



BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY HANDBOOK



The Western Australian Debating League aspires to ensure all students have meaningful access to debating that encourages critical thinking, fosters engagement with global issues, and equips students with lifelong skills and the confidence to pursue their potential. WADL aims to do this by ensuring all Western Australian school students have access to challenging debating competitions, high quality resources, and purpose-built development opportunities.

About this resource

WADL cares deeply about accessibility and making sure every student has access to resources, feedback, and advice on how to debate.

This handbook covers:

1. Introduction to the British Parliamentary format
2. Positions and speaker requirements
3. Opening teams
4. Closing teams
5. Extensions
6. Case construction
7. How to win a BP debate
8. Tactics and traps
9. Marking of British Parliamentary format

The Edith Cowan British Parliamentary Competition

This tournament is perfect for your later year debate fix! BP runs over the weekend with a series of impromptu debates followed by a series of final rounds. Sign-ups are in pairs. Rego information can be found on our website at wadl.org!



Other resources

We have a Youtube channel with a variety of example debates and helpful videos. WADL also offers a series of debating seminars, internal school competitions, and workshops which can help upskill debaters. A coaching list is also available each year.

Need help?

If you have any questions please email:

- Our British Parliamentary convenors at bp@wadl.org
- Our Chief Operating Officer at coo@wadl.org

A letter from ECU Associate Dean of Law

Introduction

My name is Dr Joshua Aston, and I am the Associate Dean of Law at Edith Cowan University. My friends and colleagues from the Western Australian Debating League have tasked the teaching team in the Bachelor of Laws at Edith Cowan University with writing an open letter on the benefits of debating. I do so with great pleasure, on behalf of my fellow law academics, many of whom are former legal practitioners who all love to argue.



Debating can foster and improve three main skills: public speaking; verbal communication skills; presenting a structured logical argument; and the art of persuasion. After providing a brief outline of these skills and how debating contributes to developing those skills, this letter concludes with a note of caution on the dangers of arguing just for the sake of it. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. Through learning the skills of debating as a means unto an end, and not an end in itself, you will gain strong foundations to pursue your dreams.

Public speaking

Some (not necessarily most) politicians make an art of communicating very little, but because they are good public speakers they do so in a way that nonetheless makes you want to listen – at least initially. There are several techniques they use – and these are all techniques you will learn through debating. When under pressure, most people tend to speak at one pace and in one tone, and always too quickly. Think of it like this:

I'm writing without stops because I want you to read without a break and see how hard it is to follow whatever I'm writing. Through debating, you will learn to speak slowly, with some variation in speaking pace, and some variation in tone – you will sound nothing like the previous last sentence! You will also learn to project your voice. With practice comes confidence. Whether this comes naturally or not, you will learn to project your voice confidently and command the room – just with the power of your voice. When you speak, people will listen!

Verbal communication skills

More than being just about public speaking, verbal communication skills are about the transferral of ideas. You will have many great thoughts in your head. Through debating, you will learn the skills necessary to translate thought into word – to get from inside your head and into the head of another. Debating teaches you to focus on the issue. It forces you to think about how you will convince another person of your view. Perhaps you will disagree with your own argument – you don't always get to choose which side of the debate you will take. Nonetheless, you will be constructing thoughts about an issue and then having to communicate those to another. It takes practice. Each time you practise, you receive feedback. You take on board the feedback, and you improve.

A logical structured argument

The key points in an argument matter – but equally important is how those points are ordered. A question was once posed to a retired judge about closing submissions. Closing submissions happen at the end of a trial and should sum up your case and give a punchy conclusion. The question to the retired judge was, “In closing submissions, what’s the sort of thing that you least want to hear?” The judge replied “What I really don’t want is a directionless speech, that starts somewhere in the middle, floats around and finishes somewhere in the beginning. I want submissions that are well structured and easy to follow”.

