

The British Parliamentary Format

A Resource Module on BP Debating from the UP DEBATE SOCIETY

Original Module By: Sir Martin Cortez, Carl Ng

Current Version Edited By: Sabrina-Laya Gacad, Melissa Sayoc

When debating is done in a competition, a format with a system of rules and procedures are needed. Among such formats is the British Parliamentary (BP) format, which is used in the National Debate Championships and the World Universities Debating Championships. BP is based on the actual protocols used by British parliamentarians debating on a motion in the House of Commons and House of Lords.

There are two sides in a BP debate: the Government and the Opposition, representing the two sides in parliament. Each side is composed of two teams: the first team is called the Opening and the other the Closing. Having two teams on each side reflects a common situation where the dominant party in the Government or Opposition has a coalition with a smaller party in parliament, which serves as its junior partner. Their coalition presumes that both parties are on the same side, but because they are different from each other (in ideology, supporters, etc.) they may have different reasons for supporting or opposing a parliamentary motion. However, even if they have different reasons, they (the reasons) **MUST BE** consistent with each other.

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ROLES OF TEAMS AND SPEAKERS

In a BP debate, each team (and each speaker) has a distinctive **role**, which they are expected perform in the course of the debate. Note that all speakers are given 7 minutes to deliver their speeches and are encouraged to use up all this time. A grace period up to 20 seconds after the seventh minute is given for a speaker to wrap up his speech.

Prime Minister (PM)

The Prime Minister is tasked to do five general things in a BP debate:

Setup. The PM must provide a valid definition of the motion (according to the rules discussed in the prior module). This includes the elaboration of terms or the concretizing of the theme of the motion. If needed, the PM must be able to contextualize the motion to a certain issue to provide direction and focus to the debate. At the end of the PM speech setup, he/she must be able to provide the Question of the Debate, which his/her team's case and arguments must answer. This process should not take up a chunk of the speech sizable enough to limit the thorough explanation of arguments. At times, if the proposal needs to be extremely detailed and the arguments can be explained by merely referring to the (conscientiously explained) setup, the PM may choose to deliver the setup for at least half the time of the speech. However, in general cases, a two-minute setup is most preferable since it gives due emphasis to the thorough explanation of a case.

Team Strategy. After setting-up the debate, the PM must then introduce the constructive material (or simply, the case) of the Opening Government. He/she can do this either by providing the overall theme for the arguments of the Opening Government or simply providing a breakdown of their arguments. It is advised to provide a theme because it shows team cohesion, which is vital in assessing the arguments of the Opening Teams. After providing a theme, discuss the team split (or the division of cases). Be reminded that the arguments in a split must be exclusive to each other or they must **NOT BE DEPENDENT** on each other.

Case Outline. After providing the team strategy, the PM must proceed to how he or she would discuss the arguments. This involves the outlining his or her arguments by providing the banner or title statement of each. Sometimes, if the arguments need premises, he or she can build it at this point. Premises are the accumulation of facts or generally accepted notions that are needed to be proven (or stated, if the

premise is a fact) before arguments can stand. They must serve as the foundations of your case and not as clearly delineated arguments (ex. the nature of elections, the political situation in Afghanistan). The Team Strategy and Case Outline should be brief (preferably, less than a minute) since they are simply introductions (or signposts) and not the bulk of the speech.

