

Welcome to The WSDC 2025 Handbook

WSDC 2025 Handbook

Introduction and objectives

This document has been drafted by the Panama WSDC 2025 CA Team as a guidance to key elements of the World Schools Debating Championships (WSDC) format, speeches, judging, and common terminology.

Our objectives are to:

- Ensure consistency and transparency in how debates are understood and evaluated.
- Offer accessible explanations of core concepts, from speech roles to judging criteria.
- Provide shared vocabulary so judges can deliberate effectively and give teams precise feedback.

This is **not intended to be a complete or final guide, but one to offer more clarity and support**. WSDC evolves, and future Chief Adjudication teams (CAs) will continue to build on and refine this document to reflect new experiences, examples, and improvements.

Process and acknowledgements

This document was developed through a multi-pronged process by the efforts of the CA Team of Panama WSDC 2025. We

- Carefully reviewed the **official WSDC Rules** document to ensure alignment with core principles and procedural requirements;
- Consolidated insights and examples from **past adjudication briefings** used at previous WSDCs, specifically, 2022-2024;
- Drew on the **vast collective knowledge of the diverse WSDC 2025 CAP**, whose experience spans different circuits, eras, and styles of WSDC debate (dating back ~17 years);
- Held **informal conversations with a number of coaches** to incorporate practitioner perspectives from teams worldwide;
- **Reviewed IA tests and other judge tests** from tournaments our team has CAed to identify areas that repeatedly surfaced as contentious or misunderstood;
- Integrated **issues that CAP applicants themselves highlighted** as unclear or needing resolution, treating these as signals of common gaps in judging understanding;
- Looked at **guidance from the initial year published on the WSDC website**, ensuring continuity and building on previous work.

We extend our thanks to all past Chief Adjudication teams, whose briefings, examples, and frameworks provided a strong foundation for this document. We are also grateful to the WSDC Board for bringing together and preserving many of the materials we consulted. Their collective efforts over the years made it possible for us to develop this more unified and comprehensive guidance.

Navigating and using this document

This guide is organised by major areas of the WSDC format - **navigate using tabs to the left**.

- [Glossary](#) gives you a reference to key terms used through the doc and in debates.
- [Introduction to the World Schools format](#) provides an overview of the format and structure of debates
- [Defining debates](#) deals with what counts as a reasonable vs unfair definition, and how definitional challenges should be raised and adjudicated.
- [Approaching motions](#) lays out how to understand what common motion formulations typically expect teams at WSDC to do
- [Speaker roles](#) includes what speeches are typically expected to do, and resolve common questions on adjudicating these speeches
- [Judging at WSDC](#) covers everything from the process to how to evaluate a round to conferral discussions and final decision-making.

Additional stylistic notes:

- **Yellow highlights** will guide you to other sections you should read to get a complete understanding of a point.
- **Illustrations appear in boxes**, helping you see examples or sample notes in practice.

Last, but certainly not least:

- Go slowly. Read each section carefully - these **ideas often build on each other**, and trying to rush will leave gaps.
- **Watch a couple of debates**, using the speaker role sections to follow what each person is trying to do, and applying the judging guidelines to test how you'd evaluate them.

Glossary of Key Terms

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Glossary of Key Terms

This glossary provides brief explanations of important concepts and language you'll encounter in WSDC debates and adjudication (and indicate how we use these words in the rest of this guide). Many of these terms overlap and reinforce each other in practice - they are tools to help you describe, analyse, and ultimately decide debates with clarity and precision. Use these definitions to ensure consistency across panels and to better communicate decisions and feedback to teams.

1. **Argument:** An argument refers to a claim that a team makes which suggests that their side of the motion is correct. Typically, an argument will build to an endpoint that suggests the motion should pass or fail by explaining why that endpoint will likely occur, and why that endpoint matters in the debate. These will be outlined in the speaker's speech as arguments, although different circuits use different terminology; for instance, some countries refer to their arguments as their 'substantives' or 'constructive material'. In many cases, each argument is a distinct reason from the next for why the motion should pass or fail, although teams may loosely use the word argument for different sections leading to one cumulative endpoint in the speech.
2. **Burden:** A burden in debate refers to what a team needs to prove, defend, or establish in order to win the round, given the wording of the motion. It defines the scope of what a team is responsible for demonstrating, and contributes to how judges will assess whether that team has fulfilled its side of the debate. **A more detailed description by motion type commonly set at WSDC is in the section '[Approaching Motions](#)'.**
3. **Case:** The term 'case' is used to describe the full set of arguments and position (such as their set-up, model, etc.) that a team has used to support their side of the motion. As such, it refers to the overall philosophy and reasoning for why the team believes that their side of the motion is correct.
4. **Characterisation:** The term characterisation refers to a grounding of the debate by explaining what it looks like in the real world. Teams will characterise either the actors, context, or how certain systems work. This is often done in set-up, but will also be incorporated throughout the speech wherever relevant, such as within arguments.

Teams will characterise actors by explaining the context they're situated in, their interests, or their capabilities. For instance, in the motion "This House would legalise all drugs", teams may attempt to characterise why drug users take drugs and whether banning drugs can actually limit them from continuing to consume drugs. For instance, the proposition team may argue that drug users choose not to go to rehabilitation centres or take drugs in secret because drug users primarily fear stigma, and thus, legalising drugs will compel them to go to rehabilitation centres by removing that stigma. In

characterising that, teams will often explain that addicts are afraid that friends and family will not trust them, or that prospective employers will not hire them, thus meaning that removing social stigma is the most important thing for getting rehabilitation to occur.

Teams will characterise context by explaining what current events or trends have been happening; for instance, in debates about politics, teams may characterise the rise of right-wing populism to support their arguments. Teams may characterise how systems work by explaining how it was designed and why it functions the way it does; for instance, in the motion “This House supports free immigration”, teams may explain why immigration systems are often overly restrictive due to motivations of cultural preservation, and that admitting more immigrants will allow for more economic development. Good characterisation accompanies all parts of a good speech, and increases the stylistic persuasion of a speech. However, characterisation is used to support the endpoint the teams are proving, thus teams must relate their characterisation back to why it supports their side clearly.

5. **Clash:** A clash refers to a disagreement between the two teams that is important for dictating who will win the round. Teams will often disagree about many things, but often only a few such disagreements are discussed in sufficient depth to be designated as clashes and thus, become decisive to the outcome of the round. For instance, in the motion “This House would ban zoos”, teams may disagree on whether chihuahuas are kept in zoos, but that will be unimportant as it is not a significant factor in which side will win the debate. An important disagreement that would become a clash is whether banning zoos will broadly improve the treatment of animals. By necessity, the two teams’ positions on the clash must be contradictory in some way as the disagreement requires that the two teams take a contrasting position. A clash can be a disagreement about whether a specific outcome occurs OR if that outcome is good or bad.

Later speakers in the round tend to organise debates under the central clashes so it helps the judges to understand how the two team’s cases interact with one another, and explain why it is that they both win the clash and the other team loses the clash. Clashes are often presented in a variety of ways; most commonly, it will tend to be a theme title or a question on that important issue, but speakers may break clashes down using disagreements about the effects upon certain actors. Finally, while clashes may follow a similar order as the teams’ arguments, particularly when they naturally clash, clashes can encompass multiple arguments and pieces of rebuttal.

6. **Content, Style, and Strategy:** These are the three categories that the World Schools ballot uses to evaluate speakers. Content is 40% of the ballot, style is 40% of the ballot, and strategy is 20% of the ballot.

Content refers to what is said; how logically sound the arguments, rebuttal, weighing or any other material is in the speech. Content thus refers to the strength of analysis.

Style refers to the manner in which speakers present their ideas. This includes vocal delivery, such as tone, pace, and pausing; body language, such as the speaker’s hand

gestures and body movement; and phrasing, such as their rhetoric and the use of illustrations by the speaker. Crucially, we do not assess style based on what the speaker is wearing, their accent, or the default pitch of their voice. Style is often linked to content and enhances the content presented.

Strategy refers to the sum of the decisions teams make in order to win the round. This includes their decision-making in terms of what arguments they're focusing on, how much time they spend on certain responses, the way they explain the strategic importance of various different pieces of content, or whether a speaker answers POIs and when in the speech they may choose to answer it.

7. **Downward/upward pressure:** Pressure refers to the effect of a particular action (or lack thereof) on an adjudicator's assessment of a given category. Upward pressure refers to positive changes in an assessment of a speech, while downward pressure refers to negative changes in an assessment of a speech. Simply put, pressure refers to the impression on the adjudicator's assessment of actions taken by a speaker. In most cases, pressure translates into increases or decreases in a given speaker's score. However, the pressure on a given category changes throughout the speech and thus, the direction of pressure is not absolute. A speaker may, for example, misdefine an important word within the motion (and thus, their strategy score experiences downward pressure) but effectively pre-empt the opposing side's case (thus placing upward pressure on their strategy score).
8. **Fiat:** Fiat refers to the proposition's right to define, and model (where relevant) a motion within reasonable constraints. Definitional fiat refers to the idea that the proposition can define the terms in the motion, while modelling fiat refers to the idea that the proposition can model the motion with specific details that help to explain why it is likely to be done well. However, both forms of fiat must still fit within the plain meaning of the motion. This also means that opposition teams have to engage with the effects of the motion/model rather than with whether the motion can be implemented. For e.g., in the motion, This House would ban meat, the opposition team has to engage with the impacts of banning meat the way proposition says they will. They cannot say that meat would not be banned because most parliamentarians are meat eaters.
9. **Framing:** Framing occurs when a team explains why certain issues, actors, or contexts are more or less relevant than others to how a debate or clash is evaluated. As an example, in many social justice debates, teams will frame that it is more relevant to the debate how moderates receive an action rather than those with extreme beliefs within the political spectrum as those with extreme beliefs are likely to be unmoving from their initial position on either side. Framing is frequently done through weighing, which shows that some issues are more relevant to the debate by virtue of being more important. Another common strategy is for teams to frame the debate using characterisation to explain why certain sets of cases are more or less applicable than others for the debate; for instance, in debates about the feminist movement, speakers will often frame that the

most repressive countries which violate women's rights are not relevant in the debate as the feminist movement is nascent, if not non-existent, in some of these countries.

While framing can happen in any speech, good cases and first speakers often include it in their set up, as it is the underlying logic of the case. Speakers do not explicitly need to flag that they are framing or use that terminology; rather, judges should be trying to identify material in a speech that fulfills the function of framing. This is similar to how many speakers do not explicitly flag that they are defining terms in the motion.

Framing might include first speakers making explicit trade-offs within their setup (e.g., we would rather that fewer people access higher quality of X, than that more people access a worse version of it), or restricting the debate using reasoning to only specific cases (e.g., this debate only happens in cases where X, Y, Z alternatives have already been tried).

- 10. Mechanism:** A mechanism is a reason provided by the team that is concerned with explaining why or how something will occur. It is purely focused on explaining why a certain outcome will occur and why a side can exclusively guarantee that outcome, rather than focusing on why that outcome is important in the debate. As an example, the *'inability of casinos to advertise openly and attract crowds'* is a mechanism through which banning gambling reduces the number of people who gamble for the first time, and eventually become addicted.

In the United States of America, many speakers refer to mechanisms as 'warrants.'

- 11. Meta commentary (also known as strategic commentary):** Meta commentary refers to observations made about the debate which help to establish why a team is winning or losing. These observations are not directly proving or disproving a piece of content; rather, they're about assessing what has happened in the debate thus far in a way that will often suggest that a team has won the debate. Some examples include pointing out contradictions, noting that a team has failed to meet the burdens it set out for itself, or noting that a violation of the rules has taken place (i.e. new material in third).
- 12. Mitigation:** Mitigation refers to arguments and rebuttal that does not defeat an opposing argument or show that it's untrue, but instead, rebuttal that demonstrates that the argument is less impactful than originally suggested. This frequently occurs when a team suggests that an issue is not as large of a problem as suggested by the other side, that there are other ways in which the problem will be solved nonetheless, or that the outcome/impact suggested by the other side is smaller than originally argued.
- 13. Motion:** The motion is the topic or subject of the debate. It consists of a statement that proposes an idea, typically a belief, concept, practice, or action, that is to be supported by the Proposition and opposed by the Opposition. All motions contain, typically at their beginning, the words "This House," followed by a standard word or phrase (e.g., believes that, supports, regrets, etc.) that determines the nature of the debate that will occur. For some motions, a paragraph of background information will be provided that explains the

context of the debate. This is called an information slide, and is treated as a part of the motion.

- 14. Rebuttal (direct rebuttal):** Rebuttal refers to responding to the material that is provided by the other side. Rebuttal can either be defensive or offensive. Defensive rebuttal refers to rebuilding an argument by responding to the rebuttal offered against it by the opposing team, while offensive rebuttal refers to responding to the arguments provided by the other team. The line between defensive and offensive rebuttal can become blurred later in the debate as both teams will frequently naturally clash, meaning that defensive and offensive rebuttals are often happening simultaneously later in the debate.

Crucially, rebuttal is not the same as constructing another argument and then weighing it against the arguments made by the other team. It is also not constructing parallel reasons to reach the same endpoint without touching the original analysis. Rebuttal refers to directly attacking the analysis provided by the other team and disproving it.

- 15. Set-up:** Set-up is a broad term that describes the 1st Proposition, and often the 1st Opposition, explaining their vision of what the world will look like on either side and what the relevant issues are in the round. This can include definitions, modelling, counterfactuals in regrets debates, stance, and framing (which can be inclusive of both characterisation or weighing). Teams do not need to use the word 'set-up' in order to indicate that they have fulfilled these functions.

- 16. Stance:** A stance refers to the general position that a team is taking in the debate. It articulates what they broadly support and what they do not support in the debate. For instance, in the motion "This House would nationalise the pharmaceutical industry", proposition's stance will be inclusive of the idea that they broadly want governments to develop and distribute drugs as they are a better actor to do so; in contrast, opposition's stance may be that they support private companies developing and distributing drugs, but they are supportive of government regulations and price caps. This can often also be inclusive of a countermodel where countermodels are relevant, as in the above motion. This will generally be done within set-up.

- 17. Structural reason:** A structural reason refers to an overarching reason that applies past just an individual circumstance or example and can be generalised. They are logical explanations of why certain outcomes will occur, why that outcome is more likely to be positive than negative, or why a certain characterisation is more or less likely in a debate. These are tightly linked to the term 'mechanism' and are often used interchangeably, but mechanisms in a more formal sense relate specifically to particular actions that are taken and how they solve a problem while structural reasons are more inclusive of any reason that suggests something occurs in a multitude of cases.

- 18. Weighing:** Weighing occurs when a team explains why the argument they have established is more important than the argument that has been established by the other team. By necessity, weighing assumes that the other team has proven something;

although it may have been mitigated, weighing assumes that the argument is still true in some respect.

Weighing can be done for both the mechanisms of an argument (i.e. suggesting why an outcome is more probable on their side despite both teams having arguments that show why their side leads to that outcome) or for the outcomes/impacts of an argument/clash compared to other arguments (i.e. showing why the impact of their argument/clash they won is more important than the impact of other arguments/clashes).

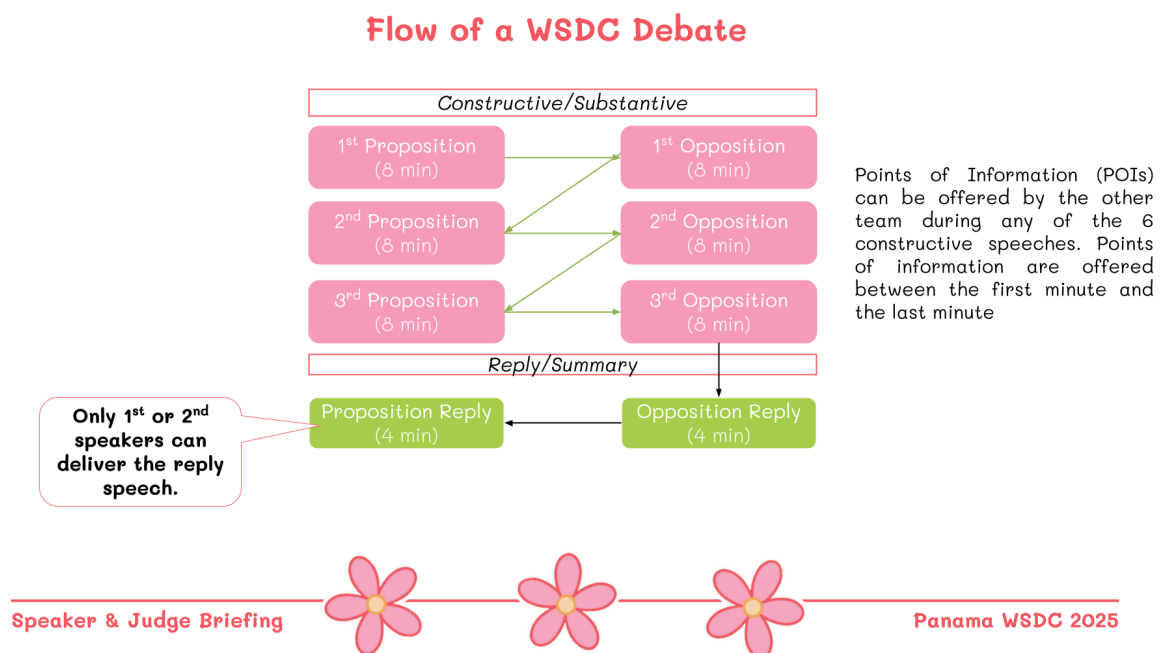
Introduction to the World Schools Format

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Introduction to the World Schools Format

The World Schools Debating Championship uses the World Schools format of debating. In World Schools debating, there are two teams debating against one another. Each team can have a maximum of 5 team members that prepare together during impromptu preparation time. In each round, only 3 members will speak.

The teams in World Schools are split between the Proposition and Opposition. Each side has each of the three main speakers give 8 minute speeches, referred to as the first, second, and third speakers. The speaker order begins with the 1st Proposition, before moving onto the 1st Opposition, the 2nd Proposition, and so on and so forth. At the conclusion of these constructive speeches, both teams will have their reply speaker provide a 4 minute summary of the debate, beginning with the opposition and then ending with the proposition reply. Either the 1st or 2nd speaker from the respective team can give the reply speech. All speeches have a 15 second grace period when the last minute has passed; speakers must conclude their speech within that 15 seconds.



In each debate, there will be a motion debated. The motion is the topic that is being debated, and they always have the phrasing “This House” within them. The House refers to a metaphorical parliament, where the proposition is proposing the motion and the opposition is opposing it (read usually ‘the government’ in This House Would... motions, and as ‘we’ in most

other motion formulations). As such, the proposition has an obligation to explain the motion (see our section on [definitions](#)) and provide supporting arguments in favour of the motion passing, while the opposition must conversely provide reasons why the motion should fall. There are different formulations of common motions, and a more detailed breakdown is provided in the section: [Approaching Motions](#).

One important component of the World Schools format is Points of Information (POI). After the first minute of each of the main constructive speeches, and before the last minute of those speeches, members of the opposing team can ask POIs. POIs are short questions or statements that may last no longer than 15 seconds, and are designed to force the speaker to respond to the idea presented in the POI. When a POI is offered, the speaker may choose to reject or accept the POI; the expectation is for speakers to accept 1-2 POIs per speech. Members of the opposing team should take care not to 'badger' the speaker, which occurs when members of the opposing team are asking POIs too frequently, which often intentionally or unintentionally distracts the speaker.

Points of Information (POIs) 1/2



A POI is a short interjection from a speaking member of the other team to the speaker on your team holding the floor



In the remainder of this document, more details will be offered on definitions, each of the different speaker roles, and notes for judges.

Defining debates

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Defining debates

For a debate to proceed, both teams require a clear understanding of what the motion means. This requires the motion to be defined so that all participants - including the adjudicators and the audience - know what is being debated. A failure to do so results in “definition debates” where the focus shifts from the issues raised by the motion to the meaning of the words themselves, which undermines the purpose of debating and should be avoided wherever possible.

On receiving a motion, both teams must ask: ‘What is the issue that the two teams are expected to debate? What would an ordinary intelligent person reading the motion think that it is about?’ This should give a good idea as to what the audience, adjudicators and people setting the motion expect to see debated.

The First Speaker of the Proposition is responsible for defining the motion.

What constitutes a fair definition?

