**EFP 11 Debate Unit: Everything You Need to Know**

**Debating Basics**

**Resolutions:**

* Resolutions = the issue to be argued.
* The topic of every debate (the “proposition” or “resolution”) shall be worded in a positive manner. Parliamentary resolutions have to be propositions of policy (recommending a course of action), whereas other styles of debate (e.g. cross-ex) may have value resolutions,
* e.g. “Racism is unforgivable.”

**Teams:**

* Every debate involves two opposing teams, an affirmative side that supports the resolution and a negative team which contests its validity or proposes an alternative policy. Both teams argue their side of the resolution an equal number of times for an equal number of minutes.

**The Burden of Proof:**

* The onus of persuasion lies upon the affirmative team; there cannot be a tie in debating. The affirmative either fulfills its burden of persuasion or loses. The only exception is when the negative team introduces a Counter-Plan- a plan of its own; then the negative team assumes the burden of persuasion. If the negative wishes to introduce the Counter Plan it must do so during the address of its first speaker. The negative must prove the Counter Plan is significantly different from the affirmative proposal and is demonstrably more desirable.
* The standard of proof required to discharge the onus of persuasion is that “on the balance of probabilities” - a case that would convince a reasonable person - the resolution is more likely true than false.

**Integrity:**

* All assertions of fact must be accurate and debaters must be prepared to give their authority (publication, author, page, date, etc.) upon being challenged. A judge will penalize debaters severely for using inaccurate evidence. Debaters who fabricate or falsify might be disqualified, as will debaters who plagiarize or go online during a debate or impromptu debate preparation time.

**Definitions:**

* The terms of a resolution should be defined by the affirmative team during its first speech. If it fails to do so, it must accept any reasonable definition proposed by the negative team during its first address. A team which considers the other team’s definition unreasonable must challenge them in its speech immediately following the introduction of those definitions; otherwise it has accepted the other team’s interpretation of the resolution.

**Rebuttal:**

* Rebuttal = direct disagreement
* Rebuttal (attacking the opponents’ arguments and evidence & defending one’s own) is not restricted to the official rebuttal periods; debaters may attack their opponents’ arguments at any time in their speeches. In the Oxford style (traditionally used in parliamentary debates) only the first affirmative debater gives an official rebuttal; all other debaters incorporate their rebuttals into their speeches. This final official rebuttal must not contain new arguments or evidence.

**Other Basics:**

* Debaters stand to speak, including questioning and answering in Cross Ex. Only parliamentary heckling is seated.
* Debaters should not read speeches word for word; they can use notes and read quotations.
* Debaters must prepare for impromptu topics without assistance from other students, or teachers and coaches, and do their own research for prepared topic debates.

**Providing Definitions:**

* The first affirmative speaker should define the terms of the resolution. Before providing the definition, the speaker could choose to arrest the audience’s attention; e.g. he or she could:
  + Give a dramatic quote relevant to the debate.
  + Tell a short anecdote that demonstrates the case in simple emotional terms. Ask an attention grabbing question.
  + Provide some startling factual information, e.g. a mind-boggling statistic.
* **Then** define the terms of the resolution. Simple dictionary definitions are not likely to impress judges. Definitions should always be put in the context of the debate.
  + “In context x, when\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is used correctly, it means the same as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

**For Examples:**

* “In Scotland, when ‘separatism’ is used correctly, it means the same as ‘someone who advocates that Scotland formally separates itself from the country and governmental jurisdiction of the United Kingdom and becomes an entirely independent nation.”

**Definitions:**

* More precise definitions can be used when there is a need to refine the meaning of a commonly used word beyond its level of common usage.
* E.g., in a free trade debate a debater might propose: “We declare that “Free” which in western society means the same as “having private rights which are respected” be refined for the purposes of this debate to mean “respecting the rights of and distinctions between Canada and the U.S. and at the same time easing those trade laws which are inconsistent with mutual economic prosperity.”