PM Case. After providing the case outline, the PM must then argue his/her portion of the split. The rule of thumb is to devote half to two-thirds of the time of the constructive speakers' speeches to building your arguments. Depending on the need to clarify as opposed to rebut, the LO can deliver the Clash for more than a minute. The important thing is that the disagreement between the teams is clear and the House has a general idea of why the Opposition dissented from the Government. In circumstances where there is a little to no need to clarify the issues, it is preferable that the LO deliver the Clash in no more than one minute. This is to emphasize the nature of Formal Debating as an avenue where arguments are judged according to **how well** they are argued. Obviously, the more time you have to explain your arguments, the better. The standard structure for an argument is: Banner/Title, General Analysis, and Illustrative Example. The Banner Statement must be as brief and concise as possible. It has to be worded in a way that immediately tells the adjudicator what your argument is about. It should also have an explicit or at least noticeable link with the theme of your team. In the General Analysis portion of the argument is where you explain the logic and reasoning behind your conclusions. In between logical links, examples or facts can be inserted to make your argument seem more believable and less theoretical. If the debate is contextualized in a certain issue, place or both, the general analysis must also be contextualized. Examples not necessarily within the place parameter may also be used as long as the speaker can explain the **parallelism** of the example to the context being debated. However, the use of too many examples might backfire if it already **replaces** the general explanations. Remember that in a General Analysis, your goal is to provide the LOGIC that explains your reaching a certain conclusion with your arguments. Providing unexplained examples just points out that your argument is lacking in logical development. Lastly, provide an example that can illustrate the WHOLE (or an epitome of the) logic of your argument. This example must be the perfect (or at least best) the best or quintessential realization of the theories, logic or explanations which you discussed.

Generalization. After explaining your argument(s), provide a brief summary that ties together all your arguments. Most effective speakers provide a minute to generalize their arguments. Generalizing **does not mean** merely restating your arguments. One must restate his or her premises and arguments and then show **how you proved your theme** or **side** using them. The PM must then end his or her generalization by introducing the DPM case. As a strategy, provide a statement which defines the arguments your DPM will say **without** specifying exactly what those arguments are.

Leader of the Opposition (LO)

The Leader of the Opposition is tasked to provide six general things:

Clash. If the definition is accepted by the LO, he or she must provide the clash of the Opposition against the Government. To do this, the LO must provide their stand on the Question of the Debate that is contrary to the Government's. If the Question of the Debate is not apparent, the LO must then explain how their side will DIRECTLY OPPOSE the line of argumentation of the Government. At this point, it is advised to provide a clash this way: "We oppose the Government argumentation because ..." The provided reason may be the theme of the Opening Opposition to clearly show how the Opposition entered the debate. This should not be a rebuttal but a general statement of the reason why they dissent against the Government's stand. The LO should clarify things that are left out or under-explained in the PM's definition to clarify and sharpen the issues between the Government and Opposition. This can be done without challenging the definition. However, the LO should be wary of questioning too many aspects in the definition because it might appear as if he or she is avoiding the main issues set forth by the Opening Government. Depending on the need to clarify as opposed to rebut, the LO can deliver the Clash for more than a minute. The important thing is that the disagreement between the teams is clear and the House has a general idea of why the Opposition dissented from the Government. In circumstances where there is a little to no need to clarify the issues, it is preferable that the LO deliver the Clash in no more than one minute.

Definitional Challenge. If ever the LO challenges the definition of the PM, he or she must then say it **outright** and then explain why, using the grounds for definitional challenges (as provided in the earlier module). There must be a clear explanation and proof for this challenge because this will be crucial in determining the winner of the debate. After challenging, the LO must provide a new definition **as if** he or she was the PM, but the LO will then argue **contrary to the motion**. Keep in mind that only the LO can challenge the definition for the Opening Opposition. The entire challenge and the new definition should take no more than two minutes.

Rebuttal. The LO must then identify the arguments of the PM and its flaws then rebut them one by one. He or she can do this using one or more of these methods:

- Show that the argument cannot stand because its premise is not true. Don't just say that they did not provide the premise, but attack and disprove it as well. It's highly advised to conclude this rebuttal by providing a counterexample.
- Show the flaws in the logic of the arguments in order to disprove the conclusions. Provide a counterexample to wrap up your case.
- Show contradictions or inconsistencies in or between arguments if any. These contradictions or inconsistencies might not be blatant but if found, it can negate most if not all of your opponent's arguments. The next thing to do is to show why and how their contradiction is so grave and detrimental to the arguments provided. This is important because the adjudicator may interpret the inconsistency as minor or not vital to the general outlook of the team.
- Show that EVEN IF the argument is true, it does not prove the theme of their team.
- Show that EVEN IF the arguments prove the theme of their team, the theme is not sufficient for them to prove their side.

