

# **Canadian University Society for Intercollegiate Debate**

## **National Debating Guide**

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# Foreword

At the beginning of my term as CUSID President, the idea of a National Debating Guide that could serve as a resource for all CUSID debaters was bandied about. Much to my surprise and good fortune, the Vice President of the Central Region, Paul-Erik Veel, undertook that sort of project during the summer of 2005 and I was pleased to assist him in a limited capacity. While his project was intended to meet the needs of the Central Region, the extensive and comprehensive document that was produced is a valuable tool for all debaters within our organization, and I am proud to report that it is being used by university clubs across CUSID. As a result, this compilation seeks to address those aspects of CUSID debating that were not touched upon in the Central Debating Guide. Generally speaking, it considers topics and issues that are more national in scope, such as British Parliamentary debating, North-Ams style, French debating, and the various regional styles of debate. Ideally, it will serve as a useful supplement to that first document, filling in some of the relevant gaps.

This National Debating Guide is not intended to be taken as a finished document. I hope that it will provide a solid foundation upon which further work can be built, as current issues are explored from new perspectives and as the various forms of debating evolve. Furthermore, this compilation is not a definitive or conclusive work. It is not an attempt to “set in stone” the proper approach to British Parliamentary or North-Ams style, for example. Rather, I hope that it can play an educational role, both in helping those debaters who may lack the resources to effectively learn a certain style of debate, and in enlightening individuals as to how debating takes place in a region or language other than their own.

All of the articles in this collection were written by highly qualified and experienced members of CUSID, but of course, they represent the specific perspectives of those individuals. In certain instances, the articles contradict one another; in others, they take normative stances on issues that are not necessarily “cut and dry.” In my opinion, this is a strength of the document, since it illustrates that there can be multiple acceptable approaches to debating. As previously noted, however, the authors of these articles are all skilled debaters and their opinions are worthy of serious consideration.

Ultimately, this National Debating Guide exists largely because of the contributions of the individual writers and their willingness to share their expertise with the CUSID community. I thank them for their time and effort. I would like to recognize Paul-Erik Veel for assisting in the final editing of this document. I would also like to thank my Executive Director, Julieta Chan, for all of her technical expertise and hard work in getting this Guide into tip-top shape.

Happy reading!

Jessica Prince

CUSID President, 2005-2006

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# British Parliamentary Debating

## *Advice and Strategy*

### 1. General

The one thing that you should remember about British Parliamentary is that your most important job is fundamentally the same as in Canadian Parliamentary— you must beat the team across the table from you (First Proposition vs. First Opposition, and Second Proposition vs. Second Opposition). If you don't do that, you can't possibly win the round. Your chances of taking even a second place are dramatically lessened, because your biggest role is to engage and clash with the team across from you. If that team is really weak, it may take you less time to beat them, and you will be able to engage with the other half of the round, but always spend the time to deal with them, no matter how bad you think they were. If they are really strong, then focus solely on their material and do the best you can to poke holes in it.

A lot of people think that the number of teams in BP means that you can hide from the best material presented by the other side by “cutting them out of the round” or by refusing to engage with that team at all. However, the smartest thing you can do is to attack the best arguments, the ones that are most difficult to rebut, because those will be the ones that are most important to the round. With four teams in the round, it's easy to get lost and to be deemed inconsequential by the judges; the way to avoid that is by putting yourself in the middle of the most important arguments. Even if you don't win them all, engaging with them as best you can will put you ahead of teams who didn't even attempt to do that.

### 2. First Proposition

The key to First Proposition is to treat it as any other case you would construct. First Proposition teams do best when they present a well-thought out model with solid arguments to back it up. It may help to think of the Prime Minister's speech in these terms: need, solution (plan or model), and arguments for why the solution addresses the need. Establishing a need may be more or less difficult depending on the topic you are given; most teams will concede that ending terrorism in Iraq is a reasonable need right now, while it is less accepted that school children have become dangerously unruly and teachers need a new form of punishment. The amount of time you spend on establishing the need will thus vary, and may even end up forming part of your arguments.

The plan or model you present can also vary in complexity. You might argue that the way to address the economic dependency of Aboriginals on the federal government is to prioritize casino licensing so it favours reserves who apply, a plan that is pretty straightforward and doesn't require much more detail. However, in the case of corporal punishment being used to address the unruly schoolchildren mentioned above, you're going to have to attach a lot more conditions to the plan. Who will be able to use it? In what circumstances? How often? How do you tell if it's being abused? Who will be the ones monitoring it? A lot of times, clearly setting out limitations and conditions on your model cuts out potential opposition arguments you would otherwise have to address.

Finally, you need to use your arguments to discuss how the plan solves the need: why it works, and why it is the best method (easiest, cheapest, safest, most reliable, etc.). This section can be further expanded upon by the second speaker on your team, whose role is similar to that of the Minister of the Crown in a Canadian Parliamentary round. They can simply add new arguments, or they can discuss philosophical underpinnings, case studies, or other new perspectives that help support your plan.

### **3. First Opposition**

As First Opposition, it can be tempting to throw out a lot of refutation-type arguments, and hope that something sticks. However, that strategy is going to make it very difficult for the judges to figure out what your stance or contribution to the round was, and it often means that Second Opposition will be able to pick your best argument and expand on it, claiming the credit for themselves. First Opposition should have a clear position on the topic, one that includes positive matter supporting their own view. The first speaker for the team can even start their speech with “On First Opposition, we will argue \_\_\_\_\_”. If it helps, you can view First Opposition as very similar to the direction that Canadian Parliamentary rounds have been going with regards to Opposition, in that there is a burden for positive matter and not just refutation.

