PHSSL Guide to Parliamentary Debate

Introduction:

The impetus for Parliamentary Debate in PHSSL came from a desire of the Executive Board to expand debate opportunities for students. Five years after the inception of the event – at the Summer 2014 PHSSL Executive Board meeting – we reviewed a survey of PHSSL members and made changes in the event. It was the Board's intention to retain this argumentation event without erecting high entry-level barriers that would keep schools or individual students from participating. Extensive changes were made at the 2017 Summer meeting and those changes are reflected here. Additional changes were made at the 2020 Summer meeting involving the number of competitors. Minor alterations to the definition of "This House" were made at the 2021 Summer meeting.

Motions:

The topics for parliamentary debate are stated as general beliefs of the parliamentary house that is debating them. The judge(s) and the four students form a legislative body. The team in favor of the motion is known as The Government. The team opposed to the motion is known as The Opposition. Arguments flow pro and con on the motion at hand and then a decision is rendered in the form of a vote by the judge(s). Judges are expected to set aside their personal beliefs and vote to accept or reject a motion based on the arguments made by the debaters. There is no need for The Government to advance a plan of action or to be bound in their arguments to a specific country or a specific time period.

The Government has the freedom and burden of defining "This House" and the key terms of the resolution as well as defining the Government and Opposition burdens for the round (On-Case). Unless the government's definitions violate the educational value of the debate, their definitions should frame the round. If Government definitions harm the educational value of debate, they may be challenged with a "topicality" argument. Therefore, the focus of the round should be on the arguments set forth by the Government in the Prime Minister's speech (1st Speech). The goal of the Opposition is primarily to rebut this position, and secondarily to advance their own case (Off-case) to enhance the educational value of debate.

This House shall be defined as the people in this room, the United States Federal Govt, the United Nations, a non-specific developing country, a nonspecific developing country in the present, the "state of PA," non-specific local government, or any House made obvious by the resolution.

Also, the language that follows "This House" is important to the style of debate that is expected.

- "Should" implies more of a Lincoln-Douglas-style resolution where competitors

are welcome to include a value and value criterion in their framing of debate.

- "Believes" implies a Cross-X-style debate where the teams are welcome to include a "plan" to solve a problem in the real world.
- "Will/Is/No keyword following" implies a Public Forum-style fact-based debate that looks generally looks at the status quo and its impacts, on balance.
- "Regrets" implies that This House rejects something rather than embraces it. The Government needs to show why it would be better if this had never happened.

Format:

The Prime Minister (PM) speaks first and outlines definitions for the resolution and frames the scope of debate and burdens for each side.

The Leader of Opposition (LO) follows and attacks the Government's (GOV) case. Time permitting, they should present an "Off Case" which can include another side for debate but is of secondary importance to the GOV case. The LO should NOT redefine the resolution unless it is obvious the resolution is non-topical, a truism, or detracts from the educational value of debate. This topicality argument becomes another point the judge can vote off in the round: was the way the GOV defined the resolution educational? If it is deemed abusive, the OPP should win the round regardless of arguments presented.

The Member of Government (MG) supports the "On Case" and attacks the "Off Case" and Member of Opposition (MOP) do the reverse. The focus should be on the case provided by the Government. No new contention-level arguments should be given in the member speeches by either team (Speeches 3&4 in the round), but POI/POC may be made outside of the first and last minute of the replies.

After all speakers have spoken once, the PM and LO will give the reply speeches , with The Opposition's reply happening first and The Government's reply second. The reply speeches are not going to delve into fine detail, but will take a broad approach to the issues of the debate. They should also summarize their own case either as part of the analysis of the issues or towards the end of the speech as a separate section. For obvious reasons the reply speeches cannot introduce new arguments. Not only is this unfair but a complete misunderstanding of the role of reply speeches. The reply speech is a summing up of the whole debate, not a chance to introduce new ideas. Voting Issues are welcomed in this section.