A fair (or reasonable) definition is one that meets all of the following criteria:

1. **It reflects the obvious meaning of the motion.** The Proposition must define the motion according to what the *ordinary intelligent person* would understand it to mean. If the motion has a clear and obvious meaning, any other interpretation is not reasonable.
2. **It allows for a reasonable debate.** A definition must not eliminate the Opposition’s ability to argue. Truisms (obviously true statements), tautologies (true by definition), and overly narrow interpretations that leave the Opposition no ground are all illegitimate.
3. **It matches the level of abstraction of the motion.** A general motion should not be restricted to a single example, and a specific motion should not be defined too generally. The Proposition must not arbitrarily alter the scope or focus of the motion.
4. **It is one the ordinary intelligent person would accept.** Definitions should align with common usage and not depend on obscure or technical meanings of words. A dictionary may be consulted for clarity, but obscure meanings from a dictionary cannot be used to distort a motion.

Unfair definitions

Type	What makes it unfair	Example
Squirreling	Distorts the motion to run a pre-prepared case by asserting a tenuous link	Defining <i>"This House would legalise performance enhancing drugs in sport"</i> to mean legalising marijuana because "life is a sport", and marijuana makes your life more fun, and hence makes it performance enhancing
Violation of 'obvious meaning'	Ignores the plain, expected interpretation of the motion despite it being clear	Defining <i>"This House believes that we need a world government"</i> to mean "We need a more effective version of the International Criminal Court to prosecute crimes like genocide"
Truism	Makes the motion obviously true and thus undebatable	Defining <i>"This House believes that the sun is rising in the East"</i> literally
Tautology	Makes the motion true by definition; circular logic	Defining <i>"extremism"</i> as "radical groups that contribute to the advancement of society" in <i>"This House believes that extremism is the catalyst for progress"</i>
Restrictive Definition	Narrows a general motion to a specific example, avoiding the full debate	Defining <i>"This House would maintain United States military bases in Asia"</i> to mean "US bases in Japan, but ignoring those in Korea"
Overly General Definition	Makes a specific motion too abstract, avoiding the actual issue	Interpreting <i>"This House would maintain United States military bases in Asia"</i> as a general case for offshore bases without tying it to the US and Asia explicitly

Manipulation of Absolute Words	Takes words like “all” literally to set an impossible burden or shield from Opposition	Arguing “ <i>This House believes that all politicians are incompetent</i> ” must be proved literally for all politicians.
Unexpected Redefinition of a Word	Redefines a key term in a way not accepted by ordinary usage	Defining “democracies” in “ <i>This House would break unjust laws in democracies</i> ” to include apartheid South Africa because a vote ‘technically existed’ even though 90% of its population couldn’t vote

Opposition options if definitions are unfair

The Opposition, depending on how the definition has been presented, can do the following:

Option	When advisable	How used
(1) Accept and Debate	The Proposition's definition is reasonable and a foreseeable option, and the Opp's case applies with some tinkering Alternatively, the proposition's definition is unfair or unexpected, but Opposition is able to adapt and run a convincing case nonetheless. In some cases, Opposition may even find this strategic.	The Opposition proceeds directly to rebut the Proposition's case and presents its own. It may clarify or rephrase wording, but does not contest the definition.
(2) Challenge	The Proposition's definition is unreasonable — e.g., it violates the obvious meaning, is a truism, tautology, or squirrel.	The Opposition rejects the definition, explains why it's unreasonable, offers a new, reasonable definition , and ignores the Proposition's arguments (since they're based on a flawed frame). This can only be done by the 1st Opposition speaker.

(3) Broaden/ Shrink	The Proposition's definition is applies but is narrow or analogous, or overbroad - it focuses on only one part of a general motion, or overprops the motion	The Opposition broadly accepts the Proposition's conception, refutes it on the basis overlapping clash in their existing case , and then extends the debate or narrows the debate to the level of specificity or generality the motion reasonably covers.
Optional Add-On: "Even If"	Used in combination with Challenge or Broaden - when Opposition wants to hedge or maximise clash .	Opposition says: "Even if you accept the Proposition's definition..." and refutes their arguments on their terms. This allows Opposition to win even if the adjudicator doesn't accept the definitional objection, or to add pressure alongside a broadened case.

Approaching motions

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Approaching motions

Policy/action motions

Policy motions ask teams to consider the merits and demerits of implementing a proposed action. Typically, policy motions are evaluated from the perspective of the ordinary intelligent person, and the policy is assumed to be implemented throughout the world (in countries where governments are assumed to care for their people) unless otherwise stated (obviously, teams can make arguments that these apply more or less in certain countries or contexts). Policy motions involve an entity putting in place a deviation from the status quo, and the debate is then to evaluate the potential benefits and drawbacks of this deviation. There are 3 possible configurations of policy motions:

- This House would...
- This House believes that X should..., and
- This House, as X, would...

Broadly, in these motions, teams have 'fiat', i.e., they can reasonably assume a common sense amount of resources and political will to implement their version of the policy/action stated in the motion in case of proposition, or a different policy (within reason and related to the motion) in case of opposition.

This House would X

Illustration: 'THW' motions

- THW replace agricultural companies with farmers' cooperatives, (Vietnam WSDC 2023 Round 7)
- THW create a global carbon market (Netherlands WSDC 2022 Round 3)
- THW ban free-to-play games (Netherlands WSDC 2022 Round 4)

In motions worded "This House would X, where X is an action/policy Proposition needs to demonstrate that

- implementing their version of the policy or action stated in the motion...
- is better...(*what this means is up for debate*)
- than whatever world Opposition supports.

An action can be implemented in different ways. Proposition chooses how to implement the action specified in the motion through a process called 'modelling', and Proposition has the fiat

to assume their 'model' will be the way the motion is implemented. If something falls within this modelling fiat, the other team must accept that it can be done, and the debate then becomes about whether it should be done and its merits, not about whether it is possible to implement.

The details they provide of this model should be reasonable, within common sense limitations, and relevant to the core issues at hand, such that the ordinary intelligent person would accept it as applicable to the debate. This means that Proposition teams must model the debate in a manner that adheres closely to the plain meaning of the words in the motion.

Reasonable add-ons are covered within Proposition's modelling power. Add-ons in a model should not reshape the debate or world beyond what the motion requires, and should be closely tied to the model as it would exist in a real-world policy context. If a team wants to introduce such an add-on that reshapes the debate/world and goes far beyond the motion, they have to explain why this is a likely inclusion in the policy, rather than assume their modelling power covers it.

Illustration: Proposition use of modelling

This House would legalise all drugs for recreation

Model (directly protected by fiat): The government removes criminal penalties for the production, sale, and use of drugs, while regulating them through licensing and quality controls.

Reasonable add-ons: Using tax revenue from drug sales to fund rehabilitation programs. *This does not fundamentally reshape the world; it is a common real-world feature tied to managing public health impacts that arise from legalisation, and thus comfortably sits within Proposition's modelling power.*

Unreasonable add-on: Financial incentives - like tax breaks or direct cash rewards - to families who commit addicts in their families to rehabilitation. *This goes beyond what the motion "This House would legalise drugs" requires. It effectively introduces an entirely new policy that changes the debate from whether we should legalise drugs to whether the state should use monetary tools to pressure private family decisions around treatment. Proposition would have to show that this will likely be implemented, and unless they do, these benefits cannot flow from this.*

Opposition needs to oppose the implementation of Proposition's proposed version of the policy. They can do this by proposing an alternative model (countermodel), or by supporting a range of alternatives, or by saying the status quo is better.

If Opposition proposes a countermodel, the debate shifts into an evaluation of which model – the Proposition's model or the Opposition's model – provides a better solution to the problem given by the motion. An Opposition team which elects to adopt a counter-model holds **equivalent counter-fiat** to the Proposition. Equivalent counter-fiat means that the Opposition is assumed to have as many resources as the Proposition had set aside for its model. The

Opposition's counter-model must thus use resources equivalent to or less than those used by the Proposition's model, which means they cannot implement all of prop policy and add more on (e.g., modelling in a 50% quota for women on corporate boards where Proposition modelled in a 1/3rd quota). The Opposition countermodel also still has to be in opposition to the overall motion, and cannot be a different version of the policy (e.g., banning smoking through a different means).

This countermodel should be similarly reasonable, within common sense limitations, and relevant to the core issues at hand.

Illustration: Opposition use of modelling

This House would legalise all drugs for recreation

Model (directly protected by fiat for opp): The state would remove criminal penalties for personal possession and use of drugs, but keep production and commercial sale illegal. They might pair this with expanded funding for treatment programs and harm reduction initiatives.

If Proposition's legalisation model involved licensing, regulatory bodies, and using tax revenues for rehab, Opposition can similarly assume funds for expanded policing against traffickers, or to support public health measures (here, teams may debate about who has more funding, given Opposition does not have tax revenues).

Direction of debate: The debate now becomes legalising drugs v. decriminalising

Invalid for Opp: Legalising drugs and then adding even greater harm reduction layers on top.

Finally, fiat only covers the idea that a policy **can be** implemented. Any harms or benefits derived from it are argumentative, and are up for debate.

This House, as X, would Y

Illustration: 'TH, as X would Y' motions

You are an athlete who has been identified as having huge potential in your sport. Unfortunately, you are a citizen of a country that cannot afford to provide the training and facilities you'd need to achieve your potential. Another country has offered you the training and facilities that could make you an Olympian, and potentially an Olympic Champion. The only condition is that you must renounce your current citizenship and become a citizen of this new country.

This House, as this athlete, would accept the offer and move to the new country (Macau WSDC 2021 Round 6)

In motions in the type This House, as X, would Y (where Y is an action), (known commonly as actor motions), Propositions teams have to demonstrate that:

- Implementing proposition's version of Y...
- meets X's interests (*what these interests are is up for debate*)

Opposition will argue that implementing Proposition's version of Y does not meet X's interests. Opposition here also has the option to develop a countermodel as with THW do X motions.

Any model introduced in an actor debate is reasonable only if it falls within the constraints available to the actor (this is illustrated further below).

These motions require teams to closely examine the perspective of a given entity, and argue from that entity's perspective. This perspective ranges from what the actor knows, to what their values and interests are, even if these values and interests are not in the interests of the general public. Therefore, teams can be engaged in a two-pronged discussion of the interests of an actor, and whether those interests are fulfilled by a given action.

Finally, actor debates do not presume a selfish and socially disinterested actor. It is perfectly plausible that an actor would prioritise altruism or any number of other principles based on a team's analysis of why that is their interest or description of what their interests typically are.

Illustration: Actor motions approach

You are an athlete who has been identified as having huge potential in your sport. Unfortunately, you are a citizen of a country that cannot afford to provide the training and facilities you'd need to achieve your potential. Another country has offered you the training and facilities that could make you an Olympian, and potentially an Olympic Champion. The only condition is that you must renounce your current citizenship and become a citizen of this new country.

This House, as this athlete, would accept the offer and move to the new country (Macau WSDC 2021 Round 6)

In this motion, teams argue from the perspective of the athlete and assess whether accepting the offer best serves the athlete's interests. Proposition might model, within reasonable constraints, access to top facilities and stable immigration status, since these are explicitly part of the offer. However, they cannot assume, for example, guaranteed gold medals or adaptation to a new culture without justification.

Opposition might argue the athlete's interests are better served by staying - highlighting identity, community ties, or long-term wellbeing - or propose a countermodel such as seeking private sponsorship while remaining a citizen of their current country. All of this must stay grounded in what is realistically available to the athlete, respecting the motion's constraints.

This House believes that X should Y

Illustration: THBT X should Y motions, where Y is an action or policy

- THBT the World Bank Group should adopt a one-country-one-vote system, (Vietnam WSDC 2023 Round 1)
- THBT African countries should recognise the sovereignty of Somaliland (Vietnam WSDC 2023 Round 5)
- THBT the International Olympic Committee should recognise the athlete's right to protest (Macau WSDC 2021 Round 2)
- THBT the feminist movement should promote the maximization of individual development over empowerment and solidarity among women (Vietnam WSDC 2023 Round 4)

In motions worded "This House believes that X should Y (where Y is an action that X takes), Proposition needs to demonstrate that

- From a neutral standpoint...
- X implementing Proposition's version of the policy or action stated in the motion...
- is better...(*what this means is up for debate*)
- than whatever world Opposition supports.

Opposition must oppose X implementing Proposition's proposed version of the policy. They can do this by proposing an alternative model (countermodel), or by supporting a range of alternatives, or by saying the status quo is better.

Note: In cases where 'X' is a common plural rather than a proper noun (e.g., companies, parents, etc. rather than the United States, the World Bank, etc.), opposition's burden is only to oppose that it is obligatory/desirable to adopt the policy across the set of actors. For e.g., if the motion says that companies should adopt 4-day workweeks, Opposition only has to show that it is not desirable for this to be an expectation of a majority of companies. They can also adopt the position that no companies should adopt a 4-day work week.

Similar constraints to modelling apply to both teams as before, but fiat only applies to the specific actor. So a team **cannot say that they agree with Y needing to be done, but by a different actor, A.**

Note: 'Better' in this debate is from a neutral standpoint, and is not restricted to the interests of X. So while both teams may make arguments about why their actions benefit X's interests, this needs to be weighed as more important than other interests in order to stand in the round.

Illustration: THBT X [proper noun/single collective] should [action word] Y motions and approaching them

THBT African countries should recognise the sovereignty of Somaliland

In this motion, both teams argue from a **neutral standpoint** on whether **African countries**, as a single collective, should recognise Somaliland's sovereignty.

Proposition might model that recognition would involve formal diplomatic acknowledgement, potential bilateral agreements, and support for Somaliland's membership in African and international organisations. This is fully within reasonable modelling - they can assume these states have the diplomatic capacity and typical foreign policy tools, but cannot fiat outcomes like automatic UN admission.

Opposition could defend maintaining the current position of non-recognition or propose as a countermodel, deeper engagement with Somaliland under Somalia's sovereignty. However, Opposition cannot, for example, stand for the US recognising Somaliland, unless they show that this is the likely alternative (without African recognition).

Both teams must show why these choices are **better overall from a neutral perspective**, which typically would mean debating impacts on the people's right to self determination, Somaliland's development, regional stability, norms around secession, and wider African diplomatic interests - not just whether it suits wider African diplomatic interests. If a team focuses only on African diplomatic interests, they would have to show why this outweighs the other considerations to win.

Analysis/judgement motions

Analysis motions are fundamentally about **evaluating phenomena, policies, narratives, or courses of action as they actually exist, or would likely have existed if something already present in the world did not**. Unlike prescriptive "X should do Y/THW do Y" debates, these motions are not about teams modelling new implementations or hypothetical designs. Instead, they require teams to assess the real-world manifestations, impacts, and dynamics of what is named in the motion, and compare them to the most plausible alternatives/alternatives named in the motion. This grounds the debate in analysing how things have unfolded or will likely unfold, rather than inventing an implementation plan, and then assessing its merits.

This House believes that... ('THBT')

Any THBT formulation that isn't "X should do Y" is fundamentally an analysis motion. This includes motions like "THBT it is in the interests of X to do Y," "THBT X does more harm than good," or "THBT X should be adopted as opposed to Y," among many other possible structures. The precise burden in these debates depends on how the motion is worded.

In such motions, the phenomenon, policy, narrative, or actor's course of conduct named in the motion is debated as it actually exists or would plausibly exist, and cannot be modelled into existence in the way that teams want it to be. Teams must engage with it by analysing its real-world form, likely outcomes, and existing or probable dynamics - not by constructing hypothetical implementations as they would in prescriptive "X should do Y" debates. This

ensures the debate is grounded in assessing the actual merits and impacts of what the motion describes, rather than inventing new mechanisms or models.

Illustration: Examples of THBT... analysis motions

- **In art and popular culture, THBT creating new lead characters for minorities (e.g. Hancock, Black Panther) is better than recasting existing roles already played by other actors/communities (e.g. Ghostbusters, Little Mermaid). (Thailand WSDC 2019, Round 3)**

Here, both teams discuss how characters are likely created/will likely look, and opposition has to defend recasting.

- **This House believes that rehabilitation should be the only consideration in criminal sentencing. (Croatia WSDC 2018, Semifinals)**

Here, proposition defends the likely manifestation of rehabilitation, and opposition defends what already exists as a consideration in criminal sentencing.

This House supports/opposes X

This House supports ('THS') X

Illustration: 'THS' motions

- This House Supports the use of the nine planetary boundaries framework. (Vietnam WSDC 2023, Round 2)
- This house supports the rise of the use of cryptocurrencies (e.g. Bitcoin, Ethereum, USDT) in financial transactions. (Netherlands WSDC 2022, Octofinals)
- This House Supports strict state secularism* in Western Liberal Democracies. *this includes prohibiting religious symbols in public spaces, not providing funding to religious schools and charities, not having an official state religion, etc. (Serbia WSDC 2024, Round 1)

In motions worded "This House supports", Proposition needs to demonstrate that the policy/narrative/phenomenon mentioned in the motion

- at and from this current point in time...
- as it exists or will likely be applied...
- is better (*what this means is up for debate*)...
- than the most likely alternative. (*teams may disagree here too*)

The opposition team can win the debate by showing that it is worse to have the policy/narrative/phenomenon mentioned as it exists or will likely be applied in the motion at this point in time than whatever will likely exist in its absence.

Both teams in this debate can disagree on likely manifestations of both, the thing identified in the motion, and the alternative, in addition to their benefits and harms

Illustration: Approaching ‘THS’ motions

This House supports the use of the nine planetary boundaries framework

In this debate, both proposition and opposition will have to debate about how the Nine Planetary Boundaries framework will likely be used based on the incentives of current policymakers, regular people, etc., and in its absence, whether anything else will likely be used, and what it will likely be. This should be based on our current context in the world.

Proposition teams cannot ‘model in’ the uses of the framework, and Opposition teams cannot have a countermodel of the use of a different framework instead.

This House opposes (‘THO’) X

Illustration: Examples of ‘THO’ motions

- This House opposes attempts by the feminist movement to redefine traditionally feminine* roles and behaviours as empowering. *e.g. wearing makeup and heels, wanting to be a housewife, and so on. (Serbia WSDC 2024, Round 8)
- This House opposes internet gurus selling their own products and services. (Vietnam WSDC 2023, Round 3)

In motions worded “This House opposes”, Proposition needs to demonstrate that the policy/narrative/phenomenon mentioned in the motion

- at and from this current point in time...
- as it exists or will likely be applied...
- is worse...*(what this means is up for debate)*
- than the most likely alternative. *(teams may disagree here too)*

The opposition team can win the debate by showing that it is better to have the policy/narrative/phenomenon mentioned as it exists or will likely be applied in the motion at this point in time than whatever will likely exist in its absence.

Both teams in this debate can disagree on likely manifestations of both, the thing identified in the motion, and the alternative, in addition to their benefits and harms.

Illustration: Approaching ‘THO’ motions

This House opposes attempts by the feminist movement to redefine traditionally feminine roles and behaviours as empowering

In this debate, both proposition and opposition will have to debate about attempts by the feminist movement as they currently exist (or will most likely exist), and in its absence, what will likely be the alternative world. This should be based on our current context in the world.

Proposition teams cannot 'model in' their ideal ways of the movement attempting this, and Opposition teams cannot have a countermodel of another approach instead.

This House regrets... ('THR')

Illustration: Examples of 'THR' motions

- THR the professionalisation of sports (Vietnam WSDC 2023 Round 6)
- THR depictions of veganism as trendy (Vietnam WSDC 2023 Partial Double Octofinals)
- THR the decline of the family as the dominant unit of organisation in society, (Netherlands WSDC 2022 Round 4)
- THR the commercialisation of space (Macau WSDC 2021 Round 1)
- THR the dominant belief that the customer's needs should always come first (Macau WSDC 2021 Round 6)

In motions worded "This House Regrets X," Proposition needs to demonstrate that

- if X had not existed from the point it did...
- the likely counterfactual that would have existed...*(teams may disagree here)*
- would be better overall...*(what this means is up for debate)*
- than the world as it has come to be.

In doing so, they must develop a plausible conception of how the world would have looked without X, tracing impacts from the point X would have existed but didn't - this is commonly called a 'counterfactual'.

Opposition defends the world as it did develop with X, arguing that the world with X is better than the likely counterfactual.

Both teams can disagree not only on the harms and benefits that flowed from X, but also on how the world counterfactually would have looked - i.e., what dynamics, alternative events, or systems would plausibly have filled the gap if X had not existed.

Note: A major implication of using a "This House Regrets..." motion instead of a "This House Opposes..." motion is that it signals the debate is also about history and long-run consequences, not just about the present. For example, a debate on "*This House Regrets the rise of social media*" invites teams to argue about how the modern world would have looked had social media never taken off. This means the burden on both sides is to engage with historical trajectories and outcomes, not just current or future policy choices.

Illustration: Examples of 'THR' motions and approaching them

This House regrets the partition of India into India and Pakistan

In this motion, Proposition cannot 'model in' a different type of split of India at the point of partition, they will have to make the case for the most likely counterfactual and defend it. It is possible that in this debate, both teams agree on a single India with Muslim electorates for elections based on History.

