

While this is one of the dictionary definitions of that word, it ignores the clear issue (is the crime of rape a problem men should be addressing as well as women?) and is not what the ordinary intelligent person would expect 'rape' to mean in this sentence.

A dictionary often lists a number of meanings for each word; some of these may be specialised, archaic or obscure meanings. Words must always be defined in context, and debaters should look to work out the meaning of the motion first. If any particular word is difficult to understand or is especially important for the debate, a dictionary might be consulted for a quick, concise explanation of its meaning, provided the dictionary definition chosen is one the ordinary intelligent person would accept in the context of the motion as a whole. When a dictionary is used, it makes no difference what dictionary it is; what matters is if it helps explain the proper use of the word in question.

The motion 'This House supports missile defence' was debated as one of the prepared rounds at the 2002 World Schools Debating Championships in Singapore. At that time, the phrase 'missile defence' was commonly used to refer to United States President George W. Bush's controversial proposal to develop a missile system that could intercept and destroy incoming ballistic missiles. It would have been inappropriate to resort to dictionary definitions of 'missile' and 'defence' to support any other more general definition. In the context of the times, there was an obvious meaning to the motion and a clear issue that was already being debated internationally.

There can sometimes be genuine ambiguity. The word 'Asia' in the motion 'This House would maintain United States military bases in Asia' might be interpreted as including the Middle East (dictionaries define the continent of Asia as doing so) or as excluding this region (common usage of 'Asia' and 'Asian' often fails to include the Middle East). It is unclear whether the framers of the motion intended American military bases in the Middle East to be included in the debate. In view of the genuine ambiguity of the word 'Asia' in this context, the Proposition might reasonably define the motion to include or not include bases in the Middle East and the Opposition would have to be prepared for either eventuality. This example can, however, be distinguished from the one mentioned earlier, namely a proposition excluding discussion of bases in Korea, which would clearly be illegitimate, given that any reasonable definition of 'Asia' must encompass Korea.

2. PARAMETERS, MODELS AND CRITERIA

In some national debating competitions the Proposition has a much greater right of definition than at the World Schools Championships. There are American university tournaments where the teams only have 15 minutes preparation time and it is accepted that the Proposition can define the motion as it wishes, so long as there some sort of a 'link' between the motion and the Proposition's case. Motions often end up being 'squirreled' so that proposing teams can argue pre-prepared cases. There are other competitions where it is usual for the Proposition to present a detailed 'policy' or 'model' for achieving the broad object of the motion, and debates focus on the merits of different models proposed. The World Schools Debating Championships are quite different from these sorts of competitions in that the Proposition has neither an absolute right of definition nor the ability to transform a broad philosophical motion into a detailed policy debate.

Because of longer preparation times, the belief that both teams have the right to employ that time gainfully, and an emphasis upon debating to an audience, the World Schools Championships are suffused by the principle of reasonableness. The Proposition must provide a reasonable definition. It must be one that the ordinary intelligent person would accept. When suggesting parameters to the