**Disputing Definitions:**

**Reasons to Challenge a Definition:**

* While deciding whether or not to challenge an affirmative team’s definition, consider these possibilities:
  + Affirmative terms may define terms in order to make their job easier. One strategy is that they could overstate key terms of the resolution such as ‘good’ ‘success’ ‘failure’; etc. In the resolution ‘The Olympic Games are a failure’ the affirmative could win more easily if ‘failure’ was allowed to be interpreted as ‘not achieving all one’s goals’ instead of ‘not achieving one’s major objectives.’
  + They may be vague or unclear. This allows the affirmative to shift their position during the debate in response to a negative attack.
  + They may squirrel. Squirreling is unfairly interpreting the resolution just to make the debate awkward for their opponents. For example, they could state that ‘Teachers should have the right to strike’ means ‘Teachers should be allowed to administer corporal punishment.’’
  + They may define a term too narrowly. For example, with the resolution ‘Cartoons are detrimental to society’ they might define cartoons as only “animated films”, while you and your colleague might wish to refer to the positive contributions of political cartoons in newspapers.

**When to challenge a definition:**

* Challenges must be made before the end of the first negative speech.

**Procedure in Challenging a Definition:**

* Restate the affirmative’s definition. Explain which parts you disagree with. Explain why (unclear, too narrow etc.)
* Explain how the debate will be affected by accepting this wrong definition. Propose your own definition.
* Support this on the basis of authority and/or common usage. Explain how the debate will work better with your definition.
* Restate a full definition of the whole resolution acceptable to your team.

**Qualities Judges Look For:**

1. Presentation is Vital:
   1. Debaters should speak clearly, expressively and avoid reading their speeches. They should vary their volume, pace and tone and use pauses for emphasis. They should appear confident and dignified. They should stand well (minus slouching and hands in pockets!) and use appropriate gestures. Speaking is like acting; the debater must control the audience.
2. Strong Definitions:
   1. The definition of the terms of the resolution can govern the whole course of the debate so one must be given and it should be persuasive, fixed in the context of the resolution (not just a dictionary definition), and consistent with the team’s case.
3. Research:
   1. Some debate topics cannot be researched, e.g. “A bath is better than a shower.” However, most debate topics can, and judges will expect thorough preparation.
      1. E.g. for a policy debate on refugees, judges would expect debaters to make reference to statistics of recent numbers of refugees, to websites, books articles on the subject, even to interviews of politicians and human right advocates. Debaters should be able to supply the source of their material. Quotes, examples and statistics make your argument convincing.
4. Analysis:
   1. Debaters should get to the heart of an issue and demonstrate critical thinking. A really strong debater will make members of the audience think “Wow, I never thought of that point!”
5. Organization:
   1. The debaters’ arguments should flow in an organized, logical way, without contradiction or repetition. Judges will mark not only speakers as individuals but also the way the team as a whole organizes its material to make a mutually complementary argument. Speeches should interlock, yet not overlap. Not only should the speeches be organized, but the debaters should make this very obvious to the audience. Remember the old advice: tell them what you’re going to say, tell them, then tell them what you have told them.
6. A Strong Conclusion:
   1. Debaters should close with an emphatic, dynamic summarization and reinforcement of their arguments.
7. Rebuttal:
   1. Debaters should note down all the arguments made in their opponents’ speeches and try to rebut each one. Debaters should demonstrate why arguments are wrong and inadequate. Rebuttal can make reference to obvious omissions in their opponents’ case too.
8. Cross Examination Questions and Answers:
   1. Debaters should try to concoct leading questions whose implications are damaging to the witnesses’ case. Skillful questions challenge weak facts, point out errors in logic and cast doubt on unsupported conclusions. Questions do not have to be asked only on material presented; good questions often highlight omissions.

**How to Give a Debate Speech:**

**1st Affirmative:**

* All speeches should begin with *“Honorable judges, worthy opponents* (& if there are any audience members), *and welcome guests.”* Next the 1st Affirmative should say something like
  + *“The resolution that stands before us today is of crucial importance because it questions the very nature of our society”* (or our education system, legal system etc, depending on the resolution). *“Before giving my constructive speech, I would first like to define the resolution.”* The terms should be defined, then the 1st Affirmative should say *“The points I will be presenting today in support of the affirmative deep conviction in the truth of the resolution are”* (outline points). *“My partner will expand on my contentions and present the following points for you considerations”* (outline partner’s points). *“I will now commence my constructive speech”.*
* Give two or three points and examples.
* If you have time, you can conclude by summarizing what you have said. If not, say something rousing. E.g. *“Ladies and Gentlemen, we hope you believe as we do, that this resolution MUST STAND.”* Then (depending on the type of debate it is) finish with *“I now stand open for cross examination.”* Remain standing, waiting to be cross examined.