The first speaker for the team should introduce the stance and a significant amount of the constructive argumentation for the side, as well as spending some time clashing with First Proposition’s case. The second speaker can then elaborate on the constructive, bring out the bulk of the attack on First Proposition, and perhaps do a small amount of summary of the round thus far.

A final thing to remember about First Opposition is that it is not enough to say that First Proposition’s model won’t work; you will have to propose an alternative. That can be the status quo (either because you disagree that there is a need for change, or because you think any change could make things worse), but often it will involve some type of alternative plan. That doesn’t have to be as detailed as a counterproposal; if they propose sending UN troops into the Sudan, you could argue that the African Union would be better. However, if you have no alternative at all, you are vulnerable to the criticism that you have admitted there is a problem but cannot find a better solution than First Proposition’s. If you are a First Proposition team that encounters this from Opposition, point out that they agree there is a need but have no alternative to your plan; regardless of how strong their rebuttals are, they will often drop the round on that criticism.

### **4. Second Half**

The most important rule for back half teams is that you can never, ever contradict your front half counterpart (ie. Second Proposition disagreeing with First Proposition/Second Opposition disagreeing with First Opposition, also known as “knifing”). Even if they set out a stance that you think is completely dumb and the wrong way to argue the side, you must be consistent with it. If you’re stuck in that situation, you can gently steer the topic away from their material by talking about other arguments, philosophical reasons for the stance, or a different perspective on the topic, but you should never cross the line into disagreeing with them or contradicting what they said. For example, if the round is about the European Union integrating with North Africa and First Proposition proposes complete membership in the EU, including freedom of movement, it may be wise for you to argue

from a more philosophical stance (that to expand its influence, the EU should be broadening its membership rather than deepening ties among existing members) rather than continue on the more difficult practical tact.

A lot of teams get very close to this line while trying to avoid being attacked for their counterpart's bad stance, but the following rule of thumb should help: if (without another team having raised the issue first) you feel it's necessary to explain to the judges why your stance or one of your arguments is not a knife, then it probably is one.

The speakers in the second half have much more specific roles than those in the first half. The first speaker on each side must present their team's extension, and the second speakers must summarize the round. The extension is the part of British Parliamentary debating that is most confusing because there is a lot of disagreement as to what is an acceptable contribution from a back half team. Generally, an extension should be a significant amount of new material: new arguments, a new way of looking at things (if the first half was narrow, talk about broad implications; if the first half was broad, discuss case studies or practical implications), philosophical justifications for a practical case, etc. However, much like First Opposition, it's best if your material can be tied together in a single stance or theme, which makes it easier for the judges to remember where you stood in the round.

With your extension, you want to stress that what you are talking about is the real meat of the round; your first half counterpart was obviously right about their arguments with the other first half team, but your team's extension is what gets to the heart of the issue. For example, if the first half in a round about whether the critique of art should be taught in schools argued almost exclusively about whether or not you *can* critique art, it's very easy for back half teams to make their extension about the effect of having it in schools specifically. This extension is very topical to the resolution, still related to the arguments of first half, but it also has the potential to be portrayed as the more important issue because it directly addresses the question of the resolution.

Finally, a word of advice for Second Opposition specifically. There are some judges at Worlds who are of the opinion that a Second Opposition extension must directly clash with the Second Proposition extension; they feel that it's not enough to address it through rebuttal, but the extension itself must be like First Opposition's stance to First Proposition's case. This isn't a position that the majority of judges subscribe to, but I think that it does provide a good general tip: whenever possible, Second Opposition's extension should address Second Proposition's. That doesn't mean you have to wait to hear theirs before you can choose your own, but when presenting it try to do so in a way that clashes as directly as possible with the team across from you. If they discussed philosophical issues and you want to present new case studies, at least spend some time during your extension to discuss the clash between your stances and how your case studies prove that their philosophy doesn't work practically.

Whip speeches are given by the second speaker on both back half teams, and are intended to summarize the round. Second Proposition's whip is allowed to have some new constructive material (though it should never be very much, as the focus is still on summary), but Second Opposition's whip is not allowed any new constructive material (like a rebuttal in Canadian Parliamentary). Whip speeches are good or bad almost

entirely based upon the strategy taken; the material has (almost) all been said before, so the important part is what you choose to focus on and how you spin it.

When first learning to give whip speeches, a lot of debaters are told that they can summarize by talking about what each team said in the order that they said it. That's fine to help you organize when learning British Parliamentary, but it is generally not preferred at Worlds. Instead, you want to be looking at the round holistically and choosing themes to summarize the round around. For example, in a round about trade relations in the Americas, your themes might include the impact of American domestic politics, regionalism vs. global free trade, and how power dynamics work between hegemony and smaller nations. Which themes you pick will be determined by the flow of the round—what were the big issues that were talked about throughout the round, even if they weren't directly mentioned by name? On which of those issues did your team's extension really add to the analysis in a substantial way? Those are the issues you want to summarize around; usually three, occasionally two or four, never more than that.

Once you've chosen the biggest issues, you want to summarize what was said about them by the different teams, with a lot of emphasis on your team's contribution. Every time you discuss an argument made about the issue by a team on the other side, you want to talk about how your extension dealt with that argument and why it is the stronger position. Every time you discuss what your front half team said about it, you should mention that they were on the right track, but your team really fleshed out the real arguments.

Sometimes, you'll be in a round where the front half was quite weak or at least slightly worse than the back half. In those situations, you can often get away with completely downplaying the first half of the round by dealing with it before you get to your themes. You can very briefly (30 seconds at most) mention the major point of contention on either side of the front half, and why the team on your side won it. Then you can go into your themes, which you present as the real meat of the round and as much more fleshed out in the second half. That can have the effect of cutting out the first two teams, while leaving the rest of your speech free to directly attack the team across from you and discuss your material even more. However, you shouldn't try to cut out a first half that was as good as or better than the second half, because the judges will be a lot more likely to accuse you of sidestepping the important issues.

## **5. Points Of Information (POIs)**

The basic rule of thumb in a British Parliamentary round is that you should give two and take two POIs. In reality, that means that you will have to stand up upwards of 20 times during the four speeches of the other side, and you will often be taken less than twice. Even if the other side is ignoring you, continue to stand up as often as you can without being obnoxious or disruptive; the judges will be more likely to notice that you are being deliberately cut out of the round. Jumping up quickly whenever the speaker says something dumb is also a good way to point out the mistake even if they don't take you. However, you should refrain from vocalizing your POIs before they are accepted; while it used to be acceptable to say things like "On Rwanda" or "On UN mismanagement", it is now generally discouraged at Worlds. Either stick to "On that point", or don't say anything until you are taken.

Because a British Parliamentary round is so long, it is easy as a first half team to be forgotten by the end, and easy as a second half team to fail to establish yourself during the beginning. The use of POIs is the best way to avoid those problems. As a second half team, you can establish yourself early on by asking questions that point to obvious opposition arguments, which make it seem as though you came up with that argument and that First Opposition took the idea from your question. Some people advise using POIs to establish your extension early on (ie. to stake out ground so that First Opposition can't take it, and to make your material relevant from the beginning), but others caution that it only gives away your position and that First Opposition will often take that material anyway, when they might not have thought of it on their own. Whether you choose to use that method or not is a judgment call, but if you have a killer extension that's fairly obscure, it's probably safer not to POI with it in the first half.

For first half teams, POIs are the way to keep your best material in the round as long as possible. Your goal as a first half team is to have the last speaker on the opposite side *still* having to rebut your arguments. You also want to avoid having the summary speakers misrepresent your position, by characterizing it as something different or by attacking the weaker arguments and not mentioning the strong ones. Of course, the back half teams know you are trying to do that, and thus you'll be unlikely to have more than one question accepted in the whole back half. You need to make sure you make the most of what is likely your only opportunity to reiterate your case in that question.

I would recommend taking a minute or two at the end of the first half of the round to determine with your partner what you think your most important argument was; not simply the strongest one, but the one that involves the most central aspect of the debate to that point (this may need to be changed later, depending on where Second Proposition's extension takes the round). Write out a POI that restates that argument in a way that forces the back half team to either deal with it or to make it very obvious that they are avoiding it. Then, every single time you get up to ask a question, have that POI in front of you. It's very tempting to use your POIs to point out the big gaping holes you see in a team's arguments, but doing so doesn't really bring your material back into the round. Let the team across from them do the rebuttal, while you focus on keeping your position at the forefront of the judge's minds.

# British Parliamentary Debating

## *Preparing for Worlds*

The biggest difference between debating in Canada and debating at Worlds is that people at Worlds know more stuff. That sounds simplistic, but it's true—if you're in a British Parliamentary round in Canada, it's often very easy to bluff your way through without knowing very much about the topic. At Worlds, it's very likely that another team in the room (or one of your judges) will either be from the country under discussion or be in a ridiculously in-depth graduate program in the topic. The most important change you have to make to debate successfully at Worlds is not in how you argue, but in what you know and how you incorporate that into rounds.

That isn't to say that you need to spend years preparing, but you do need to be strategic in what you learn. Every year, there will be a couple hot spots in the world that you can reasonably expect to be hearing about at Worlds; recently, those would include Iraq, Israel, Sudan, North Korea, Pakistan, and the like. Then you should consider the geographic location Worlds is taking place in, because there will probably be one round relating to something local, although this is not a hard and fast rule. In South Africa, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions came up; in Malaysia, ASEAN and Myanmar did. Knowing something about the major political and economic factors in the host country or region is generally a good idea.

There is also a fairly predictable pattern of resolution topics at Worlds. Every year, there tends to be one of each of the following: trade, bioethics, children's rights, justice/law, and women's rights. Obviously, it isn't possible to know everything about all of those fields, but if you have the time, reading a basic text on bioethics or some articles about globalization/trade will be almost guaranteed to be helpful in at least one round.

Finally, one of the things that Canadian teams seem to struggle with the most is incorporating non-Canadian examples into rounds. If the round is about federalism or aboriginal-government relations, a discussion of Canada is probably okay. On pretty much anything else, however, you should be using examples from the rest of the world. There definitely exists a perception amongst Canadian teams that they are more likely to be criticized for using examples from their home country than the British or Australians, and whether this is true or not, being able to incorporate international examples can only make you sound more knowledgeable. At Worlds, you tend to hear a lot more examples in rounds than you do in Canadian British Parliamentary; people don't just make arguments based on logic, they throw in three or four examples of where a similar situation has resulted in the same outcome. That type of reasoning is hard to overcome unless you know enough to cite counter-examples that back up your case.

