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An example of the set up being delivered by Miss Natalie Wang of Anglo-Chinese Junior College at the 2011 Bratislava Schools Debating Championships on the motion : This house believes that every state should have a right to prosecute any individual for crimes against humanity committed anywhere in the world.

Introduction

The set up provides the foundation for the debate. Consisting of the definition, clarification, parameter and yardstick, the set up plays a critical role in establishing the grounds for the debate. Without a good set up, both sets of debaters and the judges could easily become confused over the course of the match. Good Proposition teams will ensure that their set up helps their case as much as possible (while being fair) and good Opposition teams will have to check, expand and if necessary, challenge the definitions to get an edge. Failure to address the set up properly could lead to teams debating on their opponents' terms, which is usually a

recipe for defeat.

Definition



The definition refers to the explanation and contextualization of the terms in the motion so that the debaters, judges and audience members will understand what these terms mean exactly. This is expected for all the key terms in the motion, even if these terms appear to be self-explanatory. Debaters are usually not required to define every single term in the motion. However, the key terms in the debate will have to be explained and the motion as a whole will have to be explained by the First Proposition Speaker.

Tiers of Definition



There are 3 tiers of definition that can be used by debaters.

(i) Literal

The dictionary definition, which is especially useful for issues not debated often.

To illustrate: To define the term “Social Network”, one will say : It is a website or internet based programme that is specifically tasked with easing the ability to connect and find friends of similar interest groups.

(ii)Contextualised

Additional information on how this concept/entity/action applies in the real world. Proposition may sometimes use this technique to portray these terms in a manner which suits their case better (without making the definition unfair).

To illustrate: A contextualised definition could read: A “Social Network” functions as a one-stop web location that simplifies the ability to rally groups of like minded individuals for various grass root causes as well as spread information and news easily. It also enables long lost friends to more easily reconnect with one another.

(iii) Examples

The use of some examples could be useful in the definitions as they will allow the participants of a debate to grasp immediate the term in the motion are.

To illustrate: Such examples include but are not exclusive to Facebook & Twitter.

Acceptable Definitions



The Proposition has the power of definition. However, it cannot abuse this position to render the definition of the motion such that the Opposition has been left with no room to debate. Thus, an acceptable definition will need to fit the following criteria:

Obvious to the Layman

The definition should be obvious to the average person on the street, especially if there is more than one acceptable dictionary definition of a certain word. If the Proposition chooses to use the more obscure definition in order to render the Opposition's case irrelevant, this is called "Squirreling" and is illegal in the WSDC format.

Illustration: For the motion "This house would go nuclear," the common understanding of the motion is that it will be a debate on atomic technology. If the Proposition decides to have a debate on "nuclear families," they will be technically correct but the definition will not be acceptable as it will be an obscure understanding of the word "nuclear."

There could, however, be some motions where there is a less than obvious understanding of what the terms in the motion may refer to. In these cases, as long as the definition allows reasonable room for debate (see next section), it can be deemed acceptable.

Illustration: For the motion, "THW require stricter regulation on drugs," the Proposition could define drugs as "pharmaceuticals" while the Opposition defined drugs as "narcotics." In this instance, the Proposition's definition could still be acceptable as it still provides sufficient room for the Opposition to debate.

Allow Room for Debate

The definition should allow both sides reasonable room for debate. If the Proposition denies sufficient room for the Opposition to debate, the definition will not be acceptable. Thus, the Proposition will have to avoid definitions of the following nature:

A Truism

A definition which is a truism means that it will not allow the Opposition team to make any arguments as the Proposition's stance will be obviously true. For instance, for the motion "THBT that this is the age of the nation state," the Proposition chooses to take the stance that "nation states exist in the world," which is obviously true and cannot be refuted by the Opposition. A more reasonable definition will be that the nation state is "the predominant actor and driver in the world today."

A Tautology

A tautology refers to a definition that is skewed or limited in order to make it true. Again, this leaves the Opposition very little room to play with and makes the definition unacceptable. For instance, for the motion "TH regrets terrorism," if the Proposition defines terrorists as "individuals who have committed a crime without just cause" this does not leave the Opposition with much room to play with and forces it to defend a restricted understanding of terrorists.

On Absolute Words

Some motions are worded in such a way that they sound absolute. For instance, the motion could read "This house believes that all schools should abolish uniforms," it will not be possible for Proposition to prove that every single school in the world should abolish school uniforms. Thus, it is acceptable for the Proposition to try to prove the case in the majority of the circumstances. Likewise the Opposition cannot win this debate by pointing out a single instance where schools should not abolish uniforms. They will have to oppose by showing that there is a significant number of schools which should not abolish them.

Defining Policies



Responding to Definitions



In an ideal debate, both set of debaters will agree on the definition and move ahead to the arguments and rebuttals. However, in many cases, the Opposition may find that the definition is not to their liking. In these cases, they could take the following options:

Expanding the Definition

If the Opposition feels that Proposition's definition was generally acceptable except for a few areas, it may expand the definition. This allows the Opposition to modify the definitions slightly without needing to issue a challenge altogether. For example, for the motion "This house would abolish the Monarchy," the Proposition may define Monarches as individuals who do not have any power in government. However, the Opposition may wish to expand the definition by pointing out that the monarchs usually have some powers, such as the ability to dissolve parliament and to grant pardons to convicted criminals.