**1st Negative**

* After the opening welcome, the 1st Negative should say *“Before commencing my constructive speech, I would first like to rebut a few of the more obvious fallacies in my opponent’s case.”* The 1st Negative should then argue against key points the 1st Affirmative made in his or her speech and cross examine. After rebutting for one to two minutes (the longer the better), the Negative should redefine the resolution if necessary - if it affects the Negative’s arguments in a harmful way if the Affirmative’s definition is accepted. Don’t redefine just for the sake of it. The 1st Negative then proceeds as the 1st Affirmative did.

**2nd Affirmative and 2nd Negative**

* Welcome
* Restate resolution (not mandatory)
* Rebuttal
* Statement of the organization of points
* Points
* Can restate points made in conclusion by the whole team
* Cross Examination

**Summary Speeches**

* Sum up the key points of disagreement with the opposing team.
* Sum up your team's key points.
* Cross the floor and shakes hands with your opponents.

**A Few Points on Rebuttal:**

* Always be polite. Smile. Winners are dignified.
* Don’t dwell on small points; e.g., “Actually, it was $13, 336.06 not $13, 336.08” will just be regarded as time wasting.
* Be prepared. Brainstorm all likely arguments from the other team. Consider the resolution from a variety of viewpoints e.g. how would it look if you were a single parent, or of a different sexual orientation? (etc). Have you looked at the resolution from social, political, economic, religious, military and moral points of view? (Of course, don’t use your rebuttal points unless your opponents raise the argument!) Decide what you will admit and what you will deny, e.g. “We admit that the scheme has worked well in Australia, but maintain that it has failed in the United Kingdom, whose economy is more like ours.”
* Be organized. You can use the other side’s order, e.g. “the affirmative suggested their plan, and three points. However, #1 is not feasible because……”
* Illustrate your grasp and close memories of the affirmative’s case. Your rebuttal should begin with a summary of your opponent’s main arguments. Quote key points accurately before exposing its flaw. Obviously you can only do this by making accurate notes while the other debaters are speaking.
* State what you agree with. You don’t have to disagree with everything. Agreeing with much of what your opponent has said but disagreeing with a key point is often effective.
* It is useful to quote a reliable source against an opposition’s arguments.
* Attack opponents for such things as:
  + Using sweeping generalizations without proof
  + Using isolated cases as if they were general rules
  + Exaggerating something’s importance to bolster a weak case
  + Use of contradiction (within a speech or between partners)
  + Irrelevance
  + Misquoting or inaccuracy of any kind
  + False analogies
* Don’t spend too much time attacking small errors in your opponents’ case. Strike at their main issues. When you chop down a tree, the branches go with it; when the main arguments fall, the little ones go with them. Don’t spend all your refutation time clipping off the branches; go for the trunk!

**Brief for the Negative:**

*Be It Resolved That: Examinations in high schools should be abolished.*

**Introduction:**

1. Because examinations have played an important part in our secondary educational system ever since its inception, and because the abolition of examinations would probably make a radical change in our entire school life, this question concerns everyone interested in secondary education.
2. The question of the abolition of examinations has always been a source of contention.
   1. Even students in medieval universities (where examinations originated) questioned the value of examinations.
   2. Many progressive schools have abolished examinations.
   3. In recent years, educators have investigated the accuracy of examinations as measuring instruments and have found wide variations in the marks which different teachers give to the same answer paper.
3. We define examinations as major tests at the end of a course, worth a considerable portion (or all) of a student’s mark.
4. The points at issue are:
   1. Do examinations aid in the accurate measurement of progress?
   2. Do examinations motivate study?
   3. Do examinations prepare for college and later life?

