

Introduction to Debating

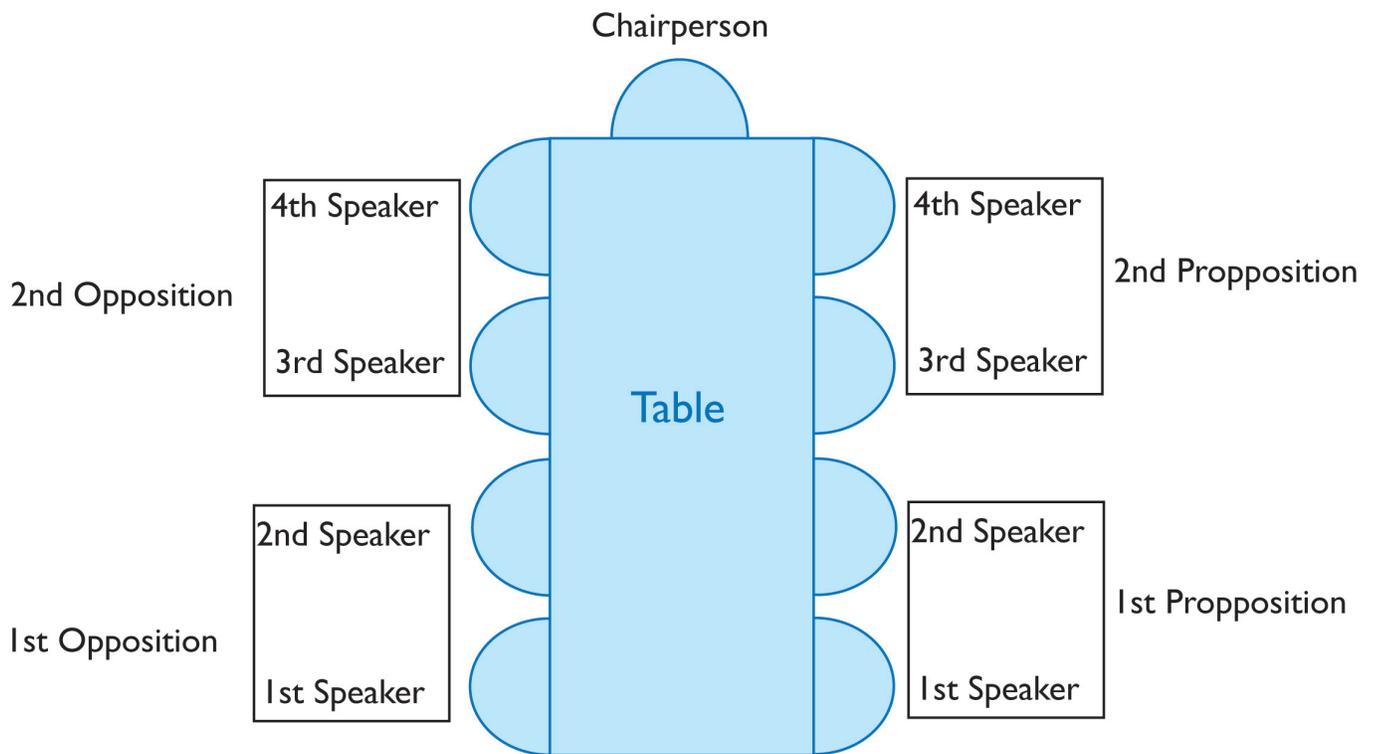
- General Rules

What is debating?

A debate is simply a formal argument. Individuals argue their case in a set order and for a set amount of time. This gives everyone an equal opportunity to have their say and to convince listeners of their case. There are several different styles of debating, we debate in British Parliamentary style which mirrors the way parliament works on a smaller scale.

How does a debate work?

A British parliamentary style debate consists of eight speakers, split into 4 pairs. Two of the pairs form the 'proposition', it is their job to argue for the motion. The other two pairs argue against the motion and are referred to as the 'opposition'. All the teams sit around a table with a chairperson at the head of the table. The table looks like this:



Speakers take it in turns to deliver their 5 minute speeches. 1st Speaker for proposition always speaks first, then 1st speaker for opposition. Next the 2nd speaker for proposition speaks followed by their counterpart in opposition. The order continues in this fashion for the 3rd and 4th sets of speakers.

Timing

During the debate the length of speeches will be timed by the chair or a separate timekeeper. The 5 minute time of a speech breaks into 3 parts. The first minute of a speech is referred to as 'protected time', the speaker cannot be interrupted by any of the other individuals at the table during this time. After this comes 3 minutes of unprotected time. The speaker can be interrupted by members of the opposition during this time with points of information, which are explained below. The beginning of unprotected time will be signalled by the timekeeper with a bang on the table. At the end of this three minutes there will be another bang from the timekeeper, this signals the final minute of time which is protected, just like the first minute. At the end of the debate the timekeeper will signal with a double bang on the table, try not to run too far past this point, you should ideally end your speech within about a quarter of a minute from the final double bang.

POIs

Points of information are an important part of a debate. They allow you to stay involved even after you have given your speech and used well they can fluster your opponent and undermine their speech. The rules are fairly simple; they can be given only during the middle three minutes of an individual's speech. To signal you want to make a POI stand up and raise your hand, it is up to the speaker whether they want to take your POI, if not they should politely wave you down or say no thank you. Speakers should do this quickly and not leave individuals standing waiting to make a POI. If the speaker accepts you should speak briefly (no more than 15 seconds) and then sit down. POIs should be genuine questions for the speaker to answer, not just mini speeches with a 'don't you think?' tacked on the end. Speakers should answer the question briefly and then return to their main speech.