

CDA Parliamentary Style Guide¹

This style guide for high school parliamentary debate in the CDA is a modified version of the parliamentary format used in many college debates. There is a companion set of Instructions for judges.

The Basics

Parliamentary debate features a Government (also called Proposition) team and an Opposition team, each with two debaters. The Government strives to convince the judge the given motion should be adopted, the Opposition to show the motion should be defeated. Teams should expect to stand for the both the Government and the Opposition in different rounds on different motions.

During the forty-minute debate, each team gives three speeches. A Judge (also called the Speaker of the House) will evaluate both the arguments and the speaking skills of each debater. The team that best supports their side wins.

The Motions

The motion is a short statement of fact that serves as the topic of debate. The motions will concern issues that should be familiar to the average high school student. Some sample motions:

This house believes assisted suicide should be legal in the United States.

This house would allow foreign-born citizens to be President of the United States.

This house would use force to spread democracy internationally.

Three motions will be provided for the tournament. The motion in each round is chosen as follows:

- The Judge flips a coin, and one team calls it in the air. The winner of the coin flip decides whether that team would prefer choice of motion or choice of side.
- The team that has the right to choose the motion as the result of the coin flip picks a motion.
- The team that has the right to choose the side then makes its choice of Government or Opposition.

In CDA, the teams will have prepared cases in the morning, so the debate begins immediately at this point.

The Cases

During the preparation period in the morning each team should have prepared a short "case" with several reasons (2-4 are typical) why their side of the motion is correct. Research materials may not be used, and statistics, expert quotes, and remote facts are discouraged because they cannot be readily verified. However, both teams are encouraged to use information that one would expect to be familiar to a well-read person.

The Government has the right to set the terms of the debate and should provide a brief interpretation of the motion and/or a definition of key terms. They may interpret the motion more narrowly than given (e.g., "Court penalties should be determined by judges, not juries" may be applied only to civil cases, rather than criminal cases). The Government interpretation may be novel, but should respect common usage and must leave the Opposition reasonable grounds to argue against it.

The Opposition should prepare as well as they can for what they expect the Government to present. However, they will likely have to adapt whatever case they develop during prep time to the specifics of the Government's interpretation of the motion and the Government's case.

The Positions and Speeches

On each team, one debater is the lead speaker and the other is the member. The leader delivers the opening and closing speeches for their team. The member presents the middle speech.

For the Government, the leader is known as the Prime Minister (PM) and the member is called the Member of Government (MG). On the Opposition team, the debaters are the Leader of Opposition (LO) and the Member of

¹ Based on the Osterweis Style Guide, which can be found at the Yale Debate Association web site, www.yaledebate.org.

Opposition (MO).

Prime Minister Constructive (PMC)	7 minutes	Provides an interpretation of the resolution and lays out the Government's case
Leader of Opposition Constructive (LOC)	8 minutes	Lays out the Opposition case and replies to the Government case.
Member of Government Constructive (MGC)	8 minutes	Responds to previous arguments, and may introduce new points while doing so
Member of Opposition Constructive (MOC)	8 minutes	
Leader of Opposition Rebuttal (LOR)	4 minutes	Summarizes the debate from the Opposition perspective, while responding to previous arguments.
Prime Minister Rebuttal (PMR)	5 minutes	Summarizes the debate from the Government perspective, while responding to previous arguments.

Each speaker has a 30 second grace period at the end of their allotted time to finish their speech, after which they are out of order. There is no preparation time or pause between speeches other than a reasonable allowance for one speaker to be seated and the next to rise.

Constructives: Each team presents its case and responds to their opponent's case. New arguments may be introduced into the debate, either as independent points or responses to a previous argument.

Rebuttals: Each side should emphasize the team's strongest points and explain why they should win the debate. This process is known as crystallization. New points cannot be raised in the rebuttals unless it is the PM's first opportunity to respond to a new point made in the MOC. New explanations, connections among points already made and examples to illustrate previous arguments are encouraged.

Questions During the Debate

The non-speaking team is allowed to interrupt a speaker to ask three types of questions:

Points of Clarification (POC): These occur at the beginning of the PMC right after the speaker has presented the Government interpretation of the resolution. Often the PM will pause briefly and ask the Opposition if the interpretation is clear and acceptable, essentially asking if the Opposition wishes to raise a POC. The clock stops while the opposing team briefly asks the speaker for further details about their case. The speaker must accept these questions. If the Opposition believes the Government interpretation leaves no room for opposition (called a "tight case") they should raise that issue at this time.

Points of Information (POI): The clock continues while a member of the opposing team stands, receives consent from the speaker, and inserts a short statement or question, intended to undermine the argument being made. Traditionally the questioner stands with one hand on his head (to keep his wig in place) and the other arm outstretched.

POIs are permitted only during the constructive speeches, and are not permitted during the first or last minute of the speech. A speaker may refuse or defer a POI, but it is considered poor form not to accept some POIs during a speech.

Point of Order: A Point of Order is raised if a team believes the speaker has violated a rule of debate, for example, exceeding the 30 second grace period at the end of a speech, or presenting a new argument in rebuttal. The questioner stands, states "Point of Order," to the judge, and explains the issue. The judge may say "Point well taken" if she agrees, "Point not well taken" if she does not agree, or "Point under consideration" if she is still deciding. Time stops during a Point of Order.

To accommodate questions, each speaker should plan each constructive speech to be one minute shorter than the time allowed. This provides time for two, three or even four POIs to be taken and answered without preventing the speaker from covering the arguments. Note it is considered poor form not to offer and accept POIs during each constructive speech, and the Judge can note this in the scoring.