

Public Speaking and Debate 2



British Parliamentary (BP) Rules
for debating

British Parliamentary (BP) Rules for debating

British parliamentary (BP) debating rules are a commonly used format for debating competitions.

In this lesson, we will discuss:

1. Role of a parliament in countries led by a multi-party government.
2. How debates in the British Parliament are managed.
3. Assigned roles during debates in the British Parliament.
4. BP rules for debating competitions.

Role of the parliament in the UK

Who do you think is the “boss” governing a country with a constitutional monarchy like the UK?



The monarch,
currently King Charles III.

The Prime Minister (PM),
currently Sir Keir Starmer.



Role of the parliament in the UK

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Role of the parliament in the UK

There are many constitutional monarchies in the world, especially in Europe. Also, many countries that are a member of the Commonwealth of Nations are constitutional monarchies that recognise the UK monarch as their head of state.

Constitutional monarchy:

United Kingdom (英国)
Netherlands (荷兰)
Belgium (比利时)
Spain (西班牙)
Denmark (丹麦)
Sweden (瑞典)
Norway (挪威)
Australia (澳大利亚)
New Zealand (新西兰)
Canada (加拿大)
Japan (日本)
Malaysia (马来西亚)
Cambodia (柬埔寨)
Many more... especially small island countries



NOT a constitutional monarchy:

China (中国)
United States (美国)
Ireland (爱尔兰)
France (法国)
Germany (德国)
Italy (意大利)
Finland (芬兰)
Russia (俄罗斯)
Poland (波兰)
Many more...



Role of the parliament in the UK



Constitutional monarchies are ruled by a **monarch** (emperor, king or queen), not a president. But although the monarch officially serves as the **head of state**, they usually hold little political power and predominantly fulfill representative functions. In the UK, for instance, the monarch is explicitly banned from taking part in political activities.

The political system in a constitutional monarchy is presided over by the **Prime Minister (PM)**, who heads the “government”, which is really just the executive branch; it has no absolute powers and needs the approval of the legislative branch (the representation of the people) to pass any laws, and is also overseen by the judiciary branch.

Role of the parliament in the UK

The British Parliament, which is a typical example of a government of a constitutional monarchy, consists of people who are elected by the British people in their **constituency** in a direct election and mostly belong to a **number of political parties**. The Conservatives and Labour are the biggest parties, but by no means the only ones.

(Note: Britain is **not typical** for having an essentially two-party system: Many other European countries have many more parties in their parliaments. For example, in the Netherlands we currently have 15 parties in the parliament and 4 parties in the government.)

In the UK, the parliament consists of the following two **houses**:

- **House of Commons**, consisting of Members of Parliament (MPs), who are elected representatives of the British people.
- **House of Lords**, consisting of appointed experts.

The role of debates in British Parliamentary affairs

Needless to say, having a political system that involves multiple political parties to pass a law, **debating is an unavoidable part of government**. The process is roughly as follows:

1. The **government** designs a **policy** based on their party's political goals.
2. The government proposes a **new law** or a **change to an existing law** to effectively execute the policy.
3. Special members of the House of Lords, who are called '**whips**', gauge and influence the mood of the MPs in the interest of their party. They also have a role in organising the parliamentary process.
4. The **PM** presents the new law to the **House of Commons**, where the law is debated by all representatives, those from the government parties as well as those from the other non-government parties. The 'other' parties are referred as the **opposition**. After the debate, the house votes on whether the law is **adopted**, **rejected** or deemed in need of being changed (**amended**). In case of amendments, the process is repeated until the law passes or is rejected.
5. A law that passed the House of Commons goes to the **House of Lords**, which either **approves** the law or **proposes amendments**, which have to go back to the House of Commons again.
6. If a proposal is finally passed by both houses, the PM **signs** it into law.

The role of debates in British Parliamentary affairs

To get an idea of how the British Parliament debates, let's have a look at a **real debate** between Rishi Sunak, the former PM, and Keir Starmer, the current PM.

[Rishi Sunak faces off with Keir Starmer.avi](#)

Note: At the time of the debate, Sunak was still the PM, but Starmer, as leader of the opposition, is (successfully) challenging his credibility.