Speaking time for speeches is 7 minutes, and for reply speeches 5 minutes (must be given by PM or LO). There is no extra preparation time provided.

Clash between the teams is vital. However, individuals do not have a burden to respond to any specific number of arguments. Adding additional argumentation to the debate is far more important than pointing out arguments that went unrefuted by the other team.

Judges should have the sole discretion to determine what arguments were dropped and what arguments were responded to.

Interruptions:

A Point of Information, Clarification, Order or Procedure is offered in the course of a speech by a member of the opposing team. The points may be made in all speeches including reply (except for during protected time) The speaker may either accept the point or decline it. If accepted, the opponent may make a short point or ask a short question (15 seconds or less) that deals with some issue in the debate (preferably one just made by the speaker). There is no limit to questions asked or answered during a given debate, but there should be some clashing interactions between teams during debate.

- *Points of Clarification* – Stand, be recognized, and ask for clarification of something the speaker has said.
- *Points of Information* – Stand, be recognized, and ask a question where the speaker is challenged directly to defend their statement.
- *Points of Order* – Stand during reply speeches or 2nd member speeches to indicate a new contention-level argument when it cannot be refuted. If the judge feels the argument (not new support of a prior argument) is new, the judge may note this on the ballot and disregard the argument.
- *Points of Procedure* – Stand, be recognized, and state a rules/procedure violation that helps maintain the educational value of debate.

A Point of Information is offered by standing and saying "Point of Information/ Clarification/Order/Procedure." The speaker on the floor is not obliged to accept every point. He may ask the interrupter to sit down, may finish the sentence and then accept the point, or may accept the point then and there.

More than one member of the opposing team may rise simultaneously. The speaker on the floor may decline all or some and may choose which one to take. The others then sit down. Opposing speakers must sometimes tread a fine line between the legitimate offering of Points of Information on the one hand and overwhelming the speaker on the other. The fact that Points of Information must be offered makes the parliamentary debate more aggressive and more prone to interruptions. However, continuous offering by a team really amounts to excessive interruption. This should incur penalties for the team members involved. Follow-up questions are allowed at the discretion of the speaker and the questioner should ask permission before asking a follow-up question.

In general, speakers should not offer Points of Information only a few seconds after a previous offer has been declined or while the speaker on the floor is clearly in the early stages of answering a Point of Information he just accepted: frequent violations of these principles might reasonably be penalized.

The Point of Information may be in the form of a question to the person making a speech, or it may be a remark addressed to the speaker. The Point of Information must be brief. 10 to 15 seconds is the norm, and over that the questioner should be told to sit down by the speaker. As well, when the person making the speech understands the point, he can tell the interrupter to sit down - the speaker does not have to let the interrupter complete his point in all cases.

Communication During the Round:

While debaters should not be disruptive during the round—and should be penalized appropriately if they are—they should be able to communicate quietly and nonverbally with only their own teammates. without penalty throughout debate through passing notes, electronic chat, etc. without incurring penalty. This practice is necessary since there is no allocated preparation time and a good Parliamentary debate team should function as a team.

Technology and Parliamentary Debate:

Technology is allowed during all phases of PHSSL competition, and Parliamentary debate is no exception. Students may use technology during the preparation and competition phases of the round to access previously prepared evidence and analysis, gather information or communicate with those in the round. Students should NOT be communicating with anyone outside of the round including teammates they might share online documents with during the round. The judge has the right to check this at any time.

Winning the Debate:

The goal of every Parliamentary debate round is to either uphold or defeat the Government case, as is the case in British Parliament. The "Off Case" can also be factored into the decision, but "off case" arguments should be given lower priority than "On case" arguments. Winning clashes, presenting sound logical arguments, offering appropriate evidence, and presenting persuasively should all be weighed in deciding the round. Although empirical evidence is allowed and encouraged, good argumentation and logical reasoning should triumph over empirical evidence. Therefore, the official Debate Evidence Rules do not apply to Parliamentary Debate.