**Brief Proper:**

*Examinations in high school should not be abolished.*

1. Examinations aid in the accurate measurement of progress, because
   1. Examinations measure for the instructor and student the increase in knowledge made since previous examinations.
   2. Examinations indicate the student’s increased ability to apply and adapt new information learned.
   3. Examinations put the entire student body on an equal footing, because
      1. All students are given the same questions.
      2. All students are given the same length of time (except for those with an Individual Education Plan).
      3. Shy students do not need to talk to the class.
      4. Although teachers vary somewhat in the marking of an essay answer, there is no such variation in the marking of a short-answer test.
2. Examinations motivate study, because
   1. They furnish a goal toward which every student must strive in order to pass.
   2. They stimulate a spirit of competition.
   3. A student will study harder and more thoroughly when she/he knows that a day of reckoning is approaching.
3. Examinations prepare for college and later life, because
   1. Many colleges require entrants to pass examinations.
   2. To succeed at college, students must be able to pass examinations.
   3. Ability to pass examinations helps young people to enter professions, secure positions, and win promotions, because
   4. To engage in such a profession as medicine, law, the civil service, teaching, or nursing, entrants must pass a lengthy, difficult examination.
   5. In the civil service, teaching, banking, and other vocations, promotion is often dependent on the passing of competitive examinations.
   6. Passing examinations gives students confidence in facing a difficult job.

**Conclusion:**

* Since examinations in high school aid in the accurate measurement of progress, since examinations motivate study, and since examinations prepare for college and later life, high school examination should not be abolished.

**Providing Vivid Examples:**

* Most members of an audience cannot absorb much information at a single hearing. Usually, if you cannot restate your message in 3-4 sentences after reviewing your speech, you are including too much material.
* It is usually best to work out 3 or 4 major ideas and then elaborate on these by giving example, using such devices as analogies, statistics, anecdotes etc.

**A Few Tips About Providing Examples:**

* Be vivid. Appeal to the senses. The Chairman of the Board for Ontario Hydro described the safety of his company’s nuclear plants like this:
  + You could sit naked, if you had a mind to, the boundary fence around the nuclear station for a year, drink the water, and eat the fish from nearby Lake Ontario, and you would pick up a total of five units of radiation. A single chest x-ray would give you eight times that exposure.
* Hone large ideas and concepts down to smaller, easy to grasp specific examples. For example, here is how one speaker used a glass of milk to describe the nation’s free enterprise system:
  + One farmer bred and raised a cow. Another farmer owned and tended the land it grazed on. He bought special feed from another person. Yet another farmer milked the cow and sold the milk to someone else, who processed it, pasteurized it, and packaged it. He sold it to a wholesaler, who sold it to a retailer. All along the line, the product was either made better or its distribution was simplified and narrowed. And the process provided a lot of people with jobs. Wealth was created.
* Statistics by themselves do not provide vivid examples! Statistics take hold when comparisons give them significance. For example, the statement that the United States spent forty-four billion dollars during World War One is fairly meaningless to most people now. However, the explanation that this sum exceeded by a half the total government expenditure in the preceding hundred and twenty eight years gives the statistic more significance.
* Try to use examples which are suited to the interests and experiences of your listeners; when debating a national issue, find out how the issue specifically relates to your region.

**Cross Examination Advice:**

* Ask leading questions that imply the answer you want. For example, in a debate where you are trying to prove that increased policing of Canada is not necessary, instead of asking “Has the rate of violent crime increased or decreased since 2016?” ask “Violent crime has decreased since 2014, hasn’t it?”
* Ask factual questions that lead to the admissions you want; these have to be prepared in advance, of course. E.g. “According to *Time Magazine*, June 24, 2017, there were only 14 violent crimes per thousand in 1982; does this agree with your own calculations?” Next question, “This suggests a decline in serious crime then, doesn’t it?”
* Don’t argue with the witness, contradict him or her later in rebuttal. Never be rude either; be extremely polite and dazzle with your smile.
* Use the admissions in the next speech.
* Don’t repeat the witness’s answers.
* Questions need not only be on material presented, they can draw attention to omission in the other team’s case; e.g. “Are you familiar with the recommendations of the McDonald Report, which you have so far not mentioned?”
* Good questions challenge weak facts, point out errors in logic, and cast doubt on unsupported evidence.
* Only ask questions. Don’t make speeches

