CASE PREPARATION: part 1

“Most debates are won and lost in the preparation room.”
Outline

1. The ‘big picture’
2. The issue and definition
3. The case approach
4. The arguments
5. The split
6. Writing speeches
7. Teamwork in preparation
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To win a debate, you need to do two things... 

1. Show why your side of the motion is true. This is what these slides are about. It involves:
   - Defining the motion,
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2. Show why your opposition’s reasons are wrong.
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Finding the issue

Some **examples** and some **principles**... 

- Where there is a clear issue, debate that issue.
  
  e.g. THIS HOUSE WOULD BAN SMOKING

- Where the issue is not clear, choose the *most* obvious, *most* relevant, *most* debatable issue.
  
  e.g. THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT IT’S NOT WHETHER YOU WIN OR LOSE BUT HOW YOU PLAY THE GAME

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The definition is...

...a brief statement about what your team thinks the words of the motion mean, *for the purposes of this debate*.

- *Both* teams need to prepare a definition.
- However, only the *Proposition* team needs to *present* its definition.
- The *Opposition* team only presents its definition if it *disagrees* with the Proposition’s definition...

...and this should not happen!

*(More on definitional disagreements later...)*
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Defining a motion: some pointers

- Define terms in the motion, not every single word.
  - e.g. THIS HOUSE WOULD PUNISH FORMER NATIONAL LEADERS FOR FOREIGN CRIMES
  - The Proposition probably needs only to define the highlighted terms.

- Do not define metaphorical terms literally.
  - e.g. THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT THE CARROT IS BETTER THAN THE STICK

- Use your own words, to keep things simple.

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Limiting motions by definition

The definition may specify the *scope* of the debate.

E.g. THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT CRIMINAL SENTENCES ARE TOO HARSH

This motion may (legitimately) refer to:

- Your local country/region, or
- The world as a whole.

However, two forms of limitation are banned:

- **‘Time setting’**: Limiting a general motion to some other time.
  E.g. “Criminal sentences were too harsh in the 1800s.”
- **‘Place setting’**: Limiting a general motion to some other place.
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  “A ‘bad law’ is ‘a law that is impossible to obey’.”

- **Argue something that your opposition cannot reasonably oppose** (a ‘truism’).
  
  e.g. THIS HOUSE WOULD PAY MORE ATTENTION TO THE ENVIRONMENT
  
  “‘The environment’ means ‘the political, economic and social situation’.”

- **Argue something very different to the plain meaning of the motion.**
  
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- The Proposition has an exclusive right of definition. The Proposition’s definition must be:
  - Reasonable, and
  - Reasonably close to the plain meaning of the motion.

- The Proposition has no exclusive right of definition. If the teams disagree on the definition (discussed later), they may legitimately compete to persuade the judge about whose definition is:
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The exclusive right is more common. You should find out which rule applies for your competition!
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- The Proposition has **no exclusive right of definition**. If the teams disagree on the definition (discussed later), they may legitimately compete to persuade the judge about whose definition is:
  - More reasonable, and
  - Closer to the plain meaning of the motion.

The exclusive right is more common. You should find out which rule applies for your competition!

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The ‘big picture’

The issue and the definition

The case approach

A bit of a technicality, but. . .
Triggers

The concept of ‘triggers’

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They ‘trigger’ familiar ways of thinking about the issue. They also help with the case approach (covered shortly).

We consider...

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‘Should’ and ‘would’

Many motions ask whether we *should* do something. . .

- **THIS HOUSE WOULD BAN SMOKING**
- **THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT CHINA SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN AWARDED THE OLYMPICS**

Such motions require the Proposition to show two things. . .

- A *moral imperative* to act, *and*
  
  e.g. “It is immoral that smokers be allowed to endanger others’ health through passive smoking.”

- A *practical imperative* to act.
  
  e.g. “Banning smoking will reduce the health consequences on smokers, and the significant resulting social cost.”

Such debates often also focus on *practicality of action.*

  e.g. How *feasible* would it be to ban smoking?
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‘Too’

To show that there is ‘too much’ of something means showing:

- An abundance
- *causing*
- harm.

The second step is easy to forget! For example...

THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THERE IS TOO MUCH MONEY IN SPORT

The Proposition must show:

- There is lots of money in sport,
- which *causes* ⇒ *and the debate focuses on this step!*
- harm (to sport, society, etc).

These principles extend to motions about ‘too little’, etc.
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Some topics ask us to judge whether something has or has not failed... 

- THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT THE UN HAS FAILED
- THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT CAPITALISM HAS FAILED

Topics about failure require the Proposition to provide a specific test as to what constitutes failure. Two standard tests are:

1. A failure to meet expectations, and
2. A failure to meet specific external criteria.
‘Failed’

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Consider a silly hypothetical motion about a hypothetical object:
THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT THE OBJECT IS A BIG, RED BALL.

What must the **Proposition** show? Clearly,

- That the object is **big, and**
- That it is **red, and**
- That it is a **ball**.

The **Opposition** can attack any of these, or any combination.

More serious motions sometimes follow the same structure...