Opposition may also choose to say given the trajectory of violence a later partition through bloody civil war will have been more likely, and disagree with the counterfactual from the start, or its longevity.

This House prefers... ('THP')

This House prefers X

In motions worded "This House prefers X", Proposition needs to demonstrate that

- X in our current context...
- as it exists/likely will exist...
- is preferable...
- **to the status quo.**

In doing so, they must develop a conception of how X already looks/will likely look or play out.

The opposition team can win the debate by showing that the status quo is preferable to X.

Both teams in this debate can disagree on how X likely looks (beyond the strict definitions), as well what the status quo is moving toward. In addition, how a judge should evaluate 'preferable' is also something the teams may disagree on.

Illustration: Examples of 'THP X' motions and approaching them

- This House prefers leaderless social movements. (Macau WSDC 2021, Round 3)

This House prefers leaderless social movements

Proposition and Opposition teams will need to explain what leaderless social movements look like in comparison to the status quo of how social movements are operated.

This House prefers X to Y

Illustration: Examples of 'THP X' motions and approaching them

- This house prefers industrial unions to workplace unions. (Netherlands WSDC 2022, R2)

- This house prefers parenting models that adultify teenagers (i.e. giving them more responsibilities and autonomy, assuming higher capacity for independence) to those which emphasise their status and treatment as teenagers (i.e. refraining from giving them adult responsibilities, emphasising they are legal minors).

In motions worded “This House prefers X to/over/as opposed to/rather than Y”, Proposition needs to demonstrate that

- X in our current context...
- as X exists/likely will exist...
- is preferable... (*what this means is up for debate*)
- to Y in our current context...
- as Y exists/will likely exist

Opposition needs to demonstrate that Y in our current context is preferable to X in our current context.

In doing so, both teams must develop a conception of how X and Y already look/will likely look or play out. In addition, how a judge should evaluate ‘preferable’ is also something the teams may disagree on.

Illustration: Approaching ‘THP’ X motions

This house prefers industrial unions to workplace unions

Proposition here needs to defend industrial unions in general and how they operate, while opposition here has to defend workplace unions and how they operate.

This House prefers a world with/without X

Illustration: Examples of ‘THP a world with/without X’ motions

- This House prefers a world where Truth and Reconciliation Commissions were established to deal with the aftermath of the Yugoslav Wars rather than the ICTY. (Serbia WSDC 2024, Round 2)
- This house prefers a world where instead of charging tuition fees to students upfront, universities collect a portion of their income upon graduation. (Netherlands WSDC 2022, Round 2)

In motions worded “This House prefers a world with/without X”, Proposition needs to demonstrate that

- had X existed from the point that it could have, or didn’t exist from the point it did...
- that new world would be a better one...
- than the world as it has come to be.

In doing so, they must develop a conception of how X will have likely looked from its point of existence, or how the world will have likely looked without X retrospectively.

Opposition has to defend the world as it did develop with or without X, or can be forced to defend Y, if written into the motion.

Both teams in this debate can disagree on how the world will have looked in actuality in addition to the harms and benefits of that world.

Note: A major implication of this motion type being used instead of 'THP X' is either that the event being debated is in history, or the motion expects teams to consider the effects of X in history and now (e.g., a team preferring a world without religion could make an argument about the Crusades, but a team opposing a world without religion cannot.)

Illustration Approaching 'THP a world with/without X' motions

This House prefers a world where Truth and Reconciliation Commissions were established to deal with the aftermath of the Yugoslav Wars rather than the ICTY

Teams in this debate have to travel to the context of the aftermath of the Yugoslav Wars, and think about how Truth and Reconciliation Commissions existing then will have shaped outcomes and the world, and compare it to how the ICTY did it.

Speaker roles

[Back to introduction: Navigate to different sections of the Handbook using the tabs on the left on Google Docs, or through the links on the Introduction Page!](#)

Speaker roles

First Proposition Speeches

First Proposition speeches in the rules

- The speaking time for the First Proposition speech is 8 minutes.
- The role of the First speaker of the Proposition is to define the topic, establish the issues for the debate, outline the Proposition case, announce the case division between the speakers, and present his or her part of the Proposition case.
- In defining the motion, the First Proposition speaker must define the topic in a manner that is reasonably close to the plain meaning of the topic, allows the Opposition team reasonable room to debate, is not tautological or truistic, and does not squirrel, place-set, or time-set the motion.

First Proposition speeches in practice

The role of the First Proposition speaker (1P) is to set up the debate and to present the first part of the Proposition's case. They do this by providing definitions that clarify the meaning of words and phrases in the motion. In doing so, the speaker must make clear what the issues within the debate are. Thereafter, 1P must outline the Proposition's case, explaining how it will be divided between the speakers before presenting their part of the case.

Typically, speakers will fulfill the aforementioned roles chronologically i.e., begin by defining the motion before outlining the case, describing how it will be divided, and making their own argument. Regardless of how it is delivered, the 1P speech must establish clearly what the debate is about before making the first contribution from the Proposition to the debate.

Setting up the debate - articulating the Proposition 'stance'

At the start of any debate, 1P is responsible for setting up the round. This setup consists of a definition of the motion that clarifies its intended meaning, a description of the vision of the world the team supports or opposes linked to the definition. Together, these elements form the **Proposition stance**: the position the team wants the debate to revolve around.

In policy debates, this may additionally include outlining specific actions the state would take under the motion. In analysis debates, it involves offering a causal or counterfactual account of the world and explaining why that account is more likely than alternatives.

The ultimate objective of articulating a stance is to ensure that adjudicators understand what the Proposition is defending, and that all teams have a clear and common starting point for clash.

Illustration: Stance

This House would ban cosmetic surgery

Proposition stance

(Overall vision of the world): We support a world where people are not harmed by the pressure to alter their appearance to meet commercialised or unattainable beauty standards.

(Definition) To do this, we make it illegal to perform all procedures undertaken primarily to change appearance, e.g., rhinoplasties, face lifts, liposuctions. Exceptions will be made in cases of medical necessity, e.g., reconstructive surgery following accidents.

(Model): A regulatory board will determine whether procedures qualify as medically necessary. Surgeons who perform banned procedures will face professional sanctions and legal penalties. Enforcement will operate through routine audits, licensing authorities, and hospital reporting systems.

This House regrets the rise of Hustle Culture

(Definition): ‘Hustle culture’ is the glorification of relentless productivity as the primary path to success and self-worth. It is characterised by social media narratives that valorise overworking (“rise and grind”), the normalisation of ‘side hustles’ (holding multiple jobs at once). It also frames alternatives as lazy. This culture is particularly visible among young professionals, entrepreneurs, and gig workers in urban economies.

(Overall vision of the world without hustle culture that Proposition supports):

- We wish that hustle culture, and its associated burnout, chronic anxiety, and the erosion of non-work identity had never emerged.
- In a world without hustle culture, people would still work and pursue ambition, but would do so within a framework that values balance, collective well-being, and intrinsic satisfaction, similar to cultures that prize protected downtime (e.g., siesta cultures, social democracies with strong labour protections).

(Why this is more likely): This alternative is most likely because people’s desire for success would still exist, but without hustle culture’s glorification of overwork, they would anchor their choices in more traditional values that shaped societies. In the absence of this narrative, work-life balance norms would have remained shaped by existing expectations of rest, family time, and non-work fulfilment.

Note: As evident, this looks different for different motion types, and we encourage you to read [Approaching Motions](#) to learn how to construct this for different motion types.

Definitions

The process of defining the topic breaks down unfamiliar words, phrases, and concepts within the topic for the adjudicators. Defining the topic takes many different forms, all of which are characterised by an attempt at clarifying the meaning of the debate to the adjudication panel.

Some of these include:

- Providing the true meaning of unfamiliar words within the motion,
- Describing important background information that is pertinent to the understanding of the motion

1Ps are aided by the right to **definitional fiat** when defining the motion. Definitional fiat, exercised in all debates, grants 1P the right to define the motion. Under this rule, unless formally challenged, the definition of the motion articulated by 1P stands as the operational definition for the rest of the debate. 1P is not required to make arguments or provide analysis in defense of their definition of the motion except in cases of challenge or broadening by opp.

In defining the motion, 1P must ensure that their definition is reasonably close to the obvious meaning of the topic. Common examples of unfair definitions are listed in [the 'Definitions' section](#).

Modelling

Policy debates will often benefit from the creation of a 'model'. A model provides details of how a policy outlined within the motion will be executed.

Illustration: Model

THW break-up big tech companies

"We would buyout the shareholders of major technological companies such as Google, Apple, and Nvidia, and would use our newly acquired control to fracture these companies into significantly smaller, self-sufficient components. We would do this in a phased fashion, over 5-10 years, and would enact robust anti-trust regulations to prevent the newly formed companies from ever reconsolidating." Modelling is not mandatory, but is often strategic. Models provide much needed clarity to the debate by describing how it would manifest in the real world.

The right to define a model is held by the 1P exclusively, who relies on **modelling fiat** to do this. Modelling fiat refers to the assumption that a given policy can be implemented reasonably well - that a reasonable amount of resources needed for a particular policy to be implemented are available.

PLEASE READ: A more detailed explanation of modelling in [Approaching motions](#).

Once a model is articulated by 1P, it cannot be changed by the second or third speaker unless it is mere clarification of existing parts of the model rather than adding more portions to the model. If they do want to make additions, rather than providing additions to the policy/model, they have to explain why those additions will likely naturally follow from the position they set themselves in, through a process of through likelihood analysis, explaining why specific additions to the model are likely a part of the model as presented by 1P.

Illustration: Likelihood Analysis to edit the model at Second Proposition

THW require political parties to have gender quotas for candidate lists

1P Model: "We would require all political parties contesting national elections to ensure that at least 40% of their candidates are women. Any party that fails to meet this threshold would be barred from contesting in that election cycle."

The First Opposition speaker (1O) model: Grassroots investment: funding local women's leadership programs and community outreach to build a pipeline of qualified, willing female candidates.

The Second Proposition speaker (2P) **cannot change their initially articulated model** to say "We'll also provide nationwide grassroots training programs for women to enter politics."

Instead, 2P can use **likelihood analysis** under their existing model. Thus, 2P could say: "While our policy does not directly fund grassroots initiatives, it's highly likely that once political parties are compelled to meet these quotas, they will have strong internal incentives to invest in local mentorship, outreach, and training to develop a reliable pipeline of female candidates. Parties have every reason to avoid being disqualified, and history shows that when faced with structural requirements - like prior youth or minority quotas - parties adapt by nurturing talent earlier. Thus, even without explicit grassroots funding in our model, the very necessity to comply will drive organic efforts that address the supply problem over time."

'Stances' in analysis debates

In analysis debates, the role of 1P is to articulate the stance of the team by establishing what they support, and depending on motion type, why what they support is likely. Depending on the motion, this may involve describing a phenomenon they oppose or support, or projecting how things will unfold in the future, or how they could have unfolded in the absence of a phenomenon. This means the stance may be a mix of description ("this is what happens"), causation ("this is why it happens"), and criteria for evaluation ("this is what more good than harm encapsulates"). The key requirement is that Proposition clearly sets out a forecast or narrative that they want the debate to be about, and explains (where necessary) why it is more likely than competing accounts the Opposition might offer.

PLEASE READ: An explanation of expectations for different types of analysis motions in [Approaching Motions](#).

Outlining the Proposition case

A case is a collection of arguments in support or opposition of a motion. These arguments, though independent and each providing discrete paths to victory for the side offering them, are often bound by a common theme or idea. This theme or idea represents the heart of the Proposition's case. In WSDC debating, the case is delivered by all three speakers. It is the role of 1P to provide a summary of the case. In practice, the Proposition case is outlined titles of the arguments that Proposition will make.

Announcing the case division

Once the case has been presented, 1P must outline how it will be divided amongst the three speakers on the Proposition team. This is called the case division or the case split or team split. The case division briefly describes the arguments each speaker will deliver. Typically, only the first two speakers will be assigned portions of the case to deliver. The case division provides a helpful "roadmap" of the debate to the adjudicators and the audience. Thus, it is important that the most important parts of the case are flagged in the case division.

Note: While the role of 1P can be broken down into distinct parts with different expectations, there is no universal rule regarding how these roles are to be fulfilled. Where some speakers will opt to begin with an introduction, before defining the motion, outlining the case and the case division, and presenting their part of the case, some speakers will opt for a more consolidated approach that fulfills multiple roles at once. What matters is that speakers balance the need for clarity and role fulfillment with the need for efficiency in their management of time.

Additionally, although there is no universal rule regarding the distribution of speaking time across the roles of 1P, in practice, many speakers will spend significantly more time presenting their part of the case, and less time setting up the debate. This however differs across debates: more complicated and niche topic areas will often require significantly more set up than simpler, more common topics.

Presenting their part of the case

Once 1P has set up the debate, they may present their part of the case. This typically involves making one or more arguments on behalf of the Proposition case. Broadly, at the end of 1P, Proposition will likely have 1-3 well-explained reasons for why the motion should pass, establishing distinct paths to victory for the Proposition. Good explanations broadly include the set up of a problem related to the absence of the motion, and an explanation for why implementing the motion or the presence of the motion solves that problem.

Typically, 1Ps deliver a 'principled' (per common parlance) argument that usually explain why a motion should stand regardless of strict outcomes (thereby defending a principle, e.g., right to choice), and a big 'practical' argument that is tied to consequences beyond the violation or upholding of a principle (e.g., health harms to cosmetic surgery). This is followed from the perspective that a principled argument is a thread that runs throughout the Proposition case. However, increasingly, teams run two practical arguments in their first speech, and may run a principle in their second speech, or not at all.

There is no one way to do this. What is important is that the parts of the case flow coherently between the first two speakers, and prove distinct things that are not hung on one another.

Rules v. Practice

1. Defining the debate also includes Framing and Characterisation

Rule: “The role of the First speaker of the Proposition is to define the topic”

Practice: While some interpret “defining the topic” as simply clarifying meanings in a strict sense, in practice, strong 1Ps go further. They use real-world images to ground the motion in reality and help adjudicators understand what the debate is truly about. This does not replace formal definitions, it enriches them. Effective topic definition combines clarity of meaning with illustration that evokes the world being debated, ensuring both linguistic precision and conceptual relevance.

Notes for judges

1. **Evaluate and credit setup:** In general, judges have a tendency to deprioritise set up when listening to and evaluating a 1P speech. However, the definition of the motion, establishment of issues, outlining of the case, and describing of the case division are all important to a successful debate. The extent to which 1P effectively sets up the debate is credited under strategy.
2. **Do not under-credit 1P speeches.** The WSDC format places a high premium on effective defense and evolution of material down the bench. Because of this, it is important that judges carefully track how arguments made in 1P are being reshaped as the debate progresses. Judges should not devalue the First Speeches as the debate progresses, favoring more recently introduced material instead.

First Opposition Speeches

First Opposition speeches in the rules

- The speaking time for the First Opposition speech is 8 minutes.
- The role of the First Opposition speaker is to challenge the definition if necessary, present an alternative definition of the motion, respond to the Proposition case, outline the Opposition case, announce the case division, and present their part of the Opposition case.
- In responding to the Proposition case, the Opposition team may produce a positive choice of its own, or merely attack the case presented by the Proposition. If it chooses to produce a positive case of its own, it must in fact produce that case through its speeches, and not concentrate solely on attacking the case presented by the Proposition.

First Opposition speeches in practice

The First Opposition speaker (1O) is the first speaker to respond to the First Proposition speech. Because of this, the First Opposition speech must be characterised by a balance of responsiveness and case presentation.

Setting up the debate for Opposition

1O holds some responsibility for setting up the debate for the Opposition. However, often, it is possible for 1O to concur with the definition of the motion and the establishment of the debate's issues done by the First Proposition speaker (1P) without consequence.

1Os' set up often includes an articulation of what they stand for and if they have any exceptions to that. In policy debates, they may additionally set up a 'countermodel', and in analysis debates, they will likely articulate their description of the world they are defending.

Illustration: Opposition stance

This House would ban cosmetic surgery

We support a world where individuals have the right to control how they look, including through safe cosmetic surgery.

Obviously, our support for cosmetic surgery comes with reasonable regulation, as exists in the status quo. This includes licensing requirements for practitioners, mandatory psychological evaluations for high-risk procedures, cooling-off periods, and full, informed consent protocols to protect vulnerable individuals.

In conceptualising their case, Opposition teams can take one of two approaches.

- They may run a **pure negative case**, which focuses entirely on attacking the Proposition - by showing that its benefits are overstated, its harms are understated, and/or that it actively makes the world worse than it is now. This does not require defending the status quo, only proving that the Proposition's world is comparatively worse. While this strategy is permitted, it is rarely optimal on its own.
- We recommend that Opposition teams also run a **positive case** - one that presents affirmative reasons why their vision of the world creates benefits and/or solves the issues Proposition identifies (should they agree with these). If they choose to run such a case, they must actually develop it in their speeches, not merely allude to it while focusing on Proposition rebuttal. This dual approach strengthens their position and improves the quality of the clash.

Illustration: Negative v. positive case lines

This House would ban cosmetic surgery

Pure negative: Banning cosmetic surgery makes all the issues Proposition suggests worse.

Potential positive case:

- Cosmetic surgery being legal is not just the lesser evil; it empowers individuals to align their physical appearance with their identity, and enables bodily autonomy.
- In some cases, a ban additionally makes any harms associated with cosmetic surgery worse.

This House supports the use of drone strikes as a tool of foreign policy

Pure negative: These operations often kill civilians disproportionately, violate sovereignty, and inflame local resentment. Inaction avoids these costs.

Potential positive case:

- Drone strikes cause ABC harms...
- In the absence of drone strikes, the likely outcome is targeted operations that respect due process and international law, rather than remote warfare with impunity. This is more likely to meet foreign policy goals for XYZ reasons...

Note: Negation can and often should be run alongside components of the positive case. For instance, saying that some harms become worse while holding the overall principle that cosmetic surgery has independent identity benefits is a stronger case than running either one of those lines by themselves.

Countermodelling

In policy debates, setting up the debate may also include a 'countermodel' - a different policy intended to address the issues of the debate that can be implemented instead of Proposition model. If a countermodel is to be introduced, **it can only be introduced by 1O**. No other speaker may offer a counter-model.

A countermodel explicitly changes the debate to one about the Proposition policy v. the Opposition policy rather than the Proposition policy v. the absence of the Proposition policy.

Illustration: Countermodel

THW legalise the buying and selling of organs

Opposition might model in an 'opt-out' system in order to address the same issue of having limited organ supply. Each argument/clash in the debate has to evaluate an organ market against an opt out system, rather than against the world we live in right now.

An Opposition that introduces a countermodel must also ensure that their countermodel uses equivalent or fewer resources than the Proposition's policy, meaning that Opposition teams **cannot implement the Proposition policy with add-ons.**

Illustration: A non permissible countermodel

THW reserve a third of all seats on corporate boards for women

Opposition cannot say they will reserve half of all seats on corporate boards for women.

PLEASE READ: [Approaching Motions](#) contains more detailed notes on countermodels, and policy debates.

Alternatives

Policy debates:

In policy debates, even if the 1O does not introduce a formal countermodel, they may still argue that there exists (a range of) alternative policies that could be used to solve the issue identified by Proposition. This approach can be introduced by the 1O or the Second Opposition speaker (2O), because it does not change the framing of the debate (as a countermodel does), but rather weakens the necessity of the Proposition's policy by showing better or equally effective options exist. Any arguments made must apply across the set of alternatives proposed.

If the Opposition chooses to focus on one specific alternative, they must justify why it is the most likely or realistic of the available alternatives. This strategy **should not be introduced at Third Opposition (3O)**, as it constitutes a new matter that shifts the framework of the clash too late in the debate for fair response.

Illustration: Difference between an alternative and a countermodel for a policy debate

This House Would nationalise water utilities

Approach	Countermodel (10)	Alternative (10 or 20)
What Opposition says	"We propose instead to keep water utilities private but introduce strict price caps and service quality regulation through an independent authority."	"Nationalisation is not the only solution. There are a range of less extreme alternatives - such as price caps, targeted subsidies, or mixed-ownership models - that could achieve the same aims without the downsides of nationalisation." Later, if they want to be specific to price caps, they have to explain why that is the most likely of alternatives: "Price caps are the most likely because they are already widely used in utility sectors, require no structural overhaul, and can be implemented quickly through existing regulatory bodies. Compared to more complex solutions like subsidies or public-private partnerships, they are politically safer, less expensive, and easier to communicate to voters."
Effect on the debate	Forces comparison between Proposition's nationalisation and Opposition's price cap model - every argument must now weigh which policy is better.	Keeps the frame as Proposition's nationalisation vs. plausible non-nationalisation worlds, unless Opposition picks one of those as most likely

Analysis debates

In analysis debates, Opposition's "alternative" is typically a competing forecast about what would happen instead of what Proposition claims will happen. The key is that Opposition must explain why their forecast is more likely, not just possible.

