

How to Break at an International: an 8-step guide

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This guide is for anyone who wants to fulfil their potential as a debater and succeed at an international tournament. Many new debaters experience early success, fall in love with the activity, but then struggle. You do well at some tournaments, poorly at others, and it starts to get to you. You begin to doubt your intellectual ability and it might even affect your self-esteem. Perhaps you go to an international tournament like WUDC or EUDC and miss the break. It's desperately disappointing. Where to go from there? This guide hopes to provide some answers. Whilst advice and tips on how to improve at debate do exist on the Internet, it can be very difficult to know where to start and what's most important.

With so much you could potentially read or do, it can be paralysing. This guide aims to break it down and put you on the right track. I'll assume you understand the rules of the British Parliamentary debate format and have some experience of speaking at BP tournaments. If you don't, I recommend this.

I also assume you're motivated to get better and are willing to commit time and effort to that endeavour. As you'll see, your personal determination and input will be the key ingredient to your success. Merely reading this guide won't be enough. The most important step - Step 1 - stresses the primacy of your personal practice. You'll only get better at an activity by actually doing it. Passive reading of advice will only get you so far. There are no shortcuts. No quick fixes. Anything that was ever worth achieving required effort and this is no different. Don't be fooled into thinking there's something mystical or unique about successful debaters. There isn't. They've likely just worked at it a lot longer and harder than you have, probably doing a lot of the things I talk about in this guide. Happily, that could be you. Crucially, you'll need to practice more - and smarter - than your competitors. This means going beyond the standard weekly training session with your debate society and

receiving feedback from judges at tournaments. This is all good, but it's not enough.

If you didn't get the chance to debate at school / didn't do World Schools / haven't been debating at university level for several years, and you want to break at an international tournament, you've got a big experience gap to close. Regular personal practice will help close that gap. A warning: as I explain in Step 8 - on building a healthy, winning mentality - nothing in debate is guaranteed. It's a game like any other, steeped in chance and probability. Get comfortable with that. Because even if you follow the advice of this guide diligently, practice extensively and intelligently, you still may not break at an international tournament. You will significantly improve your probability of breaking, for sure. But there are no guarantees on the final outcome. A quick inspection of the exceptional calibre of lots of the teams that narrowly miss the break at international tournaments tells you all you need to know about the intrinsic element of chance in debating.

Another warning: there are multiple routes to success. What worked for me might not work for you. But - trust me here - I think there's a core set of skills that you need to master (and indeed are mastered by successful debaters) and it would be time very well spent to work on these skills. There are things in this guide you might consider blindingly obvious. If so, good. But, thinking back to when I first started debating, absolutely none of this was obvious to me and I wished I'd known it then. I would've improved faster if I had. So, if the advice here contained fast tracks your progress or makes you feel more positive and in control about your personal development, that's a win. Feel free to plagiarize and disseminate this widely. Debating gets better when we share insights, tips, advice. I didn't like it when I felt like I didn't know how to improve, and I don't want anyone else to feel like that either.

May this guide and its philosophy be a useful tool for debate coaches, trainers, enthusiasts, school kids and university students everywhere. Debating gives you a big high when you win. But it also gives you a big high when you feel like you're getting better, giving your best in every debate and you're fulfilling your potential. I hope this guide helps you get to that happy place.

The guide has 8 steps:

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1 Practice with a Plan

Competitive debate is a game, just like chess or cricket or synchronized diving. As in those games, the route to success is via practice. If there's one thing you should take away from this guide, it's the importance of your personal practice.

When I first started debating, I thought you won debates by being the smartest person in the room. That is hopelessly wrong. Debating is not a test of your intelligence. It is a test of your ability to play a particular intellectual game which has quirky, often bizarre, rules and dynamics, all of which can be improved through smart practice.

1.1 How much should I practice?

It depends on how badly you want it. If you're serious about breaking at Worlds or other international tournaments, I recommend practicing very regularly, either once a day or at least every other day. Get ready to be a nerd, and be proud of it. Don't just take my word for it: the best speaker at a recent WUDC once professed to doing 7-minute speeches every morning. The top breaking team at a recent EUDC once told me that part of their preparation was to do a Prime Minister's speech and Leader of Opposition speech against each other every morning. Clearly, the speakers who put in the hard yards reap the biggest rewards. Incorporate debate practice into your daily routine.

