

# **DEBATING WSDC IMPROMPTU MOTIONS – A Guide for Training Students**

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If students are to debate impromptu motions meaningfully and with full educational benefit, they need to be properly trained to do so. These materials are designed to assist in this process.

## **THE FORMAT**

Students need to be familiar with the basics of the format.

Teams of 3 persons. Each speaker speaks once, except for the first or second speaker who can also deliver the reply/summary speech.

Prepared motions should start when announced. Impromptu motions are announced and then there is one hour for prep. Only team members can prep, can only have a dictionary and an almanac, and no written notes can be brought into the preparation room.

Speakers should never rise to speak unless called on by the chair of the debate. No prep time between speeches.

During the middle six minutes of the first six speeches members of the other side may stand and ask to be recognized to offer a point of information (15-20 seconds at the most). Debaters should offer and take points of information. Speakers should take one or two during their speech.

You can do refutation and rebuilding before or after your new substantive argument.

This is advice I am giving to USA debaters.

### **FIRST PROPOSITION SPEECH – 8 MINUTES**

- Introduction (short)
- Definition of terms
- Model (plan) if it is a policy motion.
- Guideline for decision
- Two major arguments in favor of the motion
- Conclusion (short)

### **FIRST OPPOSITION SPEECH – 8 MINUTES**

- Introduction

- Disagree with definition and interpretation (hopefully never)
- Refutation of previous speech
- Two major arguments against the motion
- Conclusion (short)

#### SECOND PROPOSITION SPEECH – 8 MINUTES

- Introduction (short)
- Refutation of previous speech
- Rebuild first speech
- One major argument in favor of the motion
- Conclusion (short)

#### SECOND OPPOSITION SPEECH – 8 MINUTES

- Introduction (short)
- Refutation of previous speech
- Rebuild first speech
- One major argument against the motion
- Conclusion (short)

#### THIRD PROPOSITION SPEECH – 8 MINUTES

- Introduction (short)
- Refutation of substantive arguments from opposition
- Rebuilding of substantive arguments from proposition
- Integrate impact comparison in your argumentation to set stage for reply/summary
- No new substantive argument
- Restructure if substantive by both teams are on a similar subject (economy, etc.)
- Conclusion (short)

#### THIRD OPPOSITION SPEECH – 8 MINUTES

- Introduction (short)
- Refutation of substantive arguments from proposition
- Rebuilding of substantive arguments from opposition
- Integrate impact comparison in your argumentation to set stage for reply/summary
- No new substantive argument
- Restructure if substantive by both teams are on a similar subject (economy, etc.)
- Conclusion (short)

#### OPPOSITION REPLY/SUMMARY – 4 MINUTES

- Introduction (very short)
- Restructure around critical points of clash or nexus questions in the debate

- Delivery a favorable analysis as to why your team wins
- Engage in impact comparison as appropriate inside of critical points
- Conclusion (very short)

#### PROPOSITION REPLY/SUMMARY – 4 MINUTES

- Introduction (very short)
- Restructure around critical points of clash or nexus questions in the debate
- Delivery a favorable analysis as to why your team wins
- Engage in impact comparison as appropriate inside of critical points
- Conclusion (very short)

Shake hands with the other team at the invitation of the chair.

Leave the room while judges decide

Talk to coaches about the debate while you wait

Return to hear the decision from the chair when invited

Ask questions of specific judges after the chair delivers the decision; take notes on what they say.

Always be respectful of the decision, never argue with judges

The debate is over.

## UNDERSTANDING THE MOTION

Whether the debate is prepared or impromptu, the students need to be able to properly interpret the motion for debate. In fact, this is more important in impromptu debates because they do not have the luxury of advice from many others or extra time to consider the motion. They will need to quickly interpret the motion and start preparing for a debate that will begin very soon.

