

Proposition Tactics

A. Goal of the lesson

Debaters will be able to build a proposition case during preparation
They will also understand how proposition cases are advanced and challenged during the debates

B. Activities

Lecture (10-20 min)

Prepare a lecture offering the basic facets of the content. Use one of three approaches:

- A. Follow the theory pointers in this lesson plan in „F. Theory“ part;
- B. Follow pre-existing theories from theory books. Suggestions are given in this lesson plan in „C. Preparation“ part;
- C. Base your lecture on observed student performance and student questions. This approach can be synthesised with the two approaches above.

The core aim of the lecture is to provide students with models of thinking they can use to make strategies for preparing and executing a *debate case*, a set of arguments that forms a convincing whole for their side of the motion. The secondary aim is to choose strategies during the debate to advance their side of the motion.

Case Prep (30 min)

- a. Divide the students on groups of 2-4 participants
- b. Give the groups a motion and 15 minutes to prepare their side of the case.
- c. After preparation each group needs to present their case in 3 minutes.
- d. Discuss the presented cases. Participants choose which case they find more compelling. They discuss possible challenges from opposition and how their cases can deal with these challenges.
- e. Debrief: did the theory help them building the proposition case? What challenges did students experience in applying the theories?

SPAR Debate (20 min) (*Spontaneous Argumentation Debate)

- a. Divide the students in 2 groups. One group is in favour, one group is against a motion. Each person is paired to another student The motion is the same as in the Case Prep exercise.
- b. Give groups 5 minutes to prepare statements proposing and opposing the motion.
- c. The proposition member gives 2-minute opening statements.
- d. Students prepare counter-responses for 30 seconds.
- e. Students engage in a 3-minute discussion on opposition responses and proposition counters.
- f. Student get 30 seconds to prepare closing statements, where they prepare their main take-away on the quality of the other sides' case.
- g. Public debrief. Students give their main takeaways to the class. The class discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the case, and checks whether the case fits all the tips and tricks given by the theoretical model.

C. Preparation

Read, if desired, debate guide books on tactics. I would recommend the [MAD Guide to Debating](#) (page 30 „Chapter Six...“), but Steven L. Johnson's [Winning Debates](#) and

Neill Harvey-Smith's [Introduction to British Parliamentary debate](#) (all available from IDEA Press) provide good introductions as well.

Alternatively, read the theory section given to this lesson plan or build your own.

Pick one motion that is deep, accessible, and interesting. A former impromptu round at World Schools is a perfect candidate.

D. Hints

- This exercise requires a lot of moving parts and concepts. Be wary that students may not pick up all information perfectly, and keep referring to these concepts in future sessions.
- Always ask for a lot of verifications during theory lectures to ensure students get familiar with the introduced concepts.

E. Verification

For trainer:

- What activity/example/discussion produced the best results at this lesson?
- What was the biggest problem during the lesson? How can I avoid/prevent it in future?
- Did I avoid/prevent the biggest problem which occurred the last time? If no, why?

F. Theory

Main Frame

Proposition Tactics follow (one of) two essential pathways.

1. From Problem to Solution;
2. Comparative Advantages.

1. From Problem to Solution.

☹ -> 😊

☹ = Problem. What is the current problem? What are its causes? What are its consequences?

-> = Policy/Mechanism. What is the mechanism? (Definition/Context) Will the mechanism be effective? Does it address the causes and/or consequences of the problem?

😊 = Solution. Has the Mechanism solved all problems? What new problems may it have created? Why does the Solution outweigh this new Problem?

2. Comparative Advantages

Then – Now

Then: what are the problems then? Why are they so bad?

Now: what are the problems after introduction of the policy? Why is the situation comparatively much better?

Choosing Tactics

Proposition Policies have to make a choice on how hardline their policy is. The main trade-off: the more hardline their policy the more principally consistent and effectful it will be, but the bigger the corresponding harms will be.

Take climate change policy as an example. On the complete hard end you could choose for having enormously high taxes on any polluting material. The consequence is a rapid shift to less polluting material, but at enormously increased prices, which causes a lot of economic growth loss. On the complete soft end you could choose for a symbolic tax increase (say: 10 cents for a plastic bag) which doesn't end up harming the economy but also doesn't remove polluting consumer habits. Proposition teams have the burden to identify where on this sliding scale they want to place their policy.

The tactically strongest choice is to choose a moderate-to-hard line. This means you can actually provide benefits whilst minimising as much as possible the harms coming to your side.

Choosing what material to develop

An intricacy of proposition versus opposition is that proposition needs to prove every chain of the Problem – Mechanism – Solution gap, whereas Opposition can win by taking one of these three away. (There is no Problem – The Mechanism Won't Work – The Harms are worse than the Problems).

This means that Proposition teams need to predict which part Opposition is most likely to challenge, and defend these with most vigour. And if there are things Opposition is likely to concede, Proposition should spend less time developing this material.