of points of information by the second speaker of the opposition.

A simple solution has been devised in Australia by Annette Whiley. Each judge has a separate sheet of paper, divided into four boxes (one line down the middle, two across the page). Each box represents the offering of points by a speaker. During the first speaker for the government, the two boxes on the right hand side will be used to record the offering of points by the three opposition speakers. A simple tallymark shows one was offered. If one was accepted, a brief note about it can be included in the box. At the end of the debate this allows the judge to see what sort of contribution was being made by each speaker in offering points of information.

A speaker's speech mark should only be adjusted if her contribution to the debate through offering points of information differed significantly from her contribution in her speech. (Contribution to the debate through offering points of information involves both the quantity of points of information offered and the quality of those accepted: speakers should not be penalized if they offer plenty of points but none is accepted.) A speaker's speech mark may be adjusted by up to two marks in either direction to take account of points of information offered: if such an adjustment is being made, the judge should write, e.g., +1 or -2 in the appropriate column on the ballot. So, a speaker whose speech deserved a 70 but who offered remarkably good points of information might receive an overall mark of 71, or perhaps 72 if the points were truly outstanding. A speaker whose speech deserved a 76 but who offered almost no points of information might receive an overall mark of 74 or 75. But a speaker whose speech deserved a 64 should not lose marks for failing to offer many points of information, because his contribution through offering points was no worse than his speech. Likewise, a speaker whose speech deserved a 78 does not get extra marks for making a couple of very good points of information, because those points were no better than her speech

A summary of how to mark points of information is as follows:

The primary component of the speaker's marks is the speaker's speech.

That mark can **increase** by up to a couple of marks if the speaker offered superb points of information during the rest of the debate.

That mark can **decrease** by up to a couple of marks if the speaker:

- (i) offered no points of information (or almost none) during the rest of the debate;
- (ii) offered bad points of information during the rest of the debate;
- (iii) failed to accept points of information during her or his own speech.

Note that just because the response to a point of information was good, it doesn't mean that the point was not a good one. Don't judge the worth of the point on the response. After all if a motion is strongly arguable on both sides, then the major points on each side should have good counter-arguments.

#### 4. The marking scheme

In both prepared and impromptu debate, the following are the maximum number of points that shall be awarded if deserved. Remember that the scores below are a **guide** to help you judge the various elements of the round. You are welcome to, and encouraged, to provide only a holistic final score, while keeping the various elements in mind.

*The expected range of marks is from 60% for an appalling speech to 80% for a brilliant one.*

*A good average speech at this competition is worth 70%.*

*Judges shall never give a speaker mark greater than 80 or less than 60.*

The following is a GENERAL guideline describing what percentage of marks should be given in each range.

A brilliant speaker would score 32 for style, 32 for content and 16 for strategy (i.e. 80% of each category).

A good average speaker for this competition would be expected to score 28 for style, 28 for content and 14 for strategy (i.e., 70% of each category).

An appalling speaker would score 24 for style, 24 for content, and 12 for strategy (i.e. 60% of each category).

#### **NB:**

- The individual score out of 100 should be an overall reflection of the speaker's speech(es).
- Please double check the speaker's name with the position in the score boxes, and be sure to get the speaker's code as well, if applicable.
- You may, and are encouraged to, enter a final score only. Please take care to compare all scores in both relative and absolute terms. Please be advised that the tabs room will only look at the final score.
- the mark given for the reply speeches will only be tabulated for the team mark and wont affect the speakers ranking.

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Overall (100)</b>	<b>Style (40)</b>	<b>Content (40)</b>	<b>Strategy (20)</b>
Exceptional	83	33	33	17
Excellent	79-81	32	32	15-16
Extremely Good	77	31	31	15
Very Good	74-75	30	30	14-15
Good	72	29	29	14
Satisfactory	69-70	28	28	13-14
Pass	66	27	27	12