Tournament Introduction Package

The McGill Debating Union (MDU) is excited to have you for our first online highschool tournament!

The MDU is one of the oldest debate clubs in Canada and we have a pool of accomplished debaters who are looking forward to judging and providing feedback at this tournament. We will be offering:

- A series of workshops
- 4 rounds of impromptu BP debate
- Semi-finals, Junior-finals, and a Grand Finals.

Keep reading for additional contact information, a detailed schedule, and an introduction to british parliamentary (BP) debate. Additional information will be released in the coming weeks.

Contact Information

Tournament Directors	
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Schedule

Saturday, August 15th, 2020

9:00-9:45	Workshop Slot 1*
9:45-10:00	break
10:00-10:45	Workshop Slot 2*
10:45-11:00	break
11:00-11:45	Workshop Slot 3*
11:45am-12:45	Registration
12:45-1:15	Lunch/briefings
1:15-1:30	Judge slotting

1:30-3:00	Round 1
3:00-3:15	Judge slotting
3:15-4:45	Round 2

* Workshop topics will be confirmed in the coming weeks. There is a possibility of more than one workshop occurring in each time slot to give people choices in what they attend.

Sunday, August 16, 2020

8:00-9:00	Registration
9:00-9:15	Judge Slotting
9:15-10:45	Round 3
10:45-11:00	Judge Slotting
11:00-12:30	Round 4
12:30-1:130	Lunch
1:30-1:45	Break announcement
1:45-3:15	Junior Finals
1:45-3:15	Semi-Finals
3:15-4:45	Finals
4:45-5:00	Awards

Style Guide

Basics of British Parliamentary Style

British Parliamentary debate emphasizes both depth of argumentation and speaking style. The best BP debates are dynamic and engaging, and feature a clash of major principles grounded in, but not dominated by, real-world examples.

In the BP style, Adjudication Core selects a different topic for each round of debate, by convention worded in the form of a parliamentary motion and beginning with "This house would..." or "This house believes that..."

Debaters are advised of the motion and their positions in the debate 15 minutes before the start of that round and have this time to prepare their case. There are two teams of two people each on the proposition (also known as the government) side, and two teams on the opposition side.

A BP debate is divided into 2 halves: the front half, featuring the 1st (or Opening) Proposition and 1st Opposition teams, and the back half, with the 2nd (or Closing) Proposition and 2nd Opposition teams. The debate alternates between speakers from each side, starting with the Prime Minister from 1st Proposition and ending with the Opposition Whip from 2nd Opposition. Each speaker has **five** minutes of speaking time, with a fifteen second grace period. Broadly speaking, front half teams lay out the terms of the debate and present the bulk of the arguments, and back half teams deepen the debate with new argumentation and summarize the round. Each team prepares independently; it is not in your interest to share information or strategy with any other teams in the round, even teams on the same side of a motion.

At the end of a debate, judges rank the teams from 1st to 4th and also assign individual scores to the speakers. To win a BP debate, a team needs to be the most persuasive and relevant in the round, present the best argumentation and effectively deal with the arguments of the opposing side. While teams on the same side of the motion are arguing for the same resolution, it is important to note that they are also competing against one another for position, and while they cannot contradict each other, they must have unique stances and arguments in the round, and should not prepare together or share any information.

Speakers and Roles

This section outlines general expectations for speakers. Unless explicitly stated, these expectations are not hard and fast rules, merely useful guidelines based on what tends to make for good debates. Judges should look at the whole context of a round and remember that there is no automatic win or loss.

Front Half

Prime Minister

As the first speaker in the round, the Prime Minister has the opportunity to shape the form of the debate to come and has the responsibility to set up a debate that is clear and fair. The PM must do two things: introduce the “model” for the debate and give most of the arguments for 1st Proposition. What is a model? It's helpful to think of a model as answering basic questions about the round: who, what, where, when, and how? (The why is the rest of the debate). Models make the debate more specific and are essential for a clear and good round. For a motion like "THW allow assisted suicide," the model should specify where the debate is taking place (Canada? The U.S.? All Western liberal democracies?) and what the system for assisted suicide will be like. Without a model, debates end up being confusing and tend to get bogged down in questions that can no longer be answered after 1st Proposition has given up the opportunity to answer them.

Sometimes there are potential problems in the case that can make it unwinnable, so you should deal with those in the model too. In the assisted suicide example, you can't win the case if doctors can simply kill patients at will--thus, the model must include a way of ensuring that patients are the ones in charge of the decision. The model can't be "tight," however, meaning that it must allow room for opposition arguments, and it should be within the spirit of the motion and should not seek to avoid major parts of the debate. The purpose of a model is to make for a better debate, not to trick the opposition.