- THIS HOUSE WOULD LIMIT POPULATION GROWTH BY LEGISLATION;
- THIS HOUSE WOULD NOT HAVE GRANTED BEIJING THE 2008 OLYMPICS.

The same principles apply.
‘Big, red ball’ motions

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Consider... THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT IT IS BETTER TO BE SMART THAN TO BE KIND.

Now consider this Opposition argument: “Hitler was brilliant, but very unkind. Look at all the suffering he caused.”

This is true, but not convincing: it is a very extreme example!

What this motion really means is THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT IT IS GENERALLY TRUE TO SAY THAT IT IS BETTER TO BE SMART THAN TO BE KIND.

This principle applies to many motions, particularly motions about what is, rather than what should be.
Consider... 

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Many motions concern ‘absolutes’…

- THIS HOUSE WOULD REQUIRE **ALL** ADULTS TO VOTE
- THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT **EVERYONE** HAS THE RIGHT TO A TERTIARY EDUCATION

The **Proposition** must support the motion for **everyone** except an insignificant minority.

For example, the **Opposition** here cannot ask, “What about people shipwrecked on a tropical island?”.

Of course, sometimes there is **no** ‘insignificant minority’.

For example,

    **THIS HOUSE WOULD ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY**

The Proposition cannot argue, “We should abolish it for everyone except terrorists”!
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Some topics ask whether something is ‘justified’, or ‘justifiable’. In most cases, ‘justify’ debates fall into the ‘absolute’ category. For example,

THAT TERRORISM IS JUSTIFIED

Here, the Proposition is required to show at least a significant minority of cases where terrorism is justified. The Proposition is not required, however, to defend the actions of all terrorist groups, nor even a majority.

In some cases, a ‘justify’ debate is just a ‘should’ debate.

THAT THE COST OF SPACE EXPLORATION IS JUSTIFIABLE

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Many debates call for a comparison. For example,

- THAT NATO IS A BETTER HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER THAN THE UN
- THAT THE MEDIA IS MORE POWERFUL THAN THE CHURCH

In such debates, the Opposition must not fall into the easy trap of choosing to ‘negate by equality’. For example the Opposition should not argue, “NATO is an equally good human rights defender as the UN”.

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In such debates, the Opposition must not fall into the easy trap of choosing to ‘negate by equality’. For example, the Opposition should not argue, “NATO is an equally good human rights defender as the UN”.

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Many debates relate to issues about the way that future may or may not be.

For example, “THAT THE 21ST CENTURY WILL BE BETTER THAN THE 20TH CENTURY”.

Such debates are obviously speculative: nobody knows for certain what the future holds, so both teams will be required to project current trends into the future.

The Proposition should note this when defining the motion.
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If your team finds itself on the ‘moral low-ground’ of a topic (for example, justifying child labour), or on territory that some would consider morally controversial (for example, arguing either for or against abortion rights), it is wise to ‘invest in moral insurance’.

This means adding a reminder early in your team’s case that:

1. This is an emotive topic upon which many people have legitimately strong feelings, and
2. Both teams must nonetheless take a rational and objective look at the issues involved.

Hopefully, this clarification will help to distance your team from issues personally, and encourage an intelligent weighing of the relevant issues in the debate.
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Outline

1. The ‘big picture’
2. The issue and definition
3. The case approach
4. The arguments
5. The split
6. Writing speeches
7. Teamwork in preparation
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A ‘case line’ (or ‘theme’) is a single, concise sentence that explains the main idea behind your team’s case.

Ideally, a case line will explain two things:

1. **Why** your team says the motion is (or is not) true; and
2. **How** your team claims that this comes about.

The case line should be stated at least once in each speech. Every speaker should return repeatedly to the key idea that underpins his or her team’s case, but there is no need to repeat the theme many times.
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Consider the motion

**THAT GLOBALISATION IS DOING MORE HARM THAN GOOD**

An effective Proposition case line might be,

“Globalisation’s emphasis on economic competition advantages a few developed nations at the expense of the majority of the world’s population.”

This case line explains both **why** the motion is said to be true, and **how**.
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The importance of a **team stance**

In many debates, teams need to present more detail than the motion (or definition) provides.

Suppose you are Proposition on the motion

**THIS HOUSE SUPPORTS THE DEATH PENALTY.**

What **details** does the Proposition need to provide?
Time for an **illustration**... 

Suppose you are Proposition on the motion

**THIS HOUSE WOULD LEGALISE MARIJUANA.**

Suggest a model...
The value of an alternative

Sometimes, the Opposition should counter with a model of its own: an **alternative**. This is particularly important when the Proposition supports a **change** to the status quo, and the status quo is **difficult to defend**.

For example, consider the motion

**THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT WE SHOULD INTERVENE MILITARILY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS.**
The key idea: **Play hardball if your argument, although harder to stomach, is easier to understand.**

For example,

**THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT THE KYOTO SUMMIT DIDN‘T GO FAR ENOUGH.**
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CASE PREPARATION: part 1

“Most debates are won and lost in the preparation room.”