

Case Construction

◆ Different types of topics – Normative and Empirical:

At intermediate and senior levels of debating there are two different kinds of topics: normative and empirical. The table below outlines how to spot different types of topics and what sort of case might be run in response.

Topic Structure	Example	Description
That we should x	e.g. <i>That we should criminalise the publishing of fake news</i>	These are normative or model based topics. In these kinds of debates, you are advocating for a certain intervention: that we should do something or run some kind of policy to achieve a certain outcome.
That a should x (these are sometimes called actor topics)	e.g. <i>That, as feminists, we would oppose single sex schools</i>	
That x does more harm than good	e.g. <i>That fast fashion does more harm than good</i>	These are empirical or test based topics. Debates about regret or doing more harm than good imply a counterfactual comparison between the world with some sort of scenario versus the world without it. Teams debate what the world would look like without that certain thing and consequently whether the world would be a better or worse place.
That we regret x	e.g. <i>That we regret the rise of technology in schools</i>	
That x is good for society	e.g. <i>That TikTok is good for society</i>	

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That x has lost its' way	e.g. <i>that the Liberal party has lost its way</i>	Debates about x having lost its way are also empirical topics. They necessitate a test, that is, a general metric which provides a 'definition' for what losing its' way looks like. Points given then prove <i>all prongs of the test.</i>
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◆ How to construct your case – normative debates:

1. Definition and Context

The first step in structuring a case involves defining the topic. A definition should take what a 'reasonable average person' would understand the topic to mean. However, when defining the topic, there should also be a discussion about the topic more generally. This discussion should be what is presented at the beginning of your team's case.

Debaters should consider: what is the topic about? Why has the topic been set, i.e. has there been recent lengthy discussion about it in the media? Why would the SADA set a motion about this particular subject area? Considering these questions will help you make sure your definition isn't just factually correct but is also relevant. Moreover, it helps you come up with more persuasive arguments. This more general definition of the topic is referred to as the context.

2. Stakeholders

After your team understands **what** the topic means and **why** it is topical, it is important to consider **who** the topic is about and who is impacted. Different debates will involve discussions of different groups of people. Those groups of people will all be affected differently in different debates. The reason it is important to understand 'who' you are talking about is so you can come up with persuasive arguments.

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Persuasive arguments will demonstrate that your side has greater benefits for more groups in the debate, or they might demonstrate that your side has the only benefits for the most important group in the debate. Regardless, your debate will concern the 'whos' – so you need to have a clear idea of what you do and who you do it for.

For the same reason, after you decide which groups the debate is about, you should consider how important they are. Is that group the biggest, i.e. are they the most affected? Is that group the most 'vulnerable', i.e. the worst off under the status quo and therefore deserving of the benefits your side is offering? The key is that once you have worked out who matters, you need to work out why they matter. And it is important to structure your speech so you give justification for this, and ensure that your case argues in their favour.

Equally, the converse is true. When thinking about who matters, you must also think about who your opposition does more to help. Then you must think about how you will respond to it. Are the groups the opposition helps less important than the groups you help? Does the opposition not help their groups as much as you help yours? It is all up for debate!

3. Models

Next you should present a model. A model is a set of policies your side is seeking to enact. Models should be specific, but not so specific that you set yourself up for the burden of writing the policies word for word. For example, models that enact 'education policies' should, at a minimum, explain *who* is being educated, *what* they are being educated about, and *how* that education is reaching them.

Models must always be consistent with your principle/moral arguments and achieve an outcome that helps the groups you want to.

4. Arguments:

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a. Principled argument

Debates are not all about who is affected, they are also about why we should or should not, **in principle**, do certain things or live in certain types of societies or advance a particular side of a motion. Especially when all outcomes seem otherwise equal, a case with a principle advantage will be a winning one.

Most debate topics have an obvious 'principle clash'. For example, there is often a clash about the right to civil liberties (freedom) and the duty of the government to keep its citizens safe. We might value both of these things but to varying degrees, your job is to come up with a principled or 'moral' reason why your side of the motion is justified, irrespective of outcomes.