Debating will, over time, foster your ability to marshal your thoughts and present a well-structured argument to the listener. Listen out for feedback where the listener indicates that they didn’t understand a point you were making until sometime later in your debate. This is a sign of a structural issue. Your argument was great – but the listener could only follow it from about half-way through. Debating will teach you to lay down the trail of your argument, making it easy to follow.

Persuasion

Public speaking, verbal communication and well-structured arguments are critical in persuading an audience. Persuasion, however, is also about more than these things. You need to understand the listener, and the sorts of things that they find persuasive. You also need to understand your opponent – what arguments are they likely to present? You need to think about opposing arguments so that you can head them off. Debating is especially good at imparting these skills. On occasion you will be forced to present an argument you disagree with. When that happens, it’s frustrating, but it’s also a great opportunity to learn how to put yourself in the opposition’s place. You will know the arguments they will run – and you will be prepared for them, and therefore you will be able to mount strong counter-arguments. Then, when the time comes to argue a point that you do agree with, you will have the skills to pause, and think about where your opposition is coming from. You will be able to head those arguments off and convey your arguments in their most compelling form.

Arguing for the sake of it – caution!

A final note of caution. Debating is loads of fun, and in the competition you can, and indeed should, get lost in the fun. Debating though is a means to achieving an end, and shouldn’t be confused with an end in itself. Use the skills you learn and enjoy the experience, but always remember that there are things worth fighting for. Debating gives you the skills to go out and fight for them. Debate with both passion and compassion, and you will go far.

Yours faithfully,



Associate Professor Joshua Aston
Associate Dean (Law), School of Business and Law

About the tournament

Unlike the Schools' Debating Competition, the BP Tournament requires that teams participate in three debates over the course of one day.

Teams must select one date, and be available between **8.30am** and **4pm**. At the conclusion of all debates, WADL will contact schools to announce those teams progressing to the semi-final.

Students must register in **teams of two**. The competition is divided into two age brackets, Years 7-9 (Cygnets) and Years 10-12 (Swans). Students do not need to be from the same year group, but must be from the same school (no cross teams). If a team crosses age brackets, they will compete in the most senior division.

All BP debating is **impromptu**. This means that teams are not required to prepare before their designated competition day. All topics will be provided on the day. After topics are released, teams will have 30 minutes to prepare their case. WADL will provide a short **development seminar** at the beginning of each day to ensure students are familiar with the competition rules, debating format, and basic strategies of BP. The first debate of each day will be **assisted**, meaning students are allowed and encouraged to seek direction from adjudicators regarding the topic, their case, etc.

Coordinators, teachers and coaches are not required to be at the premises, and will not be allowed to watch debates or communicate with their team during the day. Schools who wish to provide chaperones in a non-coaching capacity are welcome to do so.



For further questions or information, contact our convenors at bp@wadl.org.

Basics of BP debating

What is the British Parliamentary format?

British Parliamentary debating is one of the most popular debate forms in the world. Originating in the 19th century and based on the British House of Commons, the format is famous for its lively sparring and heated engagement between all speakers.

What are the 4 teams and 2 houses?

The debate is divided into two houses: the Government (who proposes the motion) and the Opposition (opposes the motion). These two sides are further divided into Opening and Closing halves. In BP debates there are thus four teams of two who are all competing against each other. These are: Opening Government (OG), Closing Government (CG), Opening Opposition (OO), and Closing Opposition (CO).

OPENING GOVERNMENT

Argues for the motion
Opens the debate

OPENING OPPOSITION

Opposes the motion
Opens the debate

CLOSING GOVERNMENT

Argues for the motion
Closes the debate

CLOSING OPPOSITION

Opposes the motion
Closes the debate

What is different?

	3v3 format	BP format
Speakers	3 speakers per team	2 speakers per team
Teams	2 teams total	4 teams total
What do we call each side of the topic?	"Affirmative" is for motion "Negative" is against motion	"Government" is for motion "Opposition" is against
Results	1 winner	Teams are ranked from 4th place to 1st place

Are topics different in BP debating?