Warning: The debating style of the British Government is famous and very interesting to watch, but it is probably something VERY different to what you are used to from the Chinese Government! No matter what you think of it, what you see here is how matters on the level of the UK are decided, in this case whether to have a national election...

The role of debates in British Parliamentary affairs

Let's have a closer look at the real debate. Some things you may have noticed are relevant to the BP debating rules:

- The debaters **address the Speaker of the House** (“Mr Speaker”), and not the opponent.
- The debaters are clearly trying to **sway the opinion of the audience**, not their opponent! It is also remarkable that a touch of humour helps them with this (they are politicians but still human...); this is true reflection of British culture and tradition.
- The audience on their side **supports them** vocally (this is typically British, and not common in most other countries...).
- This is politics, and there are plenty of **attacks that sound like ad hominem attacks**, but if you listen carefully you notice that most of them are about what they did, not so much what kind of person they are, which makes it less unacceptable; very different from the US!
- The debaters **take turns**; they let the other finish and don't really interrupt each other, which greatly improves the debate.
- Unlike a debating competition, **there are only two debaters**.

British Parliamentary (BP) Rules for debating

The **British parliamentary (BP) debate style** is a popular tradition in politics and public speaking. This style of debate is used in parliamentary settings like the UK's House of Commons, as well as in debating classes and competitions.

The BP debate style features the following characteristics:

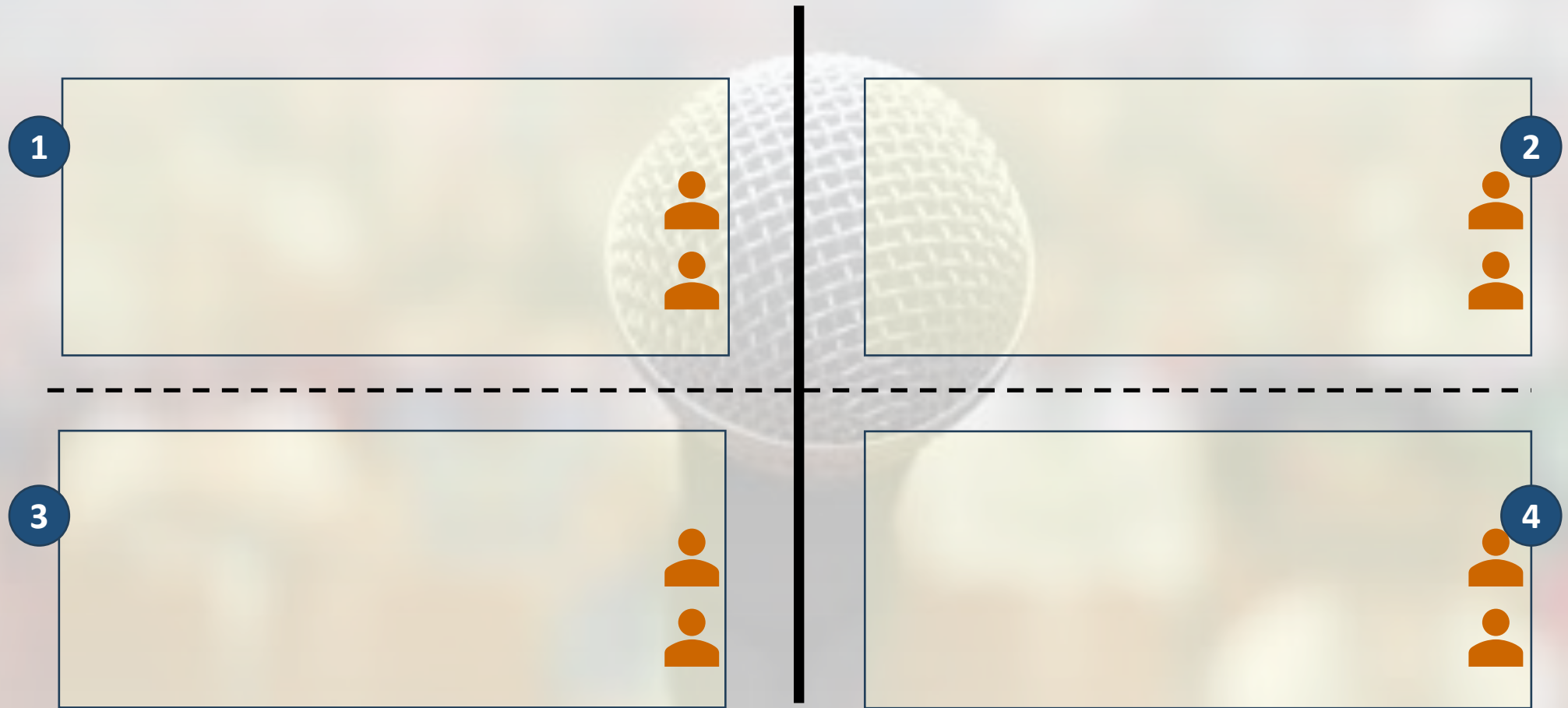
- Strict rules
- Fast pace
- Emphasis on argumentation and persuasion.



