Judges' Guideline: How to judge British Parliamentary Debate?
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Some ideas before judging

(if this confuses you somewhat: don't worry. It's just Daniel Schut on his argumentation-analysis rant)

There's a **four** things you need to know before you start judging:

1. Your own opinion on the subject matter does not count. Suppose you are against the death penalty, and you are judging a debate on re-allowing death penalty across the EU. In that case, you CAN NOT make the proposition loose simply because they 'did not persuade you'. Your job is to judge the *quality* of their argumentation, not to allocate wins based on your own preferences. This means that, when you are judging, you first need to realize the following things:

> a) Adopt a 'reasonable, impartial observer perspective' when it comes to the *content* of the arguments. I will not delve into the beautiful realms of political philosophy here and try and define what that perspective is. Just ask yourself: are the arguments the speaker makes, reasonably allowed into the public debate in a constitutional democracy? In that case, they probably reflect an opinion one can reasonably also have in a democracy, and by that standard, one should not, as judge, dismiss this viewpoint beforehand as 'bad'.

> b) Try and judge the *process* of argumentation more than the exact *content*. Even though the two are inextricably intertwined (I will get to that later), try at the very least to pay attention to *how* speakers argue at least as much as *what* they argue.

2. There's a cute thing called Role Fullfilment in British Parliamentary. Role Fullfilment (RFF) is a simple job-description of things we expect a speaker to do in every speech. At tournaments, people always want to know: what comes first: RFF (see other parts in this guide to look it up), or argumentation? In other words: if a team in second proposition fails to (signpost to) bring 'an extension', do they immediately need to be punished for that, even though both speakers gave brilliant speeches which significantly raised the level of the debate in terms of analysis, factual content and relevance?

The short answer: No. The long answer: No, unless…

To see why this is the case, try and realize what RFF is actually for. There are two types of rules in RFF. The first types of rules are there to ensure 'good sportsmanship'. The rule against squirreling is one of those for example: it makes sure that every team can actually use their prep-time evenly useful. Violations against these rules should be punished severely.

The second type of rules are rules to ensure that a minimally good debate takes place. If for example, the first speaker forgets to define the motion, then the debate itself will (usually) be a very bad debate. So, in a sense, RFF is there as a safety net: if bad or average debaters sticks to it, then will be able hold an average or slightly good debate. RFF is there for lesser debaters to protect them from their mistakes,

just as a beginning cord dancer needs a safety net to make sure he does not break his neck whilst trying to become brilliant.

But for brilliant debaters however, trying to do everything according to the book might be a nuisance: why should a brilliant first opposition speaker stick to first refuting for about two or three minutes, then building his constructive for the rest of the time, even whilst (s)he is able to build a brilliant and beautiful constructive case where the refutation flows logically from that case? Simply because our booklet said something to that effect? Of course not! In that case (and hopefully, but not always very likely, you will have a lot of these) the decision should be based solely upon the argumentation. But how do you judge the argumentation? That takes me to:

3. Relevance of speeches. I might be stretching your brain here a bit, but 'relevance' is the key concept in deciding whose argumentation won the room. How does this work? Simply put: every debate usually is a chaotic mix of threads of argumentation, with strands of thought going this and that way. With a total of eight speakers, each trying to argue their very best, you can rest assured that a lot of words will fly over the table. Luckily, you as a judge do not need to pen down every single word. Why? Simple: the speakers are the ones who need to identify for you:

a) what the most important threads are (and why)
b) how and why they contribute the most important argumentation to these most important threads.

This is just a simple rephrasing of the standard idea of ' finding the clash' in a debate. The reason why I don't use the word clash is because: 1) more often then not there are more then one 'clashes' in a debate, in which case it would be weird to speak of 'THE clash no. 1 and THE clash no. 2'. 2) both speakers and judges tend to get lazy and just listen for use of the word 'clash'- as soon as a speaker says: "this is THE clash", some judges would just be happy to recognize the word and forget to analyze whether what the speaker identified as THE clash really is THE clash. The idea of 'clash' refers to 'relevance', and relevance is what you should judge teams on.