If the arguments of the preceding speaker can be lumped under one theme or statement, they can be rebutted as one to save time without sacrificing efficiency and coverage. Discretion regarding timing should be subjected to the same mentioned prioritization above. If the definition is rejected and the new definition is completely different from the PM definition, the LO can skip rebutting the PM arguments and move on to his case. However, if there are arguments from the PM that are relevant to the new definition, the LO must still rebut them and do this together with the Set-up task within reasonable amount of time without sacrificing case-building.

Team Strategy, Case Outline, LO Case, Generalization. Same as the PM.

Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) and Deputy Leader of the Opposition (DLO)

The second speakers of both Opening teams are tasked to do five general things:

Constructive Clarification. The Deputies must refresh the Question of the Debate (or the main issue(s) at hand) and how both teams answered this. For the DPM, this can be used to show how the LO was not able to clash with the PM. For the DLO, this can be used to defend the clash of the LO when it is questioned and to prove possible inconsistencies (or "shifts" which will be explained later) between the DPM with the PM. If there is a definitional challenge, the DPM's task is only to defend their definition by rebutting the explanation to the grounds stated by the LO. A "more valid" definition is not the standard of adjudicating definitional challenges unless all the definitions can be arguably invalid.

Refute and Rebut. The second speakers should first provide a defence (refutation) to their first speakers' arguments by rebutting the rebuttals against the arguments of the PM and LO respectively. However, they must be careful not to use their case to rebut the preceding speaker. They must find other counterarguments apart from their case unless the rebuttal was due to a misrepresentation or an overlook of the team-mate's case. If this cannot be prevented, the Deputies can try using other ways of stating their arguments, or can use the rebuttals as a springboard for their arguments. The Deputies may use the rebuttal techniques mentioned under the LO, giving due consideration to any definitional challenges. The DPM should rebut the LO, and the DLO should rebut the DPM. However, the DLO may choose to rebut the PM if he or she thinks that the LO's rebuttals were insufficient, a point from the DPM contradicts the PM's argument or an entirely new level of rebuttal was thought of. If the DLO rebutted the PM

because of a lack of response from the PM, this will be taken as a minus to the team's strategy but the rebuttals are still credited. However, since these rebuttals cannot be responded to sufficiently by the OG, the flaws of the PM only exposed by the DLO can't be fully taken against them.

Case Outline, and Second Speaker Case. Same format as their first speakers.

Generalization. The Deputies must provide individual case summaries and then tie this with their first speakers (by summarizing their arguments) to show team cohesion. This is important because this would be the last time the Opening teams will have a "constructive say" in the debate.

Member of the Government (MG) and Member of the Opposition (MO)

These two speakers are often called the Extension or Elevation speakers. Their main task is to provide a case which can extend the debate by providing new arguments and elevating the debate to a different perspective. An extension or elevation is simply a new case, which employs a new premise, or a new perspective or a new explanation to an insufficiently explained argument from the Opening team. More than that, a good extension or elevation must bring the debate nearest to the heart of the issue by identifying and arguing within what really brought about the motion. This simply means that a winning extension or elevation must be the most important argument or perspective in the debate. It is logical to conclude that the MG and MO under general circumstances cannot equal the broadness of the Opening teams because they have two case speakers. That's why they have to beat the opening team by proving that your arguments are more relevant, deeper or more important than that of the Opening. However, this "comparison" must not be made to besmear the case of the Opening team. To be more detailed, the extension speakers are given six general tasks:

Constructive Clarification. This simply means identifying the arguments and points of contention in the Opening half or among the first five constructive speakers (for the MO). Usually by the time the MG speaks, many things have transpired. Sometimes, the adjudicator might already be confused by the Opening teams. In this regard, it is vital for the extension speakers to determine the issue or issues in the debate so as to show how their extension would enter the debate. If ever there was a definitional challenge, the MG or the MO can choose either of the two (or three for the MO) presented definitions and explain why by discussing the ground/s for the challenge. However, if the MG or MO deems that the two (or three for the MO) definitions are invalid, he or she can challenge the definition of the LO (or of the MG for the MO), the same manner as the LO and provide his or her new definition affirming the motion and arguing for its side (negate the motion for MO). Keep in mind that the MG can challenge the definition if and only if there was a challenge from the LO. In the same line, the MO can only challenge the definition if the LO and MG challenged respectively. Only the extension speakers can challenge the definition for their respective teams.

Rebut the Preceding the Speaker. The MG and MO must then rebut the preceding speaker (or speakers) using the techniques discussed earlier. However, it is of prime importance for the MG to rebut the DLO, and the MO to rebut the MG affirming the aspect of responsiveness in Parliamentary Formats. If the extension speaker chose to rebut the Opening teams too, he or she must do so in the context of "giving way" to their extension/elevation. This usually happens when some of the arguments/statements/assertions by the Opening team(s) pre-rebut or go against the extension of the Closing Team(s). In these cases, it is imperative that the Closing Teams rebut these relevant arguments to show dynamism and comprehensiveness of the extension – two important characteristics of a VALID extension. However, under no circumstances should the Closing Team rebut their Opening Team unless they did not choose to side with their definition and hence, rebut the validity of their definition. The MO can also rebut the MG by showing how the CG case is not a valid extension, which is usually fatal for Closing teams. They can also choose to defend their opening team's arguments if and only if they believe the rebutted Opening team's argument(s) is/are vital for the proof of their own extension. But an overlapping premise or argument between the Opening and Closing team is usually dangerous because it indicated a lack of distinctiveness for the Closing team's elevation or extension from that of the Opening. The timing of this section of the speech must be subjected to the same prioritization as said above.

Introduction to the Extension. This is a very important task for the Members because an accusation of an invalid extension can prove to be fatal for Closing Teams since this is the only time they can contribute constructively in the debate. This introduction includes three tasks. First, the Member must clearly delineate their extension or elevation from the arguments or theme of the Opening teams. Second, the Member must show why their extension or elevation is more relevant or important than the case of the Opening teams. Finally, the Member should outline the arguments of his his extension or elevation. The importance of cases can be measured via the relevance to the prior discussion or the depth of analysis (considering more premises or more critical determinants in the analysis).

Extension Case. The same case-building format as the first four constructive speakers.

Generalization. The main point of this task is to reinforce why the extension is valid and why it stands above the argumentation of the preceding constructive speakers (i.e. show your extension is not just another case but the winning case).

Government Whip (GW) and Opposition Whip (OW)

The Whips for both sides are given three general tasks, discussed below. In performing their tasks, there is one privilege that the GW has over the OW – the GW can provide new matter. This is because even if the GW provides new matter, the OW can still rebut it. As for the OW, there are no speakers after him or her, which makes it unfair to introduce new arguments or matter into the debate. However, new matter for the GW is discouraged because it creates an impression to the adjudicators that the MG was insufficient in providing enough constructive material for their team. This boils down to fulfilment of speaker roles. Among the few exceptions where the GW can introduce new matter is if the MO gave a completely different issue that wasn't broached in the debate before the speaker.

Constructive Clarification. The Whips must first identify what the main issue of the debate is and try to present a perspective in which their extension speaker answered it the best or provided the best explanation regarding issues. It is advisable for the whips to refresh the PM's setup or whatever definition they followed so as to provide relevance in their own speeches. Brevity is important here because the goal of this section of the speech is to establish instant recall and clarification. Prolonging so would only complicate matters further and de-emphasize the extension. However, there are circumstances wherein there is a need for many clarifications – hence, the need to disentangle the loose ends of the debate especially since the Whips are the last speakers of the debate. Barring these circumstances, the Constructive Clarification is preferable under one minute.

