



GOLD COAST  
**DEBATING**

# Guide for Schools

Updated January 2026

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# Introduction

Welcome to the Gold Coast Debating guide to debating principles. This guide should serve as the basis for coaching in all schools entered into the competition. It should be simple enough that someone new to debating could read it from start to finish and understand how our debates work, but the contents pages also help more experienced debaters/coaches to look up individual concepts. If you have any queries about the contents of this guide, please do not hesitate to contact the GCD Management Committee.

## Contact Details

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## Disclaimer

This is not a rulebook. The principles outlined within are designed to give schools and coaches the best chance of delivering coaching that is consistent and in line with our adjudication training. However, schools and teams must understand that adjudicators are also trained to have discretion as to what has been effective and convincing on the evening and therefore feedback may sometimes seem inconsistent with what is found here in this guide. (For example, this guide might encourage gestures, but an adjudicator may tell a student to reduce their use of gestures if they were coming over more forced than effective.) Therefore, the passages within are not to be used or quoted by schools in lodging formal complaints or appeals with regards to adjudicators' decisions. The adjudicator's decision, in the absence of gross misconduct, is final.

In all cases, where a student, parent or school representative has an issue with an adjudicator's decision or feedback, this must be lodged in writing to the Vice-President at [vicepresident@goldcoastdebating.com.au](mailto:vicepresident@goldcoastdebating.com.au)

# LEVEL 1

This section contains **“the basics” for all divisions** of the Gold Coast Debating competition, and all of the information necessary for the Junior B, Junior A and Intermediate B divisions.

These **principles are built on for the Intermediate A, Open B and Open A divisions** in the Level 2 section of this guide.

# What happens in a debate?

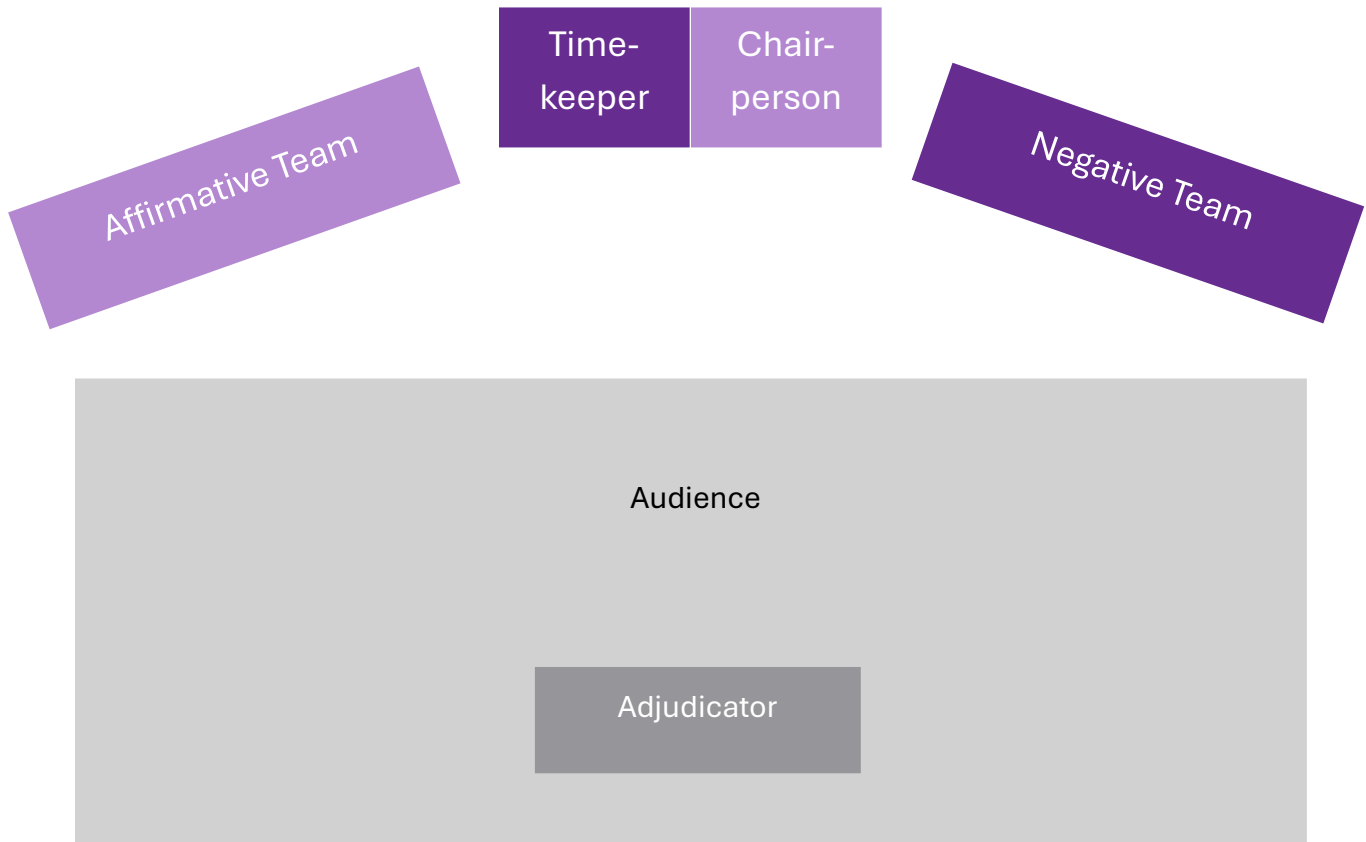
The Gold Coast Debating competition is a “3 on 3” debating style competition. This means that each debate consists of two teams of three speakers, one on the affirmative and one on the negative side of an assigned topic. Each team should have a fourth member – the affirmative’s fourth team member is the *chairperson* and the negative team’s fourth member is the *timekeeper*. These fourth members do not contribute arguments but assist in the running of the debate. The chairperson is sort of like the “MC” of the debate and is given a script to use to introduce each speaker. The timekeeper must come equipped with their own timer/stopwatch and bell, and they are responsible for timing the debate and ringing warning bells during speeches in accordance with a provided time sheet.