### Basic Ideas

- Motion is what the debate should be about. The debate should be about the ideas and concepts of the motion. You want to remain focused on those ideas.
- The proposition or government side must uphold the motion.
- The opposition side must oppose the motion.
- Proposition must interpret the motion so as to create a good debate. They should not interpret the motion so that it is easier for them to win the debate, but so that the main issues can be fully debated.
- The judges will punish proposition teams who attempt to define the motion to make it much smaller or easier for them to win. Sometimes a proposition team thinks they are being “smart” by interpreting the notion in an unexpected way so that they can take the other team by surprise. But, in taking the judges by surprise they actually are being unwise.

- When the judges see that the proposition is debating the motion the way they expected, they approve. You want judge approval.

## Types of Motions

While there may well be an infinite number of different types of motions, for the purposes of advising debaters on strategy and method, I find that three types of motions provide a fairly good framework.

Different types of motions have different obligations and requirements. This is why you need such a categorization system, because it can help you discover quickly and accurately what it is you are supposed to do within a given motion.

- FACT: Something is or is not.
- VALUE: Something is of inherent worth or not.
- POLICY: Something should be done or should not be done.

## MOTIONS OF FACT

Something is or is not true. The motion calls for a factual interpretation. It is the most basic and straightforward sort of motion.

Very much like a court decision – guilty or not guilty, a factual determination. The crime was or was not committed is a factual determination.

Examples:

THBT advertising does more harm than good for society.

THBT that China and the USA will be allies in the 21st Century.

Weigh the facts. Do not be distracted by the “harm” and “good” in the motion. The advertising motion is asking you to look at all the harms and goods in this instance and then decide which one predominates. This motion is very much like a civil court case.

The China motion is set to determine a fact, but it is a future fact. This is still quite legitimate to do within a factual framework.

Need a standard to determine who wins. Here are some common ones

- Majority of examples.
- Preponderance of evidence.
- True beyond a reasonable doubt.

## MOTIONS OF VALUE

Something is or is not of inherent value.

THBT Shakespeare is the world’s greatest writer.

Locate the value term and then define it to determine how to win the debate.

“Greatest writer” is.. You develop a list of criteria, and when you meet them you have proven it.

Name some criteria you would use to prove this motion. Which ones are the more reasonable?

THBT Deng Xiao Ping was a greater Chinese leader than Mao Ze Dong  
Locate the value term (“greater Chinese leader”) and then define it to determine how to win the debate.

Name some criteria you would use to prove this motion. Which ones are the more reasonable?

Without a clear definition of this term the debate will be a mess.  
Definition should be reasonable but favorable.

## MOTIONS OF POLICY

Something should be done. Action – government, international, individual.

THW legalize prostitution.

Proposition needs a model – how they would do this.

Relevant detail – who, what, how, who pays for it?

Build the model anticipating the opposition arguments. For example, unless you say prostitutes must be of age you are advocating child prostitution.

Must show that the model addresses a problem and reduces it.

Some detail, but not too much. Judges dislike models that have too much self-serving detail.

## OTHER MATTERS

Might be in more than one category.

THBT parents should not hit their children.

This could be done as a policy or as a value motion (with “should not” being the value).

Pick the version that makes it easier for you to win:

Policy: investigate and prosecute all parents who hit their children (losing option).

Value: parents should not hit their children because it is morally wrong, for a number of reasons (better option).

Make it international, not local.

Agent might be specific, like “developing nations” or such.

Anticipate interpretations when you are opposition. Anticipate several possible interpretations, and remodel your strategy based on the one they choose.

## WHICH TYPE?

- THW execute convicted war criminals.

- THBT humanity will not reach the 22nd Century.
- THBT state-run media cannot serve the function of a free press.
- THBT it is wrong to eat whales and sharks.
- THW not watch videos of beheadings.

MORE....

- THBT viewing violent media leads to violent behavior.
- THBT NATO is an outdated institution.
- THBT standardized testing is the enemy of learning.
- THW require all candidates for national office to undergo lie detector tests with questions submitted by their opponents.