When I was in Paris preparing for WUDC, I woke up a little earlier and spent 30 minutes each morning working on some aspect of debate. In the grand scheme of things, 30 minutes is nothing. If you cut out your procrastination and organise your time effectively, it's a drop in the ocean.

Starting is the hardest part. It gets easier with every passing day. Soon you'll get to a point where it's a habit, like brushing your teeth or checking your Facebook feed. It's something you just do every day as part of your routine.

1.2 How do I practice?

Before you start practicing you need to self-reflect, set goals and plan.

1.2.1 Self-reflection

You need to sit down and make a list of the things you're bad at. Be honest and be brutal. There's no point in kidding yourself. For inspiration, my self-reflection list in mid-2015 looked something like:

- Improve matter generation. I struggle to consistently come up with arguments across a range of motions. I also struggle to come up with the depth of argumentation that is necessary to extend off strong teams in good rooms.
- Control my speaking style. I speak too fast, my hands are all over the place and I don't feel in control of my breathing.
- Improve my analysis. Too often I don't fully explain why my arguments are true or why they are important. This skill is so basic but I still suck at it.
- Get better at top-half strategy. I struggle to control debates from opening-half and often lose to the team on the diagonal e.g. CO if I'm OG, or CG if I'm OO. I need to work out how to stop this.
- Take better notes. My notes are too small, messy and disorganised. I need to practice making better notes.

Identifying your flaws is the first step to getting better. You should do this regularly, perhaps after every tournament you attend. Your training plan will then have specific areas to improve on.

1.2.2 Setting goals

It sharpens the mind to give yourself some targets. Regardless of what your big goals is (be it breaking at Worlds, finishing in the top half of the tab, or just scoring more than a certain number of points) there are lots of mini-goals to aim for in the meantime. Targeting those mini-milestones will keep you motivated.

Examples might include: getting a speaker average greater than X at your next tournament, breaking at the next Inter-Varsity (IV) tournament you attend, giving a practice speech where you feel in full control of your speaking style, coming up with a closing-half case that beats your opening, and so on. Big goals are rarely met in singular, enormous leaps. It's all about the baby steps.

1.2.3 Make a detailed plan

Once you've set your goals and self-reflected, you know where you want to get to and what you need to improve to get there. Now you need a detailed practice plan to get you to your destination. At the time of publication, Sunday 11th September 2016, you have 109 days until the next international debate tournament - Dutch WUDC. If you start now, and do 30 minutes every day, that's around 50 hours of debate practice, not even counting the practice tournaments or group training sessions you might attend. You could get seriously good. Crucially, your plan needs to be specific. Just saying, 'I'm going to do some debate practice every morning' isn't enough. You need to plan exactly what you'll do and why you're doing it. Without that specificity, you'll lose focus and motivation. Your training should be active, varied and game-specific.

- Active = you're doing something - not just passively reading. Remember, getting better requires effort.
- Varied = you mix it up to keep it fresh.
- Game-specific = you're practicing skills that are directly relevant to what you might do in a debate. Cristiano Ronaldo gets better at football by kicking footballs. You'll get better at debate by giving speeches, practicing prep time and filling your analytical locker.

Coming up with your plan should take a good amount of time. Don't be concerned by this. It's time very well spent. You might feel like you're wasting time because you're not actually doing any debating, you're just planning. But the plan is so important, so make it. And see if you can plan for all the way up until Worlds, being aware you can make tweaks to the plan as you go along

1.3 What would a good plan look like?

Its content should be driven by the results of your self-reflection. Throughout the guide I give suggestions as to how to practice different aspects of your debating. Go to the relevant sections for inspiration. Much of the advice I give assumes you're on your own. If you're able to coordinate your training with your debate partner, that's great, but I recognise that can be tricky. To give an example of the specificity, activeness and variety I think you should be aiming for in your plan, here's what an example week might look like. Let's assume this speaker is working on improving their OG strategy, making

their speaking style more persuasive and filling their analytical locker. Let's further assume they're deciding to do 30 minutes each morning, have training with their society on Wednesdays and this is a week with no tournament at the weekend.

Example Week

Monday - OG practice: do a 15-minute prep for the PM speech on the motion "This House would legalise all drugs" (or another motion drawn at random - a useful bank of motions is available here). Record the speech and watch it back. What did you do well? How could you do better?