# British Parliamentary Debating

## *Making the Transition from Canadian Parliamentary*

Canadian Parliamentary and British Parliamentary are two totally separate worlds of debating. Some debaters manage to dabble in both, and do it very well, while others choose to stay solely in one. For a Canadian Parliamentary debater making the decision to start co-dabbling, it can be a big shock when trying to figure out the differences and how to overcome the confusion.

Asking experienced British Parliamentary debaters for help on a personal level is one of the best things the confused newbie can do, since hands-on coaching is much more likely to result in a successful transition than only reading training materials. However, most experienced British Parliamentary debaters may have forgotten the specifics of what that transition was like for them, and what were their major issues of concern. For this reason, it will help to have a list of questions and points of confusion for clarification.

### Getting a Footing

Canadian Parliamentary and British Parliamentary both involve the same basics of debate. The problem is that BP, relative to CP, involves an extended debate with more complicated role definitions, and a traditionally stronger emphasis on judging according to role fulfillment and knowledge use. The first thing the transitioning debater should do is outline all the roles in the debate, how they interact with each other, what their specific function is in the debate, and how best to accomplish that. Before moving on to advanced topics, try to answer these questions:

- Why is the back half there?
- What is the relationship between the first and second teams on each side?
- How different should the First Proposition's case be in BP from a Government case in CP?
- How much information are debaters allowed to bring into the round? Does "specific knowledge" exist in BP?
- Can you make Points of Information throughout the entire debate?
- What is the role of the summary speeches? What are they supposed to accomplish? Are you arguing, refuting, or simply summarizing?
- How much of a role does technical information play in the judging decision?
- What is the ranking system of judging? How does it relate to the granting of team and speaker scores?

### Preparation

Secondly, how do you prepare for the debate? Canadian Parliamentary debaters are not necessarily used to the intensive use of knowledge, never mind the expectation that they have significant global knowledge. To prepare for BP, one should do a lot of reading from credible sources such as *The Economist* and other international news media. One should also find out the trends in BP debating—currently focusing on legal questions, trade policies, and on certain organizations such as ASEAN and the EU.

Reading, however, is not enough. The information must be retained. For this reason, begin to compile an information folder, and rip out important articles that give compact understandings of well-known conflicts and questions, for example. Do not be afraid to share or discuss this folder with other teams and schools from your country. Ask people what they are gathering, what they think about certain issues, and to share their knowledge.

The major difference between CP and BP, however, is the addition of the back-half debate. To fully grasp this, it helps to see it first. Try to find a video tape and sit in on a BP round. After you have seen it, it will be easier to absorb the comments made in training from your BP experts. For example, it will make more sense when talking about how to use POIs to stay in the round.

The most important message is to have fun, as simple as it sounds. There are many differences between CP and BP, some small and some huge. The structure, focus, topic, and mentality of the round is different. A lot of the goals in the debate change. For this reason, it can be a confusing and stressful transition, but the learning curve is steep and it quickly becomes obvious what a gratifying experience BP debating can be. It's like starting to debate all over again with the same interest and vigor, but this time with a much stronger foundation.

### **Learning Together and Training Without Much Experience**

What about smaller clubs in which hardly anyone, if anyone at all, has much experience in BP? This is where things can get especially tricky. The best approach is to learn together. Get into discussion groups and talk about the roles of each speaker and why those roles are important. Lay out a theoretical debate, and talk about what the summary speeches might include. To tackle the knowledge issue, divide up the information search and appoint specializations to various people.

In order to practice a BP round, you first need to get eight interested people, which can often be tricky in smaller clubs. Try replacing a night's meeting with a BP workshop. Determine who will be First Proposition a few days in advance and have them choose a resolution from a past Worlds. This way they can properly prepare. Without a good start to the debate, the back-half will be awful and the BP practice will be lost. The First Proposition team can announce the resolution 15 minutes before the start, as usual, but they will have prepared with enough information to get the debate off in a good direction and this way, everyone benefits.

Finally, you should ask other clubs and personalities for help. If a larger club is in a nearby city, see if you can join their meetings for a day, or organize a weekend event, where you can practice together and get some good judging help from their pros. It's in their best interest to help smaller clubs develop and deepen the local pool of competition. So as long as an appropriate schedule can be worked out, help is probably just around the corner.

# Regional Approaches to Debate

## *CUSID West*

*(or “CUSID West on a Shoestring:  
How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Edmonton in the Winter”)*

There comes a time in every young debater’s life when they decide to take the plunge and take part in a CUSID West tournament. Whether it’s your first year of university debate, or whether you’re a grizzled veteran of many CUSID Central/East slugfests, I can assure you that while Western style will probably take a little getting used to, it’s really quite similar to CUSID Central style. Debaters from all over Canada, the US, and even the occasional international debater have all managed to enjoy success in CUSID West.

There are some things to keep in mind when you go to a Western tournament. While there are fewer schools in Western Canada, there are differences in the way each individual school runs its tournament. Things like low-point wins, scoring range, judging pools, etc. will vary from school to school. Broadly speaking, however, resolutions will usually be loose-link, with the exception of British Parliamentary tournaments. Furthermore, time-place-space cases are allowed (i.e. a case that is specifically set in a certain time, place, or space). It’s important to remember, however, that if you want to debate in the past, you can’t use knowledge that wasn’t available in that time frame to argue your case. Finally, heckling is still extremely rare in Western Canada, but it is more accepted than in Central Canadian style.

