

OXFORD STYLE



OXFORD-STYLE DEBATE PRIMER FOR JUDGES

Oxford-style debate is typically based on a speaker's ability to make their case to a mainstream audience.

DEFINITION OF OXFORD-STYLE DEBATE

Oxford-style debating is a competitive debate format featuring a resolution (provocative statement) that is supported by one side and opposed by the other. There is an audience vote before and after the debate and the winner of the debate is the team that changes their numbers the most from one vote to the next, rather than who scores the highest. The audience's vote, plus the judges' scores determine the winner.

OXFORD-STYLE DEBATE FORMAT

In Oxford-style debate, the audience's position on the resolution will be polled prior to the debate. It is polled again at the end of the debate to determine which side had the greatest influence and changed the most votes from the first vote.

Speakers are expected to read a room and address audience members who may be undecided or vehemently disagree with their side. Participants in this debate construct clear, rhetorically astute opening and closing statements, and engage in cross examination with their opponents in a respectful but assertive manner.

An Oxford judge should consider how an average citizen may react to the speakers' arguments (rather than someone with an intricate knowledge of the topic or many years of debate experience).

Resolutions for Oxford debate are presented as definitive statements that challenge the status quo. Therefore, the affirmative team traditionally argues against the status quo while the negative team argues in favor of it. Because of the concentration on the mainstream audience, resolutions (and therefore the speakers' arguments) are put together under a philosophical premise rather than a policy-leaning one. For example, when the subject is free speech, resolutions will be aimed at debating the spirit and meaning of the concept, its value as a social utility, effects in common parlance, etc., and veer away from legal jargon, statutes, legislative precedents, etc. This does not mean that speakers are not allowed to include things such as Supreme Court decisions in their arguments, but rather that mention of such decisions should be in application toward the philosophical value of free speech in civil society.

Example: A resolution might state, "College Campuses are subject to the same free speech principles as non-university public spaces." If this is the case, a speaker may wish to bring up First Amendment suits in the nonacademic public sphere, such as *Hustler Magazine v. Falwell*. If the speaker points out that the fact of the court's ruling in this case establishes which free speech principles apply to nonacademic spaces, this is fine. If the speaker goes into the intricacies of the arguments made in that case, the appeals leading up to it, the various differences between libel and defamation, etc., then he or she is veering away from the philosophical topic at hand in favor of a legal argument.

OXFORD-STYLE DEBATE STRUCTURE

Oxford debates run in three sections - opening statements, cross-examination and closing statements.

Opening statements:

- Should include a brief explanation of the controversy, namely what makes it controversial in the first place. This statement is aimed at an audience with a cursory knowledge of the topic.
- Judges should feel satisfied that the topic has been clearly and concisely explained before the speaker goes into his or her case for or against the issue.
- Should include an acknowledgment of the opposing team's concerns, directly address these concerns, and clearly establish common ground - what all four speakers agree is objectively true, so that there is a common language the speakers, audience and moderator can speak.
- Strong speakers are balanced in their arguments, and ideally will seem to be making their case to audience members who would have voted against their side prior to the debate.

Cross-examination:

- During cross-examination, the moderator and then the audience ask the speakers questions based on the speaker's opening statements.
- Speakers should exhibit several skills during this round:
 - Ability to refer to points made and the basic layout of their case.
 - Listen thoughtfully to the moderator/audience questions and not offer pre-planned answers, or pivot to subjects they would rather discuss.
 - Engage respectfully in discussion with opponents, listen to opponents' responses and understand opponents' points, rebut claims directly and answer challenges to their arguments that their opponents make. Conduct should be appropriate without interrupting, shouting over or dismissing an opponent's claims.
 - Provide clear and convincing answers. Points should match the case outlined in an opening statement; claims should be supported with research; answers given in a timely fashion without taking opponents' time; and camaraderie should be displayed with partners by allowing equal time, being on the same page and being persuasive.

Closing statements:

- Speakers should avoid case summary in closing statements.
- Closing statements are meant to clarify information the speakers feel has gotten confused during previous rounds, and to make clear the practical, real-life application of points that have been discussed beyond the debate itself.
- Speakers should not introduce new information in their closing statements.
- It should be clear that speakers have taken careful, diligent notes about their opponents' case and the questions that have been asked by referring directly to them and rebutting any points that have not been fully refuted.
- Most importantly, speakers should be able to read the temperature of the room and respond in a tone that reflects this.

Additional rules for the debate:

1. No computers.
2. Speaker should orally cite their sources during the debate.
3. Speakers must answer questions as asked; pivoting is frowned upon and will be called out by the moderator.
4. No new arguments in the closing speeches.
5. One speaker at a time (especially important during the Q&A session).
6. Distortion or falsification of evidence is unethical, prohibited and grounds for forfeiture.

OXFORD SEMI-FINAL DEBATE SCHEDULE

3 - 4 P.M.

Team Selection: Top four teams will draw for an opponent in the semi-final round.

Teams Argue: Pro or con on a resolution.

Judges: Three to five judges per room.

Moderator: There will be one moderator per room.