Your principled argument should be something that is broad, so that it is generally true with a variety of arguments to support it. You should then provide reasons why it applies to the particular issue under debate. That means you should be providing reasons why the principle applies to the topic and why it is principally superior from your opposition's. The key here is to make sure your reasons aren't just arguments in favour of your side of the case, but actually reasons directly supporting the principle.

b. Practical Arguments

Your team should then come up with practical arguments. Practical arguments explain why and how a certain group is impacted under your side of the debate. They are stakeholder-driven and this is where the conversation you had earlier about stakeholders directly manifests itself. Your team should ensure that your practical arguments are not inconsistent with your moral justification and that they discuss all the major stakeholders in the debate. Whilst practical arguments often focus on the benefits your side offers, they can (and should) also concern the potential harms of *not doing* what your side is arguing for.



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5. Grouping arguments

Once your team has brainstormed your arguments, you should then sort them into your team split. Our debating fundamentals resource outlines how to do this based on grouping similar impacts together. For example, practical arguments concerning the same group should be framed as one 'argument' titled "How on side X we do more to help X" or "Benefits to X Group."

How to structure the speech:

The case you construct comes out throughout the first and second speakers. First speakers should present the context, the model, the principle and one practical argument. Second speakers should present two further arguments of practical nature. All speakers must be aware of the case constructed so that rebuttal is consistent with your model and your points.

◆ How to construct your case – empirical debates:

Empirical debates should be constructed in the same way as model debates, but instead of a model, a test or counterfactual should be instituted. The case preparation is the same, but instead of giving a model, first speakers should present a counterfactual or a test.

For test debates, points should then establish or prove the test. For counterfactual debates, points should provide a principled justification for the counterfactual and practical arguments for what the practical outcomes of the counterfactual are.

Secret Topic Debating Specifically

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Cases for secret topics should be constructed in the exact same way as prepared motions, and in-line with the outline above. In saying that, there are some specifics that relate to secret topic debating, which are outlined below.

◆ When to get to a secret topic debate

Topics are handed out an hour before the debate time begins – always arrive 15 minutes before topic release. Late arrivals stress everyone out; your other team members think you are not coming and you get stressed if you do not know exactly where to go when you arrive at the school.

◆ What to bring to a secret topic debate

- Plenty of A4 paper
- Whiteboard markers + whiteboard eraser
- A dictionary

◆ What not to bring to a secret topic debate

- Laptop, Ipad etc
- Messy snacks

◆ How to prepare the night before when given the topic area

- Talk to your coaches about the key understandings of the topic area
- Think about whether there are any topical issues relating to the topic area:
e.g. Coronavirus and a health topic area
- Do some basic research into what the topic area means

◆ How to allocate the 60 minutes

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It is evident from the content before about constructing a case that the biggest part of prep time should be spent together, working out the case and making sure it is strong and consistent. This is vital. There is not enough time to write your whole speech out word for word, but there is enough time to write the core statements you need to get out.

Rough Schedule:

- 5-10 minute silent brainstorm: What does the topic mean? What is the context? What are our major pushes? What are the opposition's major pushes?
- 5-10 minutes working out the key clashes (principled and practical)
- 20-25 minutes: writing the first speaker's speech – this should be done as a team so that everyone is aware of the team's case
- Remaining time: writing the second speaker's point and working out any issues in your case/prepared POIs/prepared rebuttal points.

◆ Good and easy ways to improve your general knowledge for debating

1. Listen to podcasts
2. Watch the ABC news and check the website for its major stories
3. Read respected periodicals like *The Economist*
4. Talk about current issues with anyone prepared to do the same – it helps clarify your own understanding of them
5. Make sure you are familiar with the Australian electoral system, the separation of powers in Australia, the federal structure, the major players within state and federal politics
6. Similarly, be familiar with international relations, for example, have a basic understanding of the United States relationship with China

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◆ How to improve your team's chances

1. Debating is a team sport. Help each other out – this extends beyond contributing to the case in prep, helping keep each other calm and encouraging each other is equally important.
2. Before the debate, allocate topics of current relevance to different members of the team to research and become familiar with. Having one person be super knowledgeable on one subject is better than four team members who have a superficial knowledge on lots of subjects.
3. In training sessions before debates practice, prep on previous years' topics. Practice sticking to the preparation schedule above so you get a feel for the amount you can fit into the time – also, you will get faster with practice.

Points of Information

Point of Information debating is an exciting aspect of debating, which enables active participation in debates outside of your own speech. Offering strategically and responding eloquently to POIs is an important skill which can change the course of a debate. Below is an outline of the key components of offering, accepting and scoring of POIs.