Topics are not wildly different in BP. This is where the phrasing of "This house" comes from, as each side in a BP debate is called each house. Sometimes topics may appear "wider" or broader than other motions used in the 3v3 format, which is to ensure there is enough easily identifiable material for all teams to discuss. WADL also likes to run a lot of "fun" topics as BP is usually a weekend competition!

How long are speeches in BP debating?

Speech timings depend on age brackets. In the ECU BP competition, WADL divides participants into Cygnets and Swans. A single bell occurs 1 minute into the debate to open the floor for POIs and another single bell 1 minute before the end to close time for POIs. A double bell is given to indicate a speaker should finish their speech.

Speech times:

Cygnets (Years 7-9)	5 minutes, POI bell at 1 and 4	Respond to 1 POI
Swans (Years 10-12)	7 minutes, POI bell at 1 and 6	Respond to 1 or 2 POIs

Does BP have POIs?

British Parliamentary debating includes POIs for all ages. Cygnets are encouraged to offer at least 1 POI per speech and Swans to offer 2 POIs per speech. Speakers across all ages are recommended to accept between 1-2 POIs. For an explanation of POIs, please see page 21 of the [WADL Debating Handbook](#).

Is it impromptu?

All BP debating is impromptu. Teams are given 30 minutes to prepare their case without research or notes. This means that teams are not required to prepare before their designated competition day, with all topics provided on the day.

WADL offers a short development seminar at the beginning of each day to ensure students are familiar with the competition rules, debating format, and basic strategies of BP. The first debate of each day will be assisted, meaning students are allowed and encouraged to seek direction from adjudicators regarding the topic and their case.

Positions

Which role should I choose?

Each team has 2 speakers. To put it simply, one person in the pair will speak more substantively (presenting and explaining points) and one will speak more responsively (doing rebuttal and whipping). If you're used to speaking 1st in 3v3, you will likely want to take the Member position, while your 3rd speaker friend may want to speak Whip.

What does the BP set-up look like?

Government teams will sit on the same side of the room (and often the same desk) while Opposition teams sit opposite. However, despite sitting on the same side of the house, teams are not permitted to communicate with their "friendly" team.

Who are the speakers in each team?

Opening Gov Prime Minister & Deputy Prime Minister	Opening Opp Leader of the Opposition & Deputy Leader
Closing Gov Government Member & Government Whip	Closing Opp Opposition Member & Opposition Whip

What is the speaking order?

There are 8 speakers in BP. Opening teams speak first in the debate, while closing teams speak in the second half. Government speakers talk before the opposition.

In a BP debate, speeches will run:

1. Prime Minister (PM)
2. Leader of the Opposition (LO)
3. Deputy Prime Minister (DPM)
4. Deputy Leader of the Opposition (DLO)
5. Government Member
6. Opposition Member
7. Government Whip
8. Opposition Whip

How do teams on the same side interact?

You cannot prep with, speak to or help the other team on the same side as you. But as you are on the same side, you should generally avoid contradicting or saying harsh things about their material. You are not allowed to ask them POIs.

What about the opposite bench?

The two teams opposite you disagree with your position on the topic. This means you should direct plenty of energy towards rebutting their material, proving why things they claim are not true and/or not important, and ask them plenty of POIs.

For example, if you were Closing Opposition you would listen to your Opening Opposition carefully and take notes, considering how you can look better, but not interject in their speeches. When Opening Government and Closing Government speakers are talking, you should be asking POIs and preparing rebuttal.