Illustration: Opposition alternatives in analysis debates

This House regrets the rise of hustle culture

Proposition argues that hustle culture causes burnout, unhealthy work-life balance, and toxic self-worth tied to productivity. They claim that in its absence, people would embrace healthier values - slower living, more time with family, and a better mental health baseline.

Opposition:

"We don't dispute that hustle culture has harms. But we believe that removing it is more likely to lead to **disengagement, not balance**. That's because the structural pressures people face - job insecurity, debt, and hyper-competition - don't go away. Without hustle culture, they're still under pressure, but now without a narrative that gives them agency or direction. **We think this is more likely than Proposition's counterfactual** because there's no clear mechanism for how healthier cultural norms would spontaneously emerge. In the absence of a strong replacement, what we see in real life is drift, disaffection, and stagnation."

Definitional disagreements with Proposition

1P has the right to define the motion, provided their definition is as close to the obvious meaning of the motion as possible. Often, 1Ps will define the motion successfully. If this is the case, 1O can proceed to their refutation to the Proposition, and is assumed to be in concurrence with the Proposition's definitions.

If, however, 1P has provided an flawed definition, the Opposition's recourse to this is through the exercise of a series of options, the most extreme of which is a **definitional challenge**.

A definitional challenge entirely rejects the definition of the motion provided by the Proposition, and results in the Opposition running a case that requires a different definition. Definitional challenges can only be offered by 1O. A definitional challenge is most likely successful in very limited cases where the Opposition case is not operational under Proposition definition.

A definitional challenge involves two parts:

1. **'The challenge'** of the existing definition: 1O must explain why the definition provided by 1P is flawed. Importantly, they must do this in a way that explains why a debate under this definition is untenable and thus, why this definition must be challenged.
2. **'The alternative definition'**: Once a definition has been challenged, 1O must provide an alternative definition that repairs the flaws described within 1P's definition.

- 3. OPTIONAL:** To cover their bases in the event that they lose a definitional challenge, Opposition Speakers may provide refutation assuming that the definition is true.

If the Opposition believes the Proposition's definition is flawed, but can debate based on the Proposition's definition, we encourage that they accept the flawed definition and run (1) a case that broadens/shrinks the definition (as necessary) with reasons and (2) explains how they win even if the definition stayed at the level that prop set it at.

Teams are also allowed to constrain or expand the scope of the debate through the arguments they make and the analysis they provide. A speaker may, for example, argue that a motion is most likely to exist in developing countries, or is about people of colour, and so on. When this happens, any speaker, beginning with the 1O, may broaden the debate back to the level of abstraction and specificity provided for by the words in the motion.

Importantly, Opposition teams **are not mandated to challenge flawed definitions** - in fact, definitional challenges are exceedingly rare. If a team perceives it to be strategic to debate under a flawed definition, they may accept it, or briefly point it out and then accept it for the purposes of a clean debate. Opposition teams should not be penalised for this.

PLEASE READ: [Definitions](#) for a summary of Opposition options if definitions are unfair.

Responding to the Proposition's case

1O speeches are the first line of defense against the Proposition case. Often, 1P will contain arguments and analysis that preempt or otherwise cannot coexist with those coming from the Opposition. Because of this, 1O must engage in response to the Proposition's case and more specifically, needs to provide sufficient rebuttal to the Proposition case to ensure that their own case can stand. Even where this is not true and the teams' cases are parallel, Opposition has the responsibility to clash their case, and as a result must respond to big pushes from 1P.

Typically, the responses provided by 1O will strategically pick material that is most important to respond to, or expose strategic flaws in the Proposition case. Given the range of other roles they have to fulfill, 1Os often do not have the time to engage in rebuttal that is as detailed as that which would be provided by the second and third speakers. However, the limited time available for refutation should not come at the expense of the quality of rebuttal.

In general, there are two approaches to rebuttal for 1O. Some speakers will respond to the Proposition and then present their own case. Other speakers will integrate rebuttals with their positive case, oscillating between making arguments and refuting the arguments provided by the Proposition. Regardless of the approach taken, 1Os must ensure they are directly responding to the arguments offered by the other side, rather than merely providing competing analysis. This applies as much to offensive rebuttal as it does to arguments; often, 1Os will claim that an argument they have made "responds" to an argument made by the Proposition. If this is to be done, speakers must make it abundantly clear how an argument disproves a previously made argument.

Establishing the case division

Thereafter, 1O will outline the case division, describing in brief the arguments each speaker will deliver. As with the Proposition, typically only the first two speakers will be assigned portions of the case to deliver. Speakers may make arguments outside of those highlighted in the case division, but the case division is a helpful “roadmap” of the debate for judges and the audience.

Presenting their part of the case

1O must present the first part of the Opposition’s positive case. As with 1P, this consists of one or more arguments that the Opposition has prepared for the debate. Together, this part should offer 1-2 clear and well reasoned paths to victory in the debate for Opposition.

Rules v. Practice

1. Running a negative case

Rule: According to the rules, the Opposition may choose to run a pure negative case

Practice: While pure negative cases are technically allowed, they are rarely seen in WSDC and are not recommended. Pure negative cases are often just as, if not more difficult for the Opposition to run. They additionally result in static debates that lack the dynamism generated by clashes of arguments from both sides. Because of this, most teams will provide positive cases.

2. Challenging the definition

Rule: The Opposition may challenge the definition if necessary, and provide an alternative definition.

Practice: Full definitional challenges are rarely seen in WSDC. Rather, debaters will often resort to a range of options that object to the Proposition’s definitions without explicitly offering a definitional challenge, or an alternative definition. This includes provisionally accepting but broadening the definition and critiquing the definition but accepting to debate under it.

Notes for judges

1. Winning definitional challenges does not necessarily equate winning the round:

Debates featuring definitional challenges will often see speakers prioritising engaging in the definitional debate over engaging in the true debate within the motion. Definitional challenges do not replace the motion, and judges must still evaluate the extent to which speakers have affirmed or negated the motion in light of the definition that the definitional challenge resolves to. This means that it is possible for a team to lose a definitional challenge (i.e., to abandon their definition, or to have the other side make a stronger defense of their definition) and still win the debate. Definitional challenges affect how strategy is evaluated – a team that loses a definitional challenge faces downward pressure on its overall strategy – and provides a lens through which the rest of the debate is to be understood.

2. Evaluate countermodels with care:

- a. Opposition countermodels that rely on excessive fiat should be judged harshly unless justified. Judges should ask: *Is this as or more plausible than the Proposition model?*
 - b. Where a valid countermodel is run, judges must assess the debate as a comparison between two policies - Prop's policy and Opp's countermodel. This makes the burden on Opposition to prove their world is preferable. Merely critiquing the Proposition model without developing or defending their own is insufficient.
3. **Check for true responsiveness:** 1Os will often assert that their rebuttals will be integrated, and either not provide refutation to the Proposition at all, or claim that an argument they have made responds to the Proposition without explaining how it does so.

Responsiveness $\neq$ Parallelism. Judges should actively distinguish between *true rebuttal* and *parallel case-building*. Opposition teams often assert they've "clashed" merely by presenting an argument in the same domain (e.g., both sides talk about education), but fail to *disprove* or *undermine* the actual claim made by Proposition. Judges should not credit parallel cases as rebuttal.

4. **Do not undercredit 1Os:** Judges should be cautious of recency bias, where later speakers' contributions are more memorable simply because they were heard last. The First Opposition speech plays a crucial strategic role in shaping the Opposition's stance, responding to the Proposition's framing, and establishing the foundations for clash. Even if later speakers expand or deliver flashier rhetoric, much of their material depends on the structural work done by the 1O. Judges should reward 1Os for clear stance-setting, early rebuttal under time pressure, and setting up argument threads that later speakers build upon. Strong 1Os create the groundwork for a cohesive Opposition, and that foundational role should be reflected in speaker scores.

Second Speeches

Second Speeches in the rules

- The speaking time for the second speech is 8 minutes.
- The role of the second speaker is to deal with the definition if it has been challenged, respond to the opposing side's case, and continue with their team's case as outlined by their first speaker.
- If there has been a definitional challenge, Second Speakers must decide whether they will accept the definition provided by the other side, or offer a renewed defense of the definition proposed by their respective first speakers.

- Second Speakers must also comprehensively rebut the case made by the opposing side, as well as provide defensive rebuttals in response to critiques made by the opposing side.
- The second speaker must introduce a new part of the case, which can be an argument, new reasons why an existing argument is true or important, new examples, and new weighing of existing arguments.

Second Speeches in practice

In general, second speakers typically feature responses to what the other team has argued, and add additional, independent material for their side. Speakers generally adopt one of these strategies to fulfilling these roles:

- Deliver all their rebuttals to the opposing side, defend their side, and then continue their side's case
- Summarise the debate into clashes, themes, or questions and within each clash, respond to the opposing side's case and defend their own case. Thereafter, they will add a new argument
- Summarise the debate into clashes, and add new constructive material within the clashes

Although no approach is better than the other, speakers must ensure that they remain clear in the content they deliver and in the strategic intent behind it.

Response to the other side

No matter the approach, second speakers must respond to the other side's case. These responses fall into two categories - critiques of arguments made by the other side (offensive rebuttals) and responses to critiques by the other side of one's own case (defensive rebuttals). Offensive and defensive rebuttals encompass direct refutation (disproving existing analysis from the other side), weighing (third party explanations of why one argument should be preferred to another, all things being equal), and meta analysis (commentary on the strategic implications of arguments made by the opposing side).

Defensive rebuttals

Defensive rebuttals shield one's own case by interacting with rebuttals to the case offered by the opposing side.

Illustration: Defensive rebuttal

This House would nationalise the research, development, and distribution of pharmaceuticals

On Proposition, the First Proposition Speaker (1P) argues that a nationalised pharmaceutical sector sees the cost of prescription medicine dramatically decreased because the Government is able to draw from its other revenue sources to subsidise this sector.

The First Opposition Speaker (1O) responds to this argument by saying that departments whose funding will likely be cut will lobby against those funding cuts, making these untenable, and therefore putting drug prices at the mercy of interdepartmental politics.

Second Proposition Speaker (2P): Opposition responds to the first argument on lower costs due to cross-subsidisation by claiming that there will be no political will for this cross-subsidisation. This is false: While there's friction when reallocating government budgets, the cost of medicine is one of the few issues where that friction is regularly overcome because high medicine costs have a direct and visible impact on immediate quality of life unlike defense or infrastructure. Failing to act on drug prices is deeply unpopular.

The objective of this response is to shield the original argument from the criticism being levelled by the 1O.

Offensive rebuttals

Offensive rebuttals are direct criticisms of the arguments made by the opposing side. They try to disprove their truth, logical validity, and importance.

Illustration: Offensive rebuttal

This House would ban the production and consumption of meat

1O has argued that banning the production and consumption of meat restricts individual autonomy by reducing their available food options.

2P: "Opposition argues that our policy restricts individual autonomy by reducing the food options available to individuals. The problem with this argument is that it ignores the fact that rights aren't absolute. An individual's autonomy is only upheld when they do not use it to cause harm towards other individuals. This is why we, for example, criminalise burglary or murder – because even though they are all exercises of autonomy, they create harm for others. Similarly, using autonomy to justify causing harm to animals is abhorrent, and the restriction on autonomy is justified.

This is an offensive rebuttal. It attacks the premise of the Opposition's case by demonstrating an unwarranted premise in the argument that a ban on meat restricts autonomy. This premise – that autonomy is an absolute right – is explained as being untrue by the 2P.

Note: Offensive and defensive rebuttals are not always clearly distinguishable as the debate progresses, because teams will often form extended chains of arguments, responses, responses to responses, and so on. As these are formed, the original meaning and implications of an argument will shift, gradually taking on new forms as margins are widened and closed, impacts are magnified and diminished, and mechanisms are deconstructed and reconstructed. This is just a useful way to think about the functions speakers are performing.

Continuing with the case

While responses to the other side are inherently a continuation of their case, second speakers have a burden beyond this to contribute to the debate for the reason that they are still able to introduce new substantive material, and are realistically the last speaker who can do so.

Second speakers can meet this most explicitly by introducing a new, independent, well-explained argument that acts as a unique path to victory for their side. If, however, a second speaker chooses to introduce a new argument, **they MUST ensure that it is given enough time and consideration to be fully and properly analysed**. Here, we would remind speakers that poorly analysed new arguments, or thin new arguments contribute little to the debate.

Alternatively, second speakers can further develop arguments introduced by their first speaker by offering new reasons to explain why an argument is true, new impacts to existing arguments, new examples/illustrations that substantiate existing arguments, or new ways of weighing and evaluating an existing argument. If a speaker opts to introduce new analysis of existing arguments, they must ensure that it substantially contributes to the debate. Here, we would remind speakers that this is difficult to distinguish from rebuttals that second and third speakers do, and therefore runs the risk of sounding repetitive at worst down the bench.

Whatever the approach they employ, they must ensure that they are “moving the needle” on the key issues of the debate. We encourage speakers to choose between the approaches bearing in mind the context of the debate they are in:

1. Where 1P and 1O have set up the round well and explained their arguments in a compelling manner, to reasonably expected challenges from the opposing side, new arguments are the recommended contribution from second speakers. The marginal contribution of additional reasons for why well-made arguments are true is low, and such arguments can be repaired through defensive rebuttal.
2. Where the 1P/1O speeches are incomplete or in need of significant repair, second speakers would be right to spend a significant portion of their time developing an argument introduced prior. Nonetheless, if they have the time and opportunity to, a new argument here is recommended.
3. If teams have been unsuccessful in pushing themselves to identify a new argument in prep time, but are able to generate multiple strands of new analysis to a 1P/1O argument, second speakers would be right to develop arguments introduced at 1P/1O rather than introduce a poor argument.

Note (1): Regardless of which approach is taken, we encourage debaters to think as broadly as possible and debate the fullest scope of a given motion.

Note (2): Second Speakers are not required to evenly distribute their time and effort across each of their roles. It is understandably the case, for example, that the Second Opposition speaker (2O) will have less time to introduce new material than 2P because the former will have

two speeches to respond to while the latter will have only one. Similarly, it is understandable that the 2P will spend less time than 2O on rebuttals – where the former only responds to one speech, the latter responds to two speeches' worth of material.

Resolving contentious issues relating to second speakers

(1) Ranking contributions:

Not all case continuations are equal. Some contribute more substantially to the debate than others. In a typical round, where 1Ps/1Os have fulfilled their roles reasonably well, and teams have had a successful prep, the order of substantiality for a second speaker is as follows:

1. New arguments >
2. New strands of logic in existing arguments, New Impacts, or New Weighing >
3. New Illustrations/examples

New Arguments:

Typically, a new argument is the most substantial contribution a second speaker can make to a debate. To qualify as a new argument, it must introduce a logically independent and strategically significant reason for why the team's side of the motion is true or beneficial. This means the argument could, in principle, carry the case on its own - even if the first speaker's material were absent/refuted. Minor extensions or niche points do not meet this bar. A true new argument expands the debate by opening up a fresh, meaningful line of reasoning that adds significantly to what the other side must engage with, rather than merely deepening or illustrating existing claims.

Illustration: New argument

This House believes that social movements should actively use anger to mobilise support for their cause

1O introduces 2 arguments:

Argument 1: The use of anger alienates potential members of the movement

Argument 2: Anger increases backlash and violence against movement members

2O introduces a new argument

Argument 3: The use of anger is psychologically taxing to the movement's participants and leads to activist fatigue...

Verdict: This qualifies as a new argument because it introduces a logically independent and substantial reason to oppose the motion: that anger is harmful to the movement's own members, not just to its external reach or public image. It opens up a distinct line of analysis about sustainability and internal resilience, which is neither derivative of nor reliant on the claims about alienation or backlash. Even if those other arguments failed, this point could still

independently justify rejecting the motion by showing that anger undermines the very people the movement depends on.

New strands of logic in existing arguments:

New analysis develops an existing argument by introducing additional logic or mechanisms that make the argument more robust. This can include new but supporting reasons that help explain why the original argument is true, or responding to anticipated pushback.

While these additions may contain new ideas or causal claims, they are still tied to the original argumentative claim and do not evolve into an independent path to victory. Their value lies in strengthening existing material, not in expanding the scope of the debate.

Illustration: New strands of logic to existing arguments

THBT social movements should actively use anger to mobilise support for their cause

1O introduces 2 arguments:

Argument 1: The use of anger alienates potential members of the movement

- The use of anger alienates potential members who might otherwise support the cause, especially moderates or undecided individuals who are put off by confrontational rhetoric or protest styles
- In movements where anger becomes the dominant mode of expression, spaces can become more hostile, aggressive, or male-dominated. This especially alienates women or marginalised activists, who may face greater risk of being harassed, or even harmed.

2O speaker develops:

When movements use anger, coverage often focuses on disruption and aggression rather than the underlying issue. This makes it harder for potential allies to understand the cause itself, and makes them distance themselves.

Verdict: This is new analysis because it introduces a distinct mechanism of alienation that is separate from personal discomfort with anger or confrontation. While the first speaker argued that moderates are turned off by the aggressive tone of angry movements, this point focuses on how anger affects media portrayal - specifically, how coverage tends to highlight disruption over substance. It is a different reason why people are alienated, but it still supports the same overall claim: that anger reduces support for the movement.

New Impacts and Weighing

New impacts and weighing provide new ways of demonstrating the importance of pre-existing arguments. They do not introduce new logic or mechanisms for why something happens, but instead focus on why something is the consequence of a thing happening, or why certain consequences matter more than others in the debate.

To be credited as new, the contribution must go beyond repeating or rephrasing 1P/1O material. It must offer a distinct alternative lens through which the same argument's significance can be understood.

Illustration: New impacting and new weighing

This House believes that social movements should actively use anger to mobilise support for their cause

New impacts introduce previously unmentioned consequences or affected groups that flow from the existing argument.

If the 1O speaker argues that anger alienates moderates, 2O might add that this alienation also weakens electoral coalitions, or erodes donor trust. These are **new effects** of the same underlying mechanism.

Verdict: The claim of weakening electoral coalitions or eroding donor trust is a new impact because it introduces additional consequences flowing from the same original mechanism (alienation), not a new reason for alienation itself.

New weighing involves explaining why the existing impact is comparatively more important

Even if anger energises a small committed base, alienating moderates matters more because those moderates represent the tipping point in public opinion. They determine whether a cause becomes mainstream, gains legal traction, or translates into actual policy.

Verdict: The argument that alienating moderates matters more it compares the relative importance of two existing impacts (energising a base vs. losing moderates), without changing the underlying causal logic.

New Examples

New examples offer fresh ways to show what an argument looks like in the real world. They help judges and audiences understand complex or abstract claims by making them easier to picture and relate to.

When used well, examples make arguments clearer, more persuasive, and more memorable - they often improve style as well as content. These shouldn't be treated as filler - they're a vital part of good speaking and are most effective when paired with earlier methods.

To count as "new," the example must not have been mentioned earlier in the round. In addition, an example BY ITSELF is less important than extracting that logic from it too.

Illustration: New impacting and new weighing

THBT social movements should actively use anger to mobilise support for their cause

PROPOSITION

1P Argument: Anger motivates people by highlighting injustice and creating urgency, making them more likely to act.

2P New Example: Adds the case of the Indian farmers' protests (2020–2021), where initial frustration over the farm laws escalated into a sustained national movement after the government's dismissive rhetoric and police crackdowns generated mass anger. This anger not only drew in rural supporters, but also mobilised diaspora communities, youth, and civil society groups that had previously been disengaged.

Verdict: The example shows how anger did not just increase protest turnout, but expanded the coalition beyond the directly affected group supporting the argument that anger broadens mobilisation, not just intensifies it. It also subtly preempts Opposition framing that anger alienates moderates - in this case, anger created new allies, including middle-class urban sympathisers and international observers. It converts an abstract claim into a strategic insight: anger not only fuels protest, it transforms public narratives, reframing the movement as legitimate and urgent.

Note: Sometimes, the use of the example can be equivalent to a new mechanism or impact, if the speaker explains the logic behind the example in a way that it adds a fresh reasoning to the existing point.

In general, second speakers should work to ensure that they contribute as substantially to the case as possible. This is important both for the quality of their own speech, and for the quality of the debate as a whole. Second speakers who fail to evolve the debate by taking it in new and previously unexplored directions are susceptible to repeating the case as presented by the 1P/1O, or to preempting material that will likely be repeated at third speeches.

