OXFORD SCHOOLS' HUNGARIAN QUALIFIERS 2027

British Parliamentary Debate Format Guide

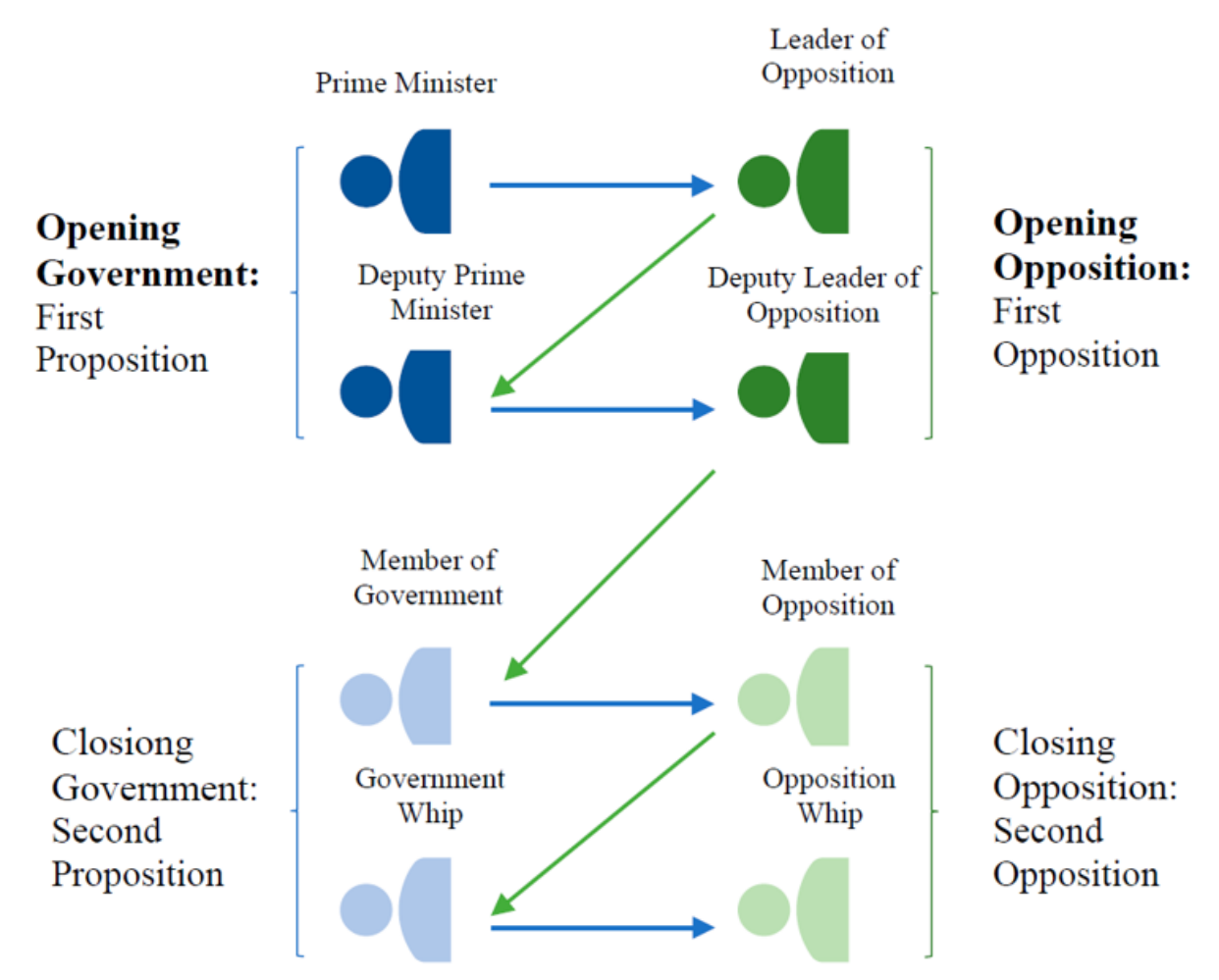
A practical guide to the structure, speaker roles, timing and judging of British Parliamentary debate.

Four teams. Eight speakers. One motion.

