DEBATING MANUAL

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This manual was originally written for the *Zuriberg Toastmasters* club in Zurich, Switzerland to enable the club to hold *British Parliamentary* type debates, as the official Toastmasters manual does not include this style of debating.

This is not an official Toastmasters manual and represents only an insight into the format agreed and used by *Zuriberg Toastmasters*.

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DEBATING BASICS

Debates are a common feature of both parliaments and broadcast news. They enable both sides of a discussion to air their views in a fair environment. Separating a debate from an argument are the rules governing a debate, which ensure this fairness.

The aim of a debate is to convince the audience to support a course of action, which is laid out in the *motion*. To establish which side has persuaded the audience of their argument, a vote is taken at the end.

From a Toastmasters' perspective, debating is a combination of prepared speeches and impromptu speaking, combined with inspirational and persuasive speaking. This makes it an ideal format where all aspects of Toastmasters' craft can be utilised together.

The debating format discussed in this manual is based on the "British Parliamentary" style of debating, as practiced in many schools and at the *World Debating Championships*.

Debates can have more than two speakers per team. However, for the purposes of fitting debates into the constraints of a Toastmasters' meeting, this manual will assume two speakers per team.

PARTICIPANTS

A debate takes place between two teams, the *proposition*, who propose and are therefore in favour of the motion, and the *opposition*, who oppose the motion and are in favour of the status quo or a different course of action. The debate is moderated by the *chairman*, who ensures that the rules are followed.

Other roles that can be performed either by the chairman or by others are the *timer* and the *vote counter*.

PROPOSITION

The two members of the proposition will make the case for the motion. They take the position that the status quo is not acceptable and that something should change. At the end of their speeches, they will encourage the house to support the motion by *"commending the motion to the house"* or via another similar sentence, for example *"I urge the house to support this motion"*.

▸ Proposition speaker 1: The first proposition speaker will define the motion and lay out the case (complete argument) for it. This speech is akin to a prepared Toastmasters speech.

▸ Proposition speaker 2: The second proposition speaker will refute the first opposition speaker's argument against the motion. Whilst having some prepared notes, he will write much of his speech while listening to and in response to the first opposition's speech.

After the questions from the floor (audience) and the second opposition speaker's summation speech, the first proposition speaker will make the final, short summation speech, explaining why the house should vote for the motion.

OPPOSITION

The two members of the opposition will make the case against the motion. They believe that the status quo or an alternative course of action is better than the proposition's motion.

▸ Opposition speaker 1: The first opposition speaker will make a clear case against the motion. The first opposition speech will be prepared, but the speaker may also choose briefly to refute the first proposition speaker. The first opposition speaker may find that the opposition's interpretation of the motion is slightly different than proposition's understanding of it. This is not a problem; it is simply a further topic of debate during the speeches!

▸ **Opposition speaker 2:** The second opposition speaker will refute the arguments for the motion. He is the last speaker to speak before the debate is opened to the floor (audience).

After the questions from the floor, the first opposition speaker will make a short summation speech, explaining why the house should vote against the motion.

When giving their speeches the *proposition* and *opposition* should observe *parliamentary language*. Insulting the other side is not allowed; however, questioning their judgement and understanding is. Speakers address other speakers as *"my honourable friend"* or *"the member of the opposition/proposition"*.

CHAIRMAN

The chairman is responsible for keeping the debate running smoothly, and ensuring that the rules are followed. He or she will correct speakers if they stray, for example, through improper language or overly long points of information. He or she will maintain order both between the speakers and also on the floor (audience).

> Speakers who overrun their allotted time will be cut off by the chairman.

At the beginning of the first debate of the evening, the chairman will explain the debate format. Before each debate, the chairman will introduce the debate teams. Then he or she will state the motion as neutrally as possible, to avoid prejudicing the floor (audience) in favour of either team's argument.

After the first four speeches (two from each team) the chairman will open the debate to the floor (audience). The chairman will moderate the discussion by acknowledging questioners from the floor, addressing the relevant debaters, and ensuring that the floor debate finishes on time. The chairman will then introduce the summary speeches. The chairman will close the debate at the end of the proposition's summation speech, and call for a house vote. Once the ballots are collected, the chairman will introduce the evaluator, and then retire from service for the evening.

The chairman shall always be addressed as *"Mister Chairman"* or *"Madame Chairman"* as appropriate.

TIMER

The timer indicates when each speaker should begin and end, and when points of information are permitted. The Timer will indicate to the chairman if the time is exceeded.

The timer will use a bell to indicate the following:

▸ a **double bell** to indicate that a speaker may begin.

▸ a **subsequent single bell** to indicate that points of information may now be delivered.

▸ **another single bell** to indicate that points of information may no longer be delivered.

▸ **another double bell** to indicate the end of the allotted speaking time.

> Unlike in Toastmasters, no timing cards are used in debating.

FLOOR

The floor (audience) will have the opportunity to question the speakers after the first four speeches (two from each team) are over. Like the speakers, floor members must address their questions to the Chairman and respect the rules of language.

After the summation speeches, the floor will vote to decide if the motion passes or not. If the motion passes, the proposition wins the debate. If the motion fails, the opposition wins.

BALLOT COUNTER

The vote may be decided either by a show of hands or via ballots. The votes shall be counted by either the chairman or a ballot counter.

EVALUATOR

If time is available, an independent evaluation of the debate is very useful, to indicate where the speakers performed well and where there may be room for improvement.

Substance is the key criterion for success. The evaluator should pay attention to the reasoning, analysis, and organisation of the debaters and their arguments, as well as the evidence offered. The evaluator will also observe the quick thinking of the debaters, since speakers must compose rebuttals and refutations while the debate is in progress.