The affirmative team’s “first speaker” speaks first. Speeches then alternate from the negative team back to the affirmative team and so on until all six speakers have spoken. Each speaker has some “jobs” that they must do, e.g. define the topic, summarise their points, etc. The individual speakers’ roles are outlined later in this guide.

Each debate has either a single adjudicator or a panel of adjudicators. The adjudicator/s will judge the debate and decide on the winning team, before providing feedback to the speakers. For more information on the structure of the competition (i.e. preliminary rounds and progressing to finals, as well as venues and other logistical information) please consult the Gold Coast Debating website.

# Layout

Debate rooms are set out as follows:



The affirmative team must sit to the left of the room (from the audience's perspective) so that the debate goes from left to right. The chairperson is supplied by the affirmative team and therefore must not sit next to the affirmative team to prevent them from communicating or contributing during the debate. The same goes for the negative team and the timekeeper.

Third speakers must sit in the middle of the team table, with first and second on either side. This is so that they can communicate and pass notes more easily.

The adjudicator does not necessarily have to sit in the middle of the room; however, they should have a good view of the debate, and no one should be seated close enough to them to read their notes.

# The Criteria

There are three criteria under which adjudicators assess debates. An important thing to keep in mind is that one error on part of a team, for example, forgetting to define the topic, is not necessarily “one point off” for that team. Scoring does not work that way in debating. Teams will do a number of things right in a debate and a number of things wrong, and this should accumulate over the entire debate to result in a small margin on either side of the given criteria.

Everything in this guide falls under the criteria as follows:

## **Matter (scored out of 40)**

Matter comprises everything pertaining to what a speaker says – the strength of their arguments and rebuttal, their logic, research/general knowledge etc. This includes the following sections of this guide:

- [The Arguments](#)
- [Rebuttal](#)

## **Manner (scored out of 40)**

Manner includes all of the presentation aspects of a debate, including how speakers speak, confidence, fluency, persuasiveness etc. This includes the following sections of this guide:

- [Presentation](#)

## **Method (scored out of 20)**

The method criteria covers how a speaker structures their case and whether they complete all of their prescribed jobs. This includes the following sections of this guide:

- [Structure](#)
- [Case Lines](#)
- [Splits](#)
- [Definitions](#)
- [Greetings](#)

# Structure

## Speaker's Roles

Each speaker is required under method to complete certain jobs. There is more on each of these elsewhere in this guide – consult the contents page. Schools are encouraged to develop scaffolds to help younger students gain understanding of how their speech should be written to include these things.

	AFFIRMATIVE	NEGATIVE
First Speaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal greeting</li> <li>• State the topic</li> <li>• Define the topic</li> <li>• Outline what the affirmative team's points are going to be (yours and your second speaker's)</li> <li>• Present arguments using the PEEL structure</li> <li>• Summarise own points</li> <li>• Finish on a strong statement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening</li> <li>• Accept / reject the opposition's definition</li> <li>• Rebut the opposition's case</li> <li>• Outline what the negative team's points are going to be (yours and your second speaker's)</li> <li>• Present points using the PEEL structure</li> <li>• Summarise own points</li> <li>• Finish on a strong statement</li> </ul>
Second Speaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening</li> <li>• Rebut the opposition's case</li> <li>• Recap what the first speaker's points were and what yours are going to be</li> <li>• Present points using the PEEL structure</li> <li>• Summarise your own points</li> <li>• Finish on a strong statement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening</li> <li>• Rebut the opposition's case</li> <li>• Recap what the first speaker's points were and what yours are going to be</li> <li>• Present points using the PEEL structure</li> <li>• Summarise your own points</li> <li>• Finish on a strong statement</li> </ul>
Third Speaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening</li> <li>• Rebut the opposition's case</li> <li>• Compare the cases, making the affirmative's sound stronger</li> <li>• Summarise the affirmative team's case</li> <li>• Strong conclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening</li> <li>• Rebut the opposition's case</li> <li>• Compare the cases, making the negative's sound stronger</li> <li>• Summarise the negative team's case</li> <li>• Strong conclusion</li> </ul>

NOTE: The third speaker does not introduce points of their own, they focus on rebuttal and then reiterate what their first and second speakers said.

## Forming an Argument - PEEL

Each point within a case should be structured well in and of itself. Points should be clearly numbered, and presented by way of a method similar to the following, in such a way that the audience knows when one point begins and ends:

**P** – Point. Like a topic sentence in an essay, speakers should begin each point with one strong sentence that sums up the whole point. This should begin with a signposting like “My first point is...”

**E** – Explain or Elaborate. Speakers should then go into more detail about what is meant by their point.

**E** – Examples/Evidence. Give facts or examples to support the point. Realistic examples are usually more effective than hypothetical ones.

**L** – Link. The speaker should remind the audience what the point was and why its relevant to the case, in one sentence.

## Signposting

It is incredibly important that debaters get into the habit of signposting when they speak. Use phrases like, “Tonight, I will present three points. My first point is...” Use these phrases when presenting points too, not just in summaries. This helps the audience (and adjudicator) keep track of when you finish one point and move onto another. Use gestures to accompany verbal signposting.

# Types of Topics

There are a few different types of debates, and these should be approached differently. Usually the topic will fall into one of these categories:

## **“Should” Debates**

Debates with the word “should” in the topic, e.g. “Homework should be banned”, should be approached with a well-rounded address of both the “moral and practical” implications. Each speaker should address some moral and some practical points. This avoids debates in which one team only addresses the moral and the other only addresses the practical, achieving very little.

Should debates are often arguing for some kind of change, and therefore the affirmative team (usually, or whichever team is proposing the change) needs to present a “model”. See the section on models in Level 2. Even junior teams can learn to present a basic model.

## **Comparison Debates**

These debates ask speakers to compare one thing to another. For example, with the topic “Summer is better than winter”, debaters must compare the respective merits and downfalls of both seasons. In comparison debates, the negative team can take a “softer line” (see Hard/Soft Lines in the Level Two section) by arguing that neither of the seasons is better than the other, but that they both have good and bad aspects to them. This can be more or less effective, depending on how it’s handled.