(2) Second speakers in definitional challenge debates

In debates featuring definitional challenges, it is the role of the second speakers to attempt to resolve this challenge. In general, second speakers deal with the definitional challenge by either rejecting the definition offered by the other side and defending the definition provided by their

own side, or accepting the definition provided by the other side and proceeding with the debate based on the new/original definition. Regardless of which of these options the second speaker takes, it is strategic to provide “even-if” analysis that assumes, for argument’s sake, that the opposing side’s definition is correct and debates in line with it.

O1	P2	O2
Challenge the P1 definition and provide an alternative definition	Reject the alternative definition and defend the original definition	Reject the defense of the original definition and defend the alternative definition
	Engage the Opposition case “even-if” the alternative definition were true.	Engage the Proposition case “even-if” the original definition were true
		Concede the definitional challenge, and proceed with the original definition
	Accept the alternative definition	Proceed with the debate based on the alternative definition

Rules v Practice

1. “Deal with the definition” ≠ Reassert your own definition

Rule: “The role of the second speaker...is to deal with the definition if it has been challenged/if it is still in issue”

Practice: When a definitional challenge is launched, the definition in question is contentious – definitions often impact how certain arguments are conceptualised, and how certain priorities within the round are evaluated. Because of this, second speakers have to deal with the definition if it has been challenged, or if it is still in question.

- 2Ps can deal with the definition by accepting the alternative definition proposed by the 1O. In this case, the definition is no longer in contention and the debate proceeds using the alternative definition. Second speakers can also deal with the definition by critiquing the alternative definition and defending the definition proposed by 1P.
- 2O can continue to critique the definition proposed by 1P after 1O if there is a challenge to be consistent with 1O while defending the alternative definition proposed by 1O. They can choose whether or not to add ‘even if’ analysis and address the Proposition definition. Alternatively, they can concede the challenge and stick with the original definition.

2. “Respond to the Proposition/Opposition case” ≠ Respond only to the arguments of the Proposition/Opposition

Rule: “The role of the second speaker...is to...respond to the Proposition/Opposition case”

Practice: Second speakers don’t respond only to the opposing side’s case. Rather, in addition to this, second Speakers must respond to rebuttals made by the opposing side as well. This is especially the case because as the debate progresses, arguments and their impacts are flipped, conceded, or abandoned and as a result, may either become part of the case where they originally weren’t – such as in the case of a very effective flip of an argument – or fall away from the case where they were originally a part of it – such as in the case of a dropped argument. Responding to both arguments and rebuttals is an important way to ensure that speakers are keeping up with the debate as it evolves.

3. “Continue with the case” ≠ only continue the first speaker’s arguments

Rule: “The role of the second speaker...is to...continue with the Proposition/Opposition case as outlined by the first speaker”

Practice: Second speakers must ensure that they are adding to the debate constructively (which is often outlined in the first speakers’ case split). While this could take the form of deepening the arguments made by their 1P/1O, second speakers can and should explore other ways of doing this. This is important because the contributions made by the 2P/2O should substantially contribute to their constructive case.

Comparisons to BP Deputy Speeches

Area	BP	WSDC
<i>Overall Role</i>	Team-justifying: In BP, Deputy speakers summarise and defend their contributions as the most important ones on the bench, while responding to and weighing against the contributions of the opposing team.	Round-progression: In WSDC, second speakers must progress the round by expanding the understanding of a preexisting argument, or expanding the scope of the debate.
<i>Expectation of New Material</i>	Not-required, may be strategic: In BP, Deputies are not strictly required to introduce new constructive material, and may defend and substantiate their first speaker’s material.	Always required: In WSDC, second speakers <u>must always</u> introduce new constructive material, which can be new arguments, mechanisms, impacts, weighing, or examples.

Notes for judges

1. Evaluate Second Speakers based on the extent to which they move the debate:

Second speeches are not mere extensions to the 1P/1O, nor prefaces to the third speeches. Rather, second speakers have a distinct role to play in moving the debate by

evolving their side's case. The extent to which a second speaker moves the debate factors into their Content and Strategy.

Remember that as with all debate, context is everything! **DO NOT TOSS OUT A SPEECH** just because it does not fit the mold of a second speech in your mind. Ultimately, take careful notes such that you are able to track how much they contribute to or move the debate.

2. **Credit the second speaker's contribution appropriately:** Second speakers are susceptible to having their substantive contributions to the debate being undercredited. This is because they often quickly fall out of the debate, are not distinctly different from the first Speaker's contributions, or are simply not allocated enough time. Judges should ensure that they credit the Second Speaker's contributions by:
 - a. Taking accurate notes, paying attention to where second speakers are evolving from the content in the first speeches,
 - b. Evaluating the strength of second speakers' new contributions in light of the contribution from the first speaker i.e., assessing what the second speaker has done to either strengthen or weaken their first speaker's material.
3. **Evaluate defensive rebuttals based on interaction:** When assessing defensive rebuttal, it is especially important to ensure that the response does not merely restate the original argument, or counterassert a response to the rebuttal. Rather, defensive rebuttals critique the content of the refutation itself as not being sufficient in breaking the original argument.

Third Speeches

Third Speeches in the rules

- The speaking time for the third speech is 8 minutes.
- The role of both third speakers is to deal with the definition if it is still in issue, and respond to the other team's case.
- The third speaker of either team may have a small part of the team's case to present, but this is not obligatory as the third speaker's primary role is to respond to what has gone before in the debate.
- If the third speaker is to present a part of the team's case, this must be announced in the case division by the first speaker.
- The more the debate progresses, the more each speaker must spend time dealing with what has been said by previous speakers.
- Hence the more the debate progresses, the less time will be spent by each speaker in presenting a new part of the team case and the more time will be spent responding to the other team's arguments.

Third Speeches in Practice

The primary role of a third speaker is to respond comprehensively to the opposing team's case by addressing their core arguments, as well as by addressing their core challenge to the speaker's team's own case.

This typically involves identifying and analysing the major points of disagreement, known as "clash points", between the two teams. Third speakers feature 2-4 clash areas or thematic areas in their speeches by reorganising the arguments and rebuttal from the rest of the debate.

Note: Third speakers may take other approaches to fulfil their role, e.g., going by argument, or by speaker. Regardless of approach, what matters most is how well they are able to tackle winning outstanding material from the other team, and how well they are able to defend and highlight their own material.

Within each section of their speech, third speakers can use number of methods to respond to the other team as well as defend their case:

1. Responses to the other team's substantive case: New offensive rebuttal, weighing existing material
2. Deepening their own case: New defensive rebuttal, New impacts + weighing, additive analysis to existing argumentation
3. Meta-debate commentary/analysis: Clarifications on stances and criteria, pointing out strategic flaws, e.g., contradictions, lack of fulfillment of burdens, etc.

What third speakers **cannot do** is introduce a new argument, even if that is phrased as responsive (through weighing) to the other team's claims.

Note: While the rules technically allow a third speaker to present part of their team's case as flagged by their first speaker, the introduction of completely new substantive arguments does not occur in practice in WSDC. This is because new arguments introduced by the third speaker do not have the time to be well engaged, and take time away from engaging with the rest of the material in the round.

Expectations around rebuttal and argumentation at third:

Rebuttal:

- Third speakers are **expected to have new rebuttal**, i.e., a third speaker without new rebuttal is not performing their function. This new rebuttal can be in the form of direct rebuttal or weighing, and third speakers can also be the first to respond to particular claims made from the other side.
- Third speakers are also **expected to evolve existing rebuttal** delivered by their team, particularly as the arguments that were rebutted are rebuilt.

Arguments

- Third speakers **should not make new arguments in their speech**. To qualify as a new argument, it must introduce a logically independent and strategically significant reason for why the team's side of the motion is true or beneficial. This means the argument could, in principle, carry the case on its own - even if the first and second speakers' material were absent/refuted. Note that if a third speaker builds a new argument (usually involving a new mechanism and impact not introduced before) and weighs it up against an existing argument on the other side, while that would also qualify as rebuttal, it is primarily a new argument that has been built, and this is not allowed.
- Third speakers **should not introduce new, unexplored alternatives** unprompted and analyse them as this is equivalent to a new argument. They can analyse new alternatives in response to the other team pushing a different alternative onto them
- Third speakers **are permitted to, and should, evolve existing arguments** in their speeches. So long as the idea being developed can be clearly traced to a development in the debate (such as picking up on an earlier response, deepening a given substantive, following on from what first or second speakers established, or pursuing a similar analytical direction), it is not considered prohibited new material. This can include:
 - New reasoning
 - New impacts based on existing analysis
 - New illustrations

Whether a piece of material is 'late' is a matter of strategy and is highly context dependent. 'Late' is not a technical or rules-based evaluation, but teams should be mindful of strategic considerations beyond mere permissibility nonetheless, as with any speech. Late material suffers from limited development time and denies teammates opportunity to build on it.

'Late' in the context of third speakers usually means:

- The piece of rebuttal is the first response to early arguments in the round (e.g., at First Proposition). This might mean, based on the context of the round, that the rebuttal, given the extent of fortification from the other team of their argument, is not able to take down the whole core of the argument when made in only one speech towards the end.
- The piece of rebuttal is not given enough time in the speech by virtue of delivering it toward the end of the third speech
- A piece of analysis that is delivered hastily at and does not land in the round/expand its scope by virtue of limited time for development

Illustrating the difference between different permissible and non permissible third speaker contributions

This House would stream students into different classrooms based on academic ability in primary and secondary schools

You are the Third Opposition Speaker (3O).

First Proposition Speaker (1P)'s Argument: Streaming improves educational outcomes because students are taught at their level, allowing for more targeted and effective instruction

First Opposition Speaker (1O)

Rebuttal: Just because teachers pitch content at the 'right level' doesn't mean students learn more - when everyone is at the same point, there's less exposure to advanced ideas or academic stretch. That can actually slow progress

Argument: Streaming harms lower-performing students by reinforcing feelings of inferiority, reducing motivation, and creating self-fulfilling cycles of low achievement

#	3O Move	Type	Permitted?	Explanation
1	Challenges Prop's tailoring claim by showing low-track students still have diverse struggles, and addressing struggles for 2-3 students in a mixed classroom is easier than dealing with 20 in a streamed class	New rebuttal	✓ Yes	Responds directly to Prop's main claim using a new angle; doesn't introduce a new caseline, undermines Prop's logic
2	Weighs marginal gains in pacing against lasting damage to student motivation and self-worth	Weighing (as rebuttal)	✓ Yes	Frames Opp's harm as more significant and enduring than Prop's benefit; valid
3	Example: In the Philippines, streaming led to underqualified teachers in low tracks as a result of labeling/perceiving low track students as unintelligent, reinforcing inequality	New illustration or example	✓ Yes	Supports existing 1O material; uses a real-world example to clarify and extend, not to introduce a new argument
4	Claims that: 1O already argued that streaming reduces exposure to academic stretch by removing higher-performing	Evolved rebuttal	✓ Yes	This 3O rebuttal is analytically continuous with 1O because it takes the same causal mechanism

	peers who elevate classroom discourse. But this isn't just about lost enrichment - it alters how teachers approach instruction. In lower streams, teachers often lower the ceiling because they anticipate behavioural issues or assume students can't handle challenge. This leads to oversimplified content, slower pacing, and less ambitious tasks			introduced by 1O (reduced exposure to academic stretch) and traces its deeper consequences
5	Claims streaming entrenches economic class stratification, outweighing learning gains	New argument	 No	Introduces a new, standalone harm not mentioned by 1O/2O; reframing as weighing doesn't make it permissible
6	Evolves 1O harm claim: streaming leads to behavior patterns like not volunteering or attempting challenges	Evolved argument	 Yes	Expands the scope of existing harm from mindset → behavior; stays within the same logical argument path
7	Introduces a new alternative without Proposition pushing a burden onto them or it bring present at 1/2O: 3O analyses why, in the absence of academic streaming, schools would likely adopt socio-emotional streaming (e.g., grouping students by motivation or behavioral	New analysis of a new alternative	 No	Impermissible because 1O and 2O did not previously suggest this as a likely alternative. This constitutes new constructive material under the guise of likelihood analysis.

	needs), and claims this would improve instruction			
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Resolving contentious issues relating to third speakers

Notes on Third Opposition speakers

3Os are a uniquely challenging and strategic position in the debate. They are the last speakers allowed to directly rebut Proposition material or take POIs. This means that they carry the burden of finalising the team's engagement with the full Proposition case, constructed over three speeches. Scenarios for consideration:

1. **1O and 2O do not respond to important material from 1P that is pivotal to the Proposition case. 3O spends their speech thoroughly responding to this material.**

It is permissible for 3O to respond thoroughly to a previously ignored argument from 1P. In theory, this response may win the debate for the Opposition, assuming that this argument was Proposition's only well constructed path to victory. However, this does not fully erase the earlier neglect by 1O and 2O when considering speaker scores. The failure to engage with pivotal material at the time it was first presented weakens Opposition's responsiveness overall.

Nevertheless, in the majority of cases this late engagement often comes at the cost of not responding as thoroughly to other well-constructed Proposition arguments. If Proposition has multiple claims, and Opposition only develops pivotal rebuttal to one in 3O, the others may stand relatively uncontested. This affects the overall balance of the debate; while the clash on the recovered argument may now favor Opposition, Proposition may still hold uncontested or lightly challenged ground elsewhere due to Opposition's poor strategy.

PLEASE READ: Guidance on [Reply Speeches](#) to understand what leeway Proposition Reply Speakers (PRs) have in dealing with 3O material that has significant new response to early material delivered in the round.

2. **3O does not take a Point of Information (POI) despite a reasonable number being offered to them.**

This is not impermissible, but can be costly in close debates. In general, not taking POIs can be the difference between a win and a loss, precisely because judges in tight rounds often need to closely scrutinise engagement, in order to determine which team was more persuasive. This is especially true for 3O. Refusing POIs at this stage means passing up

the final opportunity to confront key Proposition material as it evolves, or to pre-emptively respond to how judges might be weighing unresolved issues. In rounds where margins are paper-thin, that choice can cost the team the debate.

- 3. 3O focuses on an argument that was hardly made at 2O to make it a winning issue in the debate, de-emphasising large parts of the Opposition case.**

It is risky and generally poor form for 3O to focus on an argument that was only superficially made at 2O, especially if they use it to reframe the round and deemphasise major components of the Opposition case. While third speakers are allowed to strategically focus, they must extend, not invent. The argument must have existed in a meaningful way earlier in the debate. If it was barely asserted or lacked development at 2O, judges may reasonably treat the 3O material as a new argument, which is not permitted. Additionally, if large portions of the original Opposition case are now downplayed in favor of this underdeveloped line, the team risks looking inconsistent. Judges will weigh whether this shift in focus is legitimate, but in most cases, such a shift weakens Opposition's credibility, especially if it abandons better-contested clashes without adequate weighing.

Reframing is acceptable and may even be strategically valuable when it amplifies a valid but underemphasised thread that logically flows from earlier material developed by another speaker, and when the team clearly signals continuity between speeches. However, this does not extend to substituting for a new case at the final moment.

Rules v Practice

- 1. NOT FOLLOWED IN PRACTICE: "The third speaker of either team may have a small part of the team's case to present"**

Rule: "If the third speaker is to present a part of the team's case, this must be announced in the case division by the first speaker."

Practice: Teams at WSDC do not present new arguments at third speeches, and this norm has become broadly accepted for the reason that this means the argument gets very little time to be discussed in depth in the debate, and presenting an argument takes away from being more responsive to material that was earlier presented in the round.

- 2. "Respond to the other team's case." ≠ No new analysis of own existing arguments**

Rule: "The role of both third speakers is to... respond to the other team's case."

Practice: This does **not** mean that third speakers cannot extend the material presented by their earlier speakers in the speeches. In practice, third speakers introduce:

- New analysis that deepens an existing argument (new reasons or impacts)
- New examples to illustrate old arguments

These are particularly important within defensive rebuttal, where third speakers are responding to responses that the other team has made against earlier arguments.

3. **“Respond to the other team's case.” ≠ Go argument by argument/respond to every line the other team said**

Rule: “The role of both third speakers is to... respond to the other team's case.”

Practice: As a debate progresses, the difference between ‘their case’ and ‘your case’ becomes more and more blurry, because a speaker’s responses to the other team’s case becomes part of the foundation that may scaffold their own case. Therefore, third speakers at WSDC often create clashes that bring together, under the same question or theme, what both sides argued and how those interact, with responses and additional analysis.

Comparison to BP Whip Speeches

Area	WSDC	BP
<i>Overall role</i>	Clash-resolving: In WSDC, the third speech aims to respond comprehensively to the opposing team's case by addressing their core arguments, as well as by addressing their core challenge to the speaker's team's own case.	Bench-justifying: In BP, whip speeches are focused on justifying the contribution of their own team within their bench. The whip doesn't need to defend the opening team or tell a case story, and deals with the other side as two separate teams.
<i>Rebuttal</i>	Expected: Third speeches can directly rebut new or weak material from other teams, and are often judged on how well they do this.	Expected: Whip speeches can directly rebut new or weak material from other teams, and are often judged on how well they do this.
<i>Structure</i>	Issue-based: Third speeches in WSDC are expected to collapse the debate into 2–3 core clashes and explain how those are contested and resolve them.	Team based: Whip speeches in BP may often follow a team-by-team format, especially when justifying comparative rankings.

Similarities

- On the basis of rules, third speeches in WSDC are allowed to introduce a new argument when flagged at first, but in practice this rarely occurs.
- Both speeches are expected to compare positions or teams, not just restate arguments.
- While in practice third speeches do not, and whip speeches cannot introduce new arguments, both rely heavily on meta-level analysis. In both formats, the final speaker is not just contributing content, but explaining how the debate unfolded, what mattered, and how the judge should evaluate it.

Notes for judges

1. **Understand what counts as permissible material: Third speeches must not introduce new arguments - but must introduce new rebuttal, and may evolve prior argumentation**

a. Impermissible:

- i. A new, standalone argument (usually involving new mechanisms and a new impact together, e.g., “streaming entrenches class inequality”) - even if framed as weighing.
- ii. 3O cannot introduce analysed new alternatives (unless as a response to one being pushed on them), if they were not already raised earlier in the debate. Doing so shifts the burden of clash too late and violates the expectation that new arguments should not be introduced at third.

b. Permissible and expected:

- i. New rebuttal, even if to old material as long as it is important or winning
- ii. New analysis of existing arguments (e.g., new implications, reasoning, illustrations)
- iii. Strategic reframing or clash creation based on earlier work

Evaluate how well the third speaker extends or responds, not just whether they avoid rule violations.

2. **Reward evolved rebuttal and strategic extensions, not repetition.** A good third deepens clashes.

- a. Credit when a speaker **develops** earlier material (e.g., extends harm from mindset to behavior, or draws broader consequences from an existing claim).
- b. Don't over-reward speakers who simply rehash their team's case or rebuttal in new words - the standard is development, not restatement.
- c. Look for analytical *continuity*: can this line be traced back logically to a point made by 1O or 2O?

3. **Clash framing and comparative analysis are the core of a good 3O speech.** Third speeches are not about covering every point - they're about explaining what matters most and why.

- a. Judges should expect third speakers to show clear awareness of what is winning for the other team, and either respond to it directly or minimise its importance through weighing or framing (good third speakers will do both).
- b. At the same time, strong 3Os identify what is already winning for their own side and emphasise or elevate it - giving it clearer framing, sharper impact, or better comparative weight.
- c. Finally, they may also build up underused material that has potential but wasn't yet decisive - e.g., drawing out the implications of a 1O/2O claim that had been under-explained but now matters more given how the round has played out.'

4. **'Late' engagement is allowed but it does not erase earlier neglect.** 3O can respond to key 1P material that 1O and 2O missed - and should be rewarded for doing so if done well. However:
 - a. TO DECIDE THE WIN: Judges should ask "Does the 3O's response **fully neutralise** the argument? Does Proposition still have uncontested ground elsewhere?"
 - b. IF OPPOSITION WINS ON THE ABOVE: The 1st and 2nd speakers should still be marked down for delayed responsiveness from other speakers, especially if this was a key plank of Proposition case.
5. **Strategic shifts must come from real material and not last-minute inventions.** Third speakers may reframe or collapse the debate, but they cannot shift to a clash that wasn't meaningfully present in earlier speeches.