Tuesday - Style and OG practice: Re-do the speech you did on Monday, but this time focus on improving one aspect of your speaking style e.g. speaking slowly, controlling your hands or using persuasive emphasis. Record yourself, and when watching back, don't worry about the analysis. Solely assess the speech in terms of the aspect of your speaking style you were trying to improve.

Wednesday: group training session with your debate society.

Thursday - OG practice: watch and take notes on 3 Prime Minister speeches from WUDC/EUDC outrounds, looking out for how they structure the speech, set up the debate and hit the main clashes. What did you learn from their speeches?

Friday - OG practice and Analytical locker: do a 30-minute long prep for the OG case for a major WUDC/EUDC outround (such as the Manchester EUDC final: THW give more votes to citizens according to their performance on a current affairs test). Use the Internet to help you. Try writing out the PM speech.

Saturday - OG practice: watch the WUDC/EUDC outround for which you prepared the OG case. What did you get right? What did you miss? Go back to the case you prepared and add what you think is necessary. Now give the PM speech, also keeping in mind the aspect of your speaking style you want to improve. Record, reflect, critique.

Sunday - Analytical locker: Before watching a high-quality debate from a major IV or international tournament, spend 5 minutes brainstorming how you'd try to win from either side. Then take notes on the top-half of that debate. Were you right about the strategic burdens?

2 Groove the Basics

Two basic and fundamental skills that you can and should prioritise in your personal practice are analysis and structure. They are foundational. If you do either of these things poorly, you're unlikely to succeed at an international debate tournament.

2.1 Analysis

Persuasive, relevant analysis is the currency of victory in debating. If you win games of football by scoring more goals than the other team, you win debates by doing better, more persuasive, more relevant analysis than the other teams. Of all the skills you should look to practice as you prepare for an international debate tournament, I think this is the most important.

What does it mean to analyse an argument persuasively, in a way that will win a debate?

In brief, it is to explain:

1. why the argument is **true**
2. why the argument is **important**, and
3. why the argument is **more important** than the other arguments being made in the debate.

2.1.1 Practicing: why your argument is true

If you watch the best speakers, you'll notice many share a common trait: they frequently ask themselves 'Why?' aloud during their speeches. To take just one example, watch the Opp extension speech in the Vienna EUDC final. So much good 'Why'ing! This is a very useful tic. It forces you to explain and give reasons for the claims you are making.

It's also something that's actually very unnatural - you've probably gone through most of your life expressing opinions and ideas without having to fully justify or explain them. But that's exactly what you need to do in debates. If you don't, other teams will explain why your arguments are wrong or unimportant, and those teams will beat you.

Since it's unnatural, it's something you should practice. So when giving your practice speeches at home, ask yourself 'Why?' aloud. Record yourself giving your speeches: do you sufficiently explain 'Why' your claims are true?

During your prep time, you should also be constantly challenging yourself and your partner to explain why what you're saying is true. And you should practice this questioning so frequently that it becomes a habit. It's a skill that becomes grooved. That's to say, you start doing it without even thinking about it. Asking 'Why?' during a debate speech becomes reflexive, like tying your shoe laces or some other form of muscle memory. That's where you want to get to, and you only get there through regular, repeated practice.

2.1.2 Practicing: why your argument is important

My advice is much the same as for step 1. Successful debaters also often have the tic of asking themselves aloud the question 'And why is that so important?' Which is usually followed by explaining the impact of the argument. Failing to explain the impact of your argument is a common pitfall, and is again something you need to groove. Without an impact the judge is left asking 'Why should I care about this argument?' Make sure you always answer that question.

2.1.3 Practicing: why your argument is more important than the other arguments in the debate

Intermediate level debaters often succeed in going through steps 1 and 2 when explaining an argument. Step 3 is where the magic happens.

It's often called 'framing' or 'providing a metric', but that's just jargon for 'Here's why our arguments are more important than the other arguments in the debate'.

It's so important to winning debates that I would usually put my framing on a separate sheet of paper from the first two stages of the analysis, because I knew I'd likely lose the debate if I didn't say it.