BP rules for debating

Roles

BP debates are contested by **four teams of 2 debaters**:



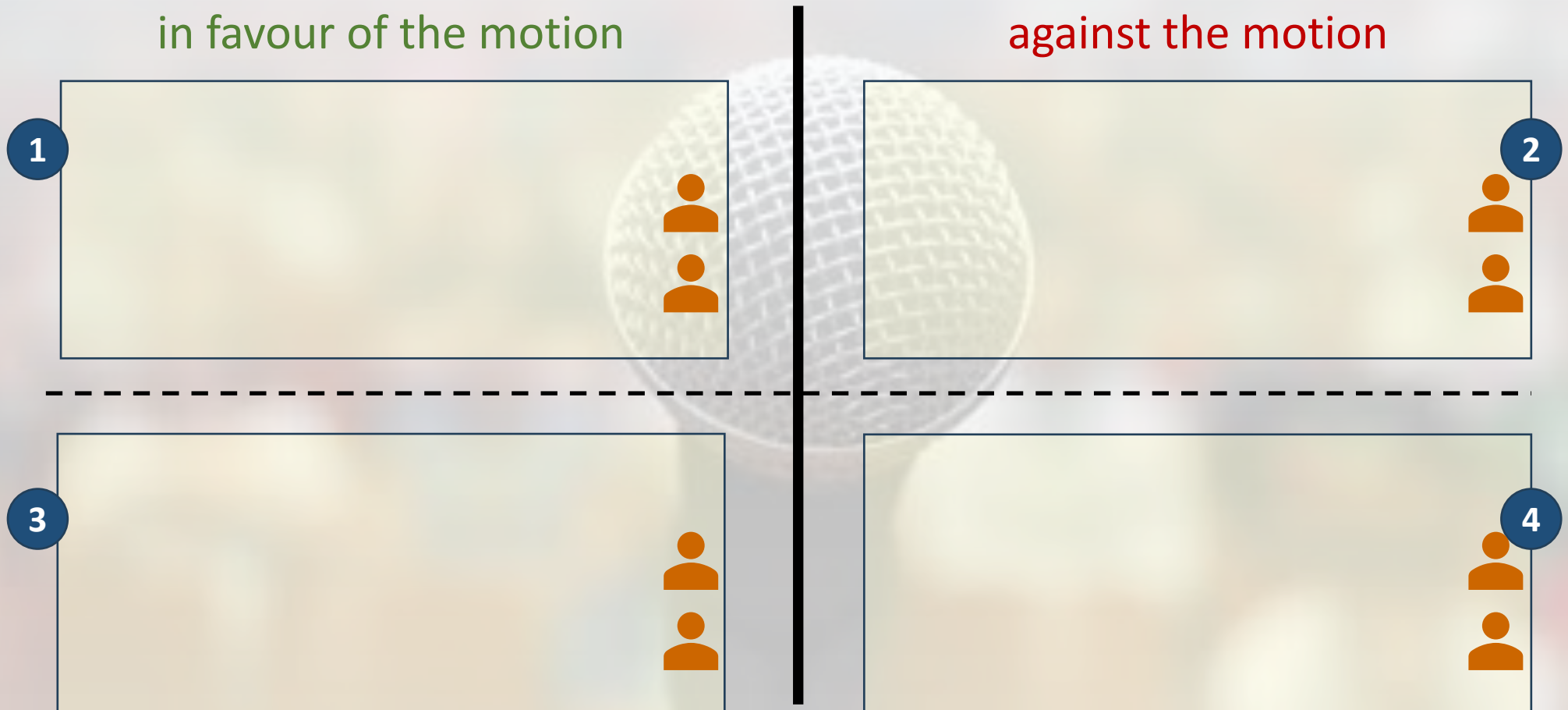
British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