Rebut the Opposing Team. The Whips can employ these methods: Point by Point, Issue by Issue or by Team. In Point by Point, the Whip rebuts lists and rebuts each and every argument from every opposing speaker one by one. In Issue by Issue, the Whip first lumps some arguments into issues (advisably, give at least two and at most four issues) and form rebuttals that can thematically (or wholly) rebut these issues of lumped arguments. Lumping arguments into issues can be done by phrases, sentences or questions. Rebutting by Team means identifying the arguments and issues contributed by each team in the debate and then undermining each team in turn. In all methods, the Whips must first state all the points or issues he or she wishes to discuss in the speech and number them either according to importance or time-order or team-order. However in the Issue by Issue method, the Whip must also justify (either before or within the issue) why the issue is relevant by extracting them from the question of the debate. After identifying the points or issues, the Whip must then proceed to rebutting them by employing the methods earlier discussed with the restriction said above about new matter. The bulk of the Whip speech is preferably allocated to Rebutting. At times, rebutting a certain issue or argument entails re-explaining the team's extension – hence, the line between rebutting and rebuilding is blurred.

Rebuild the Extension. This part is meant to further glorify the Whip's extension speaker. Remember that a winning extension must be the most important or the deepest analysed case in the debate. The Whip can choose to do this either by adding fresh analysis or defending against the rebuttals dealt to the extension. However, most of the time, if the identified issues by the Whip are already all-encompassing, he or she can choose to integrate rebuilding with the rebuttal issues so as to reinforce the image that the team's extension was able to handle all the issues in the debate. This can serve as a plus for the team.

However, the purpose of rebuilding at the end of the speech is to leave an impression that the extension case is still left standing and undiminished at the end of the debate. This is because confusion can arise in the mind of the adjudicator due to the many issues discussed in a single seven-minute speech. Usually, to better establish the importance of the extension, the Whip may need to rebuild the Opening Team's case. However, the "added" analysis from the Whip shall be credited to the Closing Team.

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WHAT'S UNIQUE IN THE BP FORMAT: The Extension or Elevation

The job of the Closing teams is to support the Opening teams by following their line of reasoning but by giving a significantly different matter, called an extension or elevation. Making an extension or elevation means supporting the stand of the Opening team by adding a different dimension or perspective to it.

Often, an extension or elevation resembles another split, i.e. proving the case from a different aspect. However, if the Opening team has attempted to cover all aspects (which, in most cases, would mean that they did not go through those aspects in depth), the Closing may choose to pick one of the aspects and explore it in a more detailed manner.

In extending or elevating the case of the Opening, do not dump the Opening's basic reasoning. The Closing team must agree on the case of the Opening. Stabbing your Opening team in the back by disagreeing with them (often called shafting or knifing) should not be done. That is not what coalitions do in a parliament!

Technically, the case might not clash or directly oppose the extension of the other Closing team, just like in the Opening debate. This means that the case of the Closing Opposition is not determined by the case of the Closing Government. It is the rebuttals that must directly clash against the other side's case.

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POINT OF INFORMATION

A Point of Information (POI) is a fifteen-second interjection made by any member of the opposing side while a speaker is delivering his/her speech. There is no standard content for POI's, but due to time constraints, they should be used optimally and strategically to gain an advantage. Asking pertinent questions in the debate, correcting a factual error, or clarifying an argument or a concept presented by the previous speaker generally make good POI's. The main objective of a POI is for a team to hint to the adjudicator that even during the other side's speeches, they have the upper hand.

POI's can only be offered after the first minute and before the last minute of a speech. Take note that the speaker has the prerogative to accept or reject a POI. Once accepted, the speaker must deliver it within the given time frame of fifteen seconds while observing proper etiquette.