Some resolutions will answer some of the questions normally addressed by a model. Others will not require much of a model (“This house believes that vegetarianism is the only moral choice”). Use your judgment, but always make sure the debate is clear.

After briefly (briefly!) presenting the model, you should present and explain (on average) two to three arguments for the case. In coming up with arguments, make sure you understand the goals of the case you're presenting. Think about who the case affects and what the major principles involved are, then develop those into arguments that deal with the most important issues. Examples are useful, but they're not arguments in and of themselves, just supporting material. It's also important to link your argument back to the case—that is, to explain why the argument proves the case you're presenting. When choosing the arguments you're going to present, go for quality over quantity: a couple strong arguments that discuss the big issues are always better than a heap of small, tangential arguments.

The Leader of the Opposition

The role of the LO is to introduce Opposition's case by laying out the “stance” the team will take, presenting a couple of arguments for Opposition, and refuting the arguments made by the PM. It is not enough, as Opposition, to simply be against Proposition--you also have to stand for something in the round. Oftentimes, Opposition teams are in favor of the status quo, but they can stand for something else as well, as long as it's within the spirit of your side of the motion.
Debates are better when there's a clear division between the principles that each side supports, and you'll get more mileage out of having a more distinct, but harder to defend stance than out of one that's principally the same and differs only on a minor point: better to say that assisted suicide is never okay than to say that it's okay in a more limited set of circumstances than those that proposition allows. Just don't go so far that your position ends up being indefensible. Outline your stance at the beginning of your speech so it's clear what your team is defending. Also, if the Prime Minister's model is unfair or overly vague, mention that very briefly at the start as well.

Just like the PM, the LO must give two to three substantive arguments for their case. You also have to refute the arguments given by the PM, meaning you must attempt to defeat the other side's arguments. Refutation is as important to winning a round as constructive argumentation is—debate is about knocking down the other side's arguments in addition to making your own. There are many ways to do refutation, including dealing with any untrue assertions or misleading examples, pointing out when logical connections are missing in an argument or when the argument fails to prove the case, explaining the problems with the other side's plan or

its goals, and so on. When listening to an opponent's speech, write down what they say and note any problems that you have with it, and use that in your rebuttal.

The Deputy Prime Minister

As the Deputy Prime Minister, you should clarify any issues with the model that Opposition might have brought up. You may, but aren't obligated to, bring in a new argument for your side.

As this is the first and last chance for your team to respond to Opposition, refutation is crucial in this speech, and you should deal effectively with all the substantive arguments given by the LO.

You also have to defend your partner's arguments from the criticisms made by the LO by explaining why the arguments still stand, which is known as reconstruction. It is your job to add any new analysis needed to rebuild the PM's arguments: for example, explaining an argument in a different way, talking about problems with the refutation, providing any missing logical links in an argument, adding new examples, etc.
Finally, the DPM often provides a short summary of what has happened in the round, with an emphasis on how your team comes out ahead.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition

The DLO does much of the same things that the DPM does. You can bring in a new argument for your side, but the bulk of your constructive arguments should have come out in the LO. As in the DPM speech, it's also necessary to refute the other side's arguments, especially the new ones or those that might have been missed, and the ones that are still standing strong in the round. You must work to rebuild the arguments made by your partner so that they carry into the next half of the debate, and again, you can summarize the front half of the round.

Back Half

Member of Government

The Member of Government should present an extension, which is some sort of material new to the round, and refute arguments made by the DLO. Similar to the first speeches from the front half teams, the aim of the extension speech is to stake out a relevant, compelling and distinct position in the debate. This will sometimes be challenging since the team “up the table” from you (i.e. 1st Proposition if you are 2nd Proposition) has every opportunity to present an overwhelming amount of material– “burning the turf” – leaving you with little to work with. The key to a good extension is adapting your prepared material to the context of the round, jettisoning points that are no longer appropriate and generating new ones if necessary.

An extension can take a number of forms. The most straightforward is a new argument that has yet to be discussed in the round. Be careful, however, to avoid trivial or tangential points that add little substantive matter to your side. Your argument should matter in the context of the round. Another type of extension focus on a case study and involves an in-depth analysis of a particular example and its application to the round. An extension can also be built on an

argument already presented in the round. This is a difficult task, since you must clearly delineate your material from the front half. Rather than simply restating your arguments, you should add depth to an area that has not been sufficiently explored. In general, debaters should make every effort to “flag” their new material.