**Rules for Cross Examination:**

* Cross ex requires the usual duties of a debater, plus answering and asking questions. The questioner is called the “examiner,” the answerer the “witness”.
* The resolution may take the form of a question. In this case, the affirmative team supports an affirmative (yes) answer to the question.
* Debaters refer to the moderator as Mr or Madame Moderator, but may call each other by name. Usually, however, a debater would call their partner their colleague and other debaters by their role in the debate, such as “First affirmative.”
* The examiner controls the cross ex (not the witness). He/she may ask the moderator to intervene if the witness stalls or answers at unnecessary length.
* The only question a witness may ask is for a confusing question to be clarified.
* The examiner should ask fair, relevant questions but they need not be directly related to the speech just delivered by the witness.
* Witnesses must try to answer all questions directly and honestly. They cannot object to answering questions on the grounds of irrelevance. (Truly irrelevant questions will be penalized by the judges, but must be answered)
* During cross ex, examiners may only ask questions. Judges evaluate examiners solely on their ability to draw out admissions from witnesses and must disregard any argument or evidence introduced by an examiner during a cross-ex period.
* No heckling is permitted.
* At the conclusion of each debate the moderator will give each debater an opportunity to point out any infractions of debate rules or misrepresentation of her/his position by her/his opponent. The accused debater should be given an opportunity to defend himself.
* As in debating or any type of public speaking, presentation is extremely important. Speak clearly; give every vowel and consonant its full value. Make sure you round off the end of every word. Speak more slowly than you would in conversation. Vary your tone; lay particular emphasis on important words. Pause slightly after each clause and more significantly after each sentence.

**Affirmative Strategies:**

* In policy debates where the affirmative team must present a plan of action, many strategies may be used.

**The Traditional Need/Plan/Benefit Case/Method of Presentation**

* The affirmative debater defines the resolution.
* States the need for change.
  + emphasizes that problems exist.
  + shows that these problems are inherent in the present system.
  + shows that these problems are sufficiently widespread to cause concern.
  + shows that the consequences create serious social, political and/or economic harms. states the affirmative plan, including costs, steps in the implementation plan etc.
* proves that the affirmative plan will solve the problems.
* presents the demonstrable benefits of the plan.

**The Comparative Advantage Case**

* Sometimes affirmative teams are faced with a resolution about an issue that does not present a pressing need for change. In the Comparative Advantage Case the affirmative argues that there are no major problems with the present system but that adoption of the affirmative plan will provide further benefits not currently available.

Method of Presentation:

1. Define the resolution.
2. Define the affirmative plan.
3. List the plan’s advantages.
   1. Prove the advantages are desirable and significant.
   2. Prove that the present system cannot provide the advantages.
   3. Prove the affirmative plan can provide the advantages

Strategy Explanation:

* You must state the plan first, or you will find it difficult to state the benefits. Two or three advantages should be stated and shown to be important and widespread. The first speaker must present the plan and probably the advantages too. The second speaker might have to spend much of her/his time on rebuttal and only able to briefly review the affirmative case.

**The Goals Case:**

“If there is agreement on certain goals and values, one can argue rationally about the means by which these objectives may be attained.” -Albert Einstein.

* Another affirmative strategy that does not rely on showing strong need for change is the goals case. The affirmative state that they agree with the present goals of the system but say that the current *means* used to try and attain the goals are unsuccessful. The affirmative then shows that its proposed means would achieve the goals.

Method of Presentation:

* Define the resolution.
* State the goals of the present system and express agreement with them.
* Prove the present system cannot meet its goals and that its failure is significant and widespread.
* State the affirmative plan.
* Prove the affirmative plan can achieve its goals

Strategy Explanation:

* The first affirmative speaker should state the goals of the present system and show that the system is incapable of meeting them. He/she should prove the failure is significant and undesirable. The second affirmative speaker should refute the negative’s arguments, state the affirmative plan and prove that this plan can meet the goals.

