



## INTRODUCTION TO WORLDS STYLE HEART OF EUROPE DEBATING TOURNAMENT

Adapted from World Schools Debating Championships ([www.schoolsdebate.com](http://www.schoolsdebate.com)). Notes for Adjudicators - compiled by Christopher Erskine (Australia) with Rosemary Dixon and Andrew Stockley (New Zealand), Elizabeth Virgo (Bermuda) and David Pritchard (Wales).

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Remember that this is a different marksheet from what you are used to at home. You can't judge these debates by adapting the international marksheet to fit domestic marksheets with which you are more familiar. So leave your own marksheet in your suitcase along with your national rule books, and look at this mark sheet with no preconceptions of what the categories mean.

### 1.1 CONTENT

Content covers the arguments that are used, divorced from the speaking style. It is as if you are seeing the arguments written down rather than spoken. You must assess the weight of the arguments without being influenced by the magnificence of the orator that presented them.

Content will also include an assessment of the weight of rebuttal or clash. This assessment must be done from the standpoint of the average reasonable person.

The adjudicator's job is to assess the strength of an argument regardless of whether the other team is able to knock it down. If a team introduces a weak argument, it will not score highly in content even if the other team doesn't refute it. Two consequences flow from this, however:

First, if a major team argument is plainly weak, an opposing team which doesn't refute it may well have committed a greater sin than the team which introduced it. In effect the team has let the other team get away with a weak argument. This is not an automatic rule, but is true in many cases. Of course, it must be a major argument, not a minor example which the opposing team correctly chooses to ignore in favour of attacking more significant points.

Second, adjudicators have to be careful not to be influenced by their own beliefs and prejudices, nor by their own specialised knowledge. For example, if you are a lawyer and you know that a team's argument was debunked by the International Court of Justice last week, you should probably not take into account this special knowledge unless the ICJ's decision was a matter of extreme public notoriety.

Distancing oneself from personal attitudes is particularly difficult in international competitions. Teams may use examples from your part of the world that you know to be wrong, but would you expect people from other countries to know that the example is wrong? For example, I doubt that I would penalise a team which had an incomplete though superficially correct understanding of Australian foreign policy. But I would be less understanding of a team which displayed an incomplete understanding of American or Japanese foreign policy, for example, because of the importance of those countries in so many international issues.

### 1.2 STYLE

The term is perhaps misleading. Adjudicators are not looking for speakers who are *stylish*, but rather they are looking at the *style* of the speakers.

Style covers the way the speakers speak. As has already been noted, this can be done in many ways, in funny accents and with the use of strange terminology. Put the strangeness out of your mind and be tolerant of different ways of presenting arguments.

There are some particular things that you need to be warned about in advance:





are readily understandable. If anything some of these teams are more understandable than the occasional broad Glaswegian or high-speed Australian that we get from native English speaking teams.

However, while we must give due credit to teams for whom English is a second language, this is not the same thing as giving credit to these teams for the very difficult task of debating in a foreign language. Judges might be tempted to be sympathetic and mark these teams on a more generous scale. This is against the rules (*see Rule 18(b)*).

Non-English-speaking teams take part in the competition on the same footing as native English speaking teams. They take part knowing that they will be against teams for whom English is a first language. If this sometimes leads to one-sided debates, that is a fact of life in the competition and should be reflected in the marks. But if they are genuinely as fluent and persuasive as the native English speakers, one should mark them accordingly.

### 1.3 STRATEGY

Strategy requires some attention. I think it covers two concepts:

1. the **structure and timing** of the speech, and
2. whether the speaker understood the **issues** of the debate.

These matters are sufficiently important to justify taking them separately.

#### 1.3.1 STRUCTURE AND TIMING

A good speech has a clear beginning, middle and end. Along the way there are signposts to help us see where the speaker is going. The sequence of arguments is logical and flows naturally from point to point. This is as true of a first speaker outlining the government case as it is of the third speaker rebutting the government case. Good speech structure, therefore is one component of strategy.

Timing is also important, but it must not be taken to extremes. There are two aspects to timing.

1. speaking within the allowed time limit, and
2. giving an appropriate amount of time to the issues in the speech.

As to the first, a speaker who goes significantly over time (for example, 9 minutes in an 8 minute speech) ought to get a penalty . Equally, a speaker who goes significantly under time (for example, 7 minutes in an 8 minute speech) in most cases would get a similar penalty. Bear in mind, however, that timing is only one element of strategy. A speaker whose only sin is to go over time might still get a reasonable strategy mark if every other aspect of strategy was quite outstanding. It would not be a brilliant mark - there would still be a penalty - but it would not automatically be a very low mark either. It all depends how good the rest of the elements of strategy were.