BP debates are contested by **four teams of 2 debaters**:

in favour of the motion

against the motion



British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

BP debates are contested by **four teams of 2 debaters**:

GOVERNMENT

OPPOSITION

1



2



3



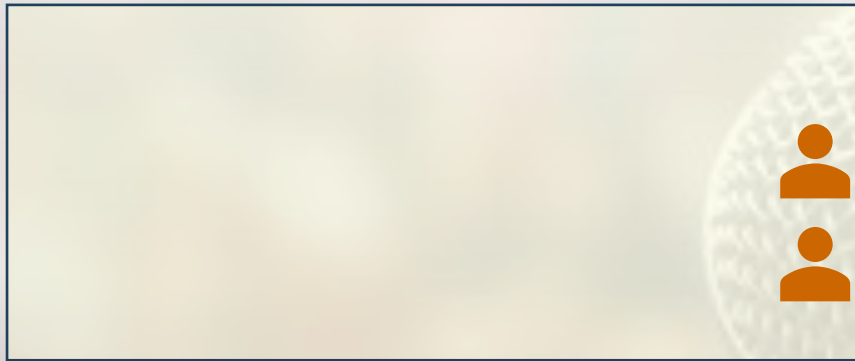
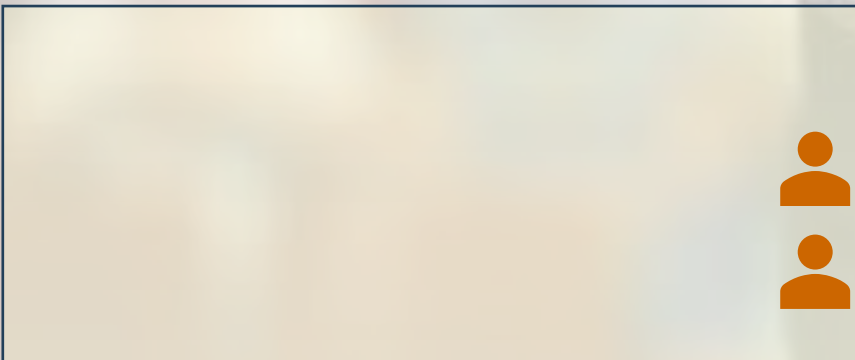
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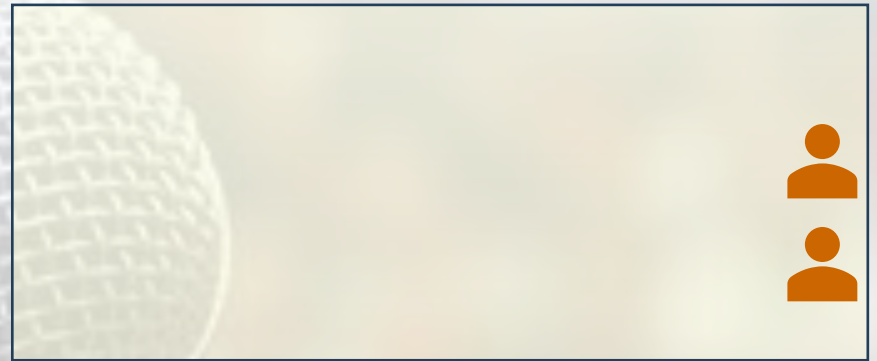
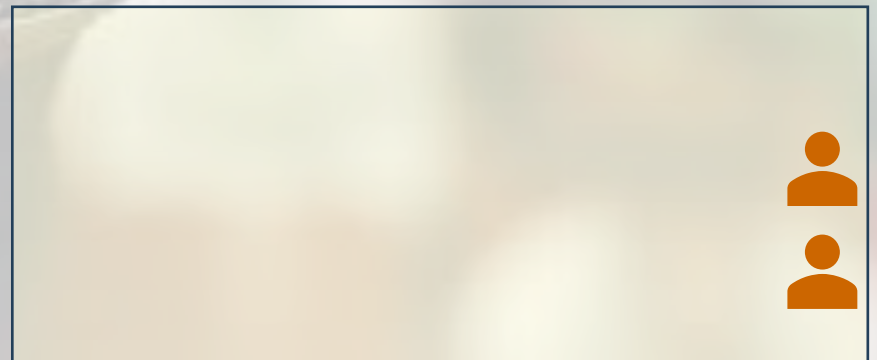
British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