Article B6 – Parliamentary Debate

Section B6.1

In the District Tournament and the State Tournament, the format shall be as follows:

A. Two speakers will form a team and only two teams will participate in each debate.
B. All of the rounds of both the district and state competitions will be Extemporaneous Debate rounds.
C. The exact motions for the Extemporaneous Debate rounds will be developed prior to the tournament from a list of six topic areas approved by the PHSSL Executive Board at their summer meeting. The specific wording of the motion will be published with the schematic of the round. Teams will have 20 minutes in their competition rooms for preparation. The judge of the round will supervise this preparation time period.
D. Extemporaneous Rounds - Teams will draw for sides on the motion.

Section B6.2 Motions

This House shall be defined as the people in this room, the United States Federal Govt, the United Nations, a non- specific developing country, a nonspecific developing country in the present, the "state of PA," non-specific local government, or any House made obvious by the resolution.

Section B6.3 Format

A. After all speakers have spoken once, the first speaker for each side gives a reply speech, with the opposition reply going first and the proposition second. Speaking time for speeches is 7 minutes, and for reply speeches 5 minutes. There is no extra preparation time provided.

B. First Speaker for The Government First	7 minutes
Speaker for The Opposition Second	7 minutes
Speaker for The Government Second	7 minutes
Speaker for The Opposition	7 minutes
Reply Speech for The Opposition	5 minutes
Reply Speech for The Government	5 minutes

C. All contention-level arguments must be made within the first two speeches on by each side.

Section B6.4 – Extemporaneous Rounds

A. Topic areas for the extemporaneous rounds at districts and state tournaments will be announced after the Executive Board's summer meeting. Member schools are encouraged to use these topic areas at other tournaments throughout the year.

B. The specific wording of the motion for debate will be released with the pairing schematic for the round. Teams will report to their competition rooms where the judge will supervise a 20-minute preparation period.

Section B6.5 – Points of Information

During any speech except the reply speeches, members of the opposing team may offer Points of Information to briefly interject a point that the speaker may immediately respond to.

A. The first and last minute of each main speech, as well as the entire duration of reply speeches, are "protected time," meaning that no Points of Information may be offered.
B. A Point of Order can be called if new contention-level arguments are presented in the reply speeches. If the judge decides that a new argument has been made, the round is won by the team calling for the Point of Order. If the judge decides that a new argument was not made, the round goes to the non-calling team.
C. A Point of Procedure may be called and may become part of the debate if a rules violation occurs that negatively affects the ability to maintain educational debate and can be easily corrected by the teams participating.

Section B6.6

A school may enter two two-person teams in the district tournament. No substitution of debaters may be made at either the district or state tournament after Round I begins. Students qualify to the state tournament as a team; no substitutions are allowed.

Section B6.7

Each district automatically qualifies two two-person debate teams. If there are 10 - 20 parliamentary debate teams, a third team qualifies to the State Tournament; if 21 or more teams compete, a fourth team qualifies to the State Tournament

Section B6.8

No interaction between a coach or any other person not involved in the debate and the debaters is permitted during a debate.

Section B6.9

If a debate team is 15 minutes late for a scheduled round of debate or for the preparation of an extemporaneous debate round, it shall forfeit the round of debate unless the delay is a result of a function of the tournament.

Section B6.10

No judges may be hired for the
State Tournament in this event.

Section B6.11

Students have 30 seconds or what is deemed reasonable by judges outside of prep time to produce all requested evidence, then prep time starts for the opposing team. Prep time will not be deducted for either team during the exchange of evidence. Evidence that cannot be produced leads to an automatic loss of the round.

Section B6.12

A. Debaters should primarily rely on logic and general knowledge.
B. Debaters should not rely heavily on published sources during the round. Judges should enforce this rule by giving a claim supported by a citation the same weight as they would give a claim not supported by a citation,

Section B6.13

The PHSSL Parliamentary Handbook is to be considered a part of the PHSSL Constitution and Bylaws; therefore, all Constitutional provisions are applicable to the Handbook.