In addition, the evaluator should assess how the speakers delivered their arguments by looking at the use of various performance tools available to the speakers, such as vocal variety, pauses, etc.

FORMAT

The debate follows an alternating format, starting with the proposition. This allows subsequent speakers to pick up on comments and ideas raised by previous speakers and to integrate counter- or complementary -arguments into their speeches.

▸ **Introduction by Chairman:** The *chairman* will introduce the debate and the speakers.

▸ **1st Proposition Speech:** Defines the motion and lays out arguments for the motion.

▸ **1st Opposition Speech:** Puts forward the opposition's interpretation of the motion lays out arguments against it.

▸ **2nd Proposition Speech:** Refutes the arguments of the opposition.

▸ **2nd Opposition Speech:** Refutes the arguments of the proposition.

▸ **Floor Debate:** moderated by *chairman*

▸ **Opposition Summary Speech:** Summarises the opposition case, refutes the proposition case.

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▸ **Floor Vote**

▸ **Evaluation**

POINTS OF INFORMATION

During the *opposition* and *proposition speeches* prior to the *floor debate*, the team not speaking can offer the speaker a *point of information*.

Points of information are intended to undermine the opponents' arguments by highlighting faulty logic, contradictions, lack of evidence, etc.

> A good *point of information* can throw your opponent off-course and leave his or her argument weakened

Opponents may deliver points of information between during *the period between the two single bells* during the first two speeches from each team.

Points of information should be short and to the point, to avoid eating into the speakers' allotted time.

The speaker being interrupted is under no obligation to accept the point of information, but general practice dictates that speakers will accept 1 - 2 points per speech. Once a speaker has accepted a point of information, he or

she is expected to respond; simply ignoring the point is considered bad manners.

Opponents deliver points of information by standing up at their chairs and uttering, *"Point of information, Mister/Madame Chairman"*. Once the speaker has stopped to accept the point of information, the opponent addressed the point to the chair, not to the speaker directly. For example, *"Madame Chairman, my honourable friend has not understood..."* or *"Mister Chairman, it is clearly not true that..."*

The opponent offering the point of information will remain standing until he has finished stating the point of information, or until the current speaker rejects his point.

> Wait until the speaker gives way before delivering the *point of information*; don't talk over them!

The chairman may cut off overly long points of information, or points in which the person offering the points is harassing the speaker. Equally, the chairman may encourage a speaker who is not taking points to reconsider and accept one!

See also *1st and 2nd speech timing* in the *format* section.

ROOM LAYOUT

The *proposition* and *opposition* should sit at the front of the room in front of the audience, either side of the speaking area. If desired, a lectern can be placed between the two teams for giving the speeches. The *chairman* and *timer* should sit at the front, in clear line-of-sight of the speakers.

Proposition

Speaking area

Opposition

SUGGESTED TIMING

Below are suggested durations for the *Zuriberg format*, which can be slotted in a Toastmasters' meeting in place of prepared speeches and evaluations, or the *mini debate format* which is half as long and suitable where the participants have little time to prepare.

SEGMENT	*ZURIBERG* FORMAT	MINI DEBATE FORMAT
1st proposition speech	5:00 *(POIs 1:00-4:00)*	2:30 *(POIs 0:20-2:10)*
1st opposition speech	5:00 *(POIs 1:00-4:00)*	2:30 *(POIs 0:20-2:10)*
2nd proposition speech	5:00 *(POIs 1:00-4:00)*	2:30 *(POIs 0:20-2:10)*
2nd opposition speech	5:00 *(POIs 1:00-4:00)*	2:30 *(POIs 0:20-2:10)*
Floor debate	5:00 *(n/a)*	3:00 *(n/a)*
Opposition summary speech	2:00 *(no POIs)*	1:00 *(no POIs)*
Proposition summary speech	2:00 *(no POIs)*	1:00 *(no POIs)*
Vote	-	
Duration	29:00	15:00

1ST & 2ND SPEECH TIMING

As mentioned in the sections on the role of the *timer* and on *points of information* a double bell is used indicate the beginning and end of the speech, whilst a single bell is used to indicate the beginning and end of the period where *points of information* can be delivered.

BELL	*ZURIBERG* FORMAT	MINI DEBATE FORMAT
Double bell	0:00	0:00
Points of information **may not** be offered	0:00-1:00	0:00-0:20
Single bell	1:00	0:20
Points of information **may** be offered	1:00-4:00	0:20-2:10
Single bell	4:00	2:10
Points of information **may not** be offered	4:00-5:00	2:10-2:30
Double bell	5:00	2:30

PREPARATION

Debates can be either prepared days in advance or with only a few minutes' notice. In the case of debates to be prepared with little notice, crib sheets are recommended to enable participants to build-up fact-based arguments.

It is desirable that debaters prepare with their team-mates to create a fluid, continual train of thought and coherent argument.

THE MOTION

In debating the idea put forward by the proposition is the motion. It will usually be worded as follows:

"This house believes that..."

The house is everyone in the room and the result of the vote is the opinion of the house. Thus the debaters wish to convince the *house* of their arguments.

The motion cannot be amended and must be debated as is. However, the wording often provides considerable scope for discussion and a debate can be won or lost depending on how either team interprets the wording, even down to the definition of individual words.

NOTES

During the debate itself, it is perfectly acceptable, even desirable, to use notes, given that debating is about facts.

USEFUL RESOURCES

INTERNATIONAL DEBATE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (IDEA)

idebate.org

At the heart of *IDEA* is the *debatabase*, which contains motions, support materials and further reading links for hundreds of different topics.

WORLD DEBATING NEWS

worlddebating.blogspot.com

Whilst the blog from this site has moved to *IDEA*, the content on *"how to debate"* including *rules* and *tips* are very useful and not yet available on *IDEA*.