Reply Speeches

Reply Speeches in the rules

- The reply speaker may be either the first or second speaker of the team, but not the third.
- The speaking time for reply speeches is 4 minutes.
- The reply speakers are in reverse order, with the Opposition Reply first and the Proposition Reply last.
- The role of the reply speeches is to sum up the debate from the team's viewpoint, including a response to the other team's overall case and a summary of the speaker's own team's case.
- Neither reply speaker may introduce a new part of the team case.
- A reply speaker may respond to an existing argument by raising a new example that illustrates that argument, but may not otherwise introduce a new argument.

Reply Speeches in practice

Typically, reply speakers summarise the debate into core 'clashes', and walk through and evaluate the material contributed by each team in those clash areas. This looks like briefly restating the important initial contributions within a clash, tracing critical challenges to and defenses of these contributions, and eventually resolving the clash in a way that highlights why the reply speaker's team won that clash, and therefore the broader debate.

Overall, a reply speech is retrospective, and therefore looks at the debate that has already happened. Reply speakers should not be adding new material that expands the case or the overall responsive pushes of the team, but should add new material that expands the judge's understanding of the debate and their ability to evaluate it.

Think of a reply speech as a judge who has decided to give the debate to the team they are from. How would they walk an audience through why?

What is permissible new material in a reply speech?

Reply speakers cannot introduce new arguments and new responses. However, they should nonetheless contribute new material to the debate. They can, and are encouraged to:

1. **Make new observations:** New observations are evaluative comments reply speakers make about how the debate unfolded. They do not introduce new arguments or rebuttal, but instead highlight key features of the debate that help the judge understand the relative strength, completeness, or structure of each team's case. Examples may include:
 - a. Highlighting dropped arguments
 - b. Noting logical gaps or missing comparatives
 - c. Flagging rules-based issues (e.g., new argument at third)
 - d. Pointing out asymmetries in burden fulfillment
 - e. Commenting on internal contradictions or inconsistencies in the opposing team

Illustration: Making new observations

This House opposes prison privatisation (Prop): "At no point did the Opposition respond to our claim that private prisons are incentivised to lobby for harsher sentencing, which means that harm stands unchallenged. This is important..."

2. **Use new examples:** New examples in reply speeches are new pieces of illustration or evidence used to support an existing argument made by earlier speakers on the team. These examples help adjudicators visualise or better understand a point

Illustration: New examples

This House would legalise the use of Performance Enhancing Drugs in Sport (Opp): "We already argued that even athletes who want to stay clean feel forced to use drugs just to stay competitive. In the Tour de France, cyclists who never wanted to use EPO said they had to, or they'd fall behind riders like Lance Armstrong who were doping. The entire field shifted because no one wanted to be the only clean athlete finishing last. That's the impact of Proposition's policy"

3. **Introduce ways to ascertain the importance of clashes:** In reply speeches, debaters are allowed to introduce new methods or metrics for evaluating which clashes matter more and how they should be weighed. This is about helping the judge make sense of the debate as it stands.

This House would require all schools to be secular (Prop): "There are two major clashes in this debate: whether secular schooling causes cultural alienation, and whether religious schooling entrenches social division. Opposition tells you that

students from devout families may feel alienated in secular schools. But this discomfort, while real, is temporary - students adapt, or can reach out to teachers or counselors.

Contrast that with this: religious schooling often codifies sexism, homophobia, and division as moral truth. These are not passing feelings - they are indoctrinated norms that shape how people vote, hire, teach, and parent for decades.

The pervasiveness of the harm over time is why you shouldn't weigh these clashes equally, and instead cast your ballot based on segregation."

Differentiating between permissible and impermissible new material

Illustrating impermissible new material in the reply speech

This House would mandate affirmative action in university admissions.

1. **New Rebuttal (NOT ALLOWED):** "They said students admitted through affirmative action struggle once they arrive. But what's crucial here is that elite universities are aware of these gaps. They actively design orientation programs, study skills workshops, mentoring, etc. to ensure students from disadvantaged backgrounds can thrive. So the problem they're describing is already addressed in practice."
 - a. It introduces a new mechanism: institutional efforts to mitigate underperformance.
 - b. It claims a cause-and-effect structure not previously mentioned.
 - c. It directly contests the logic of the Third Opposition Speaker (3O)'s point with a new line, not through evaluation or reframing.
2. **New Argument (NOT ALLOWED):** "We told you that affirmative action increases access to elite institutions. But what also matters, and went unchallenged, is that universities themselves benefit from having more diverse cohorts. It improves classroom discussion, broadens perspectives, and raises the quality of education for everyone, not just those admitted through the policy."
 - a. Earlier speeches focused on benefits to the marginalised students (access, mobility, fairness). This introduces a new benefit to a different actor: the institution and its academic environment.
 - b. It is not a reframing, extension, or evaluation of a prior claim - it's a fresh rationale for the policy.
 - c. It subtly shifts the burden: it now suggests the policy is good not only because it helps the disadvantaged, but because it improves the whole system.

Resolving contentious issues relating to second speakers

How can a Proposition Reply Speaker address Third Opposition Speakers?

3O has introduced late but valid rebuttal to First or Second Proposition Speaker (1P/2P)

This House would mandate affirmative action in university admissions.

Proposition claims that affirmative action improves access to elite institutions for marginalised students, allowing them to benefit from high-quality education and signalling, resulting in improved social mobility.

3O, for the first time, tries to rebut this by saying: “Even if more students from marginalised backgrounds are admitted, that access is not truly equal. These students often attend underfunded public schools and may not be academically prepared for the rigor of elite universities. Affirmative action may place them in environments where they struggle disproportionately - so the promised quality and benefit of access is overstated.”

1. **Evaluate the strength of the 3O responses:** Using the technique of making new observations, Reply speakers can undermine the credibility of late material at 3O.

Illustration: Evaluating the strength of the 3O response

“3O told you that students admitted through affirmative action may end up with lower GPAs - but they never asked the right question: compared to what? Unless they can show that a slightly lower GPA at Harvard is somehow worse than never having the chance to attend Harvard at all, their rebuttal simply doesn’t land”

2. **Outweigh the issue overall:** Reply speakers can acknowledge new, late rebuttal introduced by 3O without directly engaging or refuting it, and instead arguing that even if it’s valid, it’s less important than reasons their team has already given for winning the debate.

Illustration: Outweighing

In the scenario above, let’s assume that the First Proposition Speaker (1P) has made the argument that affirmative action is a form of justice.

“Even if you accept their claim that some students admitted through affirmative action may struggle, that doesn’t undo the reason we brought this motion. At 1P, we argued that access to elite education is a form of justice. These students were systematically denied opportunity, not because of talent, but because of background. Affirmative action is about correcting that exclusion. Whether every individual thrives is beside the point because justice isn’t contingent on perfection, it is contingent on having the

option to be at the table to begin with. Justice should matter more in this debate because...”

3. **Reframe existing material as preemptive response:** Reply speakers can identify arguments or analysis made earlier by their side that, while not directly phrased as rebuttal, implicitly address the substance of new rebuttal introduced at 3O.

Illustration: Reframing existing material to be responsive

In the scenario above, let's assume that the Second Proposition Speaker (2P) made an argument about why students who enter through affirmative action are overperforming relative to the opportunity they were given, making their admissions only fair. Reply speaker can extend this analysis to say

“At 2P, we told you these students are overperformers relative to the constraints they've faced - they've succeeded despite under-resourced schools, systemic bias, and limited preparation. This speaks directly to capability. If someone thrives under those conditions, that's a strong indicator they have the adaptability to succeed when the barriers are lifted. So when 3O tells you they're likely to struggle in elite institutions, that doesn't follow. If anything, the analysis we already gave you suggests the opposite, that these are students with exceptional upward potential.”

Note: This method blurs the lines, and therefore is only encouraged in cases where 3O has significantly new and late but valid rebuttal.

3O has introduced a new, invalid argument

If 3O introduces a completely new argument - one that doesn't respond to anything earlier and adds a fresh reason to oppose the motion, the reply speaker **cannot rebut it**. However, they **can point out that the argument was new** and should not be accounted for.

Rules v Practice

1. **“No new part of the team case” ≠ No new material**

Rule: “Neither reply speaker may introduce a new part of the team case.”

Practice: This does **not** mean the reply speech is purely summarising or static. In practice, reply speakers introduce:

- New examples to illustrate old arguments
- New ways of weighing clashes
- New observations about how the debate unfolded

These are considered commentary or framing tools, not new case content. They help judges understand the debate without changing the team's position.

2. **“Summarise the debate” ≠ List every argument chronologically**

Rule: “Reply speakers summarise the debate from their team’s viewpoint.”

Practice: Good reply speeches don’t list every argument. Instead, they

- Organise the round into two or three major clashes
- Highlight which arguments mattered, not just what was said
- Focus on how clashes evolved, not just who said what first
- Resolve the clashes by explaining which team won them and why

A reply is a narrative of victory, not a scorecard. Judges expect judgment, prioritisation, and framing, not transcription.

3. “Respond to the other team’s case” ≠ Rebut every point

Rule: “Reply speakers respond to the other team’s overall case.”

Practice: Reply speakers still respond, but indirectly and strategically - through procedural, comparative, or interpretive means.

4. “From their team’s viewpoint” ≠ Just reasserting their own side

Rule: “The reply speaker sums up the debate from the team’s viewpoint.”

Practice: In reply speeches, the speaker shows why their side wins by:

- Engaging with both teams’ strongest material
- Explaining why their team’s framing or burdens should prevail
- Acknowledging Opposition strengths while showing they are less important

Comparisons to BP Whip Speeches

Differences

Area	WSDC	BP
<i>Overall role</i>	Clash-resolving: In WSDC, the reply speech compares the totality of Proposition vs. the totality of Opposition. That includes evaluating internal coherence	Bench-justifying: In BP, whip speeches are focused on justifying the contribution of their own team within their bench. The whip doesn’t need to defend opening team or tell a case story, and deals with the other side as two separate teams
<i>Rebuttal</i>	Not permissible: A reply speech cannot offer direct rebuttal to arguments or new material introduced even if they are late. Replies can only evaluate it, reframe existing responses, or outweigh	Expected: Whip speeches can directly rebut new or weak material from other teams, and are often judged on how well they do this.
<i>Structure</i>	Issue-based: Reply speeches in WSDC are expected to collapse the debate into 2–3 core clashes and	Team based: Whip speeches in BP may often follow a team-by-team

	explain how those were contested and resolved.	format, especially when justifying comparative rankings.
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Similarities

- Both speeches cannot introduce new argumentation
- Both speeches are expected to compare positions or teams, not just restate arguments
- While neither reply speeches nor whip speeches can introduce new arguments, both rely heavily on meta-level analysis - commentary about the debate, rather than within it. In both formats, the final speaker is not just contributing content, but explaining how the debate unfolded, what mattered, and how the judge should evaluate it.

Notes for Judges

1. **Be clear on what counts as permissible new material:** Reply speeches must not introduce new arguments or new rebuttal. But they are expected to contribute new material in other forms. Judges need to be especially sharp here. Two common mistakes should be avoided:
 - a. Overcrediting: A reply speaker introduces a new reason to prefer their side (a new mechanism, new harm, or new rebuttal). Judges must discount this, even if it sounds persuasive or comes late in a close round.
 - b. Undervaluing: A reply speaker offers sharp new commentary, such as pointing out an unaddressed assumption, a contradiction in the opposing team, or a useful way to compare clashes — and a judge dismisses this as “new.” That’s incorrect. These are allowed and encouraged as long as they’re evaluating the existing debate, not changing its substance.
2. **Reply speeches can and do win debates:** Reply speeches are often under-weighted by judges, but they can decide debates, affect margins, and reveal the strategic quality of a team. They are especially decisive when:
 - a. The debate is close, and the reply speaker offers the cleanest comparative framing;
 - b. The third speaker on the opposing team is high quality and introduces new rebuttal or reframes prior material
 - c. The reply consolidates material that otherwise appears fragmented or weak.
3. **Replies matter even when they don’t flip the win:** Reply speeches are critical for margins especially when they:
 - a. Highlight undervalued material from earlier speakers (e.g., a strong 1P argument that didn’t get attention later)
 - b. Improves the team’s cohesion
 - c. Help clarify what to downrank in the opposing team
4. **Score reply speeches independently:** While reply speeches are delivered by either first or second speakers, they are separate speeches, and judges should score them

independently from the substantive speech delivered by the same person. A speaker may give a weak first speech but a clear, structured reply that deserves a higher score. Or, a speaker may give a strong substantive speech but a vague, undeveloped reply which should be scored lower.

5. **Don't dismiss or ignore the Reply in feedback:** Never say "I wasn't really listening to the reply." or "We already had the decision before replies." Make sure to include reply-specific comments in speaker feedback.

Judging at WSDC

[Back to introduction: Navigate to different sections of the Handbook using the tabs on the left on Google Docs, or through the links on the Introduction Page!](#)

Judging at WSDC

Overview of the judging structure at WSDC

All debates at WSDC are judged by an **odd-numbered panel** of **at least three judges**. Judges are selected based on adjudication ability and appointed by the Chief Adjudicator(s) with assistance from the Chief Adjudicator's Panel.

Prelims typically have 3 judges in each room, and in elimination rounds, (from partial/double octos onward), panels typically expand to 5-7 judges, with the Grand Final having more. One of these judges is designated the 'Chair' judge. The Chair conducts the debate and - in most cases (see [Oral Adjudication Preparation + Delivery for exceptions](#)) - announces the final decision of the panel and their collective reason for the decision, the oral adjudication (OA).

Debate outcomes are decided **ultimately by a majority vote** cast by the panel of judges **after they have a short discussion** to confer on their view of the round. A 2-1 split in a 3-judge panel results in a majority win.

Note (1): The cumulative judges' scores or cumulative winning margins are not used to determine which team wins the debate, though they may be used to rank teams for the purposes of the Break Rounds and the final awards.

Note (2): In the event a judge drops out mid-debate, and the panel is reduced to two judges (or an even number of judges), a **casting vote** is given to the more senior judge (pre-determined by the CAs) to break ties.

The mindset of a model WSDC Judge

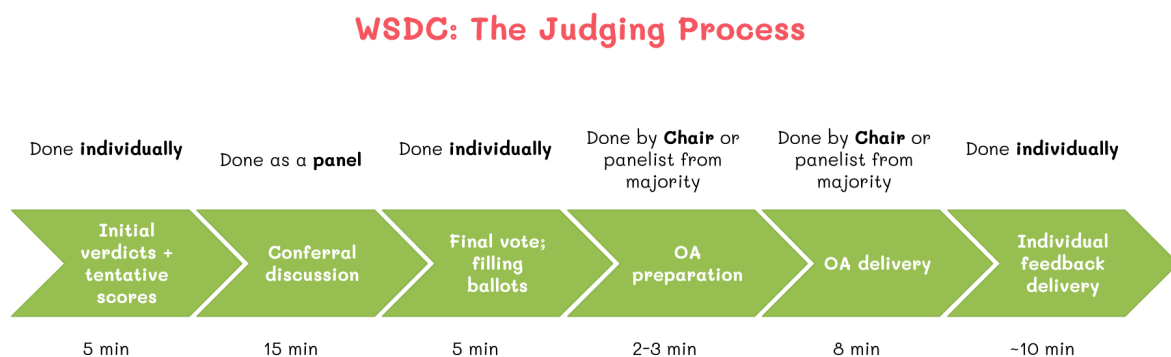
- **Hypothetical 'ordinary intelligent person'**
- **Impartial:** Doesn't judge teams they have personal bonds with (nation of affiliation, teams they coached, etc.).
- **Unbiased:** Has no prior idea who is going to win the debate. They set aside their personal opinion about the motion or specific arguments. They don't expect teams to argue their preferred arguments or discount arguments they don't like. They judge the debate that happened before them. They are thus willing to be convinced by the debaters who provide the most compelling case for or against a certain policy.
- **Observant and diligent:** Listens carefully to what debaters say and doesn't construct ideas that haven't been explained well. They look for substantiation and evidence equally from both teams. They track arguments, responses, and POIs – and are able to fairly and accurately summarise the debate (not necessarily to the debaters, even just to themselves)

before evaluating it.

- **Possessing general knowledge:** Take on the role of an average, intelligent listener and is aware of current affairs and basic facts without letting specialist knowledge interfere with the debate.
- **Expert on the rules:** Knows WSDC debating rules well and understands the words in the motion and the roles of teams/speakers.
- **Accountable & Constructive:** Can justify their decision based on a sound understanding of issues in the debate and the criteria for judging & gives debaters constructive and concrete feedback after the result of the debate is announced.

Understanding and breaking down the process end-to-end

Please follow the illustration below for the full process end-to-end from the point the Proposition Reply speaker finishes the debate.



This entire process should not take more 45 minutes



I. Initial verdicts + tentative scores

Note-taking

Note-taking is an essential judging skill. While styles vary from judge to judge, what matters most is that you track the debate in enough detail to evaluate it accurately. Good notes don't just record what was said - they also help you follow how the debate evolves, which arguments were responded to, and what remains standing at the end.

Note-taking tips

- TAKE NOTES BY HAND - this helps you process more easily
- Take notes during every speech, missing as little as possible, tracking argumentation and rebuttal
 - **NOT verbatim** - use shorthand, use bullet points, have CLEAR HEADINGS
- Include your thoughts where possible, ideally in a different colour
- Begin to write out emerging clashes in a separate sheet, with short bullets of what material goes in
- At the end of each speech, write a short note on where you are at the debate at that point on the emerging clashes

Setting yourself up to take good notes

1. Set up your sheet before the debate begins. Create a T chart (illustration below) with Proposition on the left and Opposition on the right. Leave some space for thoughts/reactions and POIs
2. Keep a separate clash tracker on the side (illustration below)
3. Track during the debate - use another colour to highlight useful material that was dropped
4. After each speech, take 30 seconds - what effect did this speaker have on your read of who is winning?
 - a. What changed in the debate?
 - b. Did this speaker push a clash one way?
 - c. Did anything collapse, or get strongly defended?
5. Track emerging clashes on the clash tracker
 - a. Write short bullets for each clash
 - b. Under each, note what both teams are saying as it develops.
 - c. Keep updating this as the debate progresses - you can return to this when making your call

Illustrations: Note-taking

This House would ban for-profit schools

T-Chart

Proposition	Opposition
Model: Ban for-profit schools → shift provision to public/nonprofit	Setup: Retain for-profits, regulate harms (e.g. stricter ad rules, inspections, etc.)
Argument 1: Exploitation of poor families • Misleading and targeted marketing • Parents lack info and evaluative tools	Rebuttal (to 1P): Model: Sudden bans → overcrowded public, learning loss

so no accountability to report/blame schools even with regulations • Poor disproportionately affected Argument 2: Weakens public education • Aspirational families exit system/the worst off schools stay; no pressure on school boards • Less political will to invest on part of govt. • Long-run system hollowing	✗ “exploitation of poor” Weakens public education: for-profits increase pressure on public schools to improve (competition) → Parallel argument rather than resolution Argument 1: Reduced access • Won’t convert to nonprofit: lower margins, harder to attract capital • Reduces schooling supply • Unmet demand, especially in rural/underserved areas Argument 2: Innovation • For-profits offer niche solutions • Public systems slow, bureaucratic • For-profits take risks and have capital to offer niche solutions
Unclear why education supply similar	Model preemption dropped Exploitation unaddressed Public system pressure claim parallel → doesn’t directly rebut Prop’s causal logic of systemic neglect.

Clash tracker at this stage

Clash	Prop Says	Opp Says	CA notes for judge
1. Educational equity for low-income students	Exploits poor families + bad education even with regulations	Reduces affordable options; schools will exit rather than convert	Which of that is worse quality? Watch for more engagement
2. Public system strength	For-profits drain aspirational families and reduce pressure on government to improve schools	For-profits create competitive pressure on public schools to do better	Parallel – not directly responsive yet
3. Innovation and responsiveness		For-profits offer flexible, niche programs that	Unanswered → watch for Prop response in 2P

		nonprofits/public schools can't	
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Clash development and resolution

An individual judge begins arriving at a decision during the debate itself by tracking **areas of clash** and evaluating **how they are resolved**.

Step 1: Identify/frame areas of clash

A clash is a key question/tension where both teams present competing perspectives. Answering that question one way or another should influence whether you will vote for the motion or not.

Illustration: Understanding clash		
This House would ban for-profit schools		
Category	Proposition	Opposition
Overall Model/ Framing	Ban for-profit schools → shift provision to public/nonprofit	Keep for-profit schools, regulate to reduce harms
Argument 1	Exploitation of poor families: For-profit schools mislead low-income families with aggressive marketing and unverifiable quality claims.	Reduced access: Banning cuts supply, disproportionately hurting poor families in underserved areas.
Argument 2	Low-quality provision: Profit incentives drive cost-cutting on teachers and materials, reducing educational outcomes.	Competitive pressure: For-profits create pressure for state schools to improve quality and responsiveness.
Argument 3	Weakens public education: For-profits divert aspirational families and reduce political and social investment in improving public schools.	Innovation and responsiveness: Profit motive incentivises schools to develop niche offerings (e.g., vocational training, after-school programs, flexible hours), which nonprofits/public systems often lack the financial flexibility to provide.