In terms of the structure of the debate, the timings for the individual speeches are as follows: PMC - 5 minutes, MO - 8 minutes, MC - 8 minutes, LO - 8 minutes (the last 3 minutes are rebuttal only), and PMR - 3 minutes. Clearly, the speeches that are the most affected by these timings are the Prime Minister’s Constructive speech and the Leader of the Opposition’s speech. For the PMC, it is essential to make sure that you can outline your case statement and at least two arguments in the five minutes given. If your case is too complicated or requires extensive explanation of a plan, it’s probably better to try and simplify it a bit. On opposition, the LO still has to make sure that they summarize the round. It is very easy to run out of time. One of the easier ways to do this is to use your rebuttal time to do the summary of the round, and particularly useful is the “three questions” method of summarizing. You probably won’t be able to address every single argument that the Government has brought up, but you’ll give an organized end to your speech. Just keep it coherent, clear, and concise.

In Western Canada, lay judges are common. You should try to be patient and don’t give them any excuses to take off speaker points. It’s also important to watch your timing, be courteous and polite, and if you have a real problem with someone then go see the Chief Adjudicator. It is also a very good idea to time yourself, or to have your partner time you if there is a lay judge and no timekeeper in the room.

On the culture front, CUSID West tournaments usually have a theme (examples: Scrubs, Tarantino movies, or Tim Louman-Gardiner). Also, billeting is really common, so if you want to billet, it’s usually good to request one well in advance. Priority is usually

given to teams coming from far away. Finally, the drinking age in Alberta is 18, and they don't ID in B.C. or Saskatchewan!



***CUSID WEST:***

***WHERE BACKTABBING TAKES A BACKSEAT TO BACKRUBS***

# Regional Approaches to Debate

## *CUSID Central*

There are a variety of forms of parliamentary debating in North America. While they all share some common structures (such as the order of the speakers), there are variances, both subtle and blatant, that differentiate them from each other. This article focuses on some of the features of Canadian Parliamentary debating in Central Canada that differentiate it from other forms.

### **The Structure of the Round**

Like other forms of North American parliamentary debating, in CUSID Central the speaker order is as follows: PMC-MO-MC-LO-PMR. The PMC, MO, and MC are all seven minutes long. The LO is 10 minutes long, although the final three minutes are not permitted to contain any new constructive argumentation (sometimes called the LOR). The PMR is three minutes long and is similarly barred from containing new constructive arguments. New rebuttals and examples are quite acceptable in both the LOR and the PMR, although a new example that substantially furthered the Government case and arose in the PMR may have its impact lessened by the judge, in the interests of fairness.

Points of Information have gone from being non-existent five years ago to being standard now. Almost every tournament in Central Canada allows and expects POIs. They can be offered between minutes 1 and 6 of the PMC, MO, MC, and LO. No POIs are allowed during the PMR. This leaves each side with the same amount of “protected” time. The customary rule is that each speaker will accept two POIs during their speech, though it is by no means uncommon to take 1 or 3, depending on the round. Just as a debater is expected to take POIs, they are also expected to be active in offering them. POIs play a role in determining the outcome of a round and count toward a debater’s speaker score.

### **The Structure of the Speeches**

Each of the constructive speeches (PM-MO-MC-LO) introduce their constructive matter before they engage in refutation or rebuilding. While some small amount of clarificatory rebuttal or framing may be necessary or advisable from the latter three of these speakers, placing general rebuttal before constructive matter has long been frowned upon in CUSID Central.

Aside from this, there are no firm rules on how a speech should be structured. The LO can do her rebuttal starting with the PM’s points or the MC’s, and can rebuild her partner’s points at any place she deems fit. It is most common, perhaps, to do everything in reverse order (rebut the MC, rebuild the MO, rebut the PM), but it is really up to personal preference.

### **Cases**

The overwhelming majority of cases run in Central Canada (and an even greater percentage of successful cases) are of a serious nature. This does not mean that humour is not present. On the contrary, humour is very common and more than acceptable.

However, the actual substance matter of a round of debate tends to concern serious matters. Debates about domestic politics, international relations, moral concerns, trade, and law are all very common.

There is a “specific knowledge” rule which is applied to cases. In order to level the playing field between debaters with vastly different knowledge bases and to ensure that people don’t need to be absurdly up-to-date on current events, all cases are required to be accessible to a “typical university student.” This means that every case must either deal with subject matter that it is reasonable to expect your opponent to know about (such as the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, the Kyoto Protocol, and the situation in Iraq), or must give enough background information so that somebody who is not familiar with the subject matter can still identify principles and tensions in the case that they can take a side on. If I want to argue that Turkmenistan should pass a law that makes speaking out against the government illegal, then the Opposition doesn’t have to know anything about Turkmenistan to argue against me—they can simply stand for the right of free speech, for ensuring that foreign countries don’t get angry, etc. If a case deals with subject matter that is not considered to be well-publicized enough that it is legitimate to expect an average university student to be familiar with it, then it must be sufficiently accessible so that somebody with no knowledge could debate it anyway. This means that very technical debates (The X5 microprocessor is superior to the B6) or debates that cannot be abstracted from their subject matter at all (“The Godfather 1” was better than “The Godfather 2”) are illegitimate, because they can meet neither criteria, even though they may be very contentious.

