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Introduction to WSDC Format.

This document aims to serve as introduction to those interested in learning about how debates work at the World Schools Debating Championship (WSDC), commonly simply referred to as the World Schools format. Whether you are interested in simply learning how debating works for the first time or honing your skills for this format before trialing for the World Schools team, we hope this document will be a useful introduction to the workings of this format. For an introduction to the how the tournament at large works please see the "WSDC - *Introduction to the Competition*" document on our website.
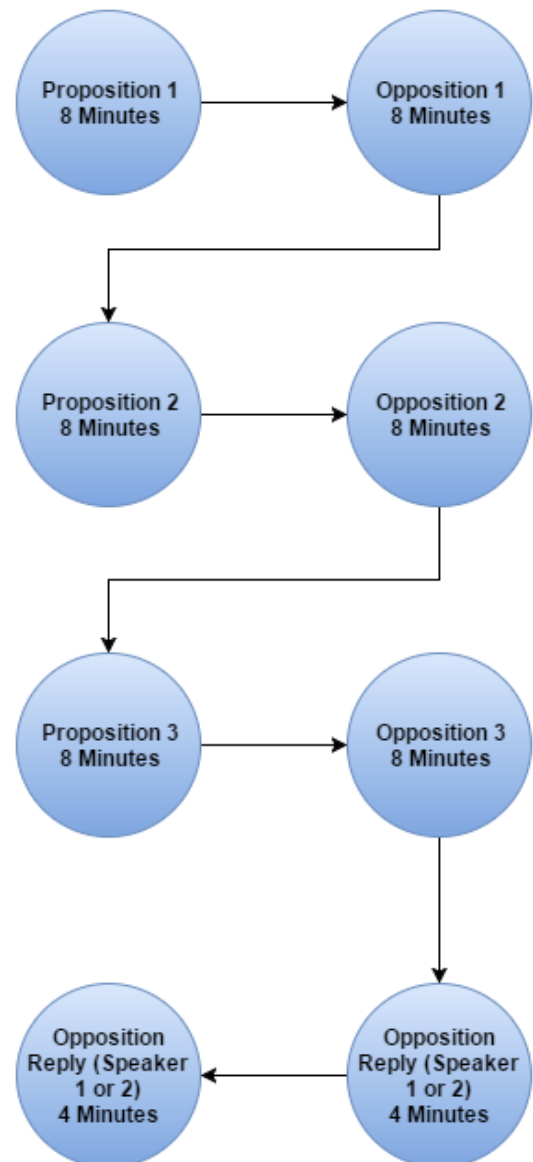
Speaking order

In World Schools format a team comprises of three to five people who prepare together, of which three speak in any given debate (though they can cycle who is speaking between debates). After the debate has begun only the three team members speaking in that debate may communicate with each other. Each team is allocated to either "proposition" or "opposition" on a motion that will be given to them (see below for details). They are then required to either provide reasons for or against the motion according to the side they have been allocated.

The first three speeches from each team are eight minutes in length and alternate between proposition and opposition starting with the proposition. At the end of these initial speeches, each team then delivers a "*reply*" speech (see below for details) of four minutes in length. This is delivered by either the first or second speaker on their team. The "*reply*" speeches reverse order and begin with the opposition first.

During the first three main speeches of each team, speakers from the opposing team may offer a "*Point of Information*" (POIs) between the first and seventh minute of the speech (these timings will be indicated by an audible signal from the judging table, normally a soft bang on the table or a clap). A POI is a short (up to 15 seconds) interjection in which one of the three members of the opposing team speaking in that debate can ask a question or make an objection to the person currently delivering their main speech – it is up to the speaker to accept or decline a POI that is offered, but speakers are expected to accept two in their speech.

World Schools format speaking order

Speaker Roles

Each speaker in the debate has a different role. These rules are intended to facilitate as fair a debate as possible, both by ensuring that clarity in the topic up for debate is established and to ensure that both teams have a reasonable chance to engage with the other side's arguments. The key thing to remember is that the speaker roles are intended to enrich the debate not to limit what a team can do.

First Speakers

The first speaker of proposition is responsible for:

- defining the motion (see below),
- outlining the arguments that proposition will bring (their team's *case*),
- explaining which speakers will present which of those arguments,
- presenting part of the case for their side.