## **“Is” or “are” Debates**

These debates tend to argue over the current state of affairs, for example, “Feminism is irrelevant.” Sometimes the words “is” or “are” may not be included, however the format is much the same (e.g. “Feminism has become irrelevant. In these debates, the negative team has several places to go, as they can argue that feminism has not necessarily become irrelevant yet, but it will. Again, this softer line can be more or less effective based on how its handled.

# Greetings

## The Formal Greeting

The standard formal greeting used in Gold Coast Debating is:

*“Good evening chairperson, ladies and gentlemen.”*

Only the first affirmative speaker is required by method to give this formal greeting. Other speakers in the debate may choose to give this formal greeting as well; however, they may begin without a formal greeting. It should only go against a first affirmative if they don’t open the debate in this way.

## Additions to the Formal Greeting

Additions to this formal greeting are discouraged, whether delivered by a first affirmative or another speaker. For example, there is no need to add anyone else in, such as, “Good evening chairperson, opposition, audience members, timekeeper, and adjudicator.” Speakers are especially discouraged from greeting the adjudicator.

## Other Openings

Other openings, such as a quote or story, may be used by speakers other than the first affirmative, and are judged on their respective merit. If the story or quote is clever and a captivating opening, then this should work in favour for the team. If, on the other hand, the quote or story is boring, irrelevant, drags on too long or is generally ineffective or adds nothing to their case, then this should work against the team.

## Summary

First affirmative must open with the formal greeting: “Good evening chairperson, ladies and gentlemen.” Other speakers may open with the formal greeting or opt to skip it.

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✓ CORRECT FORMAL GREETING	✗ INCORRECT FORMAL GREETING
Good evening, chairperson, ladies and gentlemen.	Anything else.

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# Definitions

It is the first affirmative speaker's job under method to define the topic for the debate. It is the first negative speaker's job under method to either accept or reject and redefine that definition.

The purpose of the definition is to set the parameters for the debate. What are we talking about? For example, with the topic, "We should eat less meat" – who is "we"? What kinds of "meat"? Does that include fish? Any ambiguity in the topic should be cleared up in the definition, without restricting the debate too much.

## What to Define

Teams need to define only the key, relevant words or phrases in the topic. For example, in the topic "Pets should not be allowed in the city", teams should define the terms *pets*, *should*, *allowed* and *city*. They could also choose to define the term *not be allowed*, as a phrase, meaning "not permitted by law" or something similar.

Terms with multiple words but one meaning, such as *school holidays*, should be defined together as one concept, rather than separately defining *school* and then *holidays*.

## How to Define

Definitions should be in the context of the debate as much as possible. For example, in the topic "Society values appearance more than intelligence", the definition of appearance should relate specifically to human aesthetics, not a general dictionary definition of appearance.

First affirmative speakers need to define the topic by way of a specific method. They should announce that:

*"The affirmative team defines tonight's topic as follows:*

*'Cats', the feline domestic animal, make 'better', superior, 'pets', animals kept and looked after in the home by humans, than 'dogs', the canine domestic animal."*

The speaker must then string the definition together as follows:

*"Therefore ladies and gentlemen, the topic of tonight's debate is that the feline domestic animal makes a superior animal kept and looked after in the home by humans than the canine domestic animal."*

## Accepting/Rejecting the Definition

The first negative speaker is required by method to accept or reject and redefine the affirmative's definition.

There are only two options:

- To accept the definition in its entirety, or
- To reject and redefine the entire\* definition

\*If a negative team wishes to reject only one part of the definition, they must reject it and redefine it entirely, even if they define all but one part of the topic in the same way as the affirmative.

### Accepting the Definition

To accept the definition, first negative must simply state early in their speech:

*“The negative team accepts the affirmative team’s definition of tonight’s topic.”*

Accepting the definition means that the negative team agrees with the parameters set by the affirmative. If they then go on to argue against those parameters, this should go against them.

### Rejecting the Definition

Negative teams should only reject the definition if they feel that one of the following issues has arisen:

- The negative team has been “defined out of the debate” – i.e. the affirmative has skewed the definition to suit their case, and as such the negative team cannot present a reasonable argument under that definition
- The definition is not in the “spirit” or obvious intended meaning or context of the topic
- The affirmative have misinterpreted the topic or a key word in the topic entirely – e.g. if they defined *green* in “It’s not easy being green” to mean *the colour*.

Frivolous rejecting of the topic should be discouraged. Teams should ensure that the definition provided poses an issue for the balance and accuracy of the debate overall, before rejecting the definition.

To reject the definition, the first negative must state:

*“The negative team rejects the affirmative team’s definition of tonight’s topic, and will redefine it as follows...”*

The first negative should then define the topic in the same way prescribed for the first affirmative.

## Definitional Debates

If the first affirmative defines the topic, and the first negative accepts that definition, then nothing on the definition should proceed any further.

If the first affirmative defines the topic and the first negative rejects and redefines, the second affirmative should acknowledge this fact by way of one of two statements:

*“The affirmative team recognises and accepts the negative’s redefinition of tonight’s topic.”*

In this case, the debate proceeds under the negative team’s definition, and nothing more should be mentioned on the definition.

OR, the second affirmative could say...

*“The affirmative team acknowledges the negative team’s rejection of our definition; however, we will be proceeding on tonight’s topic under our definition as we submit that it is.... (give some reason as to why their definition is more suitable.)*

In this case, both teams continue under their own definitions and they essentially have to be adjudicated as two separate debates. Adjudicators can also take into account, in their matter scoring, which definition they felt was more appropriate.

**In any instance, debate over the definition should not proceed any further than the beginning of the second affirmative’s speech.** Teams should be marked down in matter if they continue to debate over the definition of the topic.

In debates where the teams haven’t agreed on the definition, and continue to debate under their own, teams are encouraged to try to adapt their points to be relevant under their opposition’s definition on an “even if” basis. For example, teams could state their point under their own definition, and then go on to say, “even if we were to accept the negative team’s definition tonight, this point is still valid because...”