The simplest way of realizing what relevance really means, is this: there are four teams in the debate who each slurp up your precious time. Which team does the best job at explaining why they are taking up your time, and which team does the worst job? The better they are at explaining why you should sit still for about an hour and listen intently to them, the higher the chances of them actually being the best team in that debate.

4. But what exactly is relevance of speeches really decided by? There are a few pointers to help you find out what team and what speaker is the most relevant: these are 'quality of argumentation' and 'content of arguments'. Explanation:

Quality of argumentation: this refers to two things:
a)   how *well developed* the argument is. When you talk about well-developed-ness, think the 'SEXI'-model (state, explain, illustrate): do your debaters actually *expand* on their arguments or not? Do they explain every step in a causal link, do they explain every step in a moral argument? The more explicated the argument, the better the argumentation will be.

b)   logical consistency. If one side argues two things which are logically inconsistent, then, even when the other side does not point it out, as a judge you are allowed to decide that these arguments should weigh less heavy in trying to find out who won.

Content of Arguments: Even though in point 1 I said one should not judge the content of arguments based on your own convictions, I did not say one should not judge the content of arguments *at all*. When it comes to the content, one can judge on the following two criteria:

    a) Truthfulness of arguments. If an argument is factually untrue, you can strike it off of your list in 9 out of 10 cases. Why not in all cases? Simple: in some cases, knowing whether a fact is true or not may, in 1 out of 10 cases, require expert knowledge. Since debating is a game of 'general knowledge', untrue facts which can only be diagnosed by your expert knowledge alone, should stand to be judged as true during the debate, if and only if the other speakers also accepted it as true. To find out whether something is general knowledge, ask yourself if the fact in question is something you could have read as a headline or main article in *The Economist*. If so, consider it general knowledge, if not so, consider it expert knowledge. For example: if a team flatly denies that Kim Jong Il blew up an atomic bomb a few months ago, then you may judge that as factually untrue. If a team does not know exactly how many megatons that blast was, then they can be, in all likelihood, forgiven for their lack of knowledge.

    b) Relevance of arguments. Once again, many debates usually have key threads of argumentation. Examples are 'state-intervention versus free market reign' or 'intervening in favor of human rights versus respecting state sovereignty' or 'direct democracy via referenda versus representative democracy'. There is only a finite amount of these debates and many seasoned debaters have seen all of these 'archetype-debates' already. The relevance of arguments is decided by looking at 'what kind of contribution their arguments make to that key controversy'. Mind you, only in brilliant debates does this question come into play.

Judging Guidelines

Still there? Allright! Now for the guidelines:

1. You first need to decide what team comes first, second, third and fourth.
2. We would love the judges to be unanimous. In many cases, that will not happen. If there is disagreement, and the votes in the panel are tied, THE CHAIR DECIDES.
3. Fill in the speed ballot WITHIN FIVE MINUTES!
4. Only AFTER that do you decide speaker points. You do this after deciding team rank to make sure you do not accidentally award 'low point wins', which means that a team that was NOT first in speakerpoints DID come first in the ranking. ALWAYS check your points and see if they agree with the team-ranking!
5. Fill in the main ballot, with the speakerpoints.
6. Give oral feedback ONLY after the first two round on FRIDAY. In that feedback DO NOT give speakerpoints, but do give ranking of teams and some helpful hints for teams if you want to.

Here's a helpful list of questions to ask to make judging easier:

1. Were there severe violations of the 'good sportsmanship' part of the RFF? (example: squirrels, bad behavior, et cetera). If there were, the team that has made them has not *automatically* become fourth and last in the debate, but does have to have been *really* brilliant otherwise to avoid being fourth anyhow.
2. were there any violations to the 'safety net for debate' part of the RFF *which hindered the debate in it's totality?* If such is the case, the team that made those mistakes also stands a bigger chance of ending in the lower half of the ranking.
3. were there any violations to the 'safety net for debate' part of the RFF *which hindered the team's speeches specifically?* If such is the case, this specific team is also quite likely a candidate for a losing team.
4. If all the above questions did not help: congratulations! You are in a very good debate!

