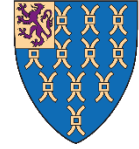


INTRODUCTION TO DEBATING AT THE HONOURABLE SOCIETY OF LINCOLN'S INN



Updated for Michaelmas 2020

Welcome to the Lincoln's Inn Debating Club. If you have never debated before, do not worry! This introduction will give you a quick overview of how to debate, what to expect at our new workshops, and the opportunities we offer throughout the year.

If you ever have any questions, please email the Debating Secretaries Ciaran and Daniel at lincolnsinndebatingclub@gmail.com.

Debating virtually is not what we wanted. However, this is an opportunity for us all to have some fun, become better advocates, and win new competitions! We hope to return to normal as soon as possible. Thank you for your understanding.

What happens at a virtual Debating workshop?

Unlike mooting, there is no need to prepare for a debating workshop (or even the possibility of doing so). The sessions will follow this format:

- There will be a short introduction from the Barrister who runs the society, he will explain in detail how the debates will work and how you should structure your points.
- The motion (i.e. what we are debating on) will be given out, and everyone will be assigned a position.
- We will split into "breakout" rooms on Zoom, where you will have time to prepare your points with the person assigned as your partner.
- Then the debates will happen, each person in a breakout room will have 5 minutes to make their points.
- Judges in the rooms (who are mostly practicing barristers) will give you feedback and tips at the end of every session. There is no scoring or winning, it is not competitive in that sense.

We run a simplified version of what is known as **'British Parliamentary'** debating. It shares certain features with what you may have seen on the news or in Parliament, though usually less rude. We highly recommend [this brilliant production](#) on YouTube by the York University Debate Society, from Toronto, Canada.

Debating Basics

There are eight speakers in each debate, divided between the proposition (the government) and the opposition, often referred to as 'prop' and 'opp'. Simply put, the government proposes a motion and the opposition opposes it (please see more on individual speakers' roles below).

Motions frequently propose a change in policy, but sometimes are a general statement of support. They usually start with either 'This House Would' (THW), 'This

House Believes That' (THBT), or occasionally 'This House Regrets' (THR). By way of example, we have previously run:

- THW bring back corporal punishment
- THW abolish juries
- THW never decide anything by referendum ever again
- THBT Donald Trump is good for politics
- THR dating apps

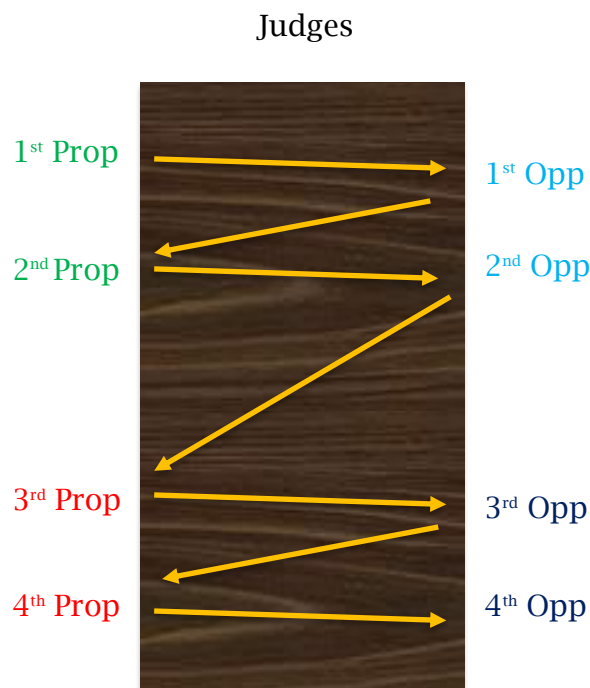
Roles

The proposition and opposition sides are divided into two teams, with the first and second speakers being one team ('opening government/opening opposition') and the third and fourth speakers being a team ('closing government/closing opposition').

The order of speakers is still as follows:

1. Prime Minister (1st Proposition)
2. Leader of the Opposition (1st Opposition)
3. Deputy Prime Minister (2nd Proposition)
4. Deputy Leader of the Opposition (2nd Opposition)
5. Member of Government (3rd Proposition)
6. Member of Opposition (3rd Opposition)
7. Government Whip (4th Proposition)
8. Opposition Whip (4th Opposition)

The seating arrangement normally looks like this. You would give your speech standing at the end of the table, facing the judges:



Strategy

Teamwork is an important part of debating: the most successful teams plan out their speeches together. And refer to the points their teammate has made or will make within their speech. If you are coming up short on ideas, talking through the motion and bouncing ideas off your partner can be a lifesaver.

