

TYPES OF MOTIONS IN WUDC DEBATE

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While the word used in the USA is topic, in WUDC we say “motion.” This is because in a parliamentary system the debate is about a motion proposed before a group, often called “This House.” The “House” being referred to is, to me, the room where the debate is taking place, and you are trying to persuade people in that room to vote for or against the motion.

Basic Ideas

- Motion is what the debate should be about. The debate should be about the ideas and concepts of the motion. You want to remain focused on those ideas.
- The proposition or government side must uphold the motion.
- The opposition side must oppose the motion.
- Proposition must interpret the motion so as to create a good debate. They should not interpret the motion so that it is easier for them to win the debate, but so that the main issues can be fully debated.
- The judges will punish proposition teams who attempt to define the motion to make it much smaller or easier for them to win. Sometimes a proposition team thinks they are being “smart” by interpreting the notion in an unexpected way so that they can take the other team by surprise. But, in taking the judges by surprise they actually are being unwise.
- When the judges see that the proposition is debating the motion the way they expected, they approve. You want judge approval.

Types of Motions

While there may well be an infinite number of different types of motions, for the purposes of advising debaters on strategy and method, I find that three types of motions provide a fairly good framework.

Different types of motions have different obligations and requirements. This is why you need such a categorization system, because it can help you discover quickly and accurately what it is you are supposed to do within a given motion.

- **FACT:** Something is or is not.
- **VALUE:** Something is of inherent worth or not.
- **POLICY:** Something should be done or should not be done.

MOTIONS OF FACT

Something is or is not true. The motion calls for a factual interpretation. It is the most basic and straightforward sort of motion.

Very much like a court decision – guilty or not guilty, a factual determination. The crime was or was not committed is a factual determination.

Examples:

THBT advertising does more harm than good for society.

THBT that China and the USA will be allies in the 21st Century.

Weigh the facts. Do not be distracted by the “harm” and “good” in the motion. The advertising motion is asking you to look at all the harms and goods in this instance and then decide which one predominates. This motion is very much like a civil court case.

The China motion is set to determine a fact, but it is a future fact. This is still quite legitimate to do within a factual framework.

Need a standard to determine who wins. Here are some common ones

- Majority of examples.
- Preponderance of evidence.
- True beyond a reasonable doubt.

MOTIONS OF VALUE

Something is or is not of inherent value.

THBT Shakespeare is the world’s greatest writer.

Locate the value term and then define it to determine how to win the debate.

“Greatest writer” is.. You develop a list of criteria, and when you meet them you have proven it.

Name some criteria you would use to prove this motion. Which ones are the more reasonable?

THBT Deng Xiao Ping was a greater Chinese leader than Mao Ze Dong

Locate the value term (“greater Chinese leader”) and then define it to determine how to win the debate.

Name some criteria you would use to prove this motion. Which ones are the more reasonable?

Without a clear definition of this term the debate will be a mess.
Definition should be reasonable but favorable.

MOTIONS OF POLICY

Something should be done. Action – government, international, individual.

THW legalize prostitution.

Proposition needs a model – how they would do this.

Relevant detail – who, what, how, who pays for it?

Build the model anticipating the opposition arguments. For example, unless you say prostitutes must