**Negative Strategies:**

**Negative Defenses Against Various Affirmative Strategies:**

* In defending the traditional needs case, the first negative speaker denies the need for change argues by the affirmative. The second negative challenges the plan put forward by the affirmative and denies that the benefits mentioned will occur.
* In a comparative advantage case, the negative argues that the affirmative’s plan will not lead to an improvement over the present system.
* With the goals case, the negative can challenge whether the affirmative really are presenting a goals case. The negative can also say that the goals the affirmative presents are not those of the present system. They can also challenge the affirmative’s contention that the system does not meet its goals.

**Negative Strategies for Policy Debates:**

* Six standard reasons for rejecting a proposition of policy.
* The negative should demonstrate that:
  + The affirmative is incapable of justifying every part of the proposition.
  + The affirmative case has no desirable benefits.
  + The affirmative benefits are insignificant.
  + The present system can do what the affirmative proposes.
  + The affirmative plan is not practically workable.
  + The disadvantages of the affirmative plan outweigh its advantages or benefits.

**Denial of the Need for Change Strategy:**

* The negative argues there is no need for change, and that the present system is capable of doing what the affirmative plan is trying to accomplish. All six of the above reasons can be used.
* The first negative speaker challenges the first affirmative’s arguments about the need for change. The second negative summarizes her/his partner’s denial and shows that the affirmative plan is incapable of improving upon the present system.

**Minor Repairs Strategy:**

* In this strategy the negative accepts that there is a need for change because there are problems in the present system. However, it argues that the system is not inherently bad and just needs minor repairs, e.g. better communication between people in the system, improved book - keeping, etc.
* The negative can use 1-3 and 5 and 6 of the standard techniques.
* The first negative admits there are minor problems but shows the current system is not inherently bad and will work better with minor repairs. He/she then outlines the repairs. The second negative explains the repairs and the benefits. She/he argues significant benefits may be achieved without the substantial changes outlined by the affirmative.

**The Counterplan Strategy:**

* This approach can be adopted when the negative feels:
  + The present system is so without merit it cannot be defended - even minor repairs would not help.
  + That a traditional approach against the affirmative won’t work - surprise is needed.

Drawback:

* The ‘burden of proof,’ normally the affirmative’s burden, becomes the responsibility of the negative too.

Method of Presentation:

* State there is a need for change but the affirmative’s plan is inadequate.
* State their plan is significantly superior and outline the plan.
* Prove their plan is significantly better than either the present system or affirmative plan both in its feasibility and its benefits.

**Developing a Confident Speaking Manner:**

* Research your subject thoroughly. You’ll feel much more confident if you know what you’re talking about.
* Write or type clear notes. Well prepared notes build confidence; you know you cannot lose the thread of your argument.
* Rehearse your speech at least four times. Try to rehearse in front of a family member or friend and also into a tape recorder. Make your final practice in front of a mirror/ and practice the gestures you intend to make to emphasize key words. Practice brings confidence; nothing is as worrying as a leap in the dark, but if both your speech and manner of speaking it are known territory, you will be okay! Practice should be spread out over several days. You’ll be more confident if you spend half an hour for six days, rather than cramming in three hours practice the day before.
* Get a good night’s sleep the evening before you give your speech.

**On the Day:**

* Rehearse one last time, as close to the time you are to speak as possible, to re-freshen the material in your mind.
* While waiting your turn to speak, try to devote your full attention to other speakers preceding you. You are thoroughly prepared and need not, for the moment, think further about what you are going to say.
* Be firm with yourself as you wait to speak; do not permit yourself to dwell on thoughts of failure.
* Breathe deeply; thorough oxygenation of the blood has a powerful calming effect on the mind.
* When called to speak, assume an appearance of confidence even if you don’t feel it. Stand up straight, shoulders back, head up, smile! Debaters often don’t smile, so this will take both judges and opponents off guard. If you are feeling unsure, pretend to feel confident and after a while you will even fool yourself and begin to feel genuinely confident.
* As in debating or any type of public speaking, presentation is extremely important. Speak clearly; give every vowel and consonant its full value. Make sure you round off the end of every word. Speak more slowly than you would in conversation. Vary your tone; lay particular emphasis on important words. Pause slightly after each clause and more significantly after each sentence.