

British Parliament Debate Format

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The Ontario Student Debating Union (OSDU) hosts the **British Parliament** provincial and national debate tournaments (BP) each year. The winners of the national tournament are eligible to attend the worlds British Parliament debate tournaments, which are held at Oxford (senior) and Cambridge Universities (junior). The British Parliament debate format is also the preferred style of high school tournaments that are hosted by Canadian universities. In this format, there are four teams of two debaters. Each debater delivers a **5-minute** speech. The structure of each speech depends on the position of the speech. What follows is the order of the speeches, which is indicated by the numbering. and the structure of each speech.

OPENING SPEECHES	OPENING SPEECHES
1) Prime Minister (PM)	2) Leader of the Opposition (LO)
3) Deputy Prime Minister (DPM)	4) Deputy Leader of the Opposition (DLO)
CLOSING SPEECHES	CLOSING SPEECHES
5) Member of Government (MG)	6) Member of Opposition (MO)
7) Government Whip (GW)	8) Opposition Whip (OW)

A. OPENING SPEECHES

Proposition 1: Prime Minister (PM)

5 minutes

- Anecdote:** It is very good practice to open your speech with a short anecdote, which relates to the dichotomy within the resolution. However, it is optional.
- Salutation:** After the anecdote, if you include one, you begin your speech by acknowledging the Speaker of the House, who is the judge of the round, your fellow debaters and by stating the Resolution.
- Model:** The PM then ‘models’ the resolution, which means defining ambiguous words or phrases in the resolution; it also means stating the context, about which arguments should be made, such as Canada only or the world. More on how to Model is given below.
- Arguments:** You then present your arguments, usually 2 or 3, which are intended to prove why the resolution should be accepted.

Opposition 1: Leader of the Opposition (LO)

5 minutes

- Anecdote:** It is very good practice to open your speech with a short anecdote, which relates to the dichotomy within the resolution. However, it is optional.
- Salutation:** After the anecdote, if you include one, you begin your speech by acknowledging the Speaker of the House, who is the judge of the round, and your fellow debaters.
- Refutation:** These are criticisms of flaws in the Arguments of the PM. For example, a flaw often exists because the evidence does not support the claim, or the explanation of how the evidence supports the claim is unclearly stated. For more detail, please see the post entitled *POIs and Refutation*.
- Arguments:** These are reasons, usually two, which are intended to prove why the Resolution should NOT be accepted.

Proposition 2: Deputy Prime Minister (DPM)

5 minutes

- a) **Anecdote:** It is very good practice to open your speech with a short anecdote, which relates to the dichotomy within the resolution. However, it is optional.
- b) **Salutation:** After the anecdote, if you include one, you begin your speech by acknowledging the Speaker of the House, who is the judge of the round, and your fellow debaters.
- c) **Refutation:** These are criticisms of flaws in the Arguments of the LO. For example, a flaw often occurs when the evidence does not support the claim or when the explanation of how the evidence supports the claim is unclearly stated. The DPM can also refute the refutation of the LO when a refutation of the LO misunderstood the arguments of the PM or the DPM. For more detail, please see the post entitled *POIs and Refutation*.
- d) **Restatement:** This is a brief restatement of the arguments of the PM.
- e) **Arguments:** These are reasons, usually one or two, which are intended to prove why the Resolution SHOULD be accepted.

Opposition 2: Deputy Leader of the Opposition (DLO)

5 minutes

- a) **Anecdote:** It is very good practice to open your speech with a short anecdote, which relates to the dichotomy within the resolution. However, it is optional.
- b) **Salutation:** After the anecdote, if you include one, you begin your speech by acknowledging the Speaker of the House, who is the judge of the round, and your fellow debaters.
- c) **Refutation:** These are criticisms of flaws in the Arguments of the DPM. For example, a flaw often occurs when the evidence does not support the claim or when the explanation of how the evidence supports the claim is unclearly stated. The DLO can also refute the refutation of the DPM when a refutation of the DPM misunderstood the arguments of the LO. For more detail, please see the post entitled *POIs and Refutation*.
- d) **Restatement:** This is a brief restatement of the arguments of the LO.
- e) **Arguments:** These are reasons, usually one, which is intended to prove why the Resolution should NOT be accepted.