FORMAT AT A GLANCE

Four teams, two sides

The British Parliamentary debate format differs from many other formats because it involves four teams rather than two. Two teams, called the “Opening Government” and the “Closing Government” teams, are charged with the responsibility of supporting the proposition while two other teams, “Opening Opposition” and “Closing Opposition” are charged with opposing it.



Debate Project, 2023

7	15	4
minutes per speech	minutes to prepare	teams per debate

Two speakers represent each of the four teams and each speaker gives a speech of seven minutes. Teams get 15 minutes to prepare after the motion is announced, with no internet or external help.

SPEAKER ROLES

Who does what?

The order of speeches and the core responsibility of each speaker are set by the format.

As can be seen from the table above, the first four speeches are delivered by the Upper House (OG, and OO, collectively) then the last four speeches are delivered by the Lower House (CG, CO, collectively). Therefore, the Opening teams are responsible for the first half of the debate and the Closing teams have the responsibility for the second half.

Speaker	Speaker Responsibilities
Prime Minister **1st speaker for OG:**	Defines and interprets the motion. Develops the case for the proposition.
Leader of Opposition **1st speaker for OO:**	Accepts the definition of the motion. Refutes the case of the 1st proposition. Constructs one or more arguments against the Prime Minister's interpretation of the motion.
Deputy Prime Minister **2nd speaker for OG:**	Refutes the case of the 1st opposition. Rebuilds the case of the 1st proposition. May add new arguments to the case of the 1st proposition.
Deputy Leader of Opposition 2nd speaker for OO:	Continues refutation of case of 1st proposition. Rebuilds arguments of the 1st opposition. May add new arguments to the case of the 1st opposition.
Member of Government **1st speaker for CG:**	Defends the general direction and case of the 1st proposition. Continues refutation of 1st opposition team. Develops a new argument that is different from but consistent with the case of the 1st proposition (sometimes called an extension).
Member of Opposition **1st speaker for CO:**	Defends the general direction taken by the 1st opposition. Continues general refutation of 1st proposition case. Provides more specific refutation of 2nd opposition. Provides new opposition arguments.
Government Whip **2nd speaker for CG:**	Summarizes the entire debate from the point of view of the proposition, defending the general view point of both proposition teams with a special eye toward the case of the 2nd proposition. Does not provide new arguments.
Opposition Whip **2nd speaker for CO:**	Summarizes the entire debate from the point of view of the opposition, defending the general view point of both opposition teams with a special eye toward the case of the 2nd opposition. Does not provide new arguments.

TIMING & INTERACTION

Points of Information

1 min	POIs open	6 min	7 min
protected	until the final minute	protected	speech ends

Points of information can be requested after the first minute of a speech and prior to the last minute of the speech. The first and last minute of each speech is "protected" against interruption. The point of information can last no more than fifteen seconds and may take the form of a question, a statement, or an argument. To request a point of information, a debater rises and politely says something like "point of information please," or "on that point."

The debater has the authority to accept or deny the POI. To refuse a point of information, the debater may say something like "No thank you" or "not at this time," or may simply use a hand gesture to indicate the person should return to their seat.

After accepting a point of information, the speaker should answer the question directly. The person offering the point of information is not allowed to follow-up with additional questions.

Prime Minister

The Prime Minister has two basic responsibilities: to define and interpret the motion and to develop the case for the proposition. The first of these responsibilities is to define and interpret the motion for debate. The definition and interpretation is particularly important because it sets the stage for the entire debate. Remember, the Prime Minister has the right to define the motion and the responsibility to do so in a reasonable fashion. Therefore, if the Prime Minister's interpretation is a poor one, the likely result will be a poor debate.

In order to properly define and interpret the proposition, the Prime Minister should do the following:

- Define any ambiguous terms in the proposition.
- Show how these definitions are reasonable ones.
- Outline a model that will be used by all teams in advancing the debate.

The second responsibility of the Prime Minister is to construct a case for the proposition. Simply stated, a "case" consists of one or more arguments supporting the Prime Minister's interpretation of the motion. Therefore, the Prime Minister will outline the arguments supporting the interpretation and begin to develop each of those arguments.