VIDEOS

Geetha Creffield, Singapore coach  
Motion Analysis - <https://vimeo.com/99471267>

Alfred Snider  
Motion Analysis for Beginners - <https://vimeo.com/72703007>

Patricia Johnson-Castle, McGill University, Canada  
Motion Analysis for Different Motion Types - <https://vimeo.com/71375180>

Stephen Boyle, Irish National Champion  
Motion Analysis Methods - <https://vimeo.com/14211625>

## **PREPARATION BEFORE THE TOURNAMENT – PACKING YOURSELF WITH MATTER**

It does little good to debate an impromptu motion if you know nothing about it. While impromptu motions should not be about exotic issues that most people do not understand, they often call for a broad understanding of the world situation and on-going issues.

You may know how to debate, and you may do it very well, but you need something to say. At some point you need to focus a lot of your competition preparation on gathering information so that you can debate motions more persuasively.

This nice part about this process is that you become a very informed citizen and it is also useful in your other events.

During preparation for impromptu debates you will need a huge amount of information that has been internalized so that you can recall it, use it and win.

ORGANIZING YOUR TIME

Create time and space for it in your day:  
Stop doing some other things such as watching television, STOP WATCHING TELEVISION TO FILL TIME! If you watch a specific program, that is fine, watch it on demand, but do not just sit in front of the television.  
Have news on in the background while you do other things.

Regular sources: All sources have bias; you just need to find out different perspectives.

VIDEO:

Do not watch Fox News or CNN, they are a waste of time.

Al Jazeera streaming news [http://www.aljazeera.com/watch\\_now/](http://www.aljazeera.com/watch_now/) In order to watch in the USA you will need to install Hola <http://hola-unblocker.en.softonic.com/> to unblock Al Jazeera and others.

France24 <http://www.france24.com/en/> streaming video live is useful, news is mainstream European perspective.

China CCTV <http://cctv.cntv.cn/englishnews/> China perspective on the news.

RTV <http://rt.com/on-air/> Russia 24/7 English language news sponsored by the Russian government.

Press TV <http://www.presstv.com/live.html> Iranian government 24/7 news in English.

BBC World Service: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldserviceradio>

MSNBC Overall <http://tv.msnbc.com/>

Andrea Mitchell <http://tv.msnbc.com/shows/andrea-mitchell-reports/>

Chris Hayes <http://tv.msnbc.com/shows/up-with-chris-hayes/>

TEXT:

Vox is a must go to source for everything debaters need. Trust me on this. Sign up for alerts <http://www.vox.com/>

Economist magazine <http://www.economist.com/>

Flipboard App <http://flipboard.com/> good app for news browsing.

Websites that compile links:

News for debaters: <http://debate.uvm.edu/newsfordebaters.html>

News for Tuna: <http://debate.uvm.edu/news.html>

Survey potential motions:

Debate Motion Central <http://debatemotioncentral.blogspot.com/>

Retention:

Remember names and sources.

Save critical info in a way that enhances it in your memory.

Almanac

These notes may help you will watching the video at <https://vimeo.com/80218782> but I have added some new sources since then.

## **BUILDING MAJOR ARGUMENTS**

The case that students will develop in an impromptu debate should be composed of a small number of well-developed arguments.

In this format of debate it is all about argument development. The judges will not do your work for you, they expect you to fully explain and develop your major arguments.

Everyone has his or her own argument style. The following recipe is based on an understanding of the empirical basis for how listeners absorb and accept information, on my experience with the WSDC format and my own preferences.

Major arguments should be developed in steps. Make sure that you make it clear when you are going from one step to the next.

Here are the components I suggest.

#### TITLE:

- This is the “name” of your argument. It is what you will call it, it is what you want judges to write down, and it is how your opponents are likely to refer to it. This repetition helps you.
- The title should be a complete thought.
- The title should be short.
- The title should be as near a complete descriptor of the argument as you can get.
- The title should be rhetorically snappy. But, do not sacrifice accurate description for a snappy title.
- You always want to say the title of your argument slower than the rest of your speech, because you want judges to write it down word-for-word.
- In front of some English second language speakers you might want to repeat the title.

