

School debating clubs and competitions don't (yet) have that degree of power. In their case the 'house' means everyone in the room listening to the debate, whom you are trying to persuade. In practice, the most important people in the room for a debater are the judges, as they decide who wins.

What actually happens in debates?

- There are two sides: the **proposition**, arguing for the motion, and the **opposition**, arguing against the motion.
- Members of the two sides take turns to speak, with the proposition going first. After that, the debate alternates between opposition and proposition.

Can I speak for as long as I want?

No. There are strict time limits on speeches.

Can I interrupt people on the other side when they are speaking?

Yes. You do this by making **points of information**. There are strict rules about points of information:

- You are only allowed to make points of information during certain times in the speech, known as 'non-protected time'.
- You must stand and say 'on a point of information.'
- If the speaker says 'No thank you', you must sit down without saying anything else.
- If the speaker says 'Yes please', you must make a brief point, no longer than 15 seconds.

Can anyone else speak in a debate?

In some formats, there are **speeches from the floor**. 'The floor' (another term from the British parliament) means the people who are watching the debate.

Now we know the basics of how debates work, we're going to look at the different formats used in competitive debate.

The most important people in the room for a debater are the judges, as they decide who wins

The two debating formats used in the UK are **Mace** and **British Parliamentary**. British Parliamentary is usually known as **BP** for short. There are other formats used in other countries (though many of those countries also use Mace and BP), but for the purposes of this book we will stick with these two, as almost all debating competitions in the UK use one or other of them.

Mace

- The Mace is a large ornamental silver club which rests on a table in the centre of the House of Commons. It is the symbol of royal authority, and if it is not there the House of Commons cannot meet or pass laws. Because debating is what the House of Commons does, the Mace has given its name to a popular format of debating.
- In Mace, there are two speakers on each side.
- They are usually given the motion several days in advance to prepare.
- They speak for seven minutes each, alternating between proposition and opposition.
- The first and last minute in each speech is 'protected' (meaning no one is allowed to make points of information during that time).
- When all four debaters have spoken, speeches from the floor are heard.
- One debater from each side then gives a **summary speech**, lasting four minutes, with the opposition speaking first.
- Marks are awarded for both content of speeches and speaking style.

A variant on the basic Mace format is **Extended Mace**.

- In Extended Mace, there are three speakers on each side.
- The first two speakers on each side speak for seven minutes, alternating between proposition and opposition, with the first and last minute protected.
- Speeches from the floor are then heard.
- Finally, four minute summary speeches are given by the third speaker on each side, with the opposition going first.
- In both formats, the timing of speeches may sometimes be altered if there is less time available / speakers are less experienced.

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