In the past couple of years, there has been more and more emphasis on running “open” cases, as opposed to “narrow” or “Government heavy” cases. An open case is one where there are obvious and compelling arguments on both sides of the debate, and there does not appear to be any serious advantage to being on either side of it. Many of the topics that people most commonly associate with debating are open cases, such as abortion and euthanasia. Although it seems to be a bad strategic move to pick a case where you give the Opposition just as good a chance as winning as yourself, open cases tend to make for better rounds of debate, and judges reward Government teams who set up interesting and exciting rounds. Conversely, very narrow cases, or cases where the Government has given themselves a very easy job (such as supporting equality rather than bigotry), tend to make for uninteresting rounds. Central Canada is beginning to put more emphasis on the job of the Government to set up a good debate rather than setting up a winning debate. Winning the arguments still has an important place, but is not the only thing that counts.

Style cases are run sometimes, but have wildly varying degrees of success. They are generally much harder to win, and there is usually an automatic bias toward the Opposition in such rounds, even when the case is quite funny and enjoyable. They are much rarer than serious cases, and should be run with caution.

Time-Place Sets, where the speaker is assigned a certain persona, are currently allowed at most Central tournaments. However, there is increasing discussion about whether they make for good rounds, and it is becoming more common for tournaments to ban them or to place strict restrictions on them. For the most part, they are allowed with the important caveat that they should not be argued by appealing to the mental states of the individual who is theoretically being appealed to. So long as the time-place set is

trying to convince a reasonable person of what they should do in the position of the speaker, instead of what the speaker herself should do, they should be accepted readily. This alteration ensures people do not resort to saying “But Mr. Speaker, you are crazy, so logic means nothing to you!”

## **The Expectations of the Opposition**

The shift in Central Canada to encourage Government teams to run open and contentious cases has also brought with it added expectations of the Opposition. Commonly referred to as “Opposition burden,” Central debating tends to expect that an Opposition team do more than simply pick away at a Government case and question its validity. Instead, an Opposition is expected to have a clearly-defined position in the round that they argue in favour of, which goes beyond “Government is wrong.” This position may be that the status quo is superior, or perhaps that a third alternative is the best option. The important thing is that the Opposition team pick a stance and stick to it. If the MO argued why the Government proposal was worse than the status quo, and then the LO argued that the Government proposal was worse than a third option, then a judge would be likely to penalize them for not having a unified stance in the round.

The “Opposition burden” is not a huge thing, and it is easy to over-exaggerate. The best way to think about it may be as a focus on Opposition constructive matter. Since the Government has been encouraged to run very contentious cases, the Opposition is expected to do more than simply engage in lots of refutation. An Opposition should be trying to go toe-to-toe with the Government in terms of constructive matter. So long as an Opposition team has sufficient and complementary constructive matter, and do not rely solely on refuting the Government, then their burden will be met.

## **Decorum**

Debating in Central Canada is not very formal. It is perfectly acceptable to refer to other speakers by name, by position, or anything else that is not rude or likely to make somebody uncomfortable. While we do attempt to retain some modicum of formality, especially in outrounds, an individual would only be penalized for being informal if this informality negatively affected somebody in the round, by being offensive, disruptive, or annoying.

That being said, there are some formalities that remain. Pens are not allowed to be taken up to the podium, and the speaker is always referred to as “Mr/Madam Speaker”, never by their real name. Time limits are strictly enforced, and an overly casual speech is likely to be received negatively. For the most part, while rounds are not very formal, they are taken fairly seriously. Stepping out of character, and admitting that you don’t really care (gasp!) about the topic, is quite rare and certain to diminish the impact of the speech.

Dress is probably at its least formal in at least the last six years. It is not uncommon for debaters to wear jeans, though it is still fairly common to wear nicer clothes in outrounds. Generally, there is a great mix in terms of wardrobe; people wearing suits will often debate against people in a t-shirt and jeans. No great importance is placed on it.

## **Everything Changes...**

What is written above is an attempt to describe what Central Canadian debating is like in 2005. As has been alluded to in this article, expectations can change quite rapidly, and many debaters have different opinions about how it should be structured. The surge of interest in British Parliamentary debating in the last few years has had a serious impact on Central debating, most evident in the emphasis on open cases and the expectations of the Opposition. This could easily change again. Nothing written here is meant to be taken as the “rules” of Central Canadian debating, just how it seems to be working at this point in time.

# Regional Approaches to Debate

## *CUSID East*

At first glance, CUSID East debating appears quite similar to debating in CUSID Central. Both regions use the same speech lengths (7, 7, 7, 10, 3), and the “rules” are generally the same. Points of Information are being used more frequently than in the past, but are not yet a mainstay of the CUSID East style. Canned cases are acceptable, but in my experience, cases are rarely *as* planned as they tend to be in Central. Using the same case twice is frowned upon (in part perhaps because there are so few of us, the chances of the second opponents having heard about it the first time are quite high).

Most CUSID East tournaments last only two days (Friday-Saturday), so there is not such a stark division between in-rounds and break rounds; everyone debates both days, with the break being announced Saturday afternoon. Moreover, given the smaller size of our tournaments, we often break to semi-finals.