Similarly the first speaker of the opposition is responsible for:

- challenging the definition and providing a new one (but only if they think that definition is unfair, see below),
- outlining the arguments that proposition will bring (their team's *case*),
- explaining which speakers will present which of those arguments,
- responding to the arguments of first proposition (this is called *rebuttal),*
- presenting part of that case for their side.

Defining the motion is about giving a clear explanation of what the motion means to ensure that all speakers and judges are clear on the topic being debated. If the two teams argue about very different things, then it becomes hard to pin down what exactly the disagreements between the teams are.

This House would allow corporal punishment in schools

The definition for this motions should include:
Who will deliver the punishment?
Will it be the school nurse, a head of discipline, any given teacher
Who can issue the punishment?
Will it be only senior staff/ all staff?
What is the punishment?
Caning/slapping/ pinching
What can the punishment be given for?
Serious breaches of behavior such as violence/ repeated ignoring of the uniform policy or can it be issued at a teachers' discretion?

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Teams should think about a few things when defining the motion:

a) **What would a reasonable intelligent person think this debate is about?**
   If a motion has an obvious meaning then it should be pursued.

> ### This House would teach Intelligent Design in schools
> This motion is about teaching students about the belief that life was designed by an intelligent creator, not a motion about thinking intelligently about your art projects whilst students are designing them.

b) **The debate should not be place or time set unless that is specified by the words of the motion.**

> ### This House would legalise the sale and consumption of recreational drugs
> This is a debate about modern day nations. It would not be fair to define it as 1960's America prior to the war on drugs regardless of whether you believed it would make it easier for your side.
>
> Whilst examples can be useful to give clarity to your definition (e.g. *"we would allow their sale and consumption within private homes and cafés specifically set up for them, similar to the Dutch model for cannabis"*) they should not restrict a reasonable discussion of the topic.

c) **What do the important words in the motion mean and are the specifics obvious?**

> ### This House believes that the United Nations has failed
> In this debate specific criteria for failure should be given.
> Do you want the criteria to be preventing war, ignoring human rights abuses or inefficient decision making procedures?

If as an opposition speaker you believe the definition is unfair (you cannot reasonably be expected to have interpreted the debate in a similar way) or reduced to a tautology then you are entitled to challenge the definition. You must explain why it is unfair and provide an alternative definition that your side believes reasonable given the above parameters. It should be noted that this is quite rare and will often lead to a very messy debate when it does happen, it is often best to simply accept the

definition in front of you and debate the topic on its merits if at all possible.

> ### This House would legalise the use of recreational drugs
> If the first proposition speaker on the motion defines use of recreational drugs as only medicine that would be used for treatments then it would be reasonable for the opposition to challenge the definition. Otherwise the proposition gain a significant advantage from setting up a debate that the opposition wasn't anticipating and that there is no real controversy over the acceptance of.

Second Speakers

The second speakers in the debate are responsible for:

- continuing to defend their definition (if required)
- continuing the argumentation presented by their team. This will include defending their previous speaker's points from the rebuttal the other team has made
- offering rebuttal to the other team's case
- making new arguments to support your case

The emphasis of these speeches should be on the new material presented, rather than the responses. As a rough guideline proposition should spend 2-3 minutes responding, whilst opposition should spend 3-4 minutes responding to the other team with the rest of the speech dedicated to new substantive material building on the case.

Third Speakers

The third speaker's role is to respond to the other team. The bulk of the speech should be dedicated to defeating the arguments brought by the other team in detail, whilst also defending the case that your team-mates have brought from the attacks that the other team has already made (think of this as rebutting their rebuttal!). It is technically permissible to dedicate 1-2 minutes of time to additional arguments in support of your case, however this must be flagged in the first speech and the emphasis should still be placed on rebuttal.

Reply Speeches

The reply speech must be delivered by either the first or second speaker of your team; it cannot be delivered by the same person that delivered the third speech. It is also worth remembering that the order switches after the first three speeches of each team, so the opposition reply speaker gives their speech straight after the opposition third speaker and the proposition reply speech is the final one of the debate (see "*Speaking Order*" above). Both of these speeches are four minutes in length as opposed to the eight of all other speeches in the debate and no POIs can be offered during them.

The reply speech is intended to explain why their side has already won the debate. They do this by boiling the debate down to the two or three over-arching points of contention (often called the *clashes* of the debate) and presenting why their team's side won those points. They are not expected (and will not have time) to go into detail in explaining why they won each individual argument and point made or deal with every example brought up in the debate. They are instead a high level explanation of why the judges should vote for their side. It is often helpful to think of these as a biased adjudication or a biased news reporter giving an account of what happened in the debate from their side's perspective.