GOVERNMENT



OPPOSITION



British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

GOVERNMENT

OPPOSITION

OPENING GOVERNMENT (OG)

1



2



3



4



British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

GOVERNMENT

OPPOSITION

1

OPENING GOVERNMENT (OG)



2



3

CLOSING GOVERNMENT (CG)



4



British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

GOVERNMENT

OPPOSITION

OPENING GOVERNMENT (OG)

OPENING OPPOSITION (OO)

1

2

CLOSING GOVERNMENT (CG)

CLOSING OPPOSITION (CO)

3

4



British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

OPENING GOVERNMENT (OG)



OPENING OPPOSITION (OO)



CLOSING GOVERNMENT (CG)



CLOSING OPPOSITION (CO)



British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

OPENING GOVERNMENT (OG)

Prime Minister

Presents motion and arguments in favour



OPENING OPPOSITION (OO)



CLOSING GOVERNMENT (CG)



CLOSING OPPOSITION (CO)



British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

OPENING GOVERNMENT (OG)

Prime Minister

Presents motion and arguments in favour



Deputy Prime Minister

Rebuts the leader of the opposition



OPENING OPPOSITION (OO)



CLOSING GOVERNMENT (CG)



CLOSING OPPOSITION (CO)



British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

OPENING GOVERNMENT (OG)

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Deputy Prime Minister

Rebuts the leader of the opposition



OPENING OPPOSITION (OO)



CLOSING GOVERNMENT (CG)

Member of Government

Brings new material to support the motion



CLOSING OPPOSITION (CO)



British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

OPENING GOVERNMENT (OG)

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OPENING OPPOSITION (OO)



CLOSING GOVERNMENT (CG)

Member of Government

Brings new material to support the motion



Government Whip

Summarizes the debate for the government



CLOSING OPPOSITION (CO)



British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

OPENING GOVERNMENT (OG)

Prime Minister

Presents motion and arguments in favour



Deputy Prime Minister

Rebuts the leader of the opposition



OPENING OPPOSITION (OO)

Leader of the Opposition

Presents arguments against



CLOSING GOVERNMENT (CG)

Member of Government

Brings new material to support the motion



Government Whip

Summarizes the debate for the government



CLOSING OPPOSITION (CO)



British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

OPENING GOVERNMENT (OG)

Prime Minister

Presents motion and arguments in favour



Deputy Prime Minister

Rebuts the leader of the opposition



OPENING OPPOSITION (OO)

Leader of the Opposition

Presents arguments against



Deputy Leader of the Opposition

Rebuts the PM and the Deputy PM



CLOSING GOVERNMENT (CG)

Member of Government

Brings new material to support the motion



Government Whip

Summarizes the debate for the government



CLOSING OPPOSITION (CO)



British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

OPENING GOVERNMENT (OG)

Prime Minister

Presents motion and arguments in favour



Deputy Prime Minister

Rebuts the leader of the opposition



OPENING OPPOSITION (OO)

Leader of the Opposition

Presents arguments against



Deputy Leader of the Opposition

Rebuts the PM and the Deputy PM



CLOSING GOVERNMENT (CG)

Member of Government

Brings new material to support the motion



Government Whip

Summarizes the debate for the government



CLOSING OPPOSITION (CO)

Member of Opposition

Brings new material to oppose the motion



British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

OPENING GOVERNMENT (OG)

Prime Minister

Presents motion and arguments in favour



Deputy Prime Minister

Rebuts the leader of the opposition



OPENING OPPOSITION (OO)