CUSID East tournaments are typically judged by one’s fellow debaters, with the occasional former debater also lending a hand. It should also be noted that we tend not to take winning and losing as seriously as debaters in other regions, so if you are going to back-tab in CUSID East, it is probably best not to advertise that fact!

I have heard that CUSID East favours style over content, but I do not think that is entirely true. The best debaters in CUSID East have roughly the same style/content balance as the best debaters in other regions. However, while it is possible in Central to progress quite far on content alone, though not on style alone, the opposite is true in the East. Here, knowledge and analysis cannot compensate for poor speaking skills, but effective rhetoric may mask a more shallow understanding of the topic. As such, I have found that the average CUSID East debater tends to be more impassioned and engaging than his/her Central counterparts, and humour is also more prevalent. Given this emphasis, it is not surprising that participation in public speaking here is also quite high, with the vast majority of speeches falling into the “humorous” category.

It is important to note the impact that CUSID East’s current small size is having on our style. First, given that within any club, there are likely to be relatively few “established” debaters, everyone within that club will be learning to debate from the same few people. As such, new debaters may not be exposed to multiple styles from which to pick and choose. Second, the fact that we have fewer tournaments and each tournament has fewer rounds means that Eastern debaters have fewer opportunities to observe (and thus be influenced by) debaters in other clubs. In other words, we do not spend very much time debating against people who debate differently from us. I see this as having led to school-specific styles, in that one can frequently identify a debater’s club simply from observing his/her speaking style.

CUSID East has not participated to a great extent in British Parliamentary debating, so we have not experienced the spill-over to Canadian Parliamentary that other regions have, in terms of an arguably higher specific knowledge threshold and a preponderance of international relations cases. Debate topics in CUSID East should fall within the general knowledge of an average university student, and the average university student does not

read The Economist. This is not to say there are issues that would be fair game in Central or the West but off-limits in the East, just that debaters in the East should not be assumed to have the same *depth* of knowledge as their counterparts further west.

# North American Style

## *Advice and Strategy*

To preface this article, I should mention that every Chief Adjudicator will have a slightly different idea of what things like “Opposition burden” and “flow” mean. When we wrote the North-Ams style guide, the intention wasn’t to give judges a checklist to use when adjudicating a round, but rather to highlight the best of both CUSID and APDA style and create ways for judges to reward them, while minimizing what we saw as the weaknesses of both styles. As always, the best advice is to make good, intelligent, relevant arguments in rounds, and ask the Chief Adjudicator about his or her interpretation of the style guide in the briefing.

When we wrote the North-Ams style guide, to our surprise, we found that there was far more common ground between CUSID and APDA than we previously had thought. As a result, I’ll say that all the same advice that applies to good CUSID debating applies here as well. For the sake of brevity, I will comment on what I see as the four major points where North-Ams style differs from what we see as standard CUSID style.

### **1. Tight Link Resolutions**

Similar advice applies to this category as applies to Worlds style debating. Don’t get cute with the motion. If you do, you risk losing for squirreling or for debating something that is counter-resolutional. To the extent that it is possible, debate the motion straight down the line, or at least, attempt to have the debate that you in good faith believe the Chief Adjudicator intended you to have when he or she wrote the motion. Do not assume that simply because the motion is philosophical that it requires modification into a real world case study. The motion “This house believes that individual rights supersede group rights” does not necessarily give you license to have a debate solely about universal public versus private for profit health care. While that example can fit the motion, it’s a pretty large stretch to use that as the only foundation for the round.

### **2. Opposition Burden/Opposition Consistency**

This is always the most controversial item that came out of the style guide, and it is subject to a lot of misinterpretation. Again, the best advice is to ask the Chief Adjudicator for his or her interpretation, but below is an explanation of what the authors of the style guide intended.

Simply put, Opposition Burden means exactly what it means in CUSID. The Opposition must stand for something in the debate. They don’t have an affirmative burden of proof. They may absolutely stand on the grounds that the Government’s proposal doesn’t solve the problem it purports to, but they must at least take some sort of a stance. IT DOES NOT INFER AN ONUS TO RAISE A COUNTERPLAN.

Opposition Consistency simply means that the Member of the Opposition and the Leader of the Opposition must have a consistent line of the debate. This does not mean that the second Opposition speaker cannot raise new lines of argumentation; they absolutely can. The proviso is that the arguments raised by the second Opposition speaker

must not be inconsistent or irreconcilable with the arguments raised by his or her teammate. This is also not intended to act as a prohibition on unrelated arguments; if the Government proposes a two tiered health care plan, the Opposition may argue both that it is economically inefficient, and morally repugnant. These arguments are not inconsistent and both can be in line with a consistent Opposition philosophy. What would be inconsistent is if the first Opposition said that the very idea of a two tiered system is a slippery slope into the destruction of a public universal system, and then the second Opposition speaker said that the public system cannot be saved and a two tiered system is bad because it isn't a fully private system. This is an extreme example, but it illustrates the basic principle that the two Opposition speakers must make arguments that are consistent with a unified Opposition theme.

### **3. Leader of the Opposition's Split**

A lot of CUSID debaters think that the LO Split is silly, or even a bad idea. This reveals the true intention of most CUSID debaters regarding the Second Opposition speech, namely to use the three minutes reserved for summary and rebuttal for new constructive argument and continued refutation. Since this abuse of the style is rampant in CUSID, we don't crack down on it, and over time it has become an accepted stylistic tool to summarize and do the rebuttal in the last minute. I see ballots with 42s on them all the time where the comment says "only used 30 seconds of rebuttal". A debater who spends only 30 seconds doing what they are supposed to be doing for 3 minutes should not receive a 42; they don't know how to manage their time. The 3 minutes is protected from Points of Information for a reason: it is to be subject to the same restrictions and limitations as the PMR.

