HOW DO I WIN?

At its most simple, winning a BP debate involves giving the most persuasive case for your side of the motion. That might mean, on proposition, showing the judges that there are significant beneficial consequences of passing the motion, or that there is some kind of moral reason why it must be passed. On opposition, it might mean showing that passing the motion is illegitimate, or that there would be negative consequences that accrue from it. Given that all motions are supposed to be both balanced (there are equally strong arguments on both sides) and deep (there are a large number of potential arguments on each side), this should be equally possible no matter the position you find yourself in.

In reality, it's obviously not quite as simple as just standing up and listing some good or bad consequences that might accrue from the motion being passed or defeated. In part this is because other teams will be trying to do the same thing (and you'll need to "rebut" them). However, there is an additional complication brought by the fact that each debate has four teams, and you need to beat all of them. This means that each team has a slightly different job.

OPENING GOVERNMENT

OG is the position that every new debater dreads receiving, because you have only 15 minutes before one of your team has to stand up and give a speech. There are a number of reasons why OG actually isn't "that bad", and indeed might be a better position to occupy than other places on the table, but for now we'll just deal with the main roles OG has to fulfil. In OG, you have the ability (and indeed the duty) to define the terms of the motion. That means that, for example, if you're defending "THW ban zoos", that you can say that you are talking specifically about parks that have as one of their primary roles being a tourist attraction and public engagement, and that you are not talking about, say, wildlife sanctuaries or nature reserves.

In addition, you often have a lot of latitude in giving a mechanism by which you will do the policy. That might mean saying "we will shut down all existing zoos, moving all of their animals to wildlife reserves that are not open to the public. We will prohibit the opening of new zoos and will punish with fines or imprisonment any attempts to do so." Different motions can call for much more complicated mechanisms – say, for example, if you're defending an intervention in a foreign country – but the basic premise remains the same.

Ideally you should give a mechanism and definition which is not debate breaking – that means that you should set something up which creates a debate, rather than something that makes the debate obviously one-sided. (If you do create a debate which is so narrow as to be almost impossible to oppose, you've done a "squirrel", and will likely be penalised by the judges for this).

OPENING OPPOSITION

This position on the table has the duty to directly respond to the claims made by OG. That means that you have to engage not just with your idea of what the motion might be, but specifically

with the case that is presented by the OG team. If they give a definition or mechanism that you didn't expect but which is reasonable, then you're going to have to live with it.

What you can do in OO is to give some idea of what you would do instead of the motion. That might mean defending the status quo (which you should give a characterisation of – what does it look like?) or it might mean defending some plausible alternative to the motion (which has to be mutually exclusive with actually doing the motion). So for example, if the motion is "THW ban private schools", you could defend not banning them, but removing the charitable status of private schools that do not contribute significantly to other less advantaged schools. This allows you to not have to take on all of the bad things about the world as it stands (because motions are usually set with a problem in mind that they want to resolve), but to still have a good debate and take on a defensible position.

If you think that the definition given by the Prime Minister is unfair to the point of not being debatable, you should challenge it. The first way to do this is to offer a Point of Clarification (POC) after the first minute of the PM speech in which you attempt to point this out and propose an alternative. The second way is to explain why, in the LO speech, the PM's definition or mechanism is unreasonable (or non-existent) and then suggest an alternative (with a reason as to why that's a plausible or reasonable alternative) which you will then argue with. This "definitional challenge" should be used incredibly sparingly, because it will make the debate quite messy and the judges will not thank you for it if it wasn't necessary.

CLOSING GOV AND CLOSING OPP

This is where BP gets a little tricky. It's fairly intuitive that the Opening Government and Opposition teams would get to define the motion and set out arguments for and against passing it. Where BP differs from other debating formats is in bringing in two extra teams, known as the "back half".

The job of CG and CO is to "extend". That means that you have to bring in a new substantive contribution to the debate that is unique to your team. This could be in the form of new constructive material, a reframing of the debate, or rebuttal. What's important is that it has to be distinct from the arguments that have already been made in opening half. That doesn't mean that you can't use the framework they've set up, or that if they've mentioned something in passing that you're prohibited from extending on it and deepening the analysis. What it does mean is that you have to be careful to show why your ideas are not derivatives of those we heard half an hour ago, and also to show why those ideas are the most important things in the debate. This is why the MG and MO speakers are often known as the "extension" speakers.

Extensions are often confusing as a concept to new debaters, so let's try and clarify by example. Say you're CO on the motion "This House would ban zoos". OO has talked a lot about the value of zoos as an educational resource, as well as the way that they can be helpful in keeping endangered species alive and in conditions where they're able to reproduce. In extension, you might then talk about the economic benefits of zoos in terms of allowing people to have a direct link with the natural world which gives them some emotional investment in the

creatures that they're told are at risk, making them more amenable to donating money to conservation organisations. This could then be impacted into a case that talks about the ways in which this money can be used to carry out the mission of conservation, and why without that money (which would be lost when zoos were banned) we would be less capable of caring for the planet as a whole. This is related to, but distinct from, the material brought in opening half, and would constitute an extension.

The second speaker in each closing/back half team is called the "whip" or "sum" speaker. They, again, have a special job. They are the only speakers in the debate who cannot bring in new material: that means that if they come up with new lines of analysis which they say in their speech, the judges should not credit them. Instead, their job is to "sum" the debate. This is a little like giving an adjudication of what happened in the debate, but it will be from the perspective of their side, and specifically the bottom half team of their side. That means it's an incredibly biased adjudication: you want to emphasise the contributions made by your partner, and show why they beat everything else said in the debate. You can obviously bring your ideas into clash with those of the teams across the table from you – and we'll talk about how to do that when we cover Rebuttal later – but it also means you have to show why your contributions are distinct from and more important than those given by your own opening team. This is a tricky art to master, and good whip speakers are highly appreciated for the job that they do (though that's not to say that extension speakers are seen as inferior – it's just that the function they perform is a little different).

To go back to our example of CO in "THW ban zoos" above, we can see how a whip speech might work here. If the Proposition teams talked a lot about animal rights and welfare, and the way that zoos keep animals unnecessarily caged up in a way that is unnatural and harmful, then you can bring the extension from your team into clash with that material by showing that it's legitimate for a few of these animals to suffer (to the extent that they do suffer, which you can contest) if it means that you can conserve entire species elsewhere. Similarly, you can then show how your material is the most important in the debate by arguing that even if OO's analysis about the conservational value of zoos themselves were to be defeated, the economic benefits to conservationists worldwide still stand. That allows you to show effectively why your material withstood the tests thrown at it by the other teams in the debate, and hence why you should win over each of them.