Adam Hawksbee, half of the winning team at EUDC 2014 as Sheffield A, once gave an excellent seminar on framing, which excels for its clarity and pertinent examples. I recommend one of your training sessions being to watch, take notes on and reflect on this workshop. So in your practice speeches you should be regularly assessing how well you do steps 1, 2 and 3. It's the most basic and crucial skill in debating, and you need to groove it.

2.2 Structure

The best speakers often have immaculate structure in their speeches. Judges better recall the intricacies and nuances of a well-structured speech compared to a messy one and, perhaps sub-consciously, are more likely to deem

its content persuasive. Two types of structure are important: holistic and internal. Holistically, your speech should have clear sections e.g. 3 overall points or 2 points of clash or an introduction and 2 clear points etc. This structure should be clearly enunciated at the start of the speech and then followed. On internal structure, you can provide extra clarity by breaking your broader themes / points into sub-parts. For example, if your first point is about proving argument X, you might say that you're going to give 2 or 3 distinct reasons why X is true. The judges then expect that sub-division and those reasons are more likely to stick in their notes. Aiming for good holistic and internal structure should be a regular feature of your practice speeches. It's another thing to groove and reflect on when you're watching your speeches back.

3 Master your Prep Method

I saw my biggest improvements as a speaker when I developed and practiced a regular method to follow in prep time. I strongly recommend you do this too. Having a good prep method has numerous benefits. First, it calms you down. It's a process to go through no matter how perplexing or scary a motion looks. It should give you the confidence that - no matter what the topic - you'll always come up with a solid case. Second, it reduces the likelihood of making silly mistakes. Under the stress and pressure of tournaments, it's easy to forget the simple questions in prep time and miss key features of the debate, which can seriously throw you off course. Third, it saves time. You've only got 15 minutes in prep and you don't want to waste a moment of it. Having a rigorous, practiced process you always go through with your partner will ensure every moment is used strategically and well.

3.1 What are the ingredients of a successful prep method?

Above all, it needs to come from you. I can advise you on the things I think you should be asking yourself in prep time, but it's down to you to organize the process in the way that best fits your particular style, preferences and weaknesses. You may put more emphasis on some questions compared to others. Good. Experiment, practice and tweak until you're happy with your method. And once it's set, stick to it and use it every time you're doing your practice speeches. It's another thing that needs to be grooved, that needs to become reflexive. In terms of the successful components of a prep method, these are the key questions I would ask, and the order in which I would ask them. Feel free to use them as a guide.

1. **Carefully read, at least three times, each of the words in the motion and agree with your partner on their meanings.** Do a quick check also if it's a 'This House Would', 'This House Believes', 'This House Regrets', or 'This House, as Actor X' type of motion. Skip this step and you risk confusion/going off on the wrong track.
2. **Ask the fundamental, first principles questions:** Who is affected by this? How will they react? What changes in the world? These questions help ground you in who and what's going to be talked about in the debate. They will also start to spark ideas for arguments.
3. **Think in depth about the best things the other side are going to say:** what will they stand for? What are the obvious arguments they're going to make? What's their case? This step is essential for understanding what the comparative in the debate is going to be, what's going to be thrown at you and what you'll need to beat to win.
4. **Now think about your side:** what will you stand for? What's your goal? Given the obvious things the other side are going to say, what will you need to show to win?

In my head, the process was distilled into 4 simple parts: Words, Fundamentals, Other Side, Us. If we were closing-half, I would add the questions: What are top-half obviously going to say? And what will we need to do to beat it? Discussing these questions generally took the first 6-8 minutes of prep. Then I felt ready to start analysing the key claims we'd identified that would win us the debate. Minutes 8 - 15: collaboratively with my partner, we'd thrash out: why are our arguments true? Why are they important? And why are they more important than the other arguments that will be made in the debate?

3.2 Should I use a prep sheet?

Having this process written down on a standard page - multiple copies of which I would print out and bring with me to tournaments - definitely helped me. It made me feel prepared and encouraged me to be disciplined in going through the process. For the sake of reference, here's the sheet I used. Big warning: I strongly encourage you to make your own. We all think in slightly different ways and your prep method will be most effective if it's come from you.

You'll notice I also had some reminders at the bottom of the sheet about good habits - such as how I should speak (calm, slow etc.) and some trigger ideas for arguments e.g. balances of harms/rights/incentives. Customize your prep sheet in the way that's best for you.