Leader of the Opposition

Presents arguments against



Deputy Leader of the Opposition

Rebuts the PM and the Deputy PM



CLOSING GOVERNMENT (CG)

Member of Government

Brings new material to support the motion



Government Whip

Summarizes the debate for the government



CLOSING OPPOSITION (CO)

Member of Opposition

Brings new material to oppose the motion



Opposition Whip

Summarizes the debate for the opposition



British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

OPENING GOVERNMENT (OG)

Prime Minister

Presents motion and arguments in favour



Deputy Prime Minister

Rebuts the leader of the opposition



OPENING OPPOSITION (OO)

Leader of the Opposition

Presents arguments against



Deputy Leader of the Opposition

Rebuts the PM and the Deputy PM



CLOSING GOVERNMENT (CG)

Member of Government

Brings new material to support the motion



Government Whip

Summarizes the debate for the government



CLOSING OPPOSITION (CO)

Member of Opposition

Brings new material to oppose the motion



Opposition Whip

Summarizes the debate for the opposition



Speaker of the House, who acts as the facilitator

Adjudicators, who judge the debaters and decide who has won the debate

By convention, speeches are **7 minutes** long

British Parliamentary rules for debating

Roles

The different types of debaters have the following **main tasks**:

OPENING GOVERNMENT (OG)

Prime Minister

Make the case in favour

Deputy Prime Minister

Rebut (attack) the opposition's case



OPENING OPPOSITION (OO)

Leader of the Opposition

Make the case against

Deputy Leader of the Opposition

Rebut (attack) the government's case



CLOSING GOVERNMENT (CG)

Member of Government

Introduce all-new matter to the argument

Government Whip

Summarize the debate, no new matter



CLOSING OPPOSITION (CO)

Member of Opposition

Introduce all-new matter to the argument

Opposition Whip

Summarize the debate, no new matter



Speaker of the House, who acts as the facilitator

Adjudicators, who judge the debaters and decide who has won the debate

By convention, speeches are **7 minutes** long

British Parliamentary rules for debating Process

Did you miss something in the description so far?



British Parliamentary rules for debating Process

Did you miss something in the description so far?

There is no specific round for **asking questions!**

This is because **EVERYONE** can ask questions!

In BP debates, **anyone** from the team opposing the speaking debater can **interrupt** them by demanding a so-called **POI** (Point of Information).

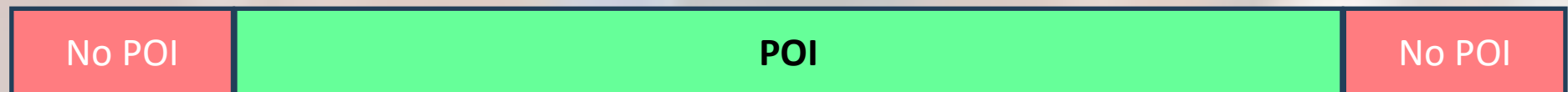


British Parliamentary rules for debating

Process

In BP debates, asking questions is managed using a special process called **POI (Point of Information)**:

- **1 minute into a speech**, the **Speaker of the House** makes know POIs are allowed by **ringing a bell** or similar.
- To start a POI, a member from the team opposing the currently speaking debater can **request a POI by saying “POI”**.
 - The debater can **reject** the POI by saying **“no thank you”**.
 - The debater can **accept** the POI by answer the question.
 - The debater must **accept at least 1 POI** or else their score will be lowered.
- **1 minute before the end** of the speech, the Speaker of the House makes know POIs are no longer allowed by **ringing the bell again**.



← 1 minute → 

 ← 1 minute →

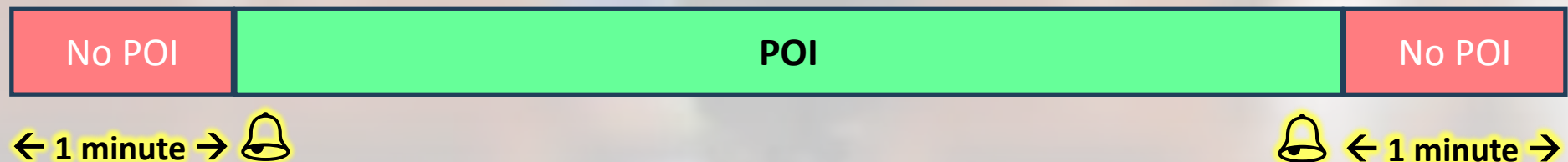
British Parliamentary rules for debating

Process

In BP debates, asking questions is managed using a special process called **POI (Point of Information)**.