#### THESIS:

- This is a one or two sentence description of the **entire** argument.
- It should come right after the title.
- Studies show that if listeners understand the context of the whole idea first, they will more successfully assemble the pieces of the idea as you go through them.
- You will want to say this portion of the argument at a little slower speed.
- While judges are writing down your title, you should be on your thesis, thus reinforcing the whole concept behind your argument.
- Your goal is to have the judge understand what the argument is and where it is going by the time you finish your thesis.

#### STEPS:

- The number and kind of steps you have in an argument are based on the nature of the argument.
- Steps are necessary components of a linear reasoning process.
- Causes come before effects, links come before impacts, assumptions come before implications, etc.
- When in doubt, put in that extra step. The more explicit you are in argument construction the better.

#### REASONING:

- You need to explain the logic and reasoning behind the operation of the argument.
- If logical connections are not explicitly stated then the process of persuading the judge ends.
- Logical reasoning is not that difficult, we use it every day, and we use induction, deduction and causation. Use these in your arguments. For a fuller explanation, see <https://vimeo.com/53775237>
- For some reason we may have been taught that you do not need to make these logical operations explicit, as if it was somehow beneath you, but I can assure you that in WSDC debating it is not. When the judges understand the “logic” behind your argument they are more likely to “buy in.” When they buy it they are more likely to vote for it.

#### EVIDENCE AND SUPPORT:

- You need evidence to link your abstract argument to the real world.
- When you use different types of evidence to support the same argument you have a stronger argument. Different forms of evidence work for different people.
- Here are some types of support you can use:

Current Event – something happening now proves your point.

- Example that mirrors what is happening in your argument.
- The more similar the better.

Expert opinion – some expert agrees with you

- Need name and who they are
- Theory, prediction, idea that you can use to support your argument.

Quotation – Some famous person or expert makes a statement

- Identity
- Slogan or statement
- Relevance
- Churchill most common – Democracy, Talk over war.
- All politics comes from the barrel of a gun. -Mao
- For every complex problem there is a solution that is clear, simple, and wrong. H.L. Mencken
- History is prolog – Jefferson

Statistics – Data that supports your argument

- Current is important

- Suggest a trend or direction
- Absolute precision not needed.

Empirical or case study – A study of an actual case proves your point

- More detail than an example
- Similarity in crucial aspects essential
- May predict result or important causal forces

Analogy, comparison – Your point is very much like something else

- Literal - better
- Figurative – not so good

Personal testimony – What happened to you that supports your argument?

- Real life example and you were there.
- Avoid too much detail

Narrative about another person - Tell a story about another person to support your argument

- Same as personal testimony, yet not as powerful

Visualization – Paint a word picture and have the audience imagine they are in that picture

- Map out a situation
- Place listeners in that situation
- Ask them to draw their own conclusion

Historical example – Event in history supports your point

- Known
- Analogous
- Not too distant

Commonly accepted idea – Something almost all people believe

- Often about motivations and what moves people
- Money motivates people

LINKS:

- Many arguments need to link directly to the motion, advocacy and/or model in the debate.
- Links need to be obvious and clear, almost intuitive. Just because they are intuitive does not mean you can afford not to develop them fully.
- In USA debate formats we often tolerate links that occur in many steps, such as “A leads to B, B leads to C, C leads to D, D leads to E and E is bad.” If it takes this many steps the direct causation seen by the judge will be minimal. If you need that many link steps, you might want to consider a different argument altogether.
- In some USA debate formats links are accepted if explained, but in WSDC the link needs to be clear, real world and intuitive. They need to “see it” to “buy it.”

IMPACTS:

- Obviously, you want to answer the question, “Why is this important?”

