

British Parliamentary

The British Parliamentary format of debate (usually called just “BP” or “Worlds” format) is the standard model of debating used in the United Kingdom and is popular in many countries around the world. It is used primarily in universities, although it also has a good following among high school debaters. Because it is the format of the World Universities Debating Championship (WUDC), it is sometimes also called “WUDC format,” or “Worlds format,”—do not confuse it with the World Schools format.

In most of the world, BP is the closest thing debating has to a lingua franca; many university societies will either conduct all of their debates in BP or will use another, often regional, format *and* BP. The situation is different in the United States, where there is often a stark divide between parliamentary debating and the separate tradition of policy debate.

BP is very loosely based on the traditions of the British Parliament and retains some of the conventions of the House of Commons. The two sides are known as Government or Proposition (Affirmative) and Opposition (Negative), and speeches alternate between sides. Debaters offer Points of Information (POIs), similar to the interruptions made by Members of Parliament. The motion is worded “This House Would . . .” or “This House Believes . . .” and is treated like a piece of legislation.

BP calls for four teams—two for the government and two for the Opposition—that compete against each other. This structure gives BP debate a unique dynamic. Speakers compete against both the other side of the house and the other team on their side. This, inevitably, affects the flow of the debate. In other formats, the issues that dominate the beginning of the debate are likely to be those that still are uppermost by the end. This can be the case in BP, but often is not.

Like any format, BP has its fans and its critics. Inevitably it develops some skills more than others but, whatever the reality, because it’s one of the most widely used formats, any serious debater should become familiar with the rules of BP and, preferably, to have seen—or better still, spoken in—a few BP debates.