The LO split provides an easy way to ensure that you use your time efficiently. I personally prefer to use the time as a 10 minute block, but it is difficult to force yourself to put your speech aside and move to rebuttal. The North-Ams style guide requires that you do so, and good judges should penalize debaters who do not move into the official rebuttal at the appropriate time. My advice here would be to prepare a separate sheet of paper for your rebuttal and when the 3 minute warning goes, force yourself to work from a different sheet of paper. This way you will use your time in the most effective and efficient way possible.

### **4. Flow**

Flow is essentially a catch-all term used by CUSID for everything we don't like about APDA style debating. The problem is that we understand it in its most flawed form. Flow does not mean that you have to respond to every argument and it never really did mean that. It means that an argument that was made deserves a response. Where an argument receives no response, it is deemed to stand, no matter how stupid or irrelevant. In CUSID, the expectation is that a stupid argument will be dismissed by a judge as being stupid. The same is essentially true under a Flow model of debating, only that the "stupid" analysis goes to weight rather than to the argument itself. In other words, while in CUSID we may just dismiss the argument, a Flow model requires that the argument stand, but that it can be of very little impact to the round if it was truly idiotic.

In a limited sense, Flow has been incorporated into North-Ams style. If a debater makes a point, the other team has an obligation to respond to the argument. If the

argument is a silly throw away point, then you may choose to ignore it, but you do so at your own risk. An argument that is silly likely won't take more than 10 to 20 seconds to respond to anyway, so you may as well do it. The nightmare scenario is where you get a PMR that says "well they didn't respond to the fifth sub-point of my third argument so we win". That debater is simply wrong, there is no such argument calculus in any style. The debater may be right that his or her opponent didn't respond to that argument, but they must still explain why that argument is important and why it carries the round.

## **Conclusion**

North-Ams style is in essence very close to what CUSID style is in theory. The problems arise when CUSID attempts to debate closer to what we often allow each other to get away with rather than what our style requires. We typically reward debaters for a free form seven minute speech about smart things, rather than a well organized "road mapped" approach that may have less analysis and more structure. Personally, I am in favour of seven minutes of smart things, but that far more closely resembles British Parliamentary than it does Canadian Parliamentary and certainly departs from North-Ams style. Organization, structure, and discipline are essential components of North-Ams style debating. They don't take the place of intelligent argumentation, but they are necessary pre-conditions to having those arguments stay in the round.

# French Debating

## *Current Situation and Future Challenges*

In my opinion, writing about the practice of French debating in CUSID is made difficult by the rapid growth it has experienced over the last three years, as well as the dramatic evolution it is bound to go through in the next few. Thus, any description of how French debating is doing should only be considered within the context in which it was written. Consequently, a good starting point is to consider the state of the development of the French debating community.

Ideally, what successive Directors of French Language Debates have been trying to achieve is a state in which the practice of French debating is on par with what is done in English. That is, most Francophone post-secondary institutions would be endowed with a student-run debating club. We are not there yet.

Debating wise, Québec schools can be seen as belonging to one of two categories: the general and professional schools. Among the general schools, there are four large universities (Université de Montréal, Université du Québec À Montréal, Université Laval, and Université de Sherbrooke), a series of smaller, regional universités du Québec, and CÉGEPs. As of the writing of this article, only Sherbrooke and UQAM are members of CUSID, but ULaval has participated at some of our tournaments. The practice of debating is greater in professional schools because they participate in non-CUSID debating competitions. However, debaters from the Hautes-Études Commerciales and École de Technologies Supérieures have participated at many of our events in the past two years. With these facts in mind, one can conclude that French debating is roughly half way to its desired development.

In my mind, French debating faces two immediate challenges. The first is that many of the debaters that took part in the expansion of debating in Québec are approaching graduation and it is not clear if debating will survive at their schools without their active participation. Some work will have to be done to improve novice retention. The second is that a partnership should be made with the people organizing the *Jeux du Commerce* and *Jeux du Génie* so that their debaters attend tournaments such as Novice and French Nationals. The current Director of French Language Debates, Brittany Piovesan, has made some progress in this regard. The very low number of French teams present at this year's Central Novice is mainly due to an event participants to the *Jeux du Commerce* had that same weekend. If the CUSID French debating community can overcome these two challenges, it will find itself much solidified.

Stylistically, French debating is close to English debating in the Central region. The main reason for this is that many of the most successful French debaters also debate in English in the Central region. As more Francophones join the French debating community, I expect that differences between the two styles will emerge. For example, many Francophone debaters at the 2005 French Nationals meeting expressed the opinion that French tournaments should offer straight resolutions.

Finally, the expansion of French debating in Québec will have some political consequences, especially for the Central region. In terms of votes, the importance of the

schools in the proximity of Toronto will be balanced by the rising influence of schools near Montreal. It is important to say that this situation has worked well so far; to make sure it continues this way, clubs in the Central region should consider making some compromises in the way tournaments are organized. For example, alternating the host of the Novice Championship between a location close to Toronto and one close to Montreal would be a good idea. It is important to remember that having the opportunity to debate in two languages makes CUSID infinitely richer.