Likewise, teams should avoid rebutting their opposition’s case on the basis that its “not relevant to our definition”. Instead, teams should try and rebut under the opposition’s definition. For example, “The opposition stated \_\_\_\_, and even if we are to accept their definition, this point is incorrect because...”

In these instances, adjudicators should determine whether one or both of the teams have given appropriate definitions. If a team’s definition is inappropriate, then they should be

marked down on matter so far as their case would be irrelevant under a more appropriate definition.

## Case Lines

Case lines have been a source of confusion within Gold Coast Debating for a number of years. The crux of the matter is:

- Teams are encouraged to have a *case line*,
- Teams are discouraged from having a *theme*.

The difference is this:

A *case line* is like a hypothesis or a thesis statement in an essay. It is one, cohesive sentence which sums up a team's entire case. Its purpose is to tie the team together and provide clarity for the basis of their arguments. For example:

*“Investment in renewable energy sources will promote sustainability and thus provide a greener future for Australia.”*

A *theme*, on the other hand, is a catchy, cliché line that might even rhyme – for example:

*“Waste not, want not!”*

*“Zoos are cool, not cruel!”*

These are ineffective and can be irritating if overused.

If a team does not present with a clear case line, and this effected the impact of their case overall, then this should go against them in the method criteria.

## Splits

In the past, teams have been required to split their points amongst their first and second speaker by way of some system. There have been prescribed categories that debaters have used, like “short term” and “long term”, or “society” and “the individual”.

Recently, the requirement of a split between speakers has been abolished and, instead, teams are encouraged to present their arguments in a way that is logical to them or from strongest to least strong.

# The Arguments

How to set out an argument is covered in “structure”, but there are several other basic principles that adjudicators look out for:

## **Quality over Quantity**

Shorter but good quality arguments are usually more effective than longer speeches that are repetitive or contain weaker arguments. Likewise, it is better for a team to present fewer, stronger points than lots of weaker points.

Teams will often think that because their times were better, that they should have won the debate. This is not always the case, given the above principle. If you do award a debate to a team with consistently shorter times, be sure to explain this.

## **Clear Logic and Plausibility**

This one is fairly self-explanatory, but you’re obviously looking for arguments that are presented logically and are plausible. Use your common sense and instincts. If you’re not convinced by it, then it’s not a strong argument and this should be reflected in the matter criteria.

## **Examples**

When it comes to giving examples to back up points, the more recent, the better. Examples must be drawn from a similar context to the debate, or they are less powerful. If there are not reasonable, recent examples available and a more historical example is still relevant to the topic, then use of these examples is fine. But as a general rule, more recent examples are best.

## **Current Affairs and General Knowledge**

The more relevant information that a team can bring to the debate, the better. This information must be relevant and add something to the debate, not just being brought up to show off vaguely relevant current affairs knowledge. However, if a team can draw on what is happening in the world right now to further their case, this is a huge win in the matter criterion.

# Presentation

Teams should present to the audience in a formal matter that is also captivating and persuasive. Again, adjudication of this area largely depends on what was effective on the night. For example, sometimes gestures can be effective and other times they can be distracting. Adjudicators should give individual speakers feedback on how they can improve on their mannerisms and general presentation in order to make what they are saying most accessible to an audience.

Some general principles are:

## Voice

- Clear enunciation
- Appealing tone and pitch
- Effective projection
- Pausing for effect
- Ideal speed
- Speakers should speak as though they are talking from the top of their head, not read word for word from palm cards

## Stance and Posture

- Stand still unless moving purposely for effect.
- Stance should appear straight and as though the speaker is confident.

## Gestures

- Should only add to, not take from, what is being said (i.e. should not be distracting).
- Should be utilised to signal numbers for points, e.g. “My first point is”
- Should look natural and not rehearsed or forced.
- Excessive use should be discouraged.

## Palm Cards

- Speakers should hold palm cards with one hand only, leaving the other available for gestures.
- Should be the size of the speaker’s palm. Not arm.
- Should not be of a distracting colour or have too much written on the back of them. Speakers must not throw each palm card on the floor as they are finished with it, or throw them all on the floor when they finish their speech. This is informal and distracting.

## Facial Expressions and Eye Contact

- Speakers should use eye contact to engage with the audience as much as possible.
- Facial expressions should be engaging and appropriate to the content (i.e. a speaker does not have to smile if they are talking about depression).

## Personal Presentation

- If a speaker appears distractingly inappropriately dressed for a formal presentation, in a way that they could have helped, this can be marked down under manner.
- Speakers must not lose marks for aspects of their personal presentation that are (or reasonably could be) beyond their control, e.g. not having a blazer, having a less formal school uniform than other schools, having scuffed shoes.
- They can, however, be marked down for poor presentation in areas within the speaker's control, e.g. having hair in their face, untied shoelaces, glaringly distracting additions to their school uniform such as coloured hair accessories or jewellery (especially if they make noise).

## Conduct

Speakers can absolutely lose marks under manner for their behaviour during a debate.

Students must:

- Be respectful of everyone in the room, especially their opposition, at all times.
- Not use their mobile phones or appear to be otherwise disengaged with the debate, even when their speech is over.
- Not speak too loudly as to distract the room from the debate.
- Not purposefully do anything to be of a distraction or detraction from the debate.
- Not use inappropriate language of any nature.
- Not engage in any other behaviour reasonably deemed inappropriate by the adjudicator.