Why give POI's?

POI's give an opportunity for the opposing side of the House to keep the audience and adjudicators aware of their presence, ideas and arguments. An important element of the dynamism of the British Parliamentary format, POI's can be used as weapons to undermine and even destroy arguments. They are not meant to turn debates into senseless exchanges of words where interruptions are made for the sake of it. Abuse of POI's is called badgering, highly discouraged and may be penalized.

Offering a POI

Standard protocol says that when offering a POI, you are expected to stand up, hold your left hand out and say, "Point of information, Sir/Ma'am!" Sit down if you are rejected. If the speaker puts your POI on hold, stay silent, hold your gesture and wait until the speaker is ready to receive your POI. Delivering a POI requires strategic timing, because speakers that are particularly sure of the direction they're headed towards will not readily accept a point. Once it is accepted, however, a concise statement is the best way

to deliver it. Remember to:

Be prepared. Think about what you are actually going to say if your POI is accepted. Do not wait until your POI is accepted and only then think about how you would formulate your question. This means that you need to practice quick thinking.

Be patient. Do not ever deliver a POI when your offer is not yet accepted (or has been rejected). There is no way you can force a speaker to accept your POI. If a speaker seems to avoid accepting POIs altogether, let them be, it is their loss. If you find it really imperative that you should say something (for example, if you're being misrepresented) but the speaker keeps on rejecting your POIs, then a brief, witty interjection can probably serve as an alternative (rather than continually badgering the speaker with POI offers).

Follow the dynamics. When your POI is rejected and the speaker moves on to the next point, don't offer a POI about the point that has passed. This shows a serious lack of responsiveness to the debate.

Distribute the workload. You're a team. Don't just depend on a single person to do all of the pointing.

Stay involved. First speakers should take advantage of POI's to stay involved even up to the closing half of the debate. Otherwise, they'll be easily forgotten by the time the members start discussing.

Watch your style. Different people have different styles of delivery. Some people like to virtually barrage opposing speakers with every point that pops into their head. If you decide to do this, be very careful. Taking this too far might constitute badgering, and will therefore cost you points. However, others prefer to just wait and see how a speech develops. This involves letting some weak points go and just using one or two attacking the core of the speech once it has developed.

Delivering the POI

If your offer is accepted, you have 15 seconds at the maximum to deliver your POI. Remember:

Keep it short and to the point: Try making the POI in 5 to 10 seconds. Remember that many speakers like to take a POI and then use the time to check what they will say next while half listening to the person offering the point. Once they know what the next part of their speech is they work out an answer to your point. If your point is short, it doesn't give them enough time and is more likely to catch them. It looks bad if they have to stop to think what to say.

Make a sharp question that demands an answer. Phrase the POI as a question (or end with a question) that requires an elaborative answer. The more difficult the answer, the better. The best POI's are the ones that have no satisfactory answers by the speaker to which it was directed at.

Variations of POI's

Raise a what if question. Ask the speaker to explain how they are going to handle the consequences of their case or proposal should a special case occur. Though the special case may be unlikely, the speaker will most likely try to answer it anyway. This way, you're able to test how good the speaker grasps the issue, and how you might be able to attack it later on.

Show an error of logic. If there's a flaw in the logical reasoning of an argument, show it and demand an explanation on how the argument shall stand with that flaw.

Show lack of relevance. Show that the argument is irrelevant to the case and then ask the speaker to elaborate on the connection between the argument and the case.

Cross examine evidence. Ask the speaker to verify the evidence presented, that is, if it sounds doubtful or is not familiarly known by an average reasonable person. If there's an error in fact, show it and show how the argument fails due to the error, forcing the speaker to defend the argument despite this error of fact.

Clarify. Ask questions to make certain things clearer and more understandable. It'll make yours and your opponent's life easier. If the speaker is deliberately trying to confuse you, then the POI could save you from possibly misrepresenting your opponent's case (which could turn against you during adjudication).