Challenging the Definition

However, if the opposition feels that the definition is simply not acceptable, they will have to challenge it. Be warned. Debates with definitional challenges are generally messy affairs and judges do not look forward to sitting through such matches. Thus, a definitional challenge should be issued only as a last resort. The challenge must be issued at the first Opposition Speaker and no later. Once the challenge has been issued, the Opposition team will have to follow through with the following steps:

Explaining the Challenge

It is not good enough for the Opposition to say the Proposition's motion is challenged. They must explain to the judges why the challenge was necessary and why the Proposition's definition was not fair (i.e., truism, tautological, squirreling). They must then explain why their definitions are fairer and offer more reasonable grounds for debate.

Alternate Definition

The Opposition team also has the responsibility of providing an alternative definition for the debate. This is why it is useful for the Opposition to prepare their own acceptable definition during the case preparation to prepare for such eventualities.

Sustaining the Challenge

Once a challenge has been issued, the Opposition has the responsibility to sustain the challenge down the line. This means that the Second, Third and Summary speakers will have to

sustain the challenge all the way. Failure to do so almost automatically awards the win to the Proposition. Likewise, the Proposition will have to defend its definition throughout all of its speakers or risk losing the match.

Even If

It is simply not enough for the Opposition to issue a challenge. In order to secure content points and demonstrate the ability to rebut, the Opposition team will have to do “Even if” debating. This means that the Opposition will continue to rebut the Proposition’s arguments on their own grounds and show that “even if” the Proposition’s definitions are correct, their arguments still do not stand. The Proposition, naturally, will have to do the same thing in rebutting the Opposition team.

Note – One option that the Opposition may exercise if they feel that the Proposition’s definitions are reasonable but completely different from the Opposition’s is to dump the case. This will mean that the Opposition team makes the decision to switch to the Proposition’s definitions upon hearing the Proposition First Speaker. For instance, if the Oppositions had defined “Drugs” as “Narcotics” while the Proposition gave the definition as “pharmaceuticals,” the Opposition may decide to switch their case altogether to talk about pharmaceuticals. Although the Opposition has this option, it is NOT recommended. Developing a case on the fly will always be difficult and the material from the Opposition team will usually be worse compared to a case produced after proper preparation.

Crossing the House

In some rare cases, the two teams in the debate may end up interpreting the motion in such a way that both end up with the same cases. For instance, for the motion, “THBT it is all downhill from here,” it is possible for the Proposition to say “Downhill” refers to things getting easier, as in cycling downhill. The Opposition may consider “Downhill” to mean the opposite, i.e., that things are getting worse. Thus, both their cases will be the same. In these unfortunate situations, it is up to each team to try to show that they had the more accurate understanding of the motion.

Clarifications

Clarifications refers to statements put forward by both teams which outlines what they will aim to achieve in the debate and more importantly, what they will not be doing. This allows the teams to manage expectations within a debate.

For instance, in a motion which says "This house will support the death penalty," the Proposition could clarify their stance by saying that although they believe that the death penalty is a valid form of punishment, they are not saying that it is the best form of punishment. Furthermore, they can use the clarifications to note which individuals will not be given the death penalty, e.g., children, pregnant women and the intellectually disabled.

Parameters

Parameters refer to the contextualization of the debate and deciding where the debate is to take place. Thus, the Proposition team can note that a debate on having compulsory voting can only take place in countries where people are allowed to vote freely and limit the debate to First World Democracies. Again, Opposition teams may disagree with that the parameters of the debate should be and expand them.

For instance, they may argue that compulsory voting matters especially in countries with new democratic institutions and thus should include developing countries. In general, once the parameter has been expanded, it is harder to contract it again as both teams will have to grapple with the examples and ideas from the new expanded parameters.

It is not permitted under WSDC rules to "time-set," i.e., to set limits on the time frame for the debate. Thus, the Proposition team may not say that the debate will only apply to the period before WWII.

Yardsticks

Yardsticks (or criteria) are the guiding statements or principles on which debaters judges the subject of the debate. If Debaters get this right, it is also the criteria which the adjudicator judges them. It thus helps if debaters establish the yardstick clearly from the beginning of the case. Furthermore, Debaters should come up with this yardstick during the preparation so that they will be able to better prioritise their substantives as they can ask themselves "Does my substantive back up my yardstick and to what degree?"

For instance,

- for THW ban abortion, the yardstick will be to determine whose policy will better protect the health/rights of the mother, the unborn child and society as a whole.
- for THW sacrifice economic growth for environmental protection, the yardstick will be whose policy will be the best balance between long and short term benefits for the environment/economy and how best to reach the goal of sustainable development.
- for TH celebrates the end of the American superpower, the yardstick will be a a time based analysis on the global situation with an American superpower and the global situation without it.
- for THW legalise child labour, the yardstick will be to strike a balance between what is best for the child and what is best to get the country out of poverty (presumably since it needs to resort to child labour).

