# Introduction to Parliamentary Debate for Season 22



Photo of parliamentary debaters preparing for a parli round at NITOC 2021.

Parliamentary debate (a.k.a. “parli” or sometimes called “world schools” debate) is a form of debating where each team is given a resolution, a set time to prepare, and then they debate. Different from most other formats is that parli resolutions are written for each round during a tournament. Tournaments and scrimmages match teams up, one side affirming the resolution as “the government” and the other side negating the resolution as “the opposition.” A judge ranks how well they debated and declares a winner of the debate round.

The origins of parli debate come from Britain, traditionally called “British parliamentary procedure.” Parliamentary procedures are the rules the parliament places upon itself to debate and govern. As early as the 16th century the House of Common in Britain recorded the rules of Parliament, rules that have been modeled by most of the Western democratic world.

In parliamentary government, a resolution is put forth by the government and debate — formal speech times for both sides to present — is given. In parliament, these debates help either push forth the resolution into law or defeat the resolution. In education, a team of students (two, three, or sometimes more) take the side of a resolution (calling themselves the “government”) and another team takes the alternative side (calling themselves the “opposition”).

There is plenty of action in the parli debate world. Today thousands of students participate in classrooms and competitions all over the country in this most invigorating activity. While it may appear complicated to those not familiar with the activity, there is an easy-to-understand structureto parliamentary debate that is actually quite simple.

#### Structure of Parli Debate

Parli debate is unique from other forms of debate in many ways, and this section attempts to lay these out as you envision yourself participating.

First, a variant among leagues is the number of debaters on the “team.” These can be 2-member, 3-member or even more-member teams that share responsibilities during the round. You may have alternates to your team that sit out of the debate round and help only at prep. Make sure you understand your parli league’s rules so that you and your partner(s) understand what is coming.

Second, while most debate formats have a set resolution for numerous tournaments that debaters can prepare for, parli tournaments release a new resolution every round *during the tournament*. You will receive your resolution shortly before the round, after which you commence with “prep time” to prepare for your debate. You and your parli team will move quickly to formulate your arguments as the timer ticks away.

For prep time, check your tournament rules to make sure you do it right. Time varies greatly among leagues and tournaments, sometimes allowing only 15 minutes or up to an hour to prepare arguments. Some leagues allow internet use, some don’t. Some allow collaboration with parents and coaches, some don’t. Make sure you understand how to best utilize your prep time during your tournament.

What do you do during prep time? You prepare arguments on a computer (if allowed) or with pen-and-paper. A lot can be said as to how to best prepare speeches, but it is wise for the parli team to first determine the kind of resolution they are debating. There are four general types of resolutions:

1. Fact. A resolution that is either true or false. The determining word of a fact resolution is “is” or “is not.” *Resolved: Education is more futile than not.*
2. Policy. A resolution that declares the need for a problem to be solved with a proposed policy. The resolution typically calls on a government (e.g. the USFG, or United States Federal Government) to solve the problem. The determining words of a policy resolution can be “shall/should” or “will.” *Resolved: The USFG should reform its education policy.*
3. Balance. A resolution that weighs either one way or another, based on how it is written. The introductory word is usually “on balance.” *Resolved: On balance, local government does a better job educating youth than state government.*
4. Value. A resolution that weighs values against conflict situations. The resolution calls for debaters to defend a superior value to justify their side of the resolution. *Resolved: Education is overvalued.*

Knowing the type of resolution helps debaters prepare for their speeches. A proctor will come to remind you to go to your room. Your team takes its seats and the debate begins with its first speaker.

Your league or tournament will show you the exact structure of your parli debate. For example’s sake, let’s look at Stoa’s 38-minute 2-on-2 format of parli debate to explain how the round rolls.

1. **Prime Minister Constructive** - 7 min.  
   The first speaker gives a seven-minute speech presenting his case to the judge.
2. **Leader of Opposition Constructive** - 7 min.  
   The first opposition speaker gives a seven-minute speech either presenting an alternative case to the resolution or directly refuting the Prime Minister’s case.
3. **Member of Government Constructive** - 7 min.  
   The second government speaker gives a seven-minute speech building their case back up, attacking the Leader of Opposition, or extending their original case.
4. **Member of Opposition Constructive** - 7 min.  
   The last constructive case, the second opposition speaker gives a seven-minute speech either of new arguments or attacking the Member of Government’s arguments.
5. **Leader of Opposition Rebuttal** - 5 min.  
   The final word of the opposition team.
6. **Prime Minister Rebuttal** - 5 min.  
   The final word of the government team.