4 Fill your Analytical Locker

You win debates by having the most persuasive, most relevant arguments in the debate. Persuasive and relevant arguments are built with compelling analysis. A key focus of your training programme should therefore be to fill your analytical locker i.e. to build up your repertoire of the things you could explain and impact persuasively to win debates. The array of ideas you will likely be called upon to explain and analyse over the course of your time as a debater is fairly extensive. That's not a problem. If you're doing some form of debate practice regularly, such as every day or every other day, you'll steadily work through these ideas and build up your repertoire. One of the primary reasons why older, more experienced debaters succeed is because they've spent more time thinking about and answering the core questions and themes I give examples of below. It's not about them being intrinsically more intelligent or talented. They've just been playing the game longer and have accumulated more in their analytical locker - either through simple exposure or training - than you have. You can work to close this experiential gap, as stressed in Step 1, through your personal practice. You might not have been to all the tournaments that they have, but you can make up the time by practicing at home. In terms of how you build up your bank of analytical capability, you'll need to do targeted practice. Think of it as doing "motion-driven matter prep". In other words, you reflect on, think about and research ideas and arguments that are likely to crop up in all sorts of debates, while always having specific motions in mind. I think motion-driven matter prep is a more productive use of your time than reading *The Economist* or *Foreign Affairs* magazine from cover-to-cover each week. There's certainly a role for that in your overall personal training plan, but it should only make up a small part relative to the time you spend doing motion-driven prep. Here's a non-exhaustive list of examples of what I'm talking about. It's based around themes and clashes that crop up regularly in debates:

4.1 Politics

Relevant to debates about: voting, elections, political parties, referenda, restricting democracy

- What is the purpose of democracy? Why is it valuable? When can it be damaging?
- What are the virtues of a liberal, democratic political system compared to an authoritarian one? And vice versa?
- What are the pros and cons of making decisions via referenda?
- Why do we have the principle of 'one person, one vote'? Why not give more or less votes based on socio-economic status / age / intelligence / gender?

4.2 Economics

Relevant to debates about: capitalism vs communism, taxation, free trade vs protectionism, nationalization vs privatisation

- What are the virtues of free-market, capitalist economies with limited state intervention? What are the harms?
- What are the benefits of economies with extensive state intervention and redistribution of wealth? What are the harms?
- What are the pros and cons of free trade?

4.3 The individual and the state

Relevant to debates about: the state banning/legalizing anything, privacy vs surveillance

- Why is individual liberty valuable?
- When should the state interfere in an individual's liberty, and why?
- Why is privacy valuable? How much state surveillance is justified? Why?

4.4 War

Relevant to debates about: military intervention, ethics of war, use of private military contractors

- When is military intervention justified?

- What's necessary for such intervention to be successful?
- What are the dangers of such intervention?
- What are the pros and cons of using private military contractors?

4.5 Criminal Justice

Relevant to debates about: making punishments stricter/more lax, tweaking the criminal justice system, truth and reconciliation, juries

- What are the purposes of the criminal justice system? Why do we value those purposes?
- Could you explain why one purpose is more important than any of the others?
- In a post-conflict situation, how best to deliver justice?
- Why do we have jury systems for deciding guilt? What are the problems with those systems?

4.6 Animals

Relevant to debates about: giving animals more/less protection, vegetarianism, the environment

- How should we treat animals?
- What do we owe them, if anything, and why?

4.7 Identity Politics

Relevant to debates about: how to best achieve the goals of oppressed groups

- What are the aims of feminism / the LGBT rights movement / the Black Lives Matter movement?
- What are the best tactics to adopt to achieve those aims?
- The aggressive pursuit of social change often risks backlash: why does that backlash happen and why is it harmful?

4.8 Building your own Analytical Locker

Don't be intimidated by the length of this list. You likely already have half-formed thoughts and answers to all of these questions already. And, as I said, if you're dedicating regular time to practice then you'll soon have done some thought and research on all of these, and you'll be much better placed to succeed in debates. I repeat: you won't find the answers to these questions by aimlessly reading *The Economist* or a newspaper. You need to target your efforts. Here are some tips on how to go about answering those questions:

1. **Think for yourself.** Have a go yourself at writing mini-essays in response to questions like these. It's best when it comes from you because you're more likely to remember it and express it in language that makes sense to you.