Motions & Preparation Time

Prepared vs. impromptu (un-prepared)

In Worlds' Schools' format you can either receive a prepared or impromptu (un-prepared) motion.

A prepared motion is one in which you have been given the motion and side you are debating on in advance of the day. These will

typically be released several weeks in advance of the tournament in order to allow time for competitors to research the topics and prepare their ideas on the important issues within the debate. The side of the debate you are on is released after the motion is in order to encourage wider thinking about both sides of the debate.

An impromptu (un-prepared) motion is a motion that you receive prior to the round at the same time as you are given the side of the debate. In this instance you will only have your preparation time to think of arguments and examples for your side.

In impromptu debates you will have one hour to prepare for the debate once the motion has been released. Whilst only three speak in each debate, all five members of the team can contribute in the preparation time with ideas and development of argumentation for their team-mates.

Each team is entitled to bring an English Language dictionary, a bilingual dictionary, and a single-volume encyclopedia or almanac per team – they are not allowed to bring any other printed materials or electronic devices with them to prepare.

Policy vs. Truth Debates

Not all debates in Worlds' Schools are policies proposing a specific policy or action on the set of people. Some of the motions are statements about the world of which the truth should be contested. In both instances defining the motion is still necessary to ensure that the words in the debate are clear and the exact points of contention are understood between teams and judges.

A *Policy* debate is when the motion implies that a specific actor should do or not do a certain policy.

> **This house would require university students to work in their country of origin for a number of years after graduation**
> The motion suggests that governments should implement this as a policy and will require explanation of how exactly that works and what the policy will look like.

A *policy* motion need not necessarily be just about governments either, it can advocate that individuals or organisations ought do or not do certain thing.

> **THW not consume art created by people who have committed deeply immoral acts**.
> In this debate you are still advocating a specific course of action but the actor is implied as individuals rather than governments.

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A *Truth* debate is when you do not need to propose a specific course of action but instead merely to argue the truth or falsity of a given statement.

This house regrets the media focus on the personal lives of politicians

In this debate speakers need only argue that the media focus is regrettable or not regrettable, they are not required to propose a specific method of reducing the focus or whether that method would be effective or problematic in practice.

Although in some cases analyzing the practical implications of a world in which the statement is untrue will make your case stronger, in order to win, a team should focus on (dis)proving the truth of the motion by analyzing values associated with either side of the debate. They need not focuse on a specific mechanism of change.

The distinction between these debates is not always clear cut and it should not be regarded as set in stone that you don't have to deal with any "practical" arguments just because this motion sounds like a *truth* debate.

This house believes that post-revolution states should delegate trials of former rulers and high-ranking officials to the International Criminal Court

This motion sounds like a truth debate as it believes in the statement that follows. However in believing that post-revolution states should pursue a particular policy, clarity in what that policy would look like is important and defending or attacking the "practical" fall-out of this policy being implemented could all be legitimate lines of arguments.

The key thing to note is that motion should be read carefully and the implications of what is up for discussion thought about in detail.

Watch it in action!

One of the best ways to understand the World Schools format is to watch and actual debate. There are lots of great debates online however here are a few to get you started

South Africa vs. England
This house believes that the police should use racial profiling when fighting crime http://bit.ly/2dUIXyY

Indonesia vs Wales
This house believes that voters should pass a general knowledge test
http://bit.ly/2dlBTfY

England vs Scotland
This house supports free immigration http://bit.ly/2d91Gme

Wales vs Peru
This house would ban religious primary and secondary schools
http://bit.ly/2dn0oXw

Judging

At the end of the debate, the judges will total the scores allocated to each speaker without conferring and decide whether they believe the Proposition or the Opposition team has won. The winning team is the team that wins a majority of the judges (usually 3 judges). In the rare event that there is an even number of judges voting for each side, the chair judge will have a casting vote and decide the winner of the debate. Teams will then receive both the result and an explanation of why the team in question won the debate.

Each substantive speaker (speaker's 1-3 for each team) can theoretically be awarded a maximum of 100 points. 40 points for content, 40 for style and 20 for strategy. The reply speech is worth a maximum of 50 points, 20 for content, 20 for style and 10 for strategy. However the actual World Schools speaker scale runs from 60 – 80 as depicted in the table below.