Different speakers have different roles to fulfil in the debate, and the best debates are those where these roles are carried out. We do not penalise speakers for not fulfilling their role, but be aware if you attend debating competitions that judges will do so. By way of overview:

1st Prop: The 1st proposition speaker has an important task: define the motion. What is the government proposing to do? What will their policy be? (Brexit means Brexit is not a good model!) It is usually easiest to start by explaining what the problem is, set out what your suggested solution is, and explain how this will make things better. This will take some time, so it is often a good idea to allow 2nd Prop to expand on the details.

Bold cases make for better debates than uncontroversial ones. Debates are won on arguments, not reality - making a persuasive case for something outlandish can win you lots of points. Be wary of 'squirrelling the motion', i.e. trying to interpret it in a way that was clearly not intended. If the judges set a motion such as 'THW allow the sale of babies on the open market', they will not be happy if your model is encouraging private provision of IVF.

1st Opp: The 1st Opposition speaker should aim to make a substantive case for why either the status quo or a different model would have a better result.

2nd Prop/2nd Opp: The 2nd speakers on both sides will then expand on the opening speaker's position.

3rd Prop/3rd Opp (extension speakers): The 3rd speakers on each side have a somewhat tricky task. They need to support the case made by the top half of the table, but also extend it with their own ideas or a different approach.

4th Prop/4th Opp (summary speakers): Finally, the final speakers on each side have the task of summarising the debate and explaining why their side won. They may not introduce any new arguments. A typical strategy is to recap themes that have emerged in the debate or the main points of clash.

Timing and Points of Information

You will speak for no more than 5 minutes - feel free to use the timer on your phone to help with timekeeping. The first and last minutes are 'protected time', during which you will speak uninterrupted. After the first minute the judge will indicate that protected time has ended. From then until the end of the fourth minute, members of the other team



are free to offer you what are known as 'points of information' or POIs.

POIs are short questions asked to the Speaker. They are not an opportunity to make your own speech. You might point out a logical flaw in the speaker's argument, or give an example that disproves their point. The speaker should respond briefly, but do not allow yourself to get dragged into an argument! It is your speech and you should retain control. Deal with the point and move swiftly on.

POIs are given by standing up, extending a hand, and saying "*Point of information*" or "*On that point*". The Speaker may choose to accept or decline a POI; if you are in the middle of a point, you can also ignore them or say: "*in a minute*". It is perfectly fine to decline a POI by waving the offeror down.

You should aim to take at least one POI during your speech. More than two may make it difficult to get through your material - if you are short of things to say, however, accepting lots of POIs may be a blessing. When you are not the speaker, use POIs to remain part of the debate and continue pushing your position.

Content and structure

It is always helpful to begin by signposting the points you are going to make - this helps the judges keep track of where you are going, and also ensures that you know you actually have something to say before you stand up. **Remember the Rule of Three:** (i) tell them what you are going to tell them; (ii) tell them; and (iii) tell them what you have told them. It may seem trite, but it really does work.



Unless you are the 1st Prop speaker, you will also want to begin by rebutting a few of the points made by the speaker before you. This can come after you set out your substantive points. Do not spend too much time in rebuttal though: make your own case.

Examples are always helpful. And will lend weight to your arguments. However, you may *not* do any research online once you know the motion. If you present a barrage of statistics, the judges are likely to suspect you have forgotten this rule. For debating (as for pupillage interviews) you will be rewarded for keeping up with current events. Skimming a newspaper's website daily is hardly onerous and should be considered the bare minimum.

Finally, debating is far more creative and relaxed than mooting. Be funny or outrageous, or clever, or passionate, but above all do not be boring!

Competitions

At each workshop you will have the opportunity to put your name forward for additional debating events. The Inn sends different teams to a number of debating competitions throughout the year. These are good fun and a great chance to get a lot of debating experience very quickly. They are generally hosted by university debating societies such as Oxford and Cambridge. Most competitions are still happening this year, but online. We will try our best to win as many as possible!

Pre-Covid: Debates in Hall

We used to host a number of debates in Hall every year, where two teams hold a debate following a dining session. These were often attended by benchers and allowed you to show your skills to a wider audience of the Inn's members. As soon as it is possible we will reinstate these.

Debating Shield 2021

Finally, there is the prestigious Debating Shield. A semi-final round is held at the final workshop of the year, and the final 8 teams compete at a public event judged by Bar and Bench members. There actually is a shield, on which the winning team's names are engraved each year. All finalists are invited to dine in Hall on the Bar table, and the winning pair will each receive a bottle of the finest Lincoln's Inn champagne. Last year's final was moved online. The location of this year's final is tbc. Thank you.