B. CLOSING SPEECHES

Proposition 3: Member of Government (MG)

5 minutes

- a) **Anecdote:** It is very good practice to open your speech with a short anecdote, which relates to the dichotomy within the resolution. However, it is optional.
- b) **Salutation:** After the anecdote, if you include one, you begin your speech by acknowledging the Speaker of the House, who is the judge of the round, and your fellow debaters.
- c) **Refutation:** These are criticisms of flaws in the Arguments of the DLO. For example, a flaw often occurs when the evidence does not support the claim or when the explanation of how the evidence supports the claim is unclearly stated. The MG can also refute the refutation of the DLO when a refutation of the DLO misunderstood the arguments of the PM or the DPM.
- d) **Restatement:** This is a brief restatement of the arguments of the PM and DPM.
- e) **Arguments:** These are reasons, usually one, which is intended to prove why the Resolution SHOULD be accepted. However, if the MG cannot think of a unique Claim for an additional argument, it is acceptable to create an extension, which means that the MG restates a Claim by the PM or DPM, but the MG uses different Evidence to support the Claim.

Opposition 3: Member of Opposition (MO)

5 minutes

- a) **Anecdote:** It is very good practice to open your speech with a short anecdote, which relates to the dichotomy within the resolution. However, it is optional.
- b) **Salutation:** After the anecdote, if you include one, you begin your speech by acknowledging the Speaker of the House, who is the judge of the round, and your fellow debaters.
- c) **Refutation:** These are criticisms of flaws in the Arguments of the DPM. For example, a flaw often occurs when the evidence does not support the claim or when the explanation of how the evidence supports the claim is unclearly stated. The MO can also refute the refutation of the MG when a refutation of the MG misunderstood the arguments of the LO or the DLO.

- d) **Restatement:** This is a brief restatement of the arguments of the LO and DLO.
- e) **Arguments:** These are reasons, usually one, which is intended to prove why the Resolution should NOT be accepted. However, if the MG cannot think of a unique Claim for an additional argument, it is acceptable to create an extension, which means that the MG restates a Claim by the PM or DPM, but the MG uses different Evidence to support the Claim.

Proposition 4: Government Whip (GW)

5 minutes

- a) The Whip speech is a Rebuttal speech, which is like the Refutation because both focus on criticizing errors in the reasoning. However, whereas the Refutation focuses on the previous speaker, the Rebuttal speech focuses on the three speakers on the opposing side. When doing so, it is best practice to highlight an error in reasoning and then immediately state how your side has corrected for this error. Although both speeches focus on errors in the reasoning of the opposing side, the GW Rebuttal speech must focus on how the Opposition side has NOT met the Burden of Rejoinder, which are criticisms of the arguments of the Proposition side. (For more information, please see the entry entitled the *Rebuttal Speech*.)

Opposition 4: Opposition Whip (OW)

5 minutes

- a) The Whip speech is a Rebuttal speech, which is like the Refutation because both focus on criticizing errors in the reasoning. However, whereas the Refutation focuses on the previous speaker, the Rebuttal speech focuses on the three speakers on the opposing side. When doing so, it is best practice to highlight an error in reasoning and then immediately state how your side has corrected for this error. Although both speeches focus on errors in the reasoning of the opposing side, the OW Rebuttal speech must focus on how the Proposition side has not met the Burden of Proof, which arguments in support of the resolution. (For more information, please see the entry entitled the *Rebuttal Speech*.)

What is unique about this format?

A unique aspect of the British Parliament debate format is the relationship among the teams. Although the Proposition side consists of two teams of two debaters and the Opposition side consists of the same, each of the teams, at the end of the debate, is assessed individually, which means that each team of two debaters is in competition with the other teams. Because of this competition, there is a unique tension between the teams on the same side because they are at once supporting each other and in competition with each other. In practice, this means that the teams on the same side cannot criticize each other, which is called *Knifing*, but they can distinguish themselves in the eyes of the judge by properly fulfilling the expectations of their role in the debate.