- Many USA debate formats go too far in explaining the impact to their arguments (“Global thermonuclear war destroying all life,” for example).
- Do not have an extreme impact that lacks credibility. You need enough impact to win the debate, but too much can hurt you.
- Explain numbers effected, severity of each instance, and what it means to those involved. Do not assume “unemployment is bad,” but explain specific harms that it has. Likewise, “money” is not an impact.
- Things that can be repaired or reversed are less important than things that cannot.
- Rights are issues that need to be explained, so you just answer the question, “Why is this right important?” It is not always bad when government takes choices away from people to protect them, just one example of how Americans may think versus people from, for example, Singapore.
- At times you need to describe the scenario for the impact to take place. This is a narrative about how the impact comes about. It needs to be a good story.
- Explain time frame, with sooner being more important.
- Explain the probability dimension, especially when predicting future events.
- Impacts based on moral absolutes need to be fully explained. Failure to do so will cost you. Yes, “slavery is bad,” but when arguing that it is a moral absolute you must explain fully.
- Use impacts later in the debate to compare the two teams. Remember, in a good debate both sides will win some stuff; you need to be able to explain why yours is more important.
- For a discussion of this, you might review <https://vimeo.com/80465328>

Generally, debates are won or lost on the basis of your substantive arguments. It is very hard to win the debate on rebuttal alone.

## VIDEOS

Zheng Bo, China

Deeper Arguments - <https://vimeo.com/102084807>

Geetha Creffield, Singapore Coach

Intermediate Argument Building - <https://vimeo.com/72646820>

Mariel Golden, University of Vermont

Argumentation Do and Do Not - <https://vimeo.com/71398733>

## PROPOSITION CASE BUILDING

The major arguments then need to be crafted into a case. In the first speech you present your interpretation of the motion and then two major arguments. In the second speech you present your third major argument.

Here are some things to keep in mind while building a case:

#### DEFINITIONS

Only define those words that really matter, or about which there will be some disagreement.

Use definitions that seem reasonable while favoring the interpretation that you seek.

Use definitions to make what your model (or plan) talks about easier to understand.

#### SET UP FOR TYPE OF MOTION

In a value motion, make sure to define the value term clearly. If the motion says that Shakespeare is the “greatest writer” then you need to specify what it means to be the “greatest writer” so that you can fulfill this term in the motion. Again, this definition should be reasonable but slightly favoring your side.

In a fact motion, make sure to set a standard for how your fact will be proven.

Meet that standard and challenge the other team to do it as well.

In a policy motion you will need to establish a “model” for how that policy will be implemented.

#### MODEL BUILDING ADVICE

If you are too vague you will leave things out and it will make you seem as if you lacked forethought.

If you put too much detail into the model you will seem to be trying to narrow the debate and/or appearing defensive.

You want to be just right.

Guidelines:

Have enough detail in your model so that it explains what you propose.

Have specific elements in your model that anticipate MAJOR arguments by your opposition.

Avoid having too much detail in your model, especially if it seems that you are trying to narrow the debate too much.

If you need added detail, try to use an example that you will model your advocacy afterwards. For example, marijuana legalization as in Colorado.

Components:

Agent: who will do it. Global or just in some parts? What level of government (international, national, regional, metropolitan)?

What: what will they/you do? Detail of action should be read word for word, not off the top of your head. Some detail good, too much detail bad.

Specifics: Specific elements in your model can be defended as “**a rational part of a scheme proposed by the motion.**” Of course, this will need to be true in order to make that argument. If it costs a lot. Include funding; if it will be hard to

enforce, specify method of enforcement; if it will need facilities, specify how you will build them; if it will take time, specify a phase in period.

Include these specifics only when necessary.

Example model: If such a proposal has already been implemented somewhere with success, say you will copy those methods. This may save time and detail.

Examples of example model:

*This House would make voting compulsory.*

**Voting in all elections will be mandatory using the system in Australia that offers small penalties to those who do not vote but allows for extremely easy voting registration and balloting.**

If you just had a model that said use penalties but you did not make voting & balloting easier you might be a target of opposition arguments. If you put these elements into your model (listing early voting, national holiday, automatic registration, etc.) there would be a perception of trying to go too far and beyond the motion.