## Teamwork

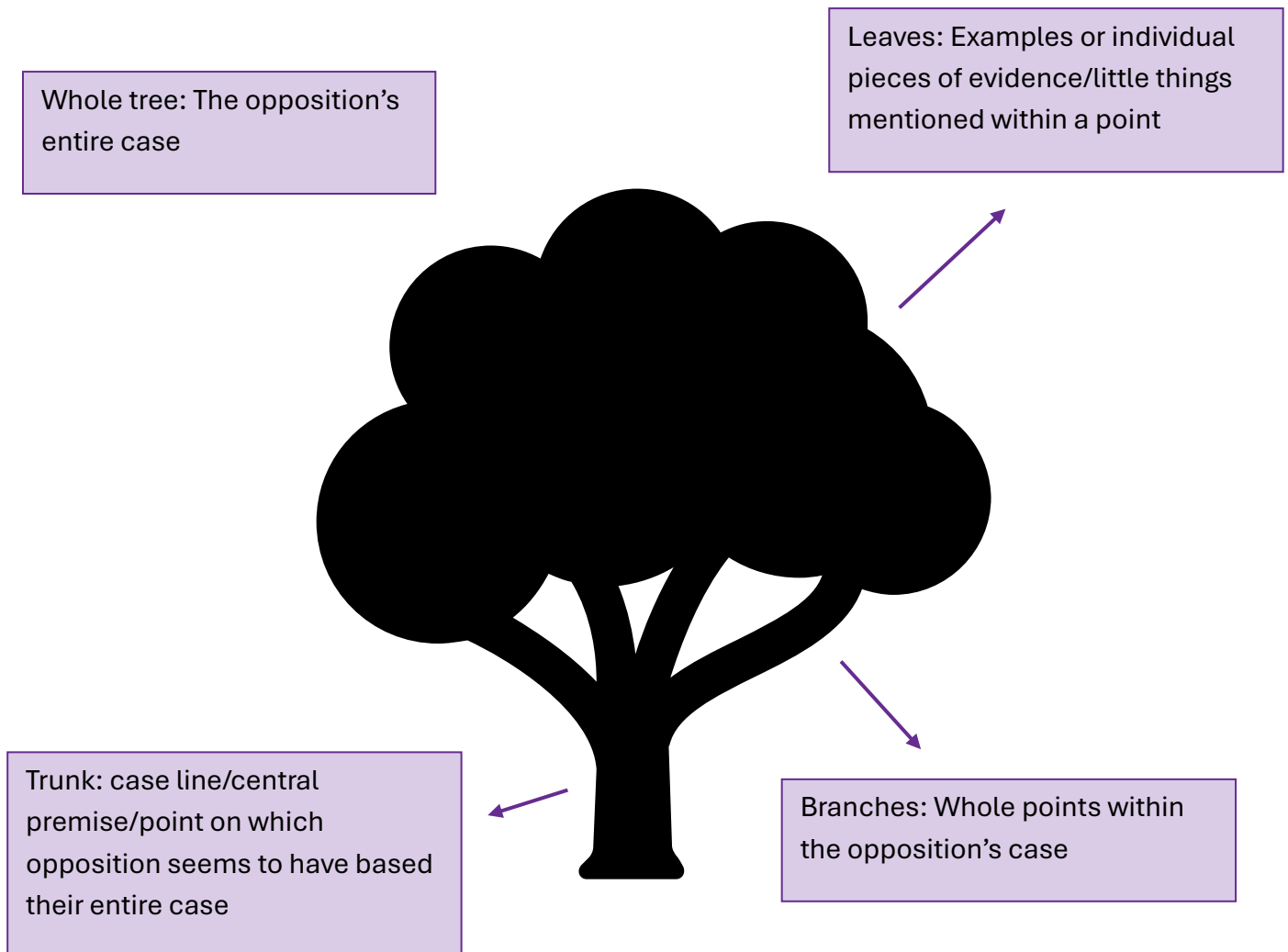
Teams can gain marks in the manner criterion for displaying effective teamwork, supporting each other as well as communicating well with each other.

# Rebuttal

Rebuttal is a key component of any debate. All speakers, except the first affirmative, must engage with rebuttal to some degree. That degree will depend on which speaker they are, which division they are competing in, and how much matter their opposition had to rebut.

## What to Rebut

It is always most effective to rebut the opposition's strongest points. Speakers should present their strongest rebuttal first. If you want to destroy a tree, you don't pick the leaves off, you chop at the base of the trunk...



## How to Rebut

Each individual rebuttal point should be structured as follows:

### What “they said”

Outline in one sentence what their point was:

*“The opposition stated that dogs make better pets than cats because they are more friendly.”*

### Why “it was wrong”

Explain what was wrong with the point. Was it contradictory, factually incorrect, based on false logic, an exaggeration, a generalisation, or irrelevant to the case?

*“However, this is incorrect because cats are actually more friendly – they curl up calmly on your lap, and are generally more placid than dogs who have been known to even attack humans.”*

### Why “our case is better”

If they can, students should present a point in their own case that proves the opposition’s point wrong:

*“As we’ve shown/will show in our case, cats are more inclined to be inside-the-house pets and therefore spend more quality time being your friend.”*

### Link

Students should remind the audience which point they’re talking about:

*“This proves that the opposition were incorrect when they stated that dogs are more friendly than cats.”*

## How Much to Rebut

How much each speaker should rebut varies depending on which division the debate is taking place in, which speaker position they are, and how much the opposition has presented for them to rebut. However, a good general guide is this:

### AFFIRMATIVE REBUTTAL TIMES

	First Speaker	Second Speaker	Third Speaker
Junior B	-	30 secs	1 – 1.5 mins
Junior A	-	1 – 1.5 mins	3 mins
Intermediate B	-	1.5 – 2 mins	3 – 4 mins
Intermediate A	-	2 – 3 mins	4 – 5 mins
Open B	-	3 mins	4 – 5 mins
Open A	-	3 mins	5 – 6 mins

### NEGATIVE REBUTTAL TIMES

	First Speaker	Second Speaker	Third Speaker
Junior B	30 secs	30 secs	1 – 1.5 mins
Junior A	30 secs – 1 min	1 – 1.5 mins	3 mins
Intermediate B	1 – 1.5 mins	1.5 – 2 mins	3 – 4 mins
Intermediate A	2 mins	2 – 3 mins	4 – 5 mins
Open B	2 – 3 mins	3 mins	4 – 5 mins
Open A	2 – 3 mins	3 mins	5 – 6 mins

## Overall Principles

The strongest rebuttal is that which undermines the greatest proportion of the opposition's case.

# Scoring

Each speaker is scored according to the following guide:

	Matter /40	Manner /40	Method /20	Total /100
Well above average (maximum)	32	32	16	80
Above average	31	31	16	78
<b>Average</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>75</b>
Below average	29	29	14	72
Well below average (minimum)	28	28	14	70

As you can see, the **minimum** score that a speaker can receive is 70, and the **maximum** is 80.