While extension speeches must clearly add new material to the debate, they can do so through refutation. An extension speech can have a relatively short new argument, but substantive refutation that has yet to be heard to points brought up by the opposing side. In evaluating the new material that back half teams bring to the round, refutation often plays an important role. As the Member of Government, you have to spend time refuting the second speaker on 1st Opposition and any arguments from the first speaker that are still standing.

Member of Opposition

The MO speech is very similar to the MG speech. You must present an extension that includes material new to the round, and you must refute the extension given by the MG. If you have difficulty coming up with an extension as the MO, one possible strategy is making the extension the direct opposite of the previous speaker's extension, which ensures that there is a great deal of clash between your sides. However, you can't necessarily rely on the other side to come up with an extension that yields well to that tactic. Either way, it is essential to clearly address and counter the extension presented by 2nd Proposition.

Government Whip

The whip speaker's primary responsibility is to summarize why your team has won the round by analyzing the major issues and principles that have been brought up. While this speech is often described as a “summary” speech, you should not just passively summarize what's happened in the round. Rather, you want to actively add new analysis on what you decide are the most important issues in the debate, explain why your partner's extension gave the best arguments in the round, and refute the opposition's arguments (or explain why they've already been dealt with). A good whip speaker understands what it takes to win the round, and emphasizes where you're already winning, while making up lost ground on the issues you're losing.

There are a number of ways this speech can be organized. The most common approach is to look at the round through the lens of two or three major themes or questions. Alternatively, the whip speaker may summarize the round on a team-by-team or front half/back half basis. Regardless of which method you choose, the speech should touch upon the most important arguments in the round, attack what the other side had to say, and rebuild your partner’s extension. Involving the extension in your whip speech is very important--if you spend your entire speech discussing 1st Proposition's arguments, for instance, you give the judges the impression that their arguments were the most important ones in the round, rather than yours. Remember that you are competing against them, and you want the judges to consider your arguments the best ones. Although it is generally not advisable, and not common practice, the government whip speaker may also introduce new constructive material.

The government whip has the burden of being the only government speaker with a chance to refute the opposition extension. This may be done explicitly at the start of the speech, or incorporated into the themes/questions. Either way, try to be clear what material from the other side you are addressing so that your judges give you full credit.

Opposition Whip

As the Opposition Whip, you present your own version of the round. While analysis and refutation are a part of any good whip speech, and some of that will touch on what the Government Whip said, you shouldn't try to rebut the previous speaker's themes. Rather, refutation and reconstruction should be built into whatever structure you choose for the speech. Again, don't forget the importance of your partner's extension. Finally, as there is no chance for other teams to respond, the Opposition Whip cannot add any new arguments to the debate—you should be presenting more analysis, but you can't pull out a new argument that doesn't relate to what's already been talked about. The whip speech should always feel like it's a part of the debate that's been happening, and the extension and whip speakers should act like a coherent team.

Points of Information

Points of information (POIs) are an opportunity for people on the opposing side of a debate to challenge a debater to deal with a particular issue or question during the middle four minutes of their speech, i.e. not during the first or last 30 seconds (protected time). POIs do not have to take the form of a question and they should last no more than ten seconds in duration.

POIs are required at this tournament, and debaters should try offer them throughout the debate. Speakers can decline POIs; however, all speakers are expected to take a minimum of one POI during their speech, and should be penalized for failing to do so.

Points of clarification may be offered during the Prime Minister's speech, in order to clarify any questions opposition teams might have about the model. Points of clarification should be announced as such by the person giving them, and it is considered bad form for the PM not to accept them. Neither POIs nor POCs can be offered by teams on the same side of a debate (ie, 2nd proposition cannot offer them to 1st proposition, or vice versa).

Structure and Style

It's important that all debaters, regardless of their position, strive to make the structure of their speeches clear and straightforward. There's no “right” way to structure a speech so long as the structure makes sense and is easy to follow—putting the model last in a PM speech isn't bad because you need a particular structure, but rather, because it means it's not clear what you're debating about until the end of your speech. In general, it's best to explain each of your arguments separately and make sure the transitions between your arguments are clear,

because otherwise it's hard to follow the logic of each argument. Similarly, it's a good idea to separate your constructive argumentation from your refutation, or to point out very clearly where you're mixing and matching.

Speaking style, like structure, is a way to present your arguments more effectively. Style includes a lot of things: how you use body language and hand gestures, where you choose to alternate the pitch, rhythm, volume, or speed of your voice, whether you use casual or formal language, or humour, and more—this is nowhere near an exhaustive list. Style is a means by which debaters try to emphasize the important parts of their speeches and convey their arguments in the most persuasive and engaging way possible. If your argument is logical and coherent, but you sound like you don't believe it, you're not likely to win over your judges, so pay attention to your presentation.