*This House would legalize prostitution.*

**National governments will legalize adult prostitution as a commercial activity. Prostitutes will register, undergo periodic health checks and be given commercial rights and police protection. The program will model the system used in Berlin, Germany.**

In this model you avoid opposition arguments like child prostitution, health issues, while gaining advantages in the areas of rights of prostitutes and customers, end of harmful pimp influence because of police protection, tax revenue advantage, avoid abuse by clients, etc.

THE SMART MODEL/STUPID MODEL TEST

Think like the opposition. Is your model a smart model or a stupid model? Then, think like the judge. Is your model a smart model or a stupid model?

GUIDELINES FOR CASE CONSTRUCTION

Make sure your major arguments are distinct and do not overlap. If all three of your arguments are about "saving money" then you are just saying the same thing over and over again.

Make the first major argument the one that the judges probably thought of before the debate and the second argument one that is very important. The third argument, presented in the second speech, can be one that is a bit more sophisticated and challenging to explain, but you will have more time in that speech to do so.

Think about the major issues concerning this motion and make sure that they are all included somewhere in your three major arguments.

Think about what the major opposition arguments will be and take them into account, either in building your model or in building your substantive arguments.

## **IMPROMPTU MOTION CHECKLIST – HOW TO USE YOUR ONE HOUR OF PREPARATION**

You have one hour to prepare. You need to do it efficiently and work as a team. The coaches will announce roles (listed below) before the motion is announced.

One of the students who are not in the debate will serve as chair of this session as well as keep track of time.

You cannot bring this list with you, you must memorize it.

### **STEPS:**

1. THINK – ABOUT IT FOR A FEW MINUTES FIRST (ALL)
2. TYPE – TYPE OF MOTION, POLICY, FACT, VALUE (ALL)
3. PRINCIPLE/TEAM LINE – UNITING CONCEPT FOR ARGUMENTS, THEME FOR DEBATE (ALL)
4. MODEL/DECISION RULE – BUILD MODEL/DECISION RULE, ANTICIPATE THEIR BEST ARGUMENTS (ALL)
5. BRAINSTORM – THINK OF ARGUMENTS (ALL)
6. PICK – THE BEST ARGUMENTS, SEQUENCE (ALL)
7. EVIDENCE – PICK EXAMPLES, FACTS ETC. FAMILIAR BUT COMPELLING. ESPECIALLY OUR INFO PERSON WORKS ON THIS CONTINUOUSLY. EXPLAIN HOW EVIDENCE PROVES THE ARGUMENT. (THIRD SPEAKER PLUS ONE)
8. INTRO & CONCLUSION – THEME GOES WITH PRINCIPLE (NON-DEBATING MEMBER)
9. WRITE – ARGUMENTS, INTRO CONCLUSION, ETC. (FIRST & SECOND SPEAKER)
10. REFUTATION – WORK ON REFUTATION SHEETS FOR OTHER SIDE'S PREDICTABLE ARGUMENTS. WRITE NEATLY SO THEY CAN READ IT. MAY NEED TO REWRITE, BEST ANSWERS FIRST, (3<sup>RD</sup> SPEAKER & NON-DEBATING MEMBER)
11. PRACTICE SPEECHES (FIRST SPEAKER, SECOND SPEAKER, SECOND SPEAKER WORKS WITH OTHERS WHEN DONE ON EXAMPLES AND ANSWERS)

SPECIFIC ROLES: this only applies if you have more than three debaters on a team, otherwise one of the three members will have to do these tasks.

- Non-debating member keeps a time clock and watches task accomplishment. Call out time every couple of minutes. Prod them when they fall behind.
- Non-debating member leads brainstorm discussion, make sure to write down all ideas, don't criticize too early. Don't all talk at once.
- Arguments need to be picked after 20 minutes gone at the most.
- First speech needs to be practiced with 15 minutes left, preferably earlier.
- Non-debating member needs to work on additional examples and evidence while others are doing their prep, 3<sup>rd</sup> speaker starts on refutation sheets, non-debating member joins after evidence gathering.
- Special assignment: impact police – is the impact person, and I want to make sure our major arguments can answer the question, “Why is this important?”
- Special assignment: contradiction police – needs to make sure that our three major arguments are: not contradictory, not repetitive.
- Special Assignment: intro & conclusion – makes sure intro & conclusions are coherent and powerful.
- Special Assignment: evidence police – review evidence and examples, prioritize them. Make sure that we explain WHY the evidence/example proves the argument.

