



Debating Glossary

Adjudicator/Judge: An observer of a debate who is responsible for deciding which team has won. Where there is more than one adjudicator, they sit as an adjudication panel.

Barracking: Offering Points of Information too quickly to the other side. To avoid barracking, teams should wait for at least 15 seconds after a POI has been declined before asking another.

Case: A set of arguments supporting one side of the motion. Ideally this set of arguments forms a coherent approach to the debate, common across all team members.

Chair(person): The person responsible for introducing speakers, inviting them to give their speech, thanking them at the end of their speech, ensuring that the rules of the competition are observed and generally keeping order. In some debates, a member of the adjudication panel may perform this role.

Definition: The proposition team (or the first proposition team, in debates with more than two teams) should give a definition. This does not mean you get to decide what the debate should be about. Nor does it mean providing a dictionary definition of the words of the motion. The purpose of the definition is to clarify ambiguous words in the motion, for the purpose of the debate. E.g. in 'This house would ban gambling', proposition should 'define' gambling - are you including private bets, the stock market etc.? The opposition must accept any reasonable government definition - challenges can be made using 'Points of clarification' if the definition is unreasonable.

Deputy leader of the proposition/opposition: See 'Speakers' titles'

Extension: The extension speaker, in a British Parliamentary (BP) debate, is the third speaker on each side (they are the first speaker for each closing team). Their role is to 'give an extension', i.e., to add new material to the debate. They should take care to highlight the aspects of their arguments that differ from the opening teams.

Government/Gov: See 'Proposition'

Floor: The members of the audience.

House: The place where the debate is taking place, and anyone present.

Knife: To knife someone in a debate is to contradict someone on the same side as you in the debate. E.g. you might 'knife' a member of your team.

Leader of the Proposition/Opposition: See 'Speakers' titles'

Mechanism/Mech: The proposition team (or the first proposition team, in debates with more than two teams) should give a mechanism. This outlines how the policy (in a policy debate) will be implemented. For example, Proposition in the debate 'This house would ban gambling' should indicate what sorts of activities do/don't count as gambling, and how gamblers may be penalised. Mechanisms are particularly important in debates where there may not be an obvious policy, and the choice of mechanism affects the substance of the debate - e.g. 'THW would support reparations'. This debate is very different if your mechanism involves very large sums vs small token sums.



Member of government/opposition: See ‘Speakers’ titles’

Model: A team’s model is their interpretation of what they must prove in the debate. For the proposition team(s), this includes their mechanism and definition.

Motion: The motion is the topic under dispute in a debate. It is normally given as a statement that the teams must propose or oppose, e.g ‘This house would abolish the monarchy’

Opposition/Opp: The opposition or ‘opp’ team is responsible for disagreeing with the motion. They will speak second. ‘Opp’ may also be used as a verb, e.g. ‘we were opping the motion THW ban zoos.’

Point of information/POI: A point of information or POI (pronounced pee-oh-eye) is a short (10 seconds or less) interjection made by one speaker to any member of the opposing side of the debate. They are often phrased as questions rather than comments, to force the other side to respond.

Point of clarification: A point of clarification is a special form of point of information. It seeks to clarify or challenge important aspects of a team’s mechanism or definition. E.g. a point of clarification might be, “the motion is that we should grant reparations for slavery - can you please tell us roughly the size of these reparations, and how you will decide who gets them?”

Preparation/Prep Time, Long, Short: Preparation or ‘prep’ time is the period between the motion being announced and the debate beginning. ‘Long prep’ typically refers to periods of days or weeks where a team may use any resources at their disposal to prepare for a debate. ‘Short prep’ typically comprises of 15-30 minutes before a debate where teams must prepare their arguments without assistance from the internet or any other people (e.g. teachers).

Prime Minister: See ‘Speakers’ titles’

Proposition/Prop: The proposition or ‘prop’ team, sometimes referred to as the ‘government’ or ‘gov’ team is responsible for supporting the motion. They will speak first. ‘Prop’ may also be used as a verb, e.g. ‘we propped the motion THW ban zoos.’

Protected time/Unprotected time: In many formats, points of information (POIs) may only be offered at certain points in a speech, typically from 1 minute into the speech, and more than 1 minute before the end. The periods during which POIs may not be offered are called ‘protected time’ (typically the first and last minute of the speech). POIs can be offered in ‘unprotected time’. Judges/chairs will often signify the start and end of unprotected time with a clap, bang of a gavel, bell, or tap on the table

Rebuttal: Rebuttal is material that directly responds to someone else’s points. It is typically given at the start of a speech, e.g. ‘Before I give my main arguments, here are three points of rebuttal...’





Speakers' titles:

British Parliamentary (BP) style				(Extended) Mace Style	
Government/Proposition		Opposition		Government/Proposition	Opposition
First half/ opening	1st prop/gov/Prime Minister (PM)	1st opp/ leader of the opposition (LO)	First half/ opening	1st prop/gov/Prime Minister (PM)	1st opp/ leader of the opposition (LO)
	2nd prop/gov. Deputy Prime Minister (DPM)	2nd opp Deputy Leader of the opposition (DLO)		2nd prop/gov. Deputy Prime Minister (DPM)	2nd opp Deputy Leader of the opposition (DLO)
		In Schools' Mace debates the summary roles are filled by one of the first two speakers			
		Prop summary speaker (prop summ)/ Government Whip (GW)	Opp summary speaker (opp summ)/ Opposition Whip (OW)		
Second half/ closing	3rd gov/prop/ prop extension/ member of government (MG)	3rd opp/ opp extension / member of opposition (MO)	Second half/ closing		
	4th gov / prop/ prop summary speaker (prop summ)/ Government Whip (GW)	4th opp / opp summary speaker (opp summ)/ Opposition Whip (OW)			

Squirrel: Defining a motion in a manner contrary to the spirit of the motion and the intended debate. Both a verb (they squirrelled that motion) and a noun (that definition was a squirrel). E.g. for the motion This house would ban gambling, it would be a squirrel to say 'driving fast cars is gambling with your life and that of others. We would ban any car from travelling over 40mph.'

Summary: A summary speech is the final speech for each team. Ordinarily, they are expected to provide a thematic summary of the key arguments of the debate.

This House..., THW, THBT: Motions conventionally start 'This house...'. You may also see common abbreviations such as THW - This house would, THBT - This house believes that, and THR - This house regrets. The 'house' in the debate typically refers to the government of the country in which the debate is taking place. For example, in the ESU Schools' Mace the motion THW ban gambling can be understood as a debate about whether or not the UK government should ban gambling. Sometimes, other actors are specified; e.g. 'This house, as the UN, would...'. Motions starting This house believes that (THBT) are commonly understood to be debates about the truth or falsity of the statement following - as such, you might consider it unimportant who the house is.

Whip: See 'Speakers' titles'