For example:

## AFFIRMATIVE TEAM

	Matter /40	Manner /40	Method /20	Total /100
First Speaker	30	29	15	74
Second Speaker	31	30	15	76
Third Speaker	31	30	16	77
			Total:	225

## NEGATIVE TEAM

	Matter /40	Manner /40	Method /20	Total /100
First Speaker	31	30	15	76
Second Speaker	30	30	15	75
Third Speaker	29	30	14	73
			Total:	224

WINNER: AFFIRMATIVE BY 1 POINT

Margins usually do not exceed 12 points.

Close debate	1 -3 points
Clear win	4 – 7 points
Very clear win	8 – 12 points

# Timing

Debaters are encouraged to stick to a time limit, depending on their division. Debaters should, in theory, be scored down in the method criterion if they exceed these time limits by more than 30 seconds, and scored down in the matter criterion if they are more than 30 seconds under these time limits:

## BELL TIMES

	1 min elapsed	1 min remaining	Full time	30 sec over
	<i>1 bell</i>	<i>1 bell</i>	<b>2 bells</b>	<i>3 bells</i>
Junior B	-	3 mins	<b>4 mins</b>	4 mins 30 secs
Junior A	-	4 mins	<b>5 mins</b>	5 mins 30 secs
Intermediate B	-	6 mins	<b>7 mins</b>	7 mins 30 secs
Intermediate A	1 min	6 mins	<b>7 mins</b>	7 mins 30 secs
Open A & B	1 min	7 mins	<b>8 mins</b>	8 mins 30 secs

# Adjudicator Interruption

There are a few very rare instances in which adjudicators may need to say something during a debate. In the absence of any of these occurrences, the adjudicator should not communicate with anyone during the debate.

## Points of Information

There will be more on points of information in the Level 2 section of this guide, but if people are misusing POIs, adjudicators will need to interrupt to tell them that they are “out of order.”

## Offence/Insensitivity

If a speaker is being overly inappropriate about a sensitive topic, and people in the room are visibly disturbed, the adjudicator should interrupt debate and ask the speaker to move on.

## Overtime

If a speaker has exceeded their time limit by an extensive period of time, the adjudicator may interrupt debate and ask them to come to their closing remarks.

## Clarification

If there is something that the adjudicator otherwise needs to clarify (for example, in a Open B debate where one team is utilising the Point of Information and the other team clearly has no idea what POIs are or how to respond to them) adjudicators may make such clarifications, but only when an even number of speakers from both sides of the debate have spoken, i.e. when both first speakers have finished, or when both second speakers have finished. This ensures that both teams have an equal opportunity to act after the clarification.

## Short Preparation Debates

Aside from the first few debates in a season (consult the current Prospectus for exactly how many), most debates in the competition are Short Prep. What this means is that teams do not receive notice of a topic until they arrive at the venue. Debaters are given between 1 and 1¾ hours (depending on their division, see table below) to prepare their case before they must deliver.

### Rules

There are a number of incredibly important rules surrounding short preparation debates. If these rules are not followed, even if the students were unaware of them, teams can be disqualified. It is the responsibility of schools to ensure that all students are aware of the rules surrounding short preparation debates.

Most of these rules surround the idea that students must prepare their case alone, with no outside assistance whatsoever. This includes internet access, pre-prepared notes and assistance from coaches. As such, only certain items are permitted in the short preparation room:

✓ CAN BE TAKEN INTO THE ROOM	✗ CANNOT BE TAKEN INTO THE ROOM
Blank paper and palm cards	School bags
Pens, pencils, highlighters, whiteboard markers*, other writing implements	Mobile phones
Dictionary	Other books
Thesaurus	Smart watches
Book of quotes	Tablets
Regular watch or stopwatch	Any other electronic device, including smart glasses
Food**	Scaffolds
Four team members (maximum)	Paper with any writing on it

If in doubt, ask the Venue Coordinator **before** topics are handed out.

\*Students must bring their own whiteboard markers and wipe the board clean before leaving the room. It is not the venue’s responsibility to provide whiteboard markers or clean up after their use.

\*\* Food MUST NOT create a mess. Students must clean up after themselves or they risk having food banned from short preparation rooms for everyone.

\*\*\* Only four team members are permitted in the short preparation room.

### How to Short Prep

Schools should come up with their own strategies to help students prepare for short prep debates, but here are some ideas:

- Give students a topic and do “practice” short preps – give the team members the amount of time that they would have in their division and see how they go. Try not to interfere— let them learn how important it will be to manage their time without a coach pushing them along.
- Develop a time management guide for the students to memorise (e.g. brainstorm for x time, spend x time writing etc. etc.) – students should ensure that at least one person in the short prep room is wearing a watch, in case the room does not have a working clock.
- Ensure that students have memorised their individual speaker method before the short prep rounds.
- Current affairs and general knowledge are valued highly in short preparation debates. Encourage students to watch the news, even if just the night before, or engage with debate about current issues at the dinner table.

### Short Preparation Times

Junior	1 ¾ hours
Intermediate	1 ½ hours
Open	1 hour

# Etiquette

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✓ WHAT TO DO	✗ WHAT NOT TO DO
Be formal at all times. Debating is not a dramatic performance or a comedy act, but an engaging combination of informative and persuasive techniques. Some humour, in moderation and within the realm of appropriateness, is acceptable.	Be a sore loser. It is against the rules outlined in the Gold Coast Debating Rules & Procedures document to behave in any way that is abusive or unpleasant towards an adjudicator or opposing team. Offending teams can forfeit the debate.
Be respectful of your opposition and do not mistake personal attacks for strong arguments. Debaters must be diplomatic and attacked only argument, not individual debaters.	Bring your own personal opinion into the debate. Even using the words <i>I / we believe / think</i> can undercut your case—the debate isn't about what you believe, it's about fact.
Handle any sensitive matters delicately and with consideration. Sometimes debate topics can involve controversial matters, and it is important that all debaters have the maturity to handle these issues without being offensive. Debaters can lose marks for lacking in sensitivity.	Forfeit debates due to lack of organisation—this is not fair on your opposition or on the competition structure and draw. Try to fulfill the commitment once it's made.
Aim to be presented as neatly and formally as possible. Adhere to all of your school's uniform requirements.	