As to the second, a speaker ought to give priority to important issues and leave unimportant ones to later. For example it is generally a good idea for a rebuttal speaker ( i.e. anyone other

















the opposition would almost certainly have to argue the need for international financial responsibility by governments, no matter how tough and unfeeling this may sound. The best debates are often ones between two strongly opposed arguments, rather than between two wishy-washy cases that try to compromise at every opportunity.

## 5 POINTS OF INFORMATION

Points of information were borrowed from British debating. However, in a couple of respects they have taken on a life of their own in the World Championships, and have to be treated as a phenomenon new to British and non-British judges alike.

A point of information is offered in the course of a speech by a member of the opposing team. The speaker may either accept the point or decline it. If accepted, the opponent may make a short point or ask a short question that deals with some issue in the debate (preferably one just made by the speaker). It is, if you like, a formal interjection.

### 5.1 DEBATING IS MORE THAN A SPEECH

Points of information bring about a major change in the role of speakers in a debate. In this style each speaker must take part in the debate from beginning to end, not just during their own speech. A first speaker for the government continues to play an active role in the debate even when the third speaker for the opposition is speaking. Equally, the third speaker for the opposition must play an active role in the debate when the first speaker for the government is speaking.

The speakers play this role by offering points of information. Even if the points are not accepted, they must still demonstrate that they are involved in the debate by at least offering. A speaker who takes no part in the debate other than by making a speech should lose marks for content and strategy - content for failing to take advantage of opportunities, strategy for failing to understand the role of a speaker under this style.

Equally, speakers must ensure that they accept at least some points of information during their speech. In an 8 minute speech, taking at least 2 would be expected (depending, of course, on how many are offered). A speaker who fails to accept any points of information must lose marks for content (failing to allow the other side to make points, thus reducing the amount of direct clash between the two teams) and particularly strategy (for not understanding the role of the speakers in this style - or, to put it another way, for cowardice!). Of course, a speaker who takes too many will almost certainly lose control of the speech and thus lose marks for style and probably also for strategy (poor speech structure) and content as well.

### 5.2 THE ETIQUETTE OF POINTS OF INFORMATION

A point of information is offered by standing and saying "Point of information;" or something similar. The speaker on the floor is not obliged to accept every point. She or he may - ask the interrupter to sit down finish the sentence and then accept the point, or 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





A simple solution has been devised in Australia by Annette Whiley. Each judge has a separate sheet of paper, divided into six boxes (one line down the middle, three across the page). Each box represents the offering of points by a speaker. During the first speaker for the government, the three boxes on the right hand side will be used to record the offering of points by the three opposition speakers. A simple tallymark shows one was offered. If one was accepted, a brief note about it can be included in the box. At the end of the debate this allows the judge to see what sort of contribution was being made by each speaker in offering points of information.

At the 1994 National Schools Championships in Australia we experimented with a separate category worth 5 marks for the offering of points of information. On the whole I don't think this worked very well. So we seem to be back with marking the offering of points within each speaker's speech marks.

A speaker's speech mark should only be adjusted if her contribution to the debate through offering points of information differed significantly from her contribution in her speech. (Contribution to the debate through offering points of information involves both the quantity of points of information offered and the quality of those accepted: speakers should not be penalized if they offer plenty of points but none is accepted.) A speaker's speech mark may be adjusted by up to two marks in either direction to take account of points of information offered: if such an adjustment is being made, the judge should write, e.g., +1 or -2 in the appropriate column on the ballot. So, a speaker whose speech deserved a 70 but who offered remarkably good points of information might receive an overall mark of 71, or perhaps 72 if the points were truly outstanding. A speaker whose speech deserved a 76 but who offered almost no points of information might receive an overall mark of 74 or 75. But a speaker whose speech deserved a 64 should not lose marks for failing to offer many points of information, because his contribution through offering points was no worse than his speech. Likewise, a speaker whose speech deserved a 78 does not get extra marks for making a couple of very good points of information, because those points were no better than her speech

A summary of how to mark points of information is as follows:

The primary component of the speaker's marks is the speaker's speech.

That mark can **increase** by up to a couple of marks if the speaker offered superb points of information during the rest of the debate.

That mark can **decrease** by up to a couple of marks if the speaker:

- (i) offered no points of information (or almost none) during the rest of the debate;
- (ii) offered bad points of information during the rest of the debate;
- (iii) failed to accept points of information during her or his own speech.

Note that just because the response to a point of information was good, it doesn't mean that the point was not a good one. Don't judge the worth of the point on the response. After all if a motion is strongly arguable on both sides, then the major points on each side should have good counter-arguments.



## 6 MARKING STANDARD

Consistency is a virtue. It ought to be possible for a debater to pick up a marksheet from any judge and work out how good the debate was just from the marks that were offered.

