



GUIDELINES FOR COMPETITORS AND ADJUDICATORS

DEFINING MOTIONS AND CONSTRUCTING CASES

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For a debate to proceed, both teams need a clear understanding of what the motion means. This requires the motion to be 'defined' so that everyone (audience and adjudicators included) knows what is being debated. Problems arise if the two teams present different understandings of the meaning of the motion. This can result in a 'definition debate', where the focus of the debate becomes the meaning of the words in the motion, rather than the motion itself. Interaction and clash between the two teams concentrates on whose definition is correct, rather than the issues raised by the motion. Definition debates should be avoided wherever possible. They make a mockery of what debating seeks to achieve.

1. REASONABLE DEFINITIONS

The Proposition must present a reasonable definition of the motion. This means:

- (a) On receiving a motion, both teams should ask: 'What is the issue that the two teams are expected to debate? What would an ordinary intelligent person reading the motion think that it is about?'
- (b) If the motion poses a clear issue for debate (i.e. it has an obvious meaning), the Proposition must define the motion accordingly. When the motion has an obvious meaning (one which the ordinary intelligent person would realise), any other definition would not be reasonable.
- (c) If there is no obvious meaning to the motion, the range of possible meanings is limited to those that allow for a reasonable debate. Choosing a meaning that does not allow the Opposition room for debate would not be a reasonable definition. Truisms and tautologies