

9 How to prepare

There are two kinds of preparation: long preparation, where you are given several days to prepare a motion, popularly known as **long prep**, and short preparation, popularly known as **short prep**, where you are given a much shorter time, usually 15 minutes, to prepare.

Mace uses long prep; BP uses short prep.

Let's start with short prep.

Short prep

It can feel like a pretty scary prospect, having to speak in front of a room full of people, half of whom will be disagreeing with every word you say, about something you knew nothing about until 15 minutes ago. Even more so when your phone and / or tablet has been surgically removed from you (as is the rule in all debating competitions), and you have nothing to rely on but your naked brains and those of your debating partner.

Every minute - every second - counts in that prep time. So, how to make the best use of those precious quarter of an hour?

Get to the room as fast as you can (this could easily use up two minutes, depending on how big the building you are competing in is and how good your sense of direction is).

Make sure you have:

- Paper
- Several pens or pencils
- Highlighters
- Index cards
- A bottle of water

Now you're in the room, alone with each other. What to do first?

You should both keep quiet for five minutes.

Why? Surely we should be discussing, sharing our ideas? Well, yes, but you have to have some ideas to share first. It's quite possible you will never have thought about the motion topic in your life. Even if the topic is one on which you have both deep knowledge and passionate

Every
minute
- every
second -
counts

convictions, you need some time to gather your thoughts. And if you gather your thoughts separately, you'll have twice as many thoughts by the end of the prep time. So, for five minutes silence should fall again, as you scratch away with your pens.

What are you writing about?

You need to be asking yourself questions; big questions.

There are **seven** big questions which apply to any policy motion, and which you should always ask.

1. **What is the debate about?**
2. **What do we have to prove?**
3. **What do they have to prove?**
4. **What will be changed if the motion is passed?**
5. **Who are the actors?**
6. **Who are the stakeholders, and what impact will the motion have on them?**
7. **What is the mechanism?**

Write or type these questions out on a piece of card and bring them to every debate.

If the motion is an **ideas motion**, the questions will be fewer, which in some ways is easier, and in other ways is harder. For an ideas motion you need to ask:

1. **What is the debate about?**
2. **What do the words in the motion mean?**
3. **What do we have to prove?**
4. **What do they have to prove?**

How might you answer these big questions in practice?

Let's take some examples. First, preparing the policy motion 'This house would tax meat', with you proposing. As we said earlier, it's a nice big, broad motion (only four words long) with lots of scope for interpretation.

You need
to be
asking
yourself
questions