Speaker requirements

OPENING GOVERNMENT

Prime Minister

- Set up, characterise and contextualise the problem
- Establish model if needed
- Preemptively clear up any ambiguity in the debate
- Present 1-3 arguments that support the motion

Deputy Prime Minister

- Identify and respond to the main arguments presented by the Opposition
- Defend or clarify any material introduced by the Prime Minister
- Present an additional 1-2 substantive arguments that support the motion
- Emphasise the importance of the material presented by your team

OPENING OPPOSITION

Leader of the Opposition

- Set up, characterise and contextualise the debate from the perspective of the Opposition (can agree with or challenge PM set-up)
- Identify and respond to the main arguments presented by the Government
- Present 1-3 substantive arguments that oppose the motion

Deputy Leader of the Opposition

- Identify and respond to the main arguments presented by Government
- Defend or clarify any material introduced by the LO
- Present 1-2 new substantive arguments that oppose the motion
- Emphasise the importance of the material presented by your team

CLOSING GOVERNMENT

Government Member

- Respond to all important material that has been delivered so far
- Clearly identify how your team will extend the debate
- Provide new substantive material in the form of an extension
- Prove that the extension is the most important element in the Government case

Government Whip

- Identify main arguments in debate
- Respond to all these arguments in novel and sophisticated ways
- Provide a biased adjudication of the debate that favours your team
- "Whip", or relay and strengthen, your team's extension

CLOSING OPPOSITION

Government Member

- Respond to all important material that has been delivered so far
- Clearly identify how your team will extend the debate
- Provide new substantive material in the form of an extension
- Prove that the extension is the most important element in the Opposition case

Government Whip

- Identify main arguments in debate
- Respond to all these arguments in novel and sophisticated ways
- Provide a biased adjudication of the debate that favours your team
- "Whip", or relay and strengthen, your team's extension

Opening teams

What is the role of an opening team?

The responsibility of opening is to **set-up** the debate.

This usually means:

- Characterising in great depth
- Grounding the debate with examples
- Identifying a principle and offering multiple arguments
- Engaging in some sort of clash with the other opening team

Generally, opening teams will be successful if they demonstrate **control** of the debate. In order to remain **relevant** for the whole debate, a strong opening team will provide a **characterisation** of the motion that all later teams **engage** with. They will deliver the **most important material** in the debate, and will be able to convince the adjudicator that all other teams in the debate need to deal with that material. They will emphasise the **stakeholders** (people) and **outcomes** that the adjudicator should care about **the most** in the debate.

Some of this emphasis can be achieved through language and structure. However, exceptional Opening teams will also use set-up and characterisation to frame the debate around these stakeholders and outcomes. Making sure to ask lots of POIs is an excellent way to make sure your opening material remains relevant even at closing!

Closing teams

What is the role of a closing team?

The responsibility of closing is to **extend** the debate.

This usually means:

- Presenting a unique and new angle to consider the debate from
- Showing why the debate was incomplete or restricted before this analysis
- Dedicating significant time to rebutting the whole enemy bench

Generally, closing teams will be successful if they can **recentre the debate** around the **extensions**. Closing teams need to present **new and distinct material**, rather than rehashing material presented by opening halves. However, exceptional closing teams will be able to **cleverly reuse** material, ideas or examples to strengthen their argument.

Closing teams should not be afraid to go into a debate with little or no content written down, as they do not have to speak for the first 30 minutes of the debate, effectively doubling their preparation time. Confident closing teams should use the initial prep time discussing the debate, generating possible extension ideas, and creating strong, strategic POIs to ask during the opening half of the debate.

Closing teams have the opportunity to align themselves to either a side (Gov/Opp) or a half (Opening/Closing) based on an evaluation of the relative strength of each team. Deciding who is winning the debate and adjusting your focus can be a clever strategy!

Extensions

What is an extension?

An extension is a unique take on the debate brought by a closing team.

Do I need an extension?

If a closing team fails to present, prove, and prioritise their extension, they cannot win the debate.

How do I present an extension?

Extensions must be introduced explicitly by the Member.