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## LEVEL 2

This section contains some more advanced principles expected to be explored in the **Intermediate A, Open B and Open A** divisions.

Students should have a good understanding of the basic principles outlined in Level 1 before exploring these techniques.

# The Fundamental Differences in Level 2

Level 2 covers debates from Intermediate A to Open A. There are a few fundamental differences between level 1 debates, and the quality that we expect in these higher divisions. Some of these include:

## **Greater Focus on the Debate Itself**

By Intermediate A, teams are expected to have a grasp on manner and method. That doesn't mean that these criteria are no longer relevant, but simply that as much focus as possible should be on the arguments. Timing and manner become less important than who won the debate itself.

## **Higher Expectations – General Knowledge and Current Affairs**

By this stage, we are expecting students to know what's going on in the world, and to be able to draw on this knowledge to contextualise the debate. Adjudicators will encourage students to engage more with the issues around them. At the senior level, students should also be gathering their information from a range of unbiased sources and presenting well-rounded perspectives on current affairs. Critical, higher-order thinking should be starting to come to the fore in the higher divisions.

## **Points of Information**

Points of Information are one of the most significant differences between the lower and higher divisions. All participants should familiarise themselves with POI techniques and be engaging with them as much as possible.

## **Higher Expectations – Rebuttal**

In the senior divisions, students should be gaining proficiency in rebuttal strategies, structure and strength. There should be a greater percentage of speeches being spent on rebuttal, especially for third speakers (over half) and more advanced techniques, such as comparative rebuttal, should be being utilised.

## **More Advanced Techniques**

There are a number of advanced debating techniques that should be experimented with and eventually mastered throughout the Level 2 divisions. These are outlined in this section of the guide.

# Points of Information (POIs)

Points of Information allow debaters to interrupt their opposition to ask a question. These questions are designed to undermine their opposition's current point. POIs must be phrased as a question and kept to 15-20 seconds as a maximum. POIs are more of an art than a science – practice is the key, so be sure to just keep trying.

## When POIs are Permitted

POIs must not be asked in the first or last minute of a speech. This is why, in divisions where POIs are allowed, there is a single bell at 1 minute into each speech, and a single bell when there is 1 minute remaining. POIs must only be asked inside these two single bells. Points of Information outside of this time frame are “out of order” and must be declared so by the adjudicator.

## Offering POIs

To offer a Point of Information, debaters must stand in their place and announce, “Point of Information” clearly to the room. The asker must wait until the speaker has accepted or rejected their POI before they proceed. If the asker does not await a response and goes ahead with asking their POI, the adjudicator must call “out of order” and ask them to resume their seat.

## Accepting/Rejecting POIs

There is only one correct response for each accepting and rejecting POIs. To accept, speakers should finish the sentence that they're on and then say, “Yes”. To reject a POI, speakers should finish the sentence that they're on and then say, “No, thank you.” Any other response is poor manner and not encouraged in Gold Coast Debating.

If a debater's POI is rejected, they must resume their seat.

When a POI is accepted, the asker should ask their question and then resume their seat immediately. They should not wait for the speaker to answer their question, as a good speaker will phase their answer back into their speech, and it can be difficult to determine when they are finished addressing the question.

## What Makes an Effective POI

Points of Information should be kept as brief as possible. The aim of the question is to undercut the opposition's point, and this is less effective when there's rambling involved. Examples of good POIs are:

*“Don’t you think that it is contradictory to argue \_\_ when you also argued \_\_?”*

*“Wouldn’t you agree that your argument isn’t valid when you consider \_\_?”*

*“What about in the context of \_\_, how does your argument stand up then?”*

## **POI Expectations**

Each debater is expected to offer two points of information per debate. This means that each speaker should be offered two throughout the course of their speech. Additionally, each speaker is expected to accept two points of information during their speech. If a student accepts more than two points of information, and this detracts from their case, they may be marked down in the matter criterion. Students must factor time for points of information into their speech, as the time is not stopped.

## **POI Manner**

There are a couple of other conventions regarding POIs:

- Speakers should face the debater when being asked a question, but turn back to the audience to respond. The response is being directed to the entire room, not the person who asked.
- Speakers should keep their answer as concise as possible and transition back to their speech as soon as possible.
- Speakers must not “badger” the opposition with too many points of information. A general rule of thumb is to wait 30 seconds between offering, or to not have one speaker offered more than 5 throughout their speech. In any case, if the adjudicator feels that the speaker is being badgered, they must ask the next debater to offer one to resume their seat as their POI is “out of order”.
- There will also be no “cross floor debate” – that is, no debater who asks a POI should then respond to the speaker’s answer. They must ask their question and then resume their seat.
- Speakers may request that the question be repeated or rephrased. If this happens more than once, the adjudicator may ask the speaker to move on and the debater who asked the question to resume their seat. The adjudicator should not rephrase the question for the debater.

## How POIs are scored

### Intermediate A

In this division, POIs are not scored. Debaters do not lose or gain marks for POIs asked, answered, accepted or rejected. The adjudicator will ignore all POIs except to give feedback on how they can be improved. Any use of POI in Intermediate A will not affect the outcome of the debate. This division is simply an opportunity for students to practice engaging with Points of Information before they are scored.

### Open B and Open A

In Open B and Open A, students are scored on POIs on a bonus points basis. That is, adjudicators will score the rest of the debate as normal, and award bonus points on top of score totals for effective use of POIs. This means that teams cannot lose points for ineffective POIs. Teams are awarded 0, 1 or 2 bonus points on top of their total score.