It's likely you've already got the intuitions and ideas in your head, you've just never forced yourself to consciously explain them. And it's better to do this work of figuring things out in your practice time, rather than when you're hit with the motion for the first time at a tournament. You want to be prepared, and if you've already thought about, you'll have a head start.

2. **Watch debates online.** If you're struggling to come up with answers yourself, it's very likely that a high-quality WUDC/EUDC/HWS round exists online where experienced speakers discuss these issues. Take notes on those debates and use their analysis as inspiration for your own.
3. **Discuss these ideas with other members of your debate society and your friends.** It's likely they'll have perspectives on these issues.
4. **Do online research.** Google is a powerful tool and will direct you to newspaper articles and academic journals that deal with these issues.

In terms of how you fit filling your analytical locker into your training plan, I recommend making a personal list of the areas where you feel weakest analytically, and then targeting those areas. For your inspiration, here are two examples of bundles of personal training sessions directed at stocking your analytical bank:

1. Imagine you're trying to boost your analytical capacity on debates regarding the individual vs the state.

You might dedicate a 30-minute session to writing down your thoughts on when the state should interfere in people's liberty, and why liberty is valuable.

Your next session might then involve taking notes on a good debate about the issue, such as the WUDC out-round, THW ban racial reassignment surgery.

Your third session might be to give a mock LO speech on a relevant motion e.g. THW ban alcohol. After these three training sessions, you'll likely be much better prepared and feel much more confident about debates regarding the individual vs the state. And when that type of debate comes up at a tournament, the probability you'll take points from the round has gone up significantly.

2. Imagine you want to get better at debates about the military and war.

Your first session might be to spend 30 minutes reflecting on and planning the OG case for a motion such as 'THW invade Zimbabwe', using the internet to help you.

Your second session might be then to watch and take notes on the WUDC Botswana final which was on that very issue, and compare the analysis of the teams in that final with the analysis you came up with.

Your third session might be to do a mock PM speech on the motion 'THBT South American states should give material support to a coup against the Venezuelan government', putting into practice some of the analysis you might have picked up in sessions 1 and 2.

Your fourth and fifth sessions might be to Google newspaper and academic articles on the merits and dangers of humanitarian intervention. Spend time reading those articles and adding notes to your Google doc. After these five sessions, when the military intervention debate comes up at a tournament, you'll be much better prepared to take points in the round.

You should be able to come up with similar bundles of training sessions for the areas where you feel analytically weak. Deep-diving into an issue, where you do it for several training sessions in a row like in the examples I've given, is an effective way of making it stick.

5 Drill your Positional Strategy

To succeed at an international debate tournament, you'll need excellent positional strategy. That is, you need to be well versed and drilled in the particular strategic dynamics of each position in a BP debate, and you know what strategies to pursue to win. A few pointers on how to get better at each position:

5.1 Opening Government

The position most frequently feared by beginner and intermediate debaters is Opening Government. It's unsurprising: you go first, you have the shortest time to prepare your speeches and you dread drawing a motion you know nothing about. That fear often correlates with weak performance. Teams panic when they are OG, make poor strategic decisions and fail to give speeches that are analytically robust and debate-winning, resulting in placing 3rd or 4th in the round. It need not be so. A key aim of your training programme should be to come to love drawing Opening Government. Once practiced, drilled and mastered, it's probably the best position to be in a BP debate. Fortunately, it's the easiest position to practice in your own time. All you need is yourself, a motion, 15 minutes of prep time, and hey presto: you've got a Prime Minister's speech. Practicing PM speeches should be a bread and butter feature of your personal training programme. The more you do them, the more your confidence will grow. Your performance in Opening Government will also improve as you fill your analytical locker. The more debates and arguments you've thought about in your practice time, the more likely it is you'll see a motion at a tournament and go 'Yup, I know what this is about'. In terms of specific advice on how to succeed in Opening Government, there's a lot of good stuff out there. Try these two for starters: Will Jones, a WUDC winner, on OG and "How to win Worlds from Opening Government" - find it on p.22 of this edition of the Monash Debate Review.