One of the most interesting aspects of parli debate is the interrupting that is allowed of the opposing teams. At certain times during the round debaters may rise from their chairs and ask to be heard. The speaker either grants permission or denies, depending on the time demands. Sometimes debaters stand with palm extended upward as a sign of peace with the other palm on his head, a visual reference to Victorian parli debate: *I come in peace, but I’m keeping my wig on in case it gets windy.* There are two types of interruptions:

1. Points of Information (POI). These are asked in the constructive speeches, typically asked to gain information about the speech being given. The first and last minutes of the constructive speeches are “protected time,” meaning opposing teams are not allowed to ask POIs.
2. Points of Order (PO). These are asked in the rebuttal speeches, typically to “cry foul” for new arguments or an abuse of the rebuttal speaker. Time keeping is stopped for POs. The opposing speaker gives reason for the PO and the speaker gives a short rebuttal. The judge will either rule on the PO or ignore it to consider later. When the judge decides, the timer continues as does the debate.

Other considerations with parli debate:

* There is no prep time between speeches. Speakers are expected to get to the lectern right after the previous speech ends.
* Notes and interjections from teammates. Debaters are allowed to interact with their partners during the round, passing notes always allowed. Some leagues allow bursts of comments.
* Audience participation. Most other debate formats forbid heckling; it is encouraged in parli debate. Rapping on tables, knocking, cheering “hear, hear!” are all welcome when good arguments are made. Judges, too, sometimes knock on their table to show agreement. As long as the participation doesn’t disrupt the round, it is a lot of fun and considered appropriate in parli debate rounds.
* Evidence. Since students are not given an ample amount of time to prepare, evidence briefs are not expected to weigh down the round. Common knowledge or understanding of world events should be appealed to, not deep analytical studies that would require strong warranting and citations.

#### Examples of Parli Resolutions

Parli resolutions are written by the tournament, and they may vary in style and topic. Generally speaking, they follow the types of resolutions listed above. Here are some examples:

1. Aging infrastructure has become an epidemic in the United States.
2. Local governments have the right to protect illegal immigrants from unjust executive mandates.
3. Secret video recordings of public officials in private conversations should not be reported in news media.
4. Xi is good for China.
5. The USFG should substantially increase funding to the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program.
6. On balance, hunting has been good for natural habitat.
7. NCAA student athletes ought to be recognized as employees under the Fair Labor Standards Act.
8. The robust global economy is a result of the Biden/Harris administration.
9. Cellphone users do not have 4th Amendment rights over its data.
10. On balance, populism has helped make America great again.
11. America is greater today than November 2020.
12. Welfare inherently hurts the poor.
13. It is sometimes beneficial to assume criminal guilt before a trial of peers.
14. The US economy is more vulnerable today than it was ten years ago.
15. The NBA should allow the use of medical marijuana within the league.
16. Congressional rules should change concerning sexual harassment.
17. Facebook is a monopoly.
18. The Left justifies violence more than the Right.
19. This House will drive the stake through the heart of the vampire.
20. Scenario: Kim Jong-un launches a ballistic missile over Japan intended to land in the Pacific Ocean. US intelligence discovers that the missile malfunctioned and mistakenly landed in northern Japan in a small village community, killing no one. North Korea apologizes for the misfortune, but vows to continue its nuclear and missile testing, claiming the misfortune was only brought on by the continued hostility from America.  
    Resolved: The US shall attack North Korea to overthrow Kim Jong-un.

You can see several resolutions that cover *fact, policy, balance* and *value* conflicts. There are a couple of others that are unique. A “metaphor” resolution challenges the government to make a strong comparison, just as #19 does, and who knows what the debaters will come up with. The last one is called a “scenario.” This is a unique resolution where debaters get to conclude on a hypothetical situation, or even rewrite history.

# Resolutions for Season 22

As a member, you get to download a tournament worth of resolutions that practice preparing for parli debate rounds. The resolutions are written by the same author as the extemp questions for the week, so you can typically expect the debate topics to be relevant to discussions in the news. These most typically are the kinds of resolutions tournament directors enjoy writing for their tournament.

*Members can expect fresh resolutions throughout the competitive season. They release every Monument Monday.*