

FIRST PROPOSITION

In first prop you have two major pieces of role fulfilment: (1) define the motion, (2) show why what you are doing is good.

The **definition** is an important part of the debate. This is the part when first proposition tells the other debaters, the judge and the audience what they are making the debate about. Once first prop have given the definition, all the other speakers have to stick with it, even if it seems perverse. A bad definition kills a debate before it can even get going, so giving a bad definition (or no definition at all) can be very harmful to a first prop team. Additionally, the most exquisite definition known to man will receive almost no praise from a judge. The definition is the bare minimum expected of you.

The first and most obvious thing to do is to check that you understand all of the words individually and that you have the wording of the motion correct. If English is not your first language, this may seem an obvious precaution; if it is: do not get complacent. It can be easy to forget that the motion is “THW *not*...” or that you are actively opposing something instead of just no longer supporting it.

This being done, you now need to work out what you want the words to mean collectively. Some things are fixed (NATO is a military organization, it is never going to mean the National Association of Terrier Owners) so don't bother defining them, some are fairly fixed (we all know what a “Western” nation is by and large), some I usually don't care about (is a child anyone under 16 or 18?) but put it in anyway to look like you know what you're doing, and some are vital (what does “punish” mean?). We all know what punishment is, but your job isn't to give a dictionary definition. Instead, we need to know exactly what sort of punishment do you propose (jail? fine? community service? something more imaginative?).

At the start of your speech you need to say exactly what your definition is (best explicitly label it “definition”). By the end of this section (no more than 2 minutes, and as quick as possible), everyone in the room should understand exactly what the debate is about: what the area we are talking about is and what your policy is.

You should be as bold as you dare in your definition. Moderation is a beautiful thing in the real World; in a five minute speech, it is difficult to convey. You should also remember that we are debating precisely so that we can disagree — we aren't trying to reach a compromise. If you're proposing the death penalty, don't make it just for serial killers, there are few of these, make it about all murderers. Apart from anything else, if you're narrowing the scope of the debate too much, then certain arguments you may want to run lose their weight: if it's only for depraved serial killers is it really a deterrent? does it make people feel safer? **If you walk in the middle of the road you're going to get run over.** Cowardly propositions look flimsy and don't impress judges. They also make for boring debates.

Squirrelling Never squirrel. A squirrel is a definition which is clearly not in keeping with the spirit of the motion. Sometimes this may be by accident (forgetting “not” in the wording of the motion, say), other times it will be deliberate and will ruin the debate for everyone. The motion “THW ban boxing” is a debate about contact sports, not packaging design. If you make it about the latter, you have wasted an hour of everyone's life.

The definition doesn't come out of the ether. Obviously you'll want a good idea of what you want to talk about, before coming up with points, but as you explore this more you may find problems with your initial definition. Don't be afraid to change it in prep time, but make sure that you and you partner agree on what it is by the end.

You'll now want to come up with points to support your case. The most logical framework for a policy debate is PROBLEM - MECHANISM - SOLUTION. That is, there is a problem, we are proposing a policy or mechanism and this will then solve the problem. This basic way of thinking allows you to fulfill your two burdens: (1)

define the motion, (2) show why what you are doing is good. In prep time you may wish to think along the following lines:

- PROBLEM

- identify the problem, this may not always be obvious, or there may be more than one
- it is fine to have several problems, though you may want to focus on a particular one
- it may be that you have to choose some instead of others because they conflict, e.g. if you are proposing the chemical castration of paedophiles, it is difficult (though not impossible) to claim children are at risk and paedophiles are vile human beings who deserve any punishment they get as well as claiming that it is inhumane to force paedophiles to live with their desires
- you may not think there is a specific problem, but that you're just making the World a better place; for example, the ability to sell the right to sue may not address a specific problem (though maybe you think it does), however, you think people ought to be able to do it

- MECHANISM

- this is the actual policy you are implementing
- you should try and be as thorough as possible, though of course we aren't expecting a government white paper
- think of all the interrogatives you can (where? when? who? how? etc.)
- for example, in a death penalty debate: who is being killed? what crimes? what is the method? is there an appeals process?
- you should also define all of the terms in the motion that need it — everyone knows what the UN is, but what is military action?

- SOLUTION

- this is the main part of a first proposition: how does the mechanism improve the World?
- how does it solve the problem?
- is it moral? We could kill all criminals, but a large part of that debate is to prove that this is moral.

Your ultimate aim is to show that your mechanism solves the problem and that no worse harms ensue. If you can do this, you win the debate. Don't just list problems (I know obesity is bad, what are you doing about it?) and don't just tell me your policy. You have to show how this proposal will solve the specific problem. Make sure you do this at every point. This is the most important thing to do and where a lot of first prop teams fall down. Too often a first prop team will give a point without referring back to the motion and showing why we should adopt their policy.

Burdens It not be enough to show that you can do something and that it will solve the problem: you may need to justify the morality of the mechanisms. For example, in a death penalty debate, the opposition will almost certainly say you have no right to kill others. You should prep why society does have this right.