STANDARD	OVERALL (/100)	STYLE (/40)	CONTENT (/40)	STRATEGY (/20)
Exceptional	80	32	32	16
Excellent	76-79	31	31	15-16
Extremely Good	74-75	30	30	15
Very Good	71-73	29	29	14-15
Good	70	28	28	14
Satisfactory	67-69	27	27	13-14
Competent	65-66	26	26	13
Pass	61-64	25	25	12-13
Improvement Needed	60	24	24	12

Reply Speeches *(out of 50)*

STANDARD	OVERALL (/50)	STYLE (/20)	CONTENT (/20)	STRATEGY (/10)
Exceptional	40	16	16	8
Very Good to Excellent	36-39	15	15	7.5
Good	35	14	14	7
Pass to Satisfactory	31-34	13	13	6.5
Improvement Needed	30	12	12	6

Taken from *Judging Guidelines* of the WSDC
Rules (see also *Further Reading*)

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Content is the strength of the argumentation presented. This also covers the quality of the rebuttal and ability to defeat opposing arguments. It marks the extent to which the strength of the arguments compel you to support or oppose the motion. It is intended to be thought of divorced from the style with which the argument is delivered.

A speaker with a high content mark will present arguments that are highly relevant, with clear explanations and logic, and be succinct in flagging the impacts of their arguments. They will be consistent and thorough in their explanation of why their set of beliefs are the strongest arguments in the debate.

Style is the ability to deliver your arguments persuasively. There is no one particular style that will be appropriate for all speakers and all debates just as there is no one set of arguments that will win all debates. It does however encompass a number of general elements that improve the impact of a speech. These including how a speaker uses their voice, their use of gestures, their use of rhetorical techniques and their engagement with the audience. What is being considered is the extent to which these things are used to augment or hinder the persuasiveness of the speaker.

Strategy encompasses two things. The first is their structure and timing, the second is their understanding of the issues of the debate.

Structure and timing means a speaker who fills their time and does not under or over speak. It also means having a clear progression of points within the speech which shows a clear sense of priorities in their argumentation.

Understanding the issues of the debate follows on from this clear sense of understanding what the key issues in any given debate are. They will be able to understand which arguments and parts of an argument they must respond to in their speeches (even if their responses are not strong);

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they will understand what the important things to prove within their arguments are (even if this is not always successful).

Thus if a speaker is clearly attempting to do the correct things in terms of argumentation but not proving the things they set out, they may receive a high strategy mark and a lower content mark.

Finals - The Break

Near the end of a tournament, after the rounds in which all teams compete (*in-rounds*) have been finished, the top teams proceed to knock-out rounds (*out-rounds*) to declare a winner. The teams that make it to the knock-out rounds are referred to as "*The Break*".

The exact size of the break depends on the size of the tournament (for instance WSDC typically breaks to octo-finals and 16 teams) but the top teams are normally calculated by the number of debates each team has won. In the event that two teams are tied for this then the number of judges that voted for them across the tournament acts as a tie-break, if again equal then the total of all the individual scores each team got will decide which team ranks higher.

Once through to the knock-out rounds each debate won will allow you to progress to the next regardless of your original position in the break, a lost debate means elimination. The winner of the tournament is the team that wins the final and all prior knock-out rounds as applicable.

Further Reading

The following material was used to compile this guide to the format of Worlds' Schools. Much of it will give a more in depth look at some of the intricacies of the format and the ESU would like to give thanks to the authors.

WSDC Website - http://schoolsdebate.com/

WSDC Debate Rules 2015 - http://mkf2v40tlr04cjqkt2dtlqbr.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/WSDC-Debate-Rules-U-2015.pdf

WSDC Judging Guidelines - Compiled by Christopher Erskine with Rosemary Dixon and Andrew Stockley, Elizabeth Virgo and David Pritchard http://mkf2v40tlr04cjqkt2dtlqbr.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/notes_adjudicators.pdf

WSDC motions – produced by Irene McGrath http://wsdc.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/wsdc.motions.pdf

WSDC motions – Debate-Motions.info - http://www.debate-motions.info/wsdc-motions

ESU website - http://www.esu.org/our-work/world-schools-debating

The Heart of the Matter – Debating with Team Singapore – Ming, Jia Mak, Benjamin (2015)