General topic: Free speech on university campuses. Specific resolution provided to students two weeks prior to Regents' Cup.

Polling: Moderator will poll audience prior to opening statements and at conclusion as part of scoring.

Schedule: **54 minutes**

1 min: Moderator introduces resolution

1 min: Moderator polls audience on pro or con position

6 min: First pro speaker opening statement

6 min: First con speaker opening statement

30 min: Q&A session facilitated by moderator, including questions from audience

4 min: Second pro speaker summation – no new arguments

4 min: Second con speaker summation – no new arguments

1 min: Moderator polls audience on pro or con position

1 min: Moderator wrap-up

OXFORD STYLE FINAL DEBATE SCHEDULE

4:45 - 5:45 P.M.

Team Selection: Two highest scoring teams from semi-final rounds compete in final round.

Teams Argue: Pro or con on a resolution.

Judges: Three to five judges per room.

Moderator: There will be one moderator per room.

General topic: Free speech on university campuses. Specific resolution provided to students two weeks prior to Regents' Cup.

Polling: Moderator will poll audience prior to opening statements and at conclusion as part of scoring.

Schedule: 54 minutes

1 min: Moderator introduces resolution

1 min: Moderator polls audience on pro or con position

6 min: First pro speaker opening statement

6 min: First con speaker opening statement

30 min: Q&A session facilitated by moderator, including questions from audience

4 min: Second pro speaker summation – no new arguments

4 min: Second con speaker summation – no new arguments

1 min: Moderator polls audience on pro or con position

1 min: Moderator wrap-up

SAMPLE OXFORD SEMI-FINALS AND FINALS SCORING SHEET

Scoring Key: 1 = ineffective; 10 = most effective/persuasive

Resolution:

Judge: _____

Team #1 Pro: _____ Team #2 Con: _____

OPENING STATEMENTS

Clear Case/Thesis

Speaker's interpretation of the resolution is well-communicated.

Speaker's approach to the resolution makes sense.

Speaker has explained the controversy sufficiently to audience.

Speaker transitions clearly between points.

Team #1-Pro 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Team #2-Con 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Support

Speaker avoids baseless claims.

Speaker offers support for points made.

Speaker includes sources for external information.

Speaker's points are based on logical steps from one point to the next/avoids logical fallacies.

Team #1-Pro 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Team #2-Con 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

References to Opposition

Speaker directly addresses opposition's concerns (or anticipates them if speaking first).

Speaker logically rebuts these concerns.

Speaker is respectful of opposition's points.

Speaker offers relevant questions regarding opposition.

Team #1-Pro 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Team #2-Con 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Public Speaking

Speaker orates at a reasonable pace.

Speaker's stance (posture, body language) is appropriate and professional.

Speaker orates at an appropriate volume.

Speaker's inflection reflects the tone of the argument.

Team #1-Pro **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

Team #2-Con **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

Rhetoric

Speaker has a clear sense of the audience to whom he or she is speaking.

Speaker addresses a general audience and avoids esoteric language.

Speaker addresses both audience members who might disagree with the case and those who might be undecided/ill-informed.

Team #1-Pro **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

Team #2-Con **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

CROSS EXAMINATION

Q & A

Speaker listens to moderator/audience questions and considers them before answering.

Speaker does not stray from the subject in question.

Speaker's tone is respectful of the question being asked.

Team #1-Pro **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

Team #2-Con **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

Knowledge of Opposition's Case

Speaker refers to points made in opposition's opening statement.

Speaker refers to his/her notes taken during opening statements.

Speaker refers to claims made by opposition during cross examination.

Team #1-Pro **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

Team #2-Con **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

Dialogue

Speaker listens carefully to opposition's point before responding.
Speaker is respectful of opponents/avoids interruptions or outbursts.
Speaker asks relevant questions in response to opposition's claims.

Team #1-Pro	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Team #2-Con	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Case

Speaker's points align with the case outlined in opening statement.
Speakers work as a team/allow for equal time/are on the same page.
Speaker's answers are concise.
Speaker's answers are supported by research.
Speaker's case is persuasive.

Team #1-Pro	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Team #2-Con	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

CLOSING STATEMENTS

Rhetoric

Speaker's tone reflects the mood of the room.
Speaker addresses those audience members who might be on the fence/do not agree.
Speaker has a clear sense of the audience in the room.

Team #1-Pro	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Team #2-Con	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Practical Application

Speaker makes a convincing case for how the topic might affect the audience in the world outside this room.
Speaker offers credible scenarios to this effect.
Speaker supports claims.

Team #1-Pro	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Team #2-Con	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Clarification

Speaker acknowledges information that may have gotten confused.

Speaker offers a compelling explanation for these confusions.

Speaker avoids offering new information to this effect/avoids summary as well.

Team #1-Pro	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Team #2-Con	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Rebuttal

Speaker has taken diligent notes regarding the opposition's case during debate.

Speaker refers directly to opposition's arguments.

Speaker refutes these arguments convincingly.

Speaker supports rebuttals.

Team #1-Pro	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Team #2-Con	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Speaker is respectful of opposition's case.

Team #1-Pro	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Team #2-Con	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Comments: