



Annual Debates on Current Economic Issues

Debate rules

Introduction

The Economics Department organises the fifth series of annual debates on current economic issues. The debates will take place between students of the European Economic Studies programme, following a modified “Oxford style”.

Students will be divided into four teams: A, B, C & D.

Teams A & B will form pair I.

Teams C & D will form pair II.

The winning team from each pair will form the finalist pair III. The winning team from pair III will be the overall winner of 2016-2017 academic year.

Judges and decisions

The debates will be chaired by Prof Christian de Boissieu, Professor at University of Paris-I Panthéon-Sorbonne.

The debates will be assessed by a panel of judges formed by Prof de Boissieu and the Economics Department staff.

Format

Derived from the Oxford Union debating society of Oxford University, “Oxford-Style” debate is a formal, competitive debate featuring a concise motion that is proposed by one team and opposed by another in a sequence of statements and responses. Speakers are subject to strict time limits.

One team is the proponent. It argues in favour of the motion. The other team is the opponent. It argues against the motion. The motions of the debates will be announced well in advance.

Pair I	Pair II	Pair III ¹
Team A: proponent	Team C: proponent	Winner I
Team B: opponent	Team D: opponent	Winner II
Winner I	Winner II	Debate Winner

Each debate has four stages, as follows:

Presentation – rebuttal – summation – questions & answers.

Each team has three formal speakers [other members of the team may speak during the question & answer stage of the debate, see below]:

Presentation: Speaker 1 presents the arguments in favour of the motion. The presentation should start with a thesis and then review the evidence that supports that thesis. The thesis is a statement that contains the reasons in favour of the motion. The presentation may also identify potential weaknesses in the (expected) line of argumentation of the other team. The time available to Speaker 1 is ten (10) minutes.

Rebuttal: Speaker 2 responds to the arguments in the opening speech of the other team. The time available to Speaker 2 is five (5) minutes.

Summation: Speaker 3 summarises the main points of the thesis and the supporting evidence and may also summarise any weaknesses or inconsistencies in the analysis or evidence of the other team. The time available to Speaker 3 is seven (7) minutes.

Question and Answers: After all the speakers of each team conclude their presentations, the judges may ask questions, first to the proposing team and then to the opposing team. In addition, each team can put a question to the other team. Any member of a team may answer. One minute will be allowed for consultation within the team. The time available to each team to answer questions is 10 minutes.

When the allotted time for speakers ends, speakers will be given only 30 seconds to conclude their sentence.

The sequence of speeches is as follows:

Presentation:	
Speaker 1 proposing team	Speaker 1 opposing team
Rebuttal:	
Speaker 2 proposing team	Speaker 2 opposing team
Summation:	
Speaker 3 proposing team	Speaker 3 opposing team
Questions & answers:	
Whole proposing team	Whole opposing team

¹ The teams will switch position, i.e. if in their initial pair the team was a proponent, in the final debate the team will be an opponent and vice-versa.

Decisions

The judges will assess the performance of each team as a whole. Their assessment will be based on the following criteria:

1. Logical cohesion of the argumentation [whether the argument is consistent and complete].
2. Clarity of presentation [whether all points are sufficiently explained].
3. Comprehensiveness of analysis [whether all possible aspects are taken into account].
4. Robustness [whether possible counter-arguments and contrary evidence are considered].
5. Persuasiveness [whether the presentation and the evidence are credible and nuanced].
6. Other [whether, for example, rhetorical devices are used, whether the presentation is entertaining, whether it attacks intelligently the position of the other side, etc].

There is no precise weight for each criterion.

The decisions of the judges are final. The Chairman will explain the decisions of the judges and provide feedback to the teams.

Conduct

The debates are competitive but civilised.

All remarks are addressed to the panel of judges. Speakers address the panel on behalf of their team.

No one in any team may interrupt a speaker or make personal comments about a member of one's own or the other team.

There are only two legitimate forms of interruption: points of order and points of information. These are addressed to the Chairman who may then interrupt a speaker or stay the proceedings.

Points of order concern possible deviation from the rules of the debate.

Points of information are questions about the interpretation of the rules, not expressions of opinion.

Advice

Good performance depends on thorough preparation. Relying on off-the-cuff clever remarks is never sufficient.

Thorough preparation requires the following:

- Definition of the thesis.
- Development of argumentation.
- Search for supporting evidence.
- Consideration of counter-arguments.
- Appraisal of the robustness of evidence and counter-evidence.

Well-structured presentation is important and simplicity is a virtue. The audience will have difficulty following complex, long or multiple arguments.

Timing is crucial. It is better to finish a presentation with a minute or two to spare than be stopped in mid-argument.

Reading a written speech is boring. It is better to memorise the main points and use notes for guidance.

Good debating performance has to be both convincing and entertaining. Identify possible weaknesses in the reasoning or evidence of the other team and expose them with brief, clear and critical statements. Find out about rhetorical devices.

Finally, like in other forms of discourse you should avoid too little or too much politeness, witticism, sarcasm or belligerent remarks. You do not want to be perceived either as lame or a bully.