Clash Map

Clash	Proposition	Opposition
Educational Mobility <i>Who improves outcomes for low-income students?</i>	1. Exploitation of poor families through misleading promises and lack of accountability. 2. Low-quality provision: Profit motive encourages cost-cutting (teacher salaries, materials) harming outcomes.	1. Access argument: For-profits create affordable seats where public schools are failing or full. 3. Model attack on learning loss and sudden overcrowding in public schools
State School Capacity and Systemic Effects <i>Do for-profits harm or help public provision?</i>	1. Public system hollowing: For-profits drain aspirational students and reduce state accountability. 2. Political disincentive: Their presence removes urgency for government to improve public schools.	1. Relieve pressure: For-profits absorb overflow, reducing crowding in public schools. 2. Competitive pressure: Their existence pushes public schools to improve performance.
Innovation and Responsiveness <i>Which model better adapts to diverse learner needs?</i>	1. Profit misaligns incentives: Encourages flashy marketing over substantive innovation.	1. Profit drives responsiveness: Incentivises tailoring offerings (vocational tracks, after-school care, etc.). 2. Non-profits/government are slower: Mission rigidity, bureaucracy, and weak feedback loops inhibit adaptation. 3. Capital access: For-profits scale successful innovations more easily.

Identifying the main clashes requires judgment, but here are some cues:

- What are the third speakers and reply speakers highlighting as the most important issues or clashes? Do you, as the judge, agree that these are the most important questions in the debate? Have they missed anything?
- Where have both teams offered substantive, opposing contributions?

Note: Please formulate clashes as they arise in the debate to decide who won the debate. Your independent judgement of how close they are to the heart of the debate can factor in, but only to the extent that teams did not do this work.

Step 2: Resolve individual areas of clash

Resolving a clash means answering the central question posed by that clash - e.g., "*Who better promotes educational mobility?*" - based on what the two teams said, how those arguments interacted, and which ones stood at the end of the debate.

A resolved clash gives you an outcome like:

"Team A demonstrated that banning for-profits would improve educational quality for all (and therefore equity) more than it would hurt access (and therefore equity), so they win this area."

It's not about who "said more". It's about a structured comparison, and argumentative quality:

- Was the argument/point clearly constructed, logically explained, and contextually grounded? Is it convincing even before it is responded to?
- Did the opposing team respond meaningfully? Was that response logical, specific, and sufficient to damage the core of the presented argument?
- How did the initial team respond to the responses?
- What remains standing? Which claims were unchallenged, or survived rebuttal better and why?
- Does whatever is left standing relate directly to what the motion requires that teams prove to win?

Remember that debates are complex - simply asking "Was the argument refuted?" is insufficient. You must judge how the argument evolved after refutation, what stuck, and how the framing shifted as a result.

At the end of the clash, you should be able to say something like: "Proposition introduced Argument A. Opposition responded with B, to which Proposition answered with C. I evaluate that C sufficiently defends A against B (this could be either because it directly disproves B, makes B less important, or shows that A still stands even if B is true). Therefore, I continue to believe A is relevant and persuasive, and this clash leans toward Proposition."

Important note: Similar to an argument, a rebuttal does not "win" just because it exists. Credit it only if it:

- Engages specifically with the logic or assumptions of the original argument;
- Makes that original argument less persuasive or less relevant;
- Is itself plausible and explained, not just asserted.

Step 3: Weighing between clashes and making a tentative call

Once you've resolved each major clash in favor of one team or the other, your final task is to determine: **Which clash (or combination of clashes) decides the debate?**

Not all clashes are equally important. A team may win one or two minor clashes, but still lose the debate if they lose the one that most directly determines the motion as argued and determined by the teams.

Note(s):

1. Debaters should have already done this work in the debate, particularly through later speeches. Teams are expected to tell you **why** their winning clashes matter more, and compare impacts, explain relevance to the motion, and tie their case together.
2. However, *if teams do not do this job well*, or if both sides leave weighing implicit, **judges must interpret how that implicit weighing translates, and in the worst case, use reasonable inference and principles of good comparison** to determine which material carries the debate. This (especially at WSDC) is a rare occurrence, and the majority of debates include at least some implicit explanations as to how to evaluate between clashes.
3. If speakers or teams focus on completely irrelevant or unrelated arguments and issues with respect to the motion, you can reflect this in the scores for those speakers or teams will be lower, i.e., the overall room will be low quality. The win or loss is still decided by the clashes as argued in the round

What are some questions to consider in making these decisions?

Note: These are illustrative, and non exhaustive. More questions may arise depending on the debate you are watching!

- **Relevance to the Motion:** Which clash most directly addresses what the motion asks us to evaluate as framed by the teams in the debate? If a team wins a secondary clash, they may still lose the debate.
- **Depth and magnitude of Impact:** Which clash affects more people, causes deeper harms, or produces more meaningful benefits? Judges should compare scale, severity, and certainty of each side's material.
- **Cumulative Narrative Strength:** Do the clashes a team wins build toward a stronger overall case? A team that wins both equity and state system arguments may have a more cohesive story than a team that only wins niche innovation.
- **Margin:** Did the teams win the clash that is being weighed by a large margin? In many cases, teams can win a clash, but the amount they won that clash by can be limited. For example, in a debate about privacy versus security, the team opposing surveillance or other privacy violations will often argue that the other side wins the practical clash about saving lives by a small amount, whereas the principled restriction to privacy applies to everybody in society. This shows that the degree to which a clash is won is relevant to

determining the relative importance of clashes. The above illustration demonstrates the margin is also relevant with respect to principled arguments.

A good judge doesn't just say "Prop won 2 clashes, Opp won 1, so Prop wins."

Instead, they say something like: "While the Opposition won the clash on innovation, Proposition won both the equity and systemic effect clashes. These are more central to the reasonable burdens set by the motion, because... therefore, I award the debate to Proposition."

Step 4: Have a set of rough scores

You should be **writing down a preliminary score for each speaker as you listen to them**. Once the debate finishes and you've resolved the key clashes, revisit these scores with your sense of **each speaker's overall contribution to what actually mattered in the round**.

Scores should reflect how you saw the debate, not the other way around - **do not try to add up speaker points to justify your team call**. Speaker points capture not just how well someone spoke in isolation, but how meaningfully they shaped the debate's key issues. This helps ensure you fairly reward impact, clarity, responsiveness, and strategic judgment. It also protects you from recency bias, keeping your scoring consistent with how the debate as a whole unfolded.

For scoring guidelines go to the [scoring section](#).

Judging Checklist

Ultimately, judging - especially when you're starting out - is hard because debates are complex. This list isn't a perfect logical algorithm, because there often isn't one that captures this complexity. But it is a useful heuristic: a structured set of questions that help you start out. Judging is a skill you only sharpen by practice, and this can help build judging muscle/intuition.

Step 1: Identify areas of clash

- Have I identified the main areas of clash in the debate? Are the clashes clearly relevant to the reasonable burdens set by the motion as agreed on by the teams?
- Did both teams present substantive material on each clash?
 - If not, award uncontested credit where appropriate.

Tip: Use third speeches and replies to help surface what the teams consider most important, but use your judgment in the rare cases that this is unclear, or their explicit framing is in tension with how they spent their time across the case.

Step 2: Resolve each clash

- Track the chain
 - Is there a clear structured initial contribution from each side?
 - Were they logically plausible and contextually supported?
 - Were there direct and specific responses?

- Was there sufficient counter-rebuttal and reconstruction?
- Compare strength
 - Whose material is more plausible, well-developed, and stood up to pressure?
 - Who provided better examples, mechanisms, or causal analysis?
 - Who was more effectively responsive to the other's claims, and to challenges?
 - Did one side give better weighing within the clash?
- Make a clash verdict
 - I can clearly state: 'This clash goes to team X because...'
 - I am not importing my own beliefs - my resolution is based only on what was said, how it evolved, and what stood at the end.

Step 3: Weigh between clashes and make a tentative call

- Did either team explain which clashes matter more, and compare their wins? Use it if so.
- If no: Who wins the most important material/material that matters most in the debate based on your best read of their implicit weighing/how much time they spent?
- I can summarise my decision clearly

II. Conferral discussion

Once each judge has reached a **tentative decision**, WSDC requires a structured conversation among the panel before each person's decision is finalised. This is called **conferral judging**.

Conferral allows you to change your mind if another judge's read of the debate helps you uncover information you may not have considered in your own evaluation - but it must be based on argumentation from the debate. The aim is not consensus, but clarity: **a fuller understanding of what happened**, through a collaborative process.

Purpose of conferral

Conferral exists to:

- Clarify what was said and what mattered in the debate.
- Expose blind spots or missed arguments.
- Help all judges test their reasoning against others'.
- Strengthen the quality of decisions.

However, it is not about convincing others to change their call - it's about understanding how others reached theirs, acknowledging subjective differences in judging, and using that to improve your own decision-making.

The conferral process

At WSDC, conferral typically proceeds like this:

1. **Conferral begins:** The chair opens discussion after tentative private calls are made, by asking for calls from the panel, summarising core clashes, then inviting judges to explain their reasoning
2. **All judges contribute:** Each judge shares their reasoning based on where/how the Chair invites input, or if there are important additions they have to existing discussion
3. **Clarifications happen as judges explain reasoning**
Judges may ask specific questions to the rest of the panel as they explain their reasoning. Similarly, they should expect other judges to test their reasoning with targeted questions. We expect these to broadly fall under the categories described in the next section ([read below for explanations](#)).
4. **Brief discussion of marking ranges:** Judges broadly express what the quality of the debate is, and what range they're marking speakers within, **but not individual scores**
5. **Final decision for the debate is made:** Judges may hold, adjust, or change their call, and announce their now final vote to the Chair
6. Judges **independently fill in their ballots** and submit them.

Possible outcomes from conferral for every judge

Hold entirely

- You continue to believe your original call is correct.
- You may still acknowledge others' reasoning as plausible or valid — holding doesn't require defensiveness.
- Agreement with others' calls is welcome, but not necessary; judges may disagree and remain in the minority.

Hold win/loss; change margins

You maintain your decision on which team won, but change how decisive the win was. Conferral may have clarified:

- The importance of a clash you initially underrated;
- The coherence or collapse of a team's case;
- The importance of a speaker's contributions to the debate that you under- or over-credited
- A clearer narrative for one side.

Change win/loss

- You now believe another team more persuasively won the key clashes.
- This is not a failure - it shows that you've reflected and reasoned in good faith.

Note: No outcome is "better" than the others. What matters is that your final call is the product of good judging - careful listening, honest evaluation, and openness to reconsider when warranted.

The scope of conferral judging

These are appropriate and helpful areas for conferral discussion:

1. **Scope/Rules clarifications**, e.g., *“Was that a new argument at third speaker?”*
 - Confirming procedures, speaker roles, eligibility of arguments, or format issues.
 - Ensuring shared understanding of what counts (e.g., did the third speaker introduce impermissible new material).
2. **Evaluative clarification**, e.g., *“How did you evaluate X, and why?”*
 - Discussing potential disagreement on clashes, or how to weigh between two well-contested clashes,
 - Testing each other’s interpretation of arguments or rebuttals.
3. **Resolution-seeking clarification**, e.g., *“I would award this to Opp if X was shown. Did you see that?”*
 - Specifying what would tip the scale.
 - Asking whether others’ flows contain the key element you think is missing
4. **Marking range** - *“I thought this was an above average debate and my scores will be around 71 to 73 for the teams”*

AVOID: (1) Exact score comparisons (2) Reconstructing the debate among the judges (3) Having a long back and forth on the round trying to convince other judges to flip their decision, rather than simply defending your own and clarifying the debate

Preparing for the conferral discussion

All judges

All judges should come into the deliberation prepared with:

- Openness and willingness to listen and change their decision if their view has changed.
- A clear initial call: Who you believe won the debate and how clearly
- A short justification across 2–3 main clashes. Jot down 2-3 sentences each clash with:
 - Big contributions from each side
 - How you resolved the clash - what made the difference?

Note: Share when a chair asks for you to contribute first on an issue

Illustration: Short justification for a clash

This House would ban for-profit schools

Clash: educational equity for low income students

- Prop argues that for-profits exploit low-income families through misleading marketing, and delivering poor outcomes that parents can’t check. This was uncontested.
- However, Opp argues that banning for-profits removes a chunk of existing school supply, because schools won’t convert due to lack of capital. They added that no school is worse than bad education because at least you have peer interactions.

→ I gave this to Opp, but narrowly. I buy Prop's harms, but I think Opp shows that losing access entirely means students lose educational and social benefits from weaker schools. I was persuaded ultimately by Opp's claim of net harm from the transition.

- Critical questions
 - Elements you're unsure how to evaluate (e.g., was this new? How much did other judges credit that weighing?)
 - What additional perspectives might shift your thinking?

Note: Use these to follow up - especially when you're not in agreement.

Illustration: Follow up questions

This House would ban for-profit schools

Let's assume a judge in the room gave you that explanation from the earlier illustration. You have voted proposition on this same issue. Here is a question you might ask to keep the discussion focused and productive:

"What were the margins on the educational benefits? I leaned Prop because this seemed too little given that poor families are sinking money - I could flip if the gains were significant."

- Language that facilitates collaboration, rather than indicates objective fact. Avoid "I think there is no way X won", or "This is such an obvious win to Y"

Note: As the deliberation proceeds, also begin to jot down specific points of feedback you will give later to individual feedback.

Chairs - conducting a productive panel discussion

- **Keep a timer running**
- **Play the role of an active facilitator (provide structure)**
 - Announce the areas of the debate in advance to give panelists a roadmap
 - Call upon specific panelists to contribute
 - Summarise contributions and ask for clarifications
 - Ask pointed questions about the debate to make the discussion more concise

Illustration - Facilitation Prompts for Chairs

Opening

- Can we go through these three areas - X,Y, Z?
- [Person X], would you start us out with how you evaluated Clash X?
- (if dissent) [Person Y], how did you see that clash differently?

Targeted questions

- Would X be enough to outweigh [specific harm/benefit]? What would you need to change your mind?

- How important did you think [dropped material was] to the debate?

Tightening rambling

- That's helpful, could you take a second to give us the bottom line on what your deciding point on this clash was?
- Sorry to jump in - can we loop back to how it changed your final decision?

Coordinating shaping the OA

- I'm broadly covering [things you've written into the OA]. Does anyone want to add nuance here in this Clash?
- (to dissenter) Does [material from them] capture your view of why you voted differently on this clash? How would you change that?

- **Spend more time on contentious areas:** prioritise areas which are more difficult to evaluate and matter more to the decision, rather than areas the judges broadly agree on.
- **Manage time actively** - while you do have to listen to both panelists, you should also be polite but firm in stopping meandering or over-explanation.
- **Contribute briefly**
 - Often, having a contribution early on can both help shape the discussion, as well as model good contributions for the rest of the discussion
 - Make sure to factor in your view of the debate as well by adding to panelists
- **Ask questions that help shape your OA.** Regardless of whether judges see clashes differently, the debate is unanimous, ask questions with the OA in mind - ie. ask judges, how to clarify particular perspectives while delivering the OA

Summary of conferral dos and don'ts

✓ Do	✗ Don't
Come in with a clear tentative decision and margin AND SHORT NOTES! The Clash tracker is useful here	Wait to decide until others speak or say "I'm 50/50"
Ask clarificatory, pointed questions that help gather more information to hold, adjust, or change your call	Expect that other judges will narrate whole arguments or exchanges that you did not have notes for - listen actively and track well!
Use broad marking range language (e.g., "looking at the speaker scale, I thought the speakers in this debate ranged from good to the higher end of very good.")	Compare exact scores or negotiate points ("I had 76, you had 74")

Explain your reasoning clearly, concisely, and respectfully.	Dominate the conversation, interrupt others, or treat it like a debate, or add unnecessary detail or verbatim notes from the speakers.
Publicly announce your final call that you are about to fill into the ballot to the panel. Have a short explanation for why, regardless of whether you changed anything.	Hide or be unclear about whether you changed your mind

Differences between independent ballots, conferral judging, and consensus judging

Area	Independent (AP)	Independent (Australis)	Consensus (BP)	Conferral (WSDC 2022)
Timing and purpose of discussion	Low (0-2 min): After ballots are submitted if at all, as a formality	Medium (5-10 min): After ballots are submitted to improve OAs	High (~25 min): Before ballots are submitted to reach consensus	Medium-High (15 min) Before ballots are submitted to expand information available to judges
Importance of discussion	Low: Does not feature strongly as each judge delivers a separate OA to the teams	Medium: Only matters to the extent that the person delivering the OA collects opinions	High: The discussion is the primary method of evaluating who won the debate	Medium-High: The discussion can increase information, and change the minds of judges and the outcome, as it is done prior to ballot submission. However, it is not the method of evaluating who won
Approach to divergence	Only matters to the teams and not to judges themselves	Matters in as much as the person delivering the OA should fold dissenting opinions in	Triggers in depth discussion to attempt to resolve this divergence, where judges try and convince the other judge to move towards a common way of viewing the debate	Room acknowledges the alternative ways to view the debate, and the explanations of these by judges may influence others to independently change their decision (or not)
Likelihood of dissents	Relatively high	Relatively high	Relatively low	Moderate - not wedded to the final decision
No. of OAs	Three separate	One OA	One OA	One OA

III. Final vote; filling in ballots

Understanding the scoring categories

At WSDC, you score each speaker on **Content (40%)**, **Style (40%)**, and **Strategy (20%)**, which together determine the speaker's overall effectiveness in the debate. While these are presented as separate categories with approximate weightings, judges should ultimately see them as **interdependent elements of the same holistic judgment**: how persuasive and impactful was this speech in advancing the team's case?

- **Content (40%)** is what is argued - the quality, depth, and relevance of the material to the motion burden, including arguments, rebuttal, and responses to POIs.
- **Style (40%)** is how that material is delivered - clarity, and choices in language and delivery that help the judge follow and be convinced by the speech.
- **Strategy (20%)** is why material is selected and structured the way it is - prioritisation of issues, clash engagement, framing and weighing, time allocation, when/how many POIs are taken, and how the speech fits into the team's overall approach.
- **POI adjustment (from -2 up to +2)**: used to adjust scores when the POIs *offered* by a speaker differ significantly in quality (content/style/strategy) from their substantive speech (i.e. not applicable for Replies). Speakers whose POIs are approximately of the same quality as their speech should not be penalised/rewarded in this column, regardless of how terrible/fantastic those POIs may have been. Responses to POIs within a speaker's speech should not be scored in this column, but as part of Content/Style/Strategy.

Note: Constructive speeches are scored out of 100, and Replies out of 50

In practice, these are **not silos**. Good content depends on style to be understood. Strategic choices determine whether even strong material can win a team the round. This is why you should always treat these categories as **different perspectives on the same speech**, rather than three isolated scores.

Of course, it's still possible for a speaker to perform noticeably better on some elements than others - offering deep analysis in a dry manner, or analysing deeply an issue that is not debate winning. Thinking in categories helps identify why a speech lands where it does on the scale, and provides precise feedback. But ultimately, these dimensions combine to capture **one unified measure of how well the speaker advanced their side in this debate**.

Below are a set of criteria to consider when thinking about each of the different categories. These are *not exhaustive lists of all the relevant factors*, but should help guide your thinking on each of these different categories.

Content (40%)

- **Argument diversity, quality, and applicability**
 - Does the speech offer a range of strong arguments (or sections in the arguments), or does it rely on repeating one idea?
 - Are the arguments logically developed, rather than shallow assertions?
 - Are they relevant to the reasonable burdens set by the motion?
 - Has the team used well-chosen and explained examples to support their case?
 - Are the links within and between arguments clearly constructed and easy to follow?
- **Rebuttal quality and depth**
 - Are rebuttals logically targeted and well-explained, or superficial dismissals?
 - Is there good comparative analysis furthering rebuttal into a point for their side?
- **Quality of responses to POIs**
 - Do POI responses address the challenge in a way that reinforces their case or weakens the opposition, or are they dodged?
- **Weighing**
 - Does the case naturally clash with the material from the other team well?
 - Does the speech explain why the team's case is preferable to the other team's case well?

Style (40%)

Overall: Style is about making it as easy as possible for the judge to understand, remember, and be persuaded by the speech.