◆ Offering POIs

To offer a POI, simply stand and say “Point of Information” clearly. You must then stay standing and wait for the speaker to accept or decline. If they appear to ignore you, sit after a few seconds of waiting for their response. If you offer a POI and the speaker accepts your offer, then you have 15 seconds to make a comment, ask a question or put a point that is pertinent to the debate. The best POIs, however, take

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only 5 to 10 seconds to deliver. If you exceed 15 seconds you will be called to order by the chair or the adjudicator and must resume your seat immediately. Assuming that your POI offer is accepted, you only hold the floor at the substantive speaker's pleasure. In other words, if the speaker starts replying you must sit down. However, a speaker who accepts your POI and then asks you to sit down only seconds later is likely to be considered unreasonable and, if so, this will be reflected in the score.

During each opposition speech you should be offering at least 3, but preferably 5 – 6 POIs. Any more than 8 per speaker would be excessive. Offering too many in quick succession is seen as badgering and will damage your score. It does not matter if none of the POIs you offer are accepted across all three opposing speeches. As long as you have offered enough POIs, you will not be penalised. Your POIs should not be offered in quick succession but rather spaced out across the entire speech.

◆ Accepting POIs

As a minimum, you should expect 9 POIs from your opponents during your substantive speech, although there may be more. You should accept 2 POIs, no more, no less. To accept 3 or more will disrupt your speech and will be reflected in your method score. Accepting any less than 2 means you have not engaged to the requisite level in the debate, which will also be reflected by a lower method mark.

As with offering, your acceptance of POIs should be spread across the speech. Having accepted one POI, you really should not accept another one for at least a minute or else your speech may become too disjointed. If you wish to decline a POI offer, you must clearly say "No thank you".

You can only accept a POI while the person offering it is standing. If they resume their seat, the POI is no longer on offer. If you accept a POI, the person offering it has 15 seconds to make a statement, comment or ask a question. You can ask the

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person offering it to sit down before their POI is completed but this is not advisable as cutting them off may mean you do not completely understand the point they are making and are not able to address it properly. As a result, your matter and method marks may suffer.

Having accepted a POI, you cannot in turn decline it because it is too hard to answer. If you accept a POI you must deal with it directly. At the very least you may say “I will deal with this issue later in my speech.” If, however, you do say this, make sure that by the completion of your speech, the matter raised by the POI must have been dealt with. Therefore, when you get to the point in your speech which is responsive to the POI you should flag it as such.

◆ Responding to POIs

The best responses to POIs maintain consistency with your team’s case and are short enough that they don’t derail your speech and your substantive content. When in doubt, trust your intuitions and respond as best you can. If you cannot think of a response at all, it is permissible to flag that you will deal with the POI later in your speech, so long as you *do* then deal with it (and flag your response when it comes).

◆ What to do if you don’t understand a POI

Once your opponent has delivered their POI you cannot seek clarification from them if you do not understand. There is to be no conversation between the debater offering the POI and the speaker once the speaker has begun answering it. If you do not understand a POI, then you need to answer from what you do understand.

◆ Scoring Systems

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Each speaker in the debate will receive a mark between -2 and +2 for their efforts with POIs. The source of this mark is only from the offering of POIs. The way a speaker handles POIs when they accept them during their substantive speech is factored into their overall mark for matter, manner and method.

Just as the average speaker will receive 75 as their score, the speaker who offers an average number of POIs will receive 0 as their POI score. Below average and above average of POIs score -1 and +1 respectively. Exceptional contributions of POIs score +2 or -2 respectively, however this is very rare. It is not unusual for there to be debates where all 6 speakers receive a 0 for POIs.

Senior B and Intermediate A

You cannot lose marks for offering POIs at these levels except for excessive badgering. You can only gain marks for above average offering of POIs (+1) or exceptional offering of POIs (+2). The source of these marks is only for offering POIs. Your response to POIs is marked as part of your overall score for matter, manner and method.

◆ Bell Times

POIs may only be offered during specific periods. At Senior A Grade, POIs may be offered between the 1 minute bell and the 7 minute bell. In the Senior B Grade, POIs may be offered between the 1 and 6 minute bells. In the Intermediate A Grade, POIs may be offered between the 1 and 5 minute bells. This gives debaters time to start and end their speeches without being interrupted by POIs.

A POI cannot exceed 15 seconds. Any POI offered outside this time is out of order. Calling a speaker to order is the job of the chair. In the event that the adjudicator believes a speaker to be out of order because they have offered a POI outside of the

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specific period, or the POI is taking more than 15 seconds, then they should call order in the absence of the chair doing so.