## Comparative Rebuttal

In the more senior divisions, debates can utilise a more advanced form of rebuttal known as *Comparative Rebuttal*. Some people use this term interchangeably with a *Case Comparison*. However, in Gold Coast Debating we draw the following distinction:

### **Case Comparison**

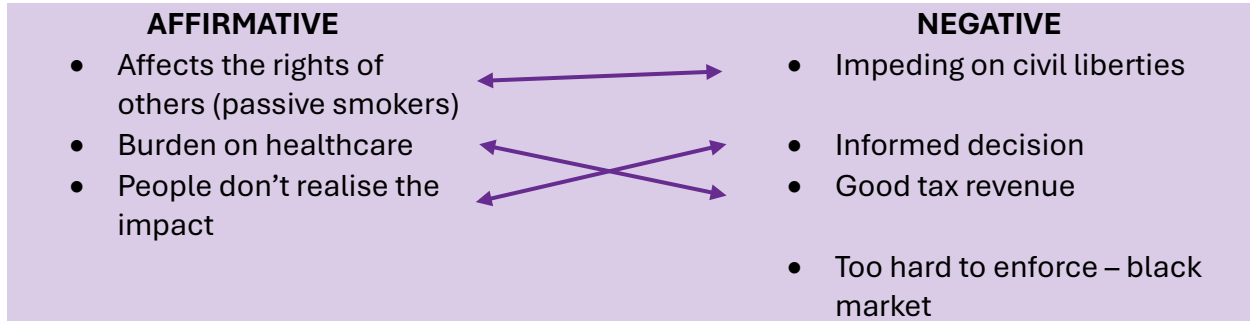
Third speakers conduct a case comparison when they get the whole case/central premise/case line from both teams, and state them together, trying to make their own case sound superior. For example:

*“Tonight, ladies and gentlemen, the affirmative team has tried to argue that the Australian government should ban smoking tobacco by way of an inefficient model riddled with impracticalities and an unrealistic view of the Australian individual’s tolerance for the ‘Nanny state’. The negative team, however, have shown that banning smoking by way of government legislation is not the solution to the issues posed by smokers in Australian society and that instead, the realistic solution is education.”*

### **Comparative Rebuttal**

Third speakers rebut comparatively when, instead of using the traditional rebuttal structure outlined in the Level 1 section of this guide, they rebut by directly matching up points from both sides of the case and pointing out how their team’s points refute their opposition’s.

For example, in a case presented with the following points, the matched-up arguments refute each other:



The points matched up above refute each other, and could be presented by the third negative speaker using comparative rebuttal as follows:

*“The affirmative team has argued that smoking should be banned because it impacts other people’s civil liberties by way of passive smoking. However our team’s arguments have shown that in fact, banning smoking impacts Australians’ civil liberties by impeding what they are able to do with their own life and in their own time. Smoking restrictions that are already in place prevent Australians from being exposed to passive smoking when they wish to avoid it...” etc.*

Third speakers should progress through in the order of their opposition’s points in this manner, using one of their own points to refute each one. If they’re able to do this, and mention all or most of their own team’s substantive points, they need not provide an additional summary at the end, but proceed straight to a powerful conclusion.

Third speakers who use this method effectively should score highly in the method criterion.

## Models

All teams at the Intermediate A level and above should be being encouraged to use models where they are needed.

Models are utilised, usually by the affirmative team, in debates where the topic proposes some kind of change. Taking the example topic, “Smoking should be banned” again, the affirmative team should present a model which details how smoking should be banned. By the government? Through legislation? What kinds of things could that legislation prohibit? Will smoking just be banned in public or made illegal altogether? Models are kind of like an

extension to the definition and should be presented by the first affirmative immediately after the definition. Teams shouldn't go into too much detail, just enough so that the debate has parameters that determine what the debate is actually about, i.e. what kind of scheme is the negative team refuting?

## Hard and Soft Lines

*“The team which sets itself a hard case to prove, and proves it, will always beat a team which tries to “take the easy line.”*

Hard and soft lines usually come into play for negative teams. They pertain to how strongly a negative team refutes the affirmative's case.

### Examples

Topic: “*Generation Z are lazy*”

- Soft negative: Generation Z are not lazy they just work differently, on computers etc.
- Hard negative: Generation Z are incredibly hard-working and possess an impeccable work ethic in all facets of their rich lives.

The soft line is not always weaker. It usually is, but sometimes, as perhaps in this instance, it can be more effective.

Teams do not need to explicitly state whether they are taking a hard or soft line, but it's a good thing for teams to plan when they are preparing, so that they are all on the same page.

## Benchmarks

Benchmarks are a specific type of question that the team needs to answer together when preparing their case when it comes to “is” or “are” debates. They set the clear benchmark for what the affirmative team is arguing is the case, and therefore what the negative team is refuting. Teams should make their set benchmark clear during their speeches.

### Examples

Topic: “*We are the lucky country*”

What constitutes lucky? Compared to which countries?

An affirmative team in this instance might set the benchmark that “lucky” means “more fortunate than most other developed countries when it comes to civil liberties and other human rights.” That would be their benchmark.

Topic: *“We watch too much TV”*

How much is too much?

Teams in this instance might decide that “too much” is when television viewing begins impacting on a person’s health and wellbeing.

Topic: *“Advertising is harmful”*

What constitutes harmful?

Teams in this instance might decide that “harmful” is where advertising has convinced people to buy into something that is only detrimental to their wellbeing and of no benefit.

Benchmarks should form part of the definition. It is useful if, as the adjudicator, you can identify benchmarks, even if the team has implemented one unintentionally, because they help you evaluate the debate far more clearly.

## Fundamental Clashes

Teams are encouraged to get down to the real issues by attempting to identify the main “clash” in the argument.

Clashes are the fundamental, ideological or political basis for both sides of the argument.

### Examples

Topic: *“Smoking should be banned”*

The affirmative case argues for a conservative “good of society” standpoint, whilst the negative case comes from a more liberalist, “rights of the individual” perspective.

Identifying this clash directs the debate more towards the core of the issue, deterring speakers from getting bogged down in, in this case, the pros and cons of smoking. The teams in this debate can both concede that smoking is bad, and further, they can both concede that more needs to be done about the issue – the debate is about whether or not banning smoking by way of government legislature is the right solution.

Teams who explicitly state that they have identified the fundamental clash and do so effectively (i.e. to enhance the clarity and impact of their case, not just to sound like a pro) should score well in the matter criterion for their sophistication and higher-order thinking.