5. Then try and analyze the argumentation. First ask yourself: what were the key threads (clashes) in the debate? Which team got closest to identifying them? Which team was farthest of?
6. Which team had the best arguments in relation to that key question, both content-wise as specified above, and quality-wise as specified above? Which team had the worst?
7. Which team did the best job of bringing constructive material, did the best job of refuting others' arguments and of defending their own arguments after they have been attacked? Which team did the worst job?
8. I am sorry to disappoint you: there are no more easy questions to be asked to help think of a winner. You still want more? You won't get any: debating is a thinking man's game – deciding who won can only be decided by thinking carefully.
9. Allright, maybe a bit more: who were better style-wise? Who had the better presentation, vocalization and verbalization? This question can never be decisive all by itself, so take care NOT to ask this question first, and ask it only as a last resort!

You see here that in this list of questions RFF comes *before* analyzing argumentation. That's what we also expect of our judges: quite a few times, whether or not teams keep to their RFF will be enough to decide who won, who lost, and who came second and third. If, and only if the debate was good and there were no procedural problems or what not, can you afford *not* to look at RFF and judge argumentation first. This only happens about 1 in a 100 times, so the chances that you will see such a debate are very, very slim.

Mind you, RFF is also there as a check against *your* biases as a judge. If you as a judge look at argumentation first all the time and say to yourself: "I don't like this argument", whereas no one in the debate actually attacked this argument, and the argument itself isn't particularly stupid, then you're judging the wrong way. Contentwise, you as a person might not like the debate, but if the debate itself functioned well, you should reward that accordingly. Looking at RFF keeps you from what we call "constructing" the argument, i.e. reading too much or too little into a team's arguments, simply because that fits better with *your* perceptions of how the debate should have gone.

On the small chance that you *do* see a brilliant debate where you can **start** by judging on arguments first, please keep this in mind: if you find that allocating the wins is difficult, then again refer back to the RFF – even though these rules might be for the lesser gods, not the debate-moguls you just saw, they still are obligated to set up a good debate, and RFF is a reminder of who should do what at what position to do just that.

If RFF first and argumentation second do not get you any further, ONLY THEN look at the differences in style and presentation. Since BP revolves around argumentation, and the goal of the game itself is to test how *smart* the participants are, not how *suave* they are, this criterion should be used very sparingly – it can never be decisive all by itself and can only function as a tie-breaker.

Allocating speakerpoints goes as follows::
We are going to use World Universities Debate Championships Standards. This means (copypasted and slightly edited from Colm Flynn, we love you Colm!):

90-100: Excellent to flawless. The standard of speech you would expect to see from a speaker at the Semi Final / Grand Final level of the World Championships. This speaker has many strengths and few, if any, weaknesses.

80-89: Above average to very good. The standard you would expect to see from a speaker at the finals level at Worlds or in contention to make to the finals. This speaker has clear strengths and some minor weaknesses.

70-79 Average to good. The speaker has strengths and weaknesses and roughly equal proportions.

60-69 Poor to below average. The team has clear problems and some minor strengths.

50-59 Very poor. This speaker has fundamental weaknesses and few, if any, strengths.

What we expect:

Average: We expect the average of all speakerpoints to be around 70 points.

Range: We expect that most of the speakerpoints allocacted to be between 60 and 80 points. Only if speakers really, really screw up, do they get below 60, and if speakers are really, really good do they get above 80. In other words: you'd better have a darn good explanation ready if you give more then 80 or less then 60, and we WILL ask for that explanation!

Take a look at the Form

This is the form you need to fill in: get to know it before you fill it in.