Watch the video [Taking a Point of Information.avi](#) to see an example of how a POI is handled.

Later in the semester, we will have a closer look at this process and practice it.



British Parliamentary rules for debating

Process

Debaters take the stage in the following order:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| 1. Prime Minister | OG |
| 2. Leader of the Opposition | OO |
| 3. Deputy Prime Minister | OG |
| 4. Deputy Leader of the Opposition | OO |
| 5. Member of Government | CG |
| 6. Member of Opposition | CO |
| 7. Government Whip | CG |
| 8. Opposition Whip | CO |

Each debater is given a fixed time to speak, which is 7 minutes by default. This includes the time spent on POI.

British Parliamentary rules for debating Process

Like in the video, debaters consider themselves to be part of a house and address the speaker of the house rather than their opponent.

- Opening statement: “***This house*** believes that...”
- Rebuttal: “***Mr Speaker***, the Prime Minister said that ..., but in my opinion his logic is faulty because ...”
- And so on...

British Parliamentary rules for debating

Adjudication



As English majors, you may be asked to **assess the performance of debaters** in an English language debate. The following slides explain what to look for when BP rules used.

Note: I will apply similar criteria to your performance in this class.

British Parliamentary rules for debating

Adjudication

Grades are based on the following aspects:

1. Definition

- Position has a **clear and logical link to the motion**.
- Position has have a **relevance to the present** (as opposed to the past or the future).
- Position is **fair** and not restricted to matters the opposing team cannot reasonably be expected to have knowledge about.

2. Matter, including POI

- Arguments are **relevant, logical** and **consistent**.
- Arguments are **persuasive** to a general audience.
- Debaters should **accept at least 1 POI** during their own speech and **offer POI** during opposing speeches.

3. Manner

- Delivery in terms of **structure** and **timing**.
- Delivery in terms of **use of voice** and **body language**.

British Parliamentary rules for debating

Adjudication

After the debate is finished, the debating **teams are ranked** from 1 (best) to 4 (worst).

Teams and debaters are graded according to the following scheme*, where **individual grades are within the range** given to their team:

A 90-100	Many strengths and no obvious weaknesses.
B 80-89	Many strengths and some weaknesses.
C 70-79	Strengths and weaknesses in equal proportion.
D 60-69	Many weaknesses and some strengths.
E 50-59	Many weaknesses and no obvious strengths.

After the debate is finished, adjudication panel (aka the jury) delivers a speech providing details about the ranks and grades assigned to the teams and debaters.

*Note: “Officially”, team grades are in the range 100-200, but for simplicity I applied the same grades for teams and individuals for this class.

Debating techniques: Being the facilitator

If you are appointed to be the **facilitator** of a debate:

- Read up on debating **rules and etiquette**.
- Switch off any bias you may have, both towards the motion and the contestants (especially if you know them personally). Make sure you are **impartial**, you are only there to manage the proceedings, and you should **not influence the outcome** in any way.
- **Strictly adhere to the timing**. Don't feel bad about interrupting contestants or putting them in their place; if you don't, some will deliberately try to take advantage of you.
- **Strictly enforce etiquette**. Don't hesitate to put contestant in their place if they are too aggressive, even if they are more powerful than you.



Summary

- BP debates are contested by **four teams of 2 debaters**:
 1. **OG** (Opening Government): **PM & Deputy PM.**
 2. **OO** (Opening Opposition): **Leader of the opposition & Deputy leader of the opposition.**
 3. **CG** (Closing Government): **Member of government & Government Whip.**
 4. **CO** (Closing opposition): **Member of opposition & Opposition whip.**
- **Questions** are handled in the form of **POI** (points of information) during any speech.
- **Adjudication criteria** consist of **definition, matter and manner.**