But if one judge thinks a good speech was worth 95% and another judge thought it was just as good and therefore worth 75%, we have a problem.

Marking standards are imposed in every competition. They are necessarily arbitrary. There is no reason why any particular standard is better than any other. But there must be a standard, and here it is.

The expected range of marks is from 60% for an appalling speech to 80% for a brilliant one.

A good average speech at this competition is worth 70%.

*Judges shall never give a speaker mark greater than 80 or less than 60.*

It is true that this marking standard means that we are really marking each speaker out of 20. But that doesn't matter. A standard is a standard, and this is what should be used.

### 6.1 A RELATIVE ABSOLUTE, OR MERELY RELATIVE

Adopting this standard means that you do not mark the first government speaker at 70 and mark everybody else up or down from that point. Instead, you must have a mental picture of a good average speech for this competition and mark every speaker (including the first government) according to that hypothetical. Thus the first government is as likely as the third opposition to score 80 or 60.

This allows some basis of comparison between marks in different debates (although the system isn't foolproof). The alternative, of marking everybody relative to the first government at 70, means that the marks for a brilliant debate and for an abysmal one will be about the same.

This standard begs the question of what is a good average speech for this competition. Unfortunately the question is impossible to answer. We could not say, for example, that a good average speech was likely to come from the team from a particular country, because the standard of most teams varies considerably from year to year.

There is often a huge gap between teams at the top and bottom of the marking range. The competition attracts both highly skilled and experienced debaters at one end of the range, and novice debaters from non English speaking countries with no exposure to debate at the other.

It is theoretically possible that the overall standard one year is very high while in another year it is very low. This ought to be reflected in the marks for the whole competition. But it is not necessary for an individual judge's marks to average around 70 throughout the competition, although this is likely if the judge is judging teams from across the whole spectrum of abilities at the competition. If your marks are consistently coming in above or below 70, you might swap thoughts with your fellow judges to see if it is just you or whether you really have been judging a distinctly non-average group of teams.





should reliably indicate which team won the debate, given the particular weightings of different categories we use at World Schools.

It is also worth noting the phenomenon called "the accelerating rebuttal mark". Some judges are swayed by rebuttal or clash. The more there is, the more they believe the speaker is doing a good job. This is logical until you realise that the government has one less opportunity to rebut the other side than the opposition does. The accelerating rebuttal mark means that opposition teams get a big advantage. Always be sure that you are giving full credit to the way a team has proposed an argument as well as to the way their opponents have attempted to knock it down.

#### 6.4 JUDICIAL DISCUSSIONS

The practice in the World competition is for the judges to go outside after the debate to discuss the issues so that one can present a short commentary on behalf of the judges. It ought to go without saying that a judge cannot go outside to discuss the debate without having reached a decision. The easiest way to ensure this is to insist that each judge hand in their completed marksheet to the person chairing the debate before they go outside to discuss the result. Once handed in, it cannot be changed as a result of the discussions outside. If we did not insist on this rule, the debate outside the room would be more important than the one inside it!

#### 6.5 THE ADJUDICATION SPEECH

Before the adjudication speech, but after ballots have been completed and handed to the chairperson, the judges have a brief opportunity to confer. This is not the time to try to persuade your fellow judges that they made a mistake on a particular issue or in their overall result. Their ballots are locked in like yours, and the only point of conferring is to help one of the judges give the adjudication speech. So, keep the discussion short and to the point. If you dissented and your views are quite different from the rest of the panel, briefly express your reasons and then stay out of the discussion.

The adjudication speech should explain the result of the debate to the audience. Teams can and should speak to the judges individually after the debate, but this is the only opportunity for the audience to hear the reason for the decision. The adjudication speech should not refer to mistakes made by individual speakers: you can discuss these privately after the debate instead of belittling a speaker in public.

Explaining the result to an audience that has just seen its first World Schools debate may require outlining the three categories in which we award marks and, where appropriate, identifying the category in which the decisive difference between the teams was to be found. The adjudication speech should not summarize the content of the debate except insofar as is truly necessary to explain the result. The speech should be as short as possible – typically between 2 and 4 minutes – while communicating to the audience a clear, explanation of the result of the debate (and expressing thanks to the hosts and sponsors).

When giving the adjudication speech you should remember that you are speaking for the panel, not just for yourself. Where there are importantly differing views, especially if the decision is not unanimous, you need to try as far as possible to explain how those differences came about. If at all possible, you should explain the grounds on which one or more judge



dissented in a way that emphasizes the reasonableness of the disagreement, rather than leaving the audience to think that one judge got it wrong. In the unlikely and unfortunate event that you cannot present the dissenting view in a way that makes it sound reasonable, it is better to say nothing about it: just explain that the panel reached a majority verdict and then present the views of the majority.