## VIDEOS

Geetha Creffield, Singapore coach  
Metacognition in Preparation - <https://vimeo.com/80884495>

Anna England-Kerr, English Speaking Union, London  
Prep for Impromptu Motions - <https://vimeo.com/26135301>

Rhydian Morgan, leading UK trainer  
<http://debatevideoblog.blogspot.com/2010/07/lecture-wsdc-prep-for-impromptu-motions.html>

## DRILLS & EXERCISES FOR IMPROMPTU MOTIONS

Here are some drills and exercises you can use to help students learn how to debate impromptu motions. Many more can be found in Chapter Seven of my recent book, *Sparking the Debate*, available at [http://debate.uvm.edu/dcpdf/Snider\\_Sparking\\_the\\_Debate\\_2014.pdf](http://debate.uvm.edu/dcpdf/Snider_Sparking_the_Debate_2014.pdf)

### EXERCISE: INTERPRET MOTIONS

**Goals:**

- Help debaters understand that all topics are not of the same type.
- Help debaters understand how to handle different types of topics.
- Help debaters gain experience in addressing topics in ways that help them succeed.

**Procedure:**

1. Assign a topic to each debater. Give them 4–5 minutes to determine how they will interpret that topic. Urge debaters not to be too self-serving in their interpretations. They need to set up a good debate, not run from the major issues. Tell debaters to take into account what they think the major opposition or negative argument will be and to consider this when they interpret the motion.
2. Discuss how some topics might be interpreted as different types and participants to pick the type they think they can be successful in supporting. For example, “This House believes that parents should not hit their children” can be debated as policy or value, but would probably be better advocated as a value topic because the particulars of how you would prevent parents from hitting a child or how enforcing a no-hitting policy could be rather daunting.
3. Have each debater tell the group what kind of topic he or she has chosen and how they would interpret it (standard for fact, define term for value, model for policy as well as definitions of other key words).
4. At the end, review what debaters have learned and answer any questions.

**Cautions:**

- Watch the time. Make sure all debaters get a chance to discuss their topic.
- When a topic might fall into different type categories, ask debaters to discuss which way they would rather advocate it.
- Avoid allowing debaters to include too much detail, especially in a plan or model, which leaves the impression that they are running away from the major issues.

**EXERCISE: BUILDING CASES****Goals:**

- Teach debaters how to brainstorm complex topics.
- Teach them how to select and organize their best arguments.
- Have debaters learn from the topics other debaters are working on.
- Help debaters find support for their arguments.
- Have debaters develop a basic understanding of every topic you deal with in this session.
- Help debaters discover good arguments on a variety of topics.

**Procedure:**

*Phase One: Build Cases*

1. Organize debaters into pairs: one debater is the proposition and the other the opposition. Give each pair a topic and allow them 10 minutes to work on their best three arguments. Have each proposition present her ideas (not as a speech, but in a discussion) for 5 minutes, including definitions (if needed), plan for action (if needed), two arguments for a first speech, and a third argument for a second speech. (This presentation is appropriate for the WSDC format—the world’s most popular.) Then have the opposition do the same. Even if you are preparing for other formats, three major arguments are good for an exercise such as this.

2. Make sure everyone is taking notes about all topics. Comment on the presentations and make concrete suggestions for improvement. You can allow a few debaters to make comments, but don’t spend too much time on each topic so everyone has a chance to present his arguments.

*Phase Two: Better Cases*

1. Give debaters 5 minutes to make adjustments and then present their basic ideas again, BUT now ask them to include examples and other forms of support.

2. After each presentation have debaters suggest other examples or forms of support.

*Phase Three: Beauty Contest*

If you have time:

1. Choose two cases the debaters presented.

2. Have debaters argue in 1-minute speeches why one is better than the other.