5.2 Opening Opposition

As with Opening Government, this is a straightforward position to practice. Mock LO speeches should be a regular feature of your personal training programme. Again, many good and insightful things have been said about the strategy of Opening Opposition. For a starter, try this excellent seminar by WUDC finalist Duncan Crowe. I think his notion of treating OO like a reverse OG is a particularly useful one.

5.3 Closing-half

On the face of it, it's hard to practice being Closing Government or Closing Opposition in your own time. Of course, you could watch the top-half of a debate online and try to extend off of it, but that's quite time-consuming.

Not to worry. If you're regularly working on filling your analytical locker, your performance in closing-half will very likely improve.

Having a deep stock of persuasive and impactful analysis at your disposal makes it more likely you'll have the arguments or particular analytical links that your top-half team didn't have, and so you will beat them.

Also, if you're regularly practicing your prep method and increasing its productivity, you're also boosting the chances that you'll win from closing-half. Having a stellar prep method that regularly turns out good arguments - no matter what the motion - makes it more likely you'll come up with a better case than your top-half.

In terms of specific strategic advice on how to win in closing-half, try for starters:

- Olivia Sundberg Diez's excellent powerpoints with advice for extensions and on summary speeches.
- Fred Cowell's advice on extensions.
- Adam Hawksbee on framing - I flagged this earlier, he rightly points out how winning extensions are often extensions driven by good framing.

6 Rebut Strategically

You win debates by having the most persuasive case in the room. If a team on the opposing bench has developed persuasive arguments, part of your winning strategy may require diminishing the persuasiveness of those arguments. That's the aim of rebuttal.

6.1 What makes rebuttal persuasive?

It must be analytic, developed and targeted.

Analytic = it's fully explained, using the frequent question of 'Why', just as you would if explaining your own argument. Novice and intermediate debaters often fall into the trap of simply asserting a counter-claim to an argument, but then failing to explain why the counter claim is true.

Developed = it's not 4 or 5 one-line responses to an argument (as has become increasingly popular amongst debaters), but it's instead 1 or 2 well-developed, thoroughly analysed responses. These are more likely to be robust and less vulnerable to counter-response.

Targeted = it's aimed at the most important arguments being made by the other side, taken at their most persuasive. Time spent rebutting less relevant or less impactful arguments is time not being used to develop the persuasiveness of your own arguments.

6.2 How to practice rebuttal?

Of course, you'll have the chance to practice rebuttal when you speak in debates in your society's training sessions and at tournaments. If you're looking to add more training on rebuttal in your own time, when you do your mock LO speeches, you can do it in response to a high-quality PM online, and you rebut that speech as part of your LO. Record yourself and check the analytic quality of your rebuttal. You can also watch the *actual* LO from the video, and compare their responses to your own for more inspiration.

7 Have Beautiful Style

Over the course of a debate tournament - and particularly an international - I reckon having good style - the way you deliver your speech - picks you up at least an extra 1 or 2 team points. That's because good style facilitates the persuasiveness of an argument in many ways. A few examples:

- A speaker who speaks clearly and slowly is more likely to have the intricacies of their argument understood and fully written down by the judging panel, compared to a speaker who doesn't speak clearly and speaks at 100mph. Speaking clearly and slowly requires practice.
- A speaker who is calm and in control of their speech is less likely to skip over key analytical links in an argument. Calm and control comes from practice.
- A speaker who has good control over their breathing during a speech is more likely able to use subtleties of tone, intonation and volume to add persuasive stress and emphasis to their arguments. Controlled breathing and emphasis requires practice.

- A speaker who is in control of their hands during a speech is less likely to make erratic, expansive gestures that distract the judges from the analysis being delivered. Controlling your hands requires practice.

For these reasons, practicing style should feature in your training programme. As a guide for where you want to get to, watch the World Schools kids. Their style is class. Their control, speed, clarity and emphasis is often fantastic. But they've only got there through lots of practice, which is what you need to do too. If you're going to spend practice sessions working on your style, as I encourage, focus on one particular element and then solely assess the speech in terms of how well you did that element. For example, you might prep a PM speech for a debate and, when giving the speech, make your primary focus to be, say, speaking slowly. Record the speech, watch it back, and see how well you did on speaking slowly. If the analysis in the speech is a bit naff, don't worry - your primary focus is how well you did at the skill you were working on, which was speaking slowly. As with the other skills mentioned in this guide, like analysis, structure or your prep method, good style needs to be grooved. In other words, you need to keep practicing it until it becomes second nature. You just automatically speak slowly, for example, when you're giving a speech. It's effortless and natural. But you only get there through grooving the skill i.e. practicing it over and over.

8 Build a Winning, Healthy Mentality

Half the battle at a debate tournament - and particularly an international - is retaining a positive, happy mind-set. If you can maintain that strong, upbeat frame of mind - regardless of the results you're taking - you're much more likely to break. And, most importantly, enjoy yourself. Think of debate like a sport where the primary muscle you use is your brain. The healthier, happier that muscle is during the competition, the more likely it is you will perform well. Your aim is to avoid psychological depletion. There is a very long list of things at a debate tournament that will deplete you at a mental level. Here is a list of top tips to avoid such things:

1. **Don't worry about things you can't control.** The other teams you might debate against, the judges, the delays, the motions, the points you're on, the points other teams are on... debaters love talking about these things yet you can't control any of them. Don't waste time dwelling or stressing over them. Simply focus on the things you definitely can control: your own prep method, your strategy, your speeches. The rest is just noise.

2. **Switch off between rounds.** Debate is mentally draining. You focus intensely for around an hour in each debate. Conserving your mental energy should be a priority in between rounds. Find something that really calms you down and puts you in a happy place. Non-debate chat with your friends, listening to music, taking a walk, reading a book - it's up to you. Noisy announcement rooms are - by their nature - just a bit stressful to be in, so try to be in there as little as possible, or listen to music to block out all the noise.
3. **Only care about the next debate.** When a round is done, it's done. Forget it. Sure, have a quick debrief with your partner after the round and perhaps get extra feedback from a judge. But then it's gone. You don't care about it. All you care about is the next debate. Agonizing over what you could have done or said is only likely to further deplete you psychologically, and you don't want that. I recommend throwing away your debate notes as you leave a round: it's a nice symbolic way of saying 'This no longer matters. Onwards.'
4. **Have faith in your practice.** If you've been regularly training in your own time as this guide suggests, you should go to Worlds with no fear. You know you've prepared as well as you could have done. Whatever happens, happens. But you know that you've done all you can.
5. **Sleep well.** If you're serious about breaking at an international, you want your mind to be in the best physical condition possible. Long sleep is crucial. You're going to be putting your mind under more intense pressure than usual, so you want to be getting at least the same amount of sleep as you get at home, if not more. Whilst you'll undoubtedly face lots of well-intentioned and good-spirited peer pressure to go to the socials on each night of WUDC and stay long into the night, say no. And don't feel bad: all the other teams that are serious about breaking will be turning in early too. Don't let them get a competitive advantage over you.
6. **Only drink alcohol once you're out.** It can be very hard to say no to the plethora of free drinks opportunities at an international, but I advise saving it until you're out of the competition. Your mind will already be strongly depleted after a day of debate and alcohol will only exacerbate that depletion. Even the very tempting 'one drink'. No-one serious about succeeding in an activity drinks the night before doing

it. You shouldn't either. (Caveat: if you're not really too fussed about breaking and are just there for the parties, go wild!)

7. **Stay hydrated.** Your brain is mostly made up of water. If your hydration levels drop, so will its performance. So you should be drinking water regularly throughout. Debate tournaments like WUDC are also rife with dehydrating factors - spending long periods of time in places where there's lots of air conditioning (the airport, the plane, your hotel room, university buildings, classrooms) is a big one. Proactively combat that by regularly drinking water.
8. **Accept the element of chance.** Debate is a game steeped in chance and probability. Be comfortable with that. The particular configuration of motions, positions and opposing teams you're handed on the final day of the international will be strong factors in determining your likelihood of breaking. But that's fine. Just do your best. That's all you can ask of yourself. Your aim is to give yourself the highest probability of breaking that you can. Once you've done that, you've just got to roll the dice and accept that what will be, will be.
9. **Take enjoyment from the success of others.** If you take a loss in a debate, or fail to break, or experience any other debate-related disappointment, a very good antidote to any blues is to take joy in the success of others. If debate matters to you, it very likely matters to them too. Be glad for them. They've likely worked just as hard as you have. Having a chilled out perspective where you recognize debate is just an intellectual game and you take joy in the success of others is a good step towards a healthy, happy mentality.