- **Legibility**
 - Is the speech delivered at a pace that allows the judge to track and process it?
 - Is the language clear, sentences complete?
 - Does the speaker signpost transitions so the judge knows when sections in a speech start or end?
- **Emphasis and variation**
 - Are key ideas clearly highlighted through pause, tone shifts (e.g., humor), volume changes and emphasis, or do they get lost?
 - Does the speaker use body language (e.g., eye contact, deliberate gestures) to add to important parts?
- **Grounding**
 - Does the speaker explain ideas in relatable and easy to understand ways rather than through abstract language or jargon?
 - Do they 'make it real' using good storytelling, scenarios, characterisation?

Strategy (20%)

Overall: the sum of choices a team makes in order to win the debate.

- **Prioritisation and timing**
 - Does the speaker spend most of their time on what will actually decide the debate, instead of getting stuck on side points?
 - Does the speaker structure their rebuttals and substantive case in a way that emphasises relevant and important material?
 - Are less important or redundant issues dealt with quickly? Do they engage with scenarios beyond ones that are most convenient for the team, or give justification for why those scenarios are unimportant?
 - Did the speaker sequence rebuttal and arguments in a way that made their case easier to follow and stronger, especially where their own arguments depend on taking down the other side first?
- **Use of comparatives and weighing**
 - Does the speaker set up clashes in a way that advances their position?
 - Is the speaker able to identify what part of the debate they are winning on, and make that more important? Alternatively, do they minimize what they are losing?
 - Do they consistently weigh issues explicitly, explaining why their impacts matter more than the opponent's?
- **Use of meta-analysis**
 - Does the speaker step back and help the judge understand how the debate is playing out overall, rather than just focusing on individual arguments?
 - Are they able to articulate "even if" clauses where different scenarios still show why they win?
- **Consistency of the overall case**
 - Is the material logically consistent, or do some statements contradict others?
 - Do the arguments reinforce a single case line or narrative, building towards the same conclusion?

Understanding scoring ranges

WSDC substantive speeches are theoretically scored out of 100, but **the range in use is 60-80: substantive speeches cannot be scored below 60 not above 80.**

- **Content** is theoretically scored out of 40, with the range in use being **24-32**.
- **Style** is theoretically scored out of 40, with the range in use being **24-32**.
- **Strategy** is theoretically scored out of 20, with the range in use being **12-16**

The minimum increment for speeches and category scores is 0.5. For example, a speech can receive 28.5 for content, but it cannot receive 28.25 for style.

Standard	Content (/40)	Style (/40)	Strategy (/20)
Exceptional	31.5-32	31.5-32	16
Excellent	30.5-31	30.5-31	15.5
Extremely Good	29.5-30	29.5-30	15
Very Good	28.5-29	28.5-29	14.5
Good ('Average')	28	28	14
Satisfactory	27-27.5	27-27.5	13.5
Competent	26-26.5	26-26.5	13
Pass	25-25.5	25-25.5	12.5
Improvement Needed	24-24.5	24-24.5	12

WSDC **reply speeches** are theoretically scored out of 50, with the range in use being **30-40**.

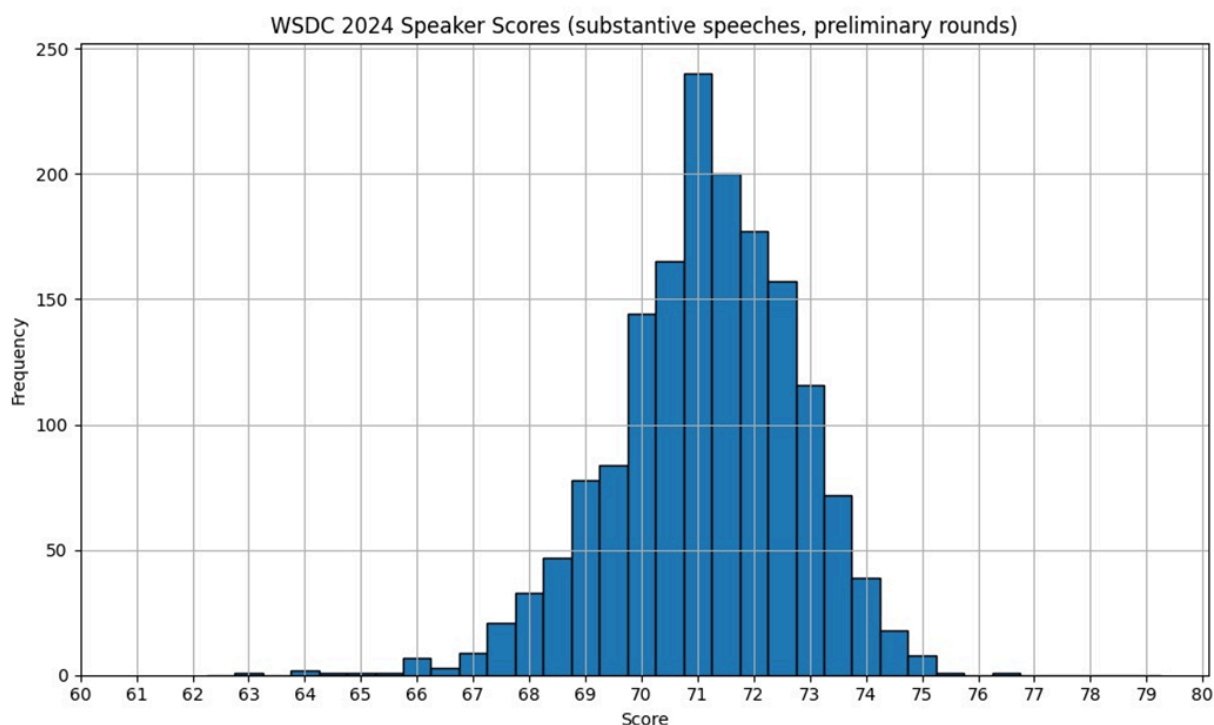
For reply speeches,

- **Content** is theoretically scored out of 20, with the range in use being **12-16**
- **Style** is theoretically scored out of 20, with the range in use being **12-16**
- **Strategy** is theoretically scored out of 10, with the range in use being **6-8**

Judges are recommended to score reply speeches as if they were substantive speeches (but half the length), and halve the scores.

The minimum increment for reply speech and category scores is still 0.5. A reply cannot score 35.25, even if you thought it was the quality of a 70.5 substantive speech—you would have to choose if it is closer to 35 or 35.5.

Distribution of Substantive Speaker Scores (panel averages) at WSDC 2024, Preliminary Rounds



Mean: 71.15

Standard Deviation: 1.64

Minimum	63.17
1st %ile	66.83
5th %ile	68.33
10th %ile	69.00
25th %ile	70.17
50th %ile	71.17
75th %ile	72.33
90th %ile	73.17
95th %ile	73.67
99th %ile	74.50
Maximum	76.50

In 2024,

- The top speaker averaged 74.12, speaking 4 rounds and ranging from 73.5 to 74.67.
- The 2nd speaker averaged 73.81, speaking 7 rounds and ranging from 72.17 to 75.17.
- Of 1626 substantive preliminary round speeches, 36 received scores higher than 74.12.

→ The top speaker averaging ~74 does NOT mean that someone must be the top speaker to score 74, just that they would be in contention if they can average that.

WSDC 2025 Speaker Scale and Conversion Table

See https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1T5Ov9XaszMAKc1JbY_L8nsAxTckhBNpE for a PDF.

WSDC 2025 Speaker Scale and Conversion Table

Note: The descriptions are general. Speeches do not need to have every feature described to fit in a particular band. For example, a speech might have very good content, satisfactory style, and good strategy. Judges should consider all features of speeches to come to speaker scores that are the most appropriate.

Scores					Description	Conversions ¹			
Overall	Content	Style	Strategy	Standard		WSDC	BP/WUDC	Australis	AP/UADC
78 - 80	31 - 32	31 - 32	15.5 - 16	Exceptional	- Flawless logical structure, examples and rebuttal integrated at the highest level, every piece of the speech strengthens their side; is also able to present clever and unexpected arguments that expand the perspective of the round; consistently picks the best examples to use. - Delivery is vivid, controlled, captivating; even complex ideas land crisply with clear emphasis and relatable illustrations. - Frames and reframes issues dynamically, concludes each section with strategic clarity, seamlessly integrates meta commentary to guide judges' decision making alongside substantive content.	80 79 78	90.0 88.5 87.0	- - -	- - -
75.5 - 77.5	30 - 31	30 - 31	15 - 15.5	Excellent	- Arguments effectively cover the major issues of the debate and are exclusively relevant; deep, layered arguments that rarely leave gaps; rebuttal that is frequently devastating and efficient; examples well-chosen and linked to burdens, consistently advances case and adds value; requires small refinements. - Style is mostly deliberate – expressive and memorable; engages the audience consistently with good pausing and tonal shifts; a unique personal style can be identified; grounding is memorable. - Successfully able to relate issues in the debate to one another in a strategic manner; weighing and explanation of strategic importance runs through the speech; demonstrates how the team wins in every scenario or explains why one scenario is the most important by far; offers judges compelling ways to adjudicate the speech in context of the debate.	77 76	85.5 84.0	79.7 79.1	82.9 82.1
73 - 75	29 - 30	29 - 30	14.5 - 15	Extremely Good	- Arguments effectively cover the major issues of the debate and are exclusively relevant; mostly standout arguments with robust logical explanation and well-explained comparative logic; strong rebuttal that often dismantles the opposing arguments as presented; effective use of examples that are compelling and explained in sufficient detail. - Delivery blends clarity with expressive moments; pauses and tone shifts highlight key ideas; begins to display a clear and distinct personal style; grounding is stylistically powerful and well-expressed. - Good explanation of how the debate plays out overall; often weighs issues explicitly and minimises losses, particularly in various different scenarios; offers judges some ways to adjudicate the speech in context of the debate, but may be unfocused when using multiple metrics for evaluating the debate; strong understanding of time prioritization.	75 74 73	82.5 81.0 79.5	78.5 77.9 77.3	81.3 80.5 79.7
70.5 - 72.5	28 - 29	28 - 29	14 - 14.5	Very Good	- Arguments cover the major issues of the debate and are almost exclusively relevant; arguments are clear with more layered comparative logic, but might still skip over strong reasoning in some areas of the speech; rebuttal is occasionally very effective; stronger examples that ground the debate well at points. - Style increasingly memorable – effective use of tone, pace, humour or analogies make points stand out, while remaining controlled and deliberate in body language; somewhat inconsistent; grounding of the debate is persuasive. - Starts to consistently highlight why their impacts matter more well; some engagement with scenarios beyond ones that are most convenient for the team, or justification for why those scenarios are unimportant; clear indication of thought behind time allocation.	72 71	78.0 76.5	76.7 76.1	78.9 78.0
70	28	28	14	Good (Average)	- Arguments cover the major issues of the debate and are almost exclusively relevant; arguments have clear but undetailed logic; rebuttal engages with opposition's key points; logic is explicitly comparative in most of the speech; examples are more relevant and help in grounding the debate. - Delivery is clear; easy to follow; rare variation in tone or pace; some thought is evident in vocabulary and phrasing; some good grounding and illustration provided. - Sequences case logically; some explicit weighing and signposting of why they win; time allocation neither impedes nor aids the speech delivered.	70	75.0	75.5	77.2
67.5 - 69.5	27 - 28	27 - 28	13.5 - 14	Satisfactory	- Arguments are mostly relevant with clear, but simplistic logic; rebuttal starts to engage with opponent's key points; implied comparative analysis in most sections of the speech; some examples that are helpful for grounding. - Style is clear, including transitions and understandable pace and delivery; some use of emphasis and grounding that engages the judge. - Some explanation and reasoning for what matters most in the debate, but the justification is weak or unsuccessful.	69 68	73.5 72.0	74.9 74.3	76.4 75.6
65 - 67	26 - 27	26 - 27	13 - 13.5	Competent	- Arguments are mostly relevant; logic is weak; distinct rebuttal, although often unsuccessful or underdeveloped; glimpses of implied comparative analysis; examples often support claims and provide grounding but underdeveloped. - Generally clear; style does not actively impede the content that is being presented; has some clear structure and organization; some attempts at emphasis; weak or unpersuasive grounding. - Assertions on what matters most in the debate, but no substantiation for it and may be unpersuasive to the ordinary intelligent person.	67 66 65	70.5 69.0 67.5	73.7 73.2 72.6	74.8 74.0 73.2
62.5 - 64.5	25 - 26	25 - 26	12.5 - 13	Pass	- Arguments are mostly irrelevant; logic is shallow where relevant; rebuttal is repetitive of the case or lacks reasoning; analysis lacks comparative explanations; some attempts at grounding, but unsuccessful. - The speech is discernible; it has some signposting and clearer pace, but style still awkward or flat; nearly no attempts at emphasis; minimal grounding. - May spend more time on certain issues than others, but not in a way that is beneficial to the speaker.	64 63	66.0 64.5	72.0 71.4	72.4 71.6
60 - 62	24 - 25	24 - 25	12 - 12.5	Improvement Needed	- Arguments are non-existent, entirely irrelevant or actively harmful to the side; rebuttal is non-existent; no real-life grounding with examples or characterization. - Impossible to follow due to unclear or confusing language, minimal signposting, delivery actively impedes comprehension; key ideas often lost, body language is distracting; no attempts to ground the debate with illustration. - No sense of strategy or prioritization, largely because there is no meaningful content to prioritize.	62 61 60	63.0 61.5 60.0	70.8 70.2 -	70.8 70.0 69.2

¹Note: Australis and AP/UADC conversions have been calculated by looking at the speaker scores given to speakers who attended consecutive WUDCs and Australis/UADCs in recent years (2023-2025).

IV. Oral Adjudication preparation + delivery

An oral adjudication (OA) is the short explanation a judge gives after the debate to clarify the decision and help teams understand why one side won. It is not a point-by-point summary of everything said, nor a space to re-argue the debate. Instead, it highlights the central areas of clash, explains how the panel weighed those issues, and why the winning team prevailed on balance. A good OA is clear, concise, and focused on reasoning - giving teams insight into what was most persuasive and what ultimately decided the round, so they can learn and improve.

Who gives the OA?

The chair should almost always be giving the OA. Beyond health reasons, the only exception is if the Chair finds themselves in the minority, AND feels that a panellist can explain the majority decision better than them, **AND the panellist agrees** to do so.

Note: Unlike BP, it is within a panelist's rights to refuse to give the OA even if the chair is rolled. It is not appropriate to pressure or otherwise leverage the power dynamics between a chair and panelist to persuade an unwilling panelist to give an OA. If relevant, a panelist's unwillingness to give an OA may be noted as a piece of qualitative feedback, but should not otherwise be reflected in judge feedback scores.

Regardless of who gives the OA, and whether there is a dissent, WSDC debates will always have one OA. Thus, the person delivering the OA should make efforts to broadly incorporate viewpoints from the panel within it, and flag the key divergences that led to a split.

Preparing the OA

For most rounds at WSDC, most judges do not prepare OAs from scratch. Rather, they use pre-existing notes accumulated over the course of the debate and deliberation, which they turn into a narrative that can be shared with debaters. Ultimately, the art of preparing an OA is highly personal - but should include the following elements as a bare minimum:

Find in your Flow	Translate into OA
Clashes as presented by the Third or Reply speakers or key conflicting ideas that are agreed upon by the team as round-defining See judging checklist , step 1: identify each clash.	Use as scaffolding to identify the main “issues” you will be discussing in your OA. Add additional issues as needed on top (for instance, a “clash” on how a narrative looks in the real world discussed in first speeches but not brought up elsewhere which impacts how subsequent material is evaluated).
Key observations and commentary made in your notes during the debate about your evaluation of certain arguments	Flesh out commentary to reach conclusions on the relative strength of contributions from each team under each clash, and the relative

	importance of each clash. See judging checklist, step 2 and 3: resolve each clash, and weigh between clashes.
Key arguments, examples, illustration as presented within the debate	Insert as “evidence” when comparing the strength of material within clashes to reach a verdict

Delivering the OA

Note(s):

1. Throughout this process, prioritise narrative clarity over comprehensiveness. You have 8 minutes, pick out the most relevant bits that helped the panel shape the decision.
2. Factor into each clash **how stylistic decisions** teams made **helped land the material**

OA Component	Phrasing
Start with the Verdict. Mention who won the debate, and if the decision was a split, or consensus. Allude to the quality of the debate. Do this before anything else.	All judges agreed that this was an incredibly close debate that was mostly above average with occasional dips below the average. The closeness of this debate is also reflected in the verdict of the debate - a 2-1 split with myself in the majority voting for Team X. Congratulations to Team X, commiserations to Team Y.
Introduce the issues, and go through them one by one. Issues should incorporate how your panel saw the debate in discussion, and the team’s understanding of the debate based on clashes their Third/Reply identified (or what you derived based on their arguments if this was not clear)	The panel saw this debate through three key issues, A, B, and C. The first issue is...
Name initial contributions from both teams under each issue	There are two main contributions from the Proposition that we credit on this issue...
Explain how the material from the rest of the debate interacted with it, and how that issue evolved over time. Remember here to flag, where possible, which speakers added the material, and to	To this, we heard from Opposition three broad responses... At 1O, they argued...

use the language they used in the debate.	Later, at 3O, they further added... However, 3P and Reply collectively responded to this with...
Conclude the issue by summarising which way it falls and its contribution to the overall debate Once again, use phrases and language from the speakers.	In summary, Proposition is able to win this clash by... This clash was the most important to the panel in the debate because...
Repeat above as needed for each issue.	

V. Individual feedback delivery

Judges should make themselves available for individual feedback that usually takes place straight after the OA.

Notes on individual feedback:

- Provide more in-depth feedback per speaker. This includes
 - Comments on their execution of their role and on strategic and stylistic choices.

Read notes on [Speaker Roles](#) and [Understanding the scoring categories](#). Cover two things:

 - **What they did well:** Pick up their language/points from the debate to show this
 - **What they can do better:** This should not be theoretical. Illustrate this - if you say they need improved characterisation, give them an example of what they could have been in the debate, and what they did
 - **[Low priority] Arguments/model points** they could have run, in cases where teams missed the debate or strong material. Discuss these succinctly, without spending the majority of the feedback session on "how you would have run" the case if you were that team
- Offer responses to any questions they may have, this may include case feedback, team feedback or individual feedback.
- Keep it friendly and constructive - do not single out speakers for doing poorly.

Special notes for chairs - administrative responsibilities

In addition to duties related to judging a debate, it is also the chair's responsibility to monitor the wellbeing of all people within the room, including judges, debaters and observers, and to ensure that all rules are being followed.

Scenario	Suggested action
The next speaker in the debate has been called. The speaker spends excessive time arranging notes, drinking water, and otherwise preparing for the speech.	Allow for a reasonable amount of time. If a speaker does not begin after 10 seconds after finishing shuffling their notes or drinking water, please prompt them again. As much as possible, enforce time equally between the two teams.
Speaker appears to be communicating with coach or non speaking team members	While the speech is happening, try to nonverbally dissuade the behavior, ie. stare at the offending party/shake your head/say “out of order” as you would for an out of time POI. Before starting the next speech, remind speakers and observers that communication of any kind, including non verbal, constitutes an equity violation and will be penalised as such. If an adult continues such behavior, ask them to leave the debate room. Report violations to the CAP and complaints team.
The speech time has passed 8:15, and the speaker shows no signs of stopping.	Make a visible sign that you have stopped flowing, such as putting your pen and raising your hands. Clap your hands twice at 8:15, and at 8:30, if a speaker is still going, stop people through a verbal interruption. If a speaker ignores the verbal interruption, clap your hands continuously till the speaker stops. After the speech and before the next speech, issue a verbal reminder to all debaters that judges do not track or listen to content said past the 8:15 mark.
A speaker, judge or observer appears to be unwell.	Proactively ask if they feel well enough to continue. This should happen between speeches unless it is an emergency. Note that it is always an option to temporarily pause the debate, and address the issue. If

	necessary, offer alternative options for receiving a detailed OA and feedback.
Panellist leaves mid-debate and misses a portion of the debate.	If between speeches, pause the debate. If mid-speech, continue the debate and start a timer to keep track of the amount of time the panelist is absent . Pause the debate before moving onto the next speech, and inform the CAP as soon as possible. If a judge is any amount of time of a speech, they will lose voting rights and the chair will be assigned two votes.
An unexpected interruption to the debate happens that requires a pause.	If the interruption is short (a maximum of 5 minutes) and judges do not lose track of the debate, unpause the debate once it is resolved. Indicate to the speaker how much time they have remaining, and at what point in their speech you stopped. If the length of the delay is unclear, please text the member of CAP who is not judging that particular round. If the length of the interruption is longer than 5 minutes and there is no CAP guidance, the speaker's timer should be started again.