Give a counter-example. Start by questioning the issue raised, then give a counter-example (something that occurred in the real world that disproves your opponent's logic), then demand an explanation for it. The speaker will then have to show that the argument stands despite the counter-example.

Though rebuttal skills are very useful in making good POIs, **POIs do not replace rebuttal.** Although a point has been raised in a POI, it is most likely that the rebuttal speaker (the Whip) will still have to deal with the argument in greater lengths. For example, if a POI has shown a counter-example to an argument, the rebuttal speaker should also explain the logic why such an argument does not stand (because a counter-example is not sufficient as a rebuttal).

When a POI is not answered satisfactorily, do refer to it on the next speech. For example: "My second speaker gave a POI asking for a real world example of the opposing side's argument, but they failed to answer it. This shows that their point was a mere assertion!" If necessary, you can also refer to a POI of your Opening team (in British Parliamentary).

There is another possible use of POIs, that is to ask for clarification from the speaker. When you are really sure that the speaker is being unclear, you may use POIs to ask for clarification. If the speaker is a novice debater who indeed has problems with his/her speech, he/she will be helped by your POI, but keep in mind that a clearer case by your opponent will also make your life easier. If the speaker is deliberately trying to confuse you, then the POI could save you from possibly misrepresenting your opponent's case (which could turn against you during adjudication). However, if you are still asking for clarification while the speaker is actually clear enough (at least to the adjudicators), you run the risk of being perceived as a slow thinker or a bad listener!

Handling a Point of Information

As for the speaker, you have to make the acceptance or rejection of a POI explicit. Do not simply ignore someone who is standing up waiting to deliver a POI – it's impolite and it might also be distracting for yourself. If you are rejecting the point, do so explicitly (either by saying "No, thank you!" or by using visually clear hand gestures). You can also ask the debater to wait, but you should not keep him/her waiting for more than 20 seconds. In handling POIs, keep the following in mind:

How many to accept? When you are speaking you should accept at least 2 to and at most 3 points (for a 7 minutes speech). Accepting too few POIs will cost you points, while accepting too many will jeopardize the flow and structure of your speech. Do not accept more than one POI for the same point of argumentation.

Whom to accept? Watch out for good speakers. If someone has killed off every other speaker on your side, be careful and don't assume that you can handle them.

When to accept? Try not to accept a POI when you are in the beginning of establishing an argument. Especially for first speakers, do not accept a POI before you're finished outlining the case (definition, theme and team split). Also, if you can sense that your argument is somehow weak or controversial, try to reject POIs at that point and accept one when you come to the stronger part of your case. Try to accept POIs between arguments and when you are on confident ground, i.e. when you are explaining about something you are very sure about.

Naturally, how you should respond to a POI depends greatly on the POI itself. Since there are many possibilities of POI, there are even more possibilities to answer them. Remember:

Answering a POI takes your time, so don't take too long in answering a POI. If the answer is long, usually it is part of your case anyway. If that is the case, then do answer it briefly first and mention that you (or your second speaker) will deal with the issue later.

Always deal with the point that is offered. Never accept a point as true, unless your opponent has made a mistake and it backs up your argument. Never admit that you have no idea how to answer a POI. Always try to dismiss a point as incorrect or irrelevant. A point ignored is allowed to stand and will go against you in adjudication. Do not resort to irrelevance too quickly. If the POI is irrelevant, remember that you need to show why it is irrelevant – otherwise, that point may come back to haunt you in the adjudication.

If you do not clearly understand a POI because it was not worded clearly, you can either ask for clarification or try to clarify it yourself first and then answering the POI, e.g. "So your question is ..." then give your answer.

If you really cannot answer a POI (this shouldn't happen too often), you might want to go back to your strongest point and reemphasize its importance (therefore undermining the importance of the POI).

If the POI is asking for a clarification, sure you can say things like, "If only the other side has listened..." but you must still clarify in case the adjudicator found you unclear.