OPENING HALF

Opening teams

Leader of Opposition

The Leader of the Opposition has three primary responsibilities: to accept, or undermine the definition and interpretation of the proposition, to refute part or all of the Prime Minister's case, and to present one or more arguments in opposition to the Prime Minister's interpretation of the motion.

The leader of opp can either accept or deny the definition given by the Prime Minister. In case of a denial, a valid explanation and a new definition should be provided.

Secondly, the Opposition should refute part or all of the Prime Minister's arguments for the motion. Because of the limits of time, the Leader of Opposition cannot reasonably expect to refute all of the Prime Minister's arguments. The proper goal is to select and refute the most important arguments presented by the Prime Minister.

Finally, the Leader of the Opposition should present one, two, or three arguments directed against the Prime Minister's interpretation of the motion.

Deputy Prime Minister

The Deputy Prime Minister has three primary obligations: to defend the case presented by the Prime Minister, to refute any independent arguments presented by the Leader of the Opposition, and to add one or more arguments to the case presented by the Prime Minister.

First, the Deputy Prime Minister defends the case presented by the Prime Minister by engaging in any refutation presented against the case by the Leader of the Opposition. The Deputy should take up the Prime Minister's argument one by one and defend each argument against any refutation by the Leader of the Opposition.

Second, the Deputy Prime Minister should refute any of the independent arguments presented by the Leader of the Opposition. Like the Leader of Opposition, the Deputy should not try to refute all arguments, just the most important ones.

Finally, the Deputy Prime Minister should add one or two arguments to the case presented by the Prime Minister.

FROM OPENING TO CLOSING

Extending the debate

Deputy Leader of the Opposition

The duties of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition are similar to those of the Deputy Prime Minister. The Deputy Leader should:

- defend the refutation offered by the Leader of Opposition,
- defend the arguments offered by the Leader of the Opposition,
- add one or more new arguments to those being offered by the First Proposition team.

First, the Deputy Leader should defend the refutation offered by the Leader of the Opposition. The Deputy Prime Minister will have engaged the refutation presented by the Leader of Opposition. At this time, the Deputy Leader needs to show that the original refutation is still sound.

Second, the Deputy Leader should defend the arguments presented by the Leader of the Opposition. The task of the Deputy Leader is to make sure that these arguments still stand firm in the mind of the judges and audience.

Third, the Deputy Leader should present one or more arguments against the proposition.

Member of Government

The Member of Government needs to defend the general direction taken by the First Proposition team but needs to offer a new perspective from the Second Proposition team.

The obligations of the Member of Government can be summarized as follows:

- Defend the general perspective of the First Proposition team,
- Continue refuting arguments made by the First Opposition team,
- Develop one or more new arguments that are different from but consistent with the case offered by the First Proposition team.

CLOSING HALF

New material, then synthesis

Member of Opposition

Member of Opposition needs to fulfill four obligations:

- Defend the general direction taken by the First Opposition team,
- Continue the refutation of the case as presented by the First Proposition,
- Provide more specific refutation of the arguments introduced by the Member of Government,
- Present one or more new arguments that are consistent with, yet different from, those presented by the First Opposition team.

Government Whip

The whip speakers for both teams have the responsibility to close the debate for their respective sides. The Government Whip should accomplish three goals:

- Refute the extension offered by the Member of Opposition,
- Defend the extension offered by the Member of Government,
- Summarize the debate from the perspective of the Proposition side.

CLOSING THE DEBATE

Whips, ranking and advancement

Opposition Whip

The responsibilities of the Opposition Whip are almost identical to those of the Government Whip except they are accomplished from the perspective of the Opposition side rather than from the Proposition side. Again, the Opposition Whip should:

- Refute the extension offered by the Member of Government,
- Defend the extension offered by the Member of Opposition,
- Summarize the debate from the perspective of the Opposition side.

Important aspects of the format

- The teams from each side attempt to maintain loyalty with one another, not to undermine their own case by not doing so
- Simultaneously demonstrating the unique qualities of their own arguments

Judging	At the end of each debate a panel of judges ranks the four teams from 1st to 4th place rather than just deciding a win/loss for a single side. Each team gets a certain amount of points based on their ranking.

The best two teams are decided based on the number of points they collect throughout the competition.