Speakers can use phrases such as:

- "What has been missing from the debate until now..."
- "The most important thing to consider in this debate..."
- "I will extend this debate to discuss..."
- "Our extension considers the impact of this debate on the stakeholder of..."
- "This debate needs to look at this issue in the context of..."
- "We will provide an extension by way of analysing X..."
- "It is important to consider X. This is our extension".

What do I talk about in an extension?

Many things can serve as an extension! For example:

A new stakeholder! **A new impact!** **A new harm!** **A different actor!**

A clearer mechanism! **A new benefit!** **A different context!**

A better principle! **A more vulnerable group!** **A more grounded example!**

Teams can either provide an extension in the form of material that has not been discussed up until that point in the debate (extending out), or in the form of analysis that has not been used to prove a key point (extending in).

“Extending out” 🌍

It is recommended that, wherever possible, teams extend out. When brainstorming directions in which to extend out, teams should be creative! This is an opportunity to show off specific knowledge, to widen the scope of the debate, or to address a stakeholder that has been ignored.

“Extending in” 🔍

Extending in narrows the debate. In order to successfully extend in, closing teams must identify a significant weakness or gap in the analysis of their opening team. For example, Opening Opposition may present a principle, but not defend it or fail to apply it to the motion in question. Closing Opposition may choose to extend the debate by running this same principle, but making it clear that they are applying it in a different way or analysing it through a different perspective.

Extending In is a completely valid tactic and can be used to win debates. However, teams should avoid extending in unless they are certain that their analysis is distinct from - and better than! - the analysis offered by their opening half.

Quick hacks to giving a debate-winning extension:

1. In prep time, write a big list of all points you can think of
2. During the debate on the bench, finalise your extension
3. Have member open with saying “the most important thing to consider in this debate” or “what has been missing from now” then state your extension
 - a. If you want to say you’re extending out, emphasise how new and unique your material is. For extending in, make it clear that you are still bringing something opening has missed e.g. “we will bring you the mechanisms opening missed” or “we will impact this”
4. Member spends a good portion of their speech explaining the extension just like you would any other substantive point. Integrate your rebuttal or do rebuttal after presenting your extension first- your whole speech should revolve around your important extension!
5. Whip speaker whips extension hard and centers it in rebuttal

Points of Information (POIs)

Why should I offer POIs?

POIs are a key element of BP strategy. They allow members to direct questions to the member speaking. Teams who fail to offer an adequate number of POIs are unlikely to be successful. POIs demonstrate that teams are engaged in the debate, listening to the other half of the debate, and provide an opportunity to engage in the opposite half of the debate.

Who should I offer POIs to?

Teams cannot offer POIs to their own bench i.e. the opening government cannot POI the closing government. They can offer POIs to both opening and closing opposition.

What is a POI?

A POI is a short question directed to the member who is speaking. This can be used to challenge or clarify an idea that the speaker brings up, to challenge an idea presented earlier in the debate, to reintroduce content/force a response to one's own material, or to introduce new ideas or new arguments into the debate.

How do they work?

After the first minute of every speech, there will be a bell. Speakers from the opposite bench may then start offering POIs. Exceptional teams should aim to offer a POI every 10-15s. Students offer POIs by standing up and vocalising their intention, by saying "Point", "Point of Information", or otherwise addressing the speaker.

The speaker may accept or reject a POI. They do not have to respond immediately, but may wait until the end of their sentence to react. They may accept the POI by looking at the person who offers, and saying "yes". Speakers may also choose to say "I will accept in a moment" and finish a sentence, thought or argument before inviting the offeree to ask their question.

Once a POI has been heard, it must be responded to. Speakers should keep their responses short, and direct responses to the adjudicator, rather than to the bench. No cross-floor debate is allowed. Speakers may also reject POIs by saying "no", "no thank you", or simply gesturing for the offeree to sit down.

Cygnets (Years 7-9)	Respond to 1 POI	Offer at least 1 POI per speaker
Swans (Years 10-12)	Respond to 1 or 2 POIs	Offer at least 2 POIs per speaker

DO:

- ✓ Offer POIs frequently
- ✓ Write POIs down before you offer them
- ✓ Keep POIs short, and always phrase them as a question
- ✓ Make sure each POI is distinct
- ✓ Control the floor when you are speaking
- ✓ Accept 1-2 POIs
- ✓ Respond succinctly and with conviction

DON'T:

- × Stop offering POIs once you have delivered your speech
- × Offer a POI to your own teammate
- × Try and fit a whole argument into a POI
- × Keep rephrasing the same question
- × Get flustered or let POIs interrupt your flow
- × Accept more than 2 POIs

Phrasing of POIs

Try not to phrase your POI in a way which can easily be answered with “yes” or “no”.
Make the speaker dedicate time to addressing your material.

e.g.

- “Why don’t we care about the rights of teachers?”
- “If we believe the drug war has been used disproportionately to search, arrest, and lock up black Americans and use their labour, how can we defend it?”
- “When somebody is called out for racist behaviour it does 2 things: forces them to self-reflect and listen to marginalised groups, and sets a deterrent for others who will now think twice before trying blackface. How is this a bad thing?”
- “You said bodily autonomy justifies legalising all drugs. Somebody cannot give proper consent when under addiction because they cannot make choices out of their own free will. Please respond.”

BP case construction**What topics are there in BP?**

Just like 3v3 topics, BP debates are phrased in different ways which require slightly different approaches. Think: how should we approach this debate? Do we need a model? What is our burden and what do we need to prove?

Normative	Empirical	Actor
Debates that propose a change or action	Debates that make a value judgement and decide if something is good or bad	Debates which prioritise the needs and wants of a specific stakeholder or person
e.g. <i>This house would ban alcohol</i>	e.g. <i>This house regrets Valentine's Day</i>	e.g. <i>This house, as an Australian voter, would not follow US politics</i>
Analyse why this change would be for the better or the worse	Devote time to discussing a world with X and a world without X	Explain why things would be good or bad for this actor specifically

There are three main “families” of debate motions that exist:

Normative debates propose an identifiable action. For example, debates about policy making (banning/legalising) are normative. These debates require that teams debate about why that specific action would help to solve a problem or make the world a better place. Teams can use a model in normative debates i.e. a team may choose to detail who will perform the action, what the action will specifically involve, or add elements into the motion about cost, length of time, consequences etc.

Empirical debates propose a value judgement about a policy, idea or state of the world. For example, debates that promote one version of the world over another (“This House would prefer a world without the social norm of marriage”) are empirical. Empirical topics often use words like regret, prefer or support. Empirical debates do not change anything. Teams are not introducing a policy, or changing anything about the world. They are simply evaluating the truth of the motion.

Actor debates can be normative or empirical. They are unique because they identify an actor on whose behalf the motion is debated. Actors can include governments, individuals, social groups, or institutions e.g. This House as the Australian Government would withdraw from the United Nations. This is a very different debate from the motions This House would dissolve the United Nations (normative) or This House believes that the United Nations has done more harm than good (empirical). Actor debates are not won by proving that something is good or bad in general, but rather that it is good or bad for the specified actor.

Can I work with the other team on my side during prep?

No.

How should I use my prep time?

BP preparation is a little different, and is half the length of 3v3 impromptu preparation. Opening half teams should spend the bulk of their prep time characterising and contextualising the debate in a way that is clear, effective, and that will help make their material as convincing as possible. They should prioritise constructing arguments for the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition, as Deputies have extra time at the bench to write down their arguments. They should have a clear principle, and establish the problem being addressed in the debate.

When constructing a case, teams should consider the following questions;

- What is the **context**? Where does this debate take place? Who does it impact? Why are we having this debate?
- What is the **problem**? What issue is this debate trying to address? What is happening in the world that makes this debate necessary? What is this debate trying to achieve?
- What is the **principle**? What do we believe in that motivates us to care about this debate? Is this debate similar to any other laws or conventions we believe in? Even if the motion doesn't achieve its goals, is there a reason we should still do it? Who is implementing this motion, and do they have the right to do that?
- What are the **practical implications**? What do we want to happen? Does this motion decrease suffering? Does it increase happiness? To whom does it confer power?
- **Who** matters in the debate? Will this motion impact some people more than others? Why? Who should we care about the most?
- How does everything fit together? How do all of these **outcomes** help to solve the **problem** you identified?

More tips on case construction can be found in our [WADL Debating Handbook!](#)

What should I include in my speech?

First person in pair (PM, LO, member)

- ☐ Introduction about problem and most important thing to consider in debate
 - This is your extension if you're a closing team
- ☐ Time spent on set-up, establish characterisation and grounding
 - Use specific examples and talk stakeholders
- ☐ Rebuttal takes down major points coming immediately out in enemy case
- ☐ Substantive offers principle and practical points
 - If closing, substantive is under extension label
- ☐ Explains why things are true and important

Second person in pair (DPM, DLO, whip)

- ☐ Responsive intro or an intro that draws the adjudicator's attention to the most important problem or point to consider in the debate
- ☐ Reinforces previous speaker's characterisation
- ☐ Significant time dedicated to rebuttal, ideally should be in themes
- ☐ Deliver one substantive point if an opening position (i.e. DPM or DLO)
 - Similar to 3rd speakers, whips cannot offer new points
- ☐ Remind us of previous speaker's material throughout speech (whipping)

How to win at BP

In a BP debate, you win by appearing the most **engaging, impactful**, and **responsive** team who has beaten both your side and the opposing bench. To do this, you need to make a deliberate language shift to convince the adjudicator you are winning through both speakers' speeches.

Beating the opposing bench

At all times, you must remind the adjudicator that you are beating the opposition, they are failing to respond to you, or their responses are inadequate.

For example:

- "Our analysis here went unresponded to"
- "This response wasn't enough to overcome..."
- "We give you 3 responses to this material"

Overcoming your opening

As a closing team, you want to subtly prove you have done better than your opening to take the 1st. Try not to disagree or insult their material, but position yourself ahead.

For example:

- "Opening did a good job proving X but we will give you..."
- "Opening started to explain X... we bring you the mechanism..."

Whipping

Always summarise and remind us of what your previous team member said!

Being comparative

Weigh up the contributions of different teams in the debate and show why your team is the strongest and the one who best understands the world of the motion!

Tactics and traps

What are the advantages and disadvantages of each half?

	Pros	Cons
Opening	Can “matter dump” to use all the good material so closing has nothing to work with, gets to set up the world of the debate	Harder to stay relevant in the debate, material may “fall out”
Closing	Later say in the debate so more opportunity for responses and weighing	Trickier to think of new material because opening had a long time to speak

What is considered bad sportsmanship?

BP debating has 8 speakers. For a BP debate to be fair, it is important that teams do not ignore each other or deliberately attempt to shut each other out.

Knifing

Benchers need to be consistent! A closing team cannot present an extension that contradicts what was said in their opening half. Additionally, if an opening half presents a model, the extension must be consistent with that model. A closing half cannot “rebut” what their opening half said. They can (and should!) point out any places where their opening half was unclear, assertive, or anything that was missed by their opening half, but should not make any attempts to disprove their opening half. Being overtly contradictory, or playing against your own team, is called “knifing”, and will always adversely affect the guilty team (no matter how convincing you may be).

Falling out

BP debates can be long! Before or after your half has spoken, there is no chance to respond, and no “final word”. If you are Opening, you need to engage with material so convincing, or so important, that it cannot be ignored. Say what is obvious and defend it well. You also need to set-up the debate so well that other teams cannot get around it.

The second main tool to avoid falling out of the debate is POIs. Teams should be offering POIs whenever they can, especially during the opposite half of the debate, to demonstrate engagement and relevance.

Locking out

The flipside of wanting to remain relevant is to treat your peers with respect. It may seem like a good strategy to ignore the opening half, or to only take POIs from one half, but your adjudicator will see through that and it will reflect poorly in your scores. Wherever possible, refer to your other half, use their material to strengthen your own, and accept POIs from the team that you did not get to respond to (e.g. closing opp should accept from opening gov). If another team does a particularly good job of establishing important arguments, failing to address those arguments will reflect worse on your team than on theirs. (For example, it is polite for you and your partner to make sure as a team that you have taken a POI from BOTH your enemy opening and closing teams.

British Parliamentary marking

WADL adjudicators will use the 3Ms to evaluate the relative strength of speeches, but scores are not artificially broken down into the three categories. Here are still some important notes to consider under the 3Ms in BP:

Manner

Manner in BP is slightly different from 3v3. Speakers should address their speech to the adjudicator, or “chair” of the room. When referring to other members of the debate, speakers should use titles (Prime Minister, Member), rather than assigning speaker “numbers”. Otherwise, generally persuasive public speaking manner should be adopted i.e. making eye contact with the room, appropriate pace and tone.

Method

The structure of a BP speech is somewhat different from a speech in a 3v3 debate, particularly in the closing half. While there are similarities between, say, a 1st Affirmative speaker and a Prime Minister, the strategic emphasis on set up rather than content will distinguish an excellent Prime Minister from a good Prime Minister. Some elements of method are essential in order to score well. For example, Members must explicitly introduce an extension in order to be rewarded in their scores. POIs are also considerably more important in BP than 3v3 debating. For example, failure to offer a sufficient number of POIs can be the difference between winning a BP debate and coming 3rd or 4th.

Matter

Matter refers to the substantive contributions that speakers make to their respective arguments. This covers principles, practical outcomes, and stakeholders.

Analysis is the tool that speakers use to strengthen matter. Clear, logical, well-referenced and defensible matter will always win out over sheer quantity.

Ultimately, the reason these three criteria play a less significant role in the adjudication of BP debates is because BP debating prioritises strategy, responsiveness and creativity above adherence to any strict formula.

How are BP debates judged?

The debate is also ranked from 1-4. The team placed first receives 3 points, second receives 2 points and so on. Teams will know the entire ranking at the end of the debate, and are encouraged to seek and apply feedback in subsequent debates.

What is the BP scoring system?

As BP debates engage more speakers than 3v3 debating, the scoring range is extended. Students can receive a score between 60 and 85.

Good luck!

British Parliamentary Debating

N	B	S	R	H	H	M	F	E	N	H	H	L	D	OPPOSITION
O	E	G	E	S	M	I	R	X	D	T	U	P	N	OUTROUND
N	N	N	D	A	S	R	A	T	N	H	U	F	U	FALLINGOUT
R	C	I	L	L	I	G	M	E	U	B	L	O	O	MECHANISM
B	H	N	O	C	N	F	I	N	O	U	O	P	R	LOCKINGOUT
G	N	E	H	F	A	A	N	S	R	R	C	P	T	FOURTH
N	H	P	E	I	H	L	G	I	T	D	K	O	N	GROUNDING
I	T	O	K	R	C	L	M	O	U	E	I	S	E	FRAMING
D	R	N	A	S	E	I	E	N	O	N	N	I	L	FIRST
N	U	N	T	T	M	N	M	N	R	O	G	T	I	BURDEN
U	O	G	S	O	N	G	B	P	O	I	O	I	S	STAKEHOLDER
O	F	O	T	T	T	O	E	E	G	L	U	O	H	BENCH
R	N	W	H	I	P	U	R	D	L	S	T	N	N	EXTENSION
G	E	G	S	B	S	T	R	A	T	E	G	Y	G	SILENTROUND

MEMBER
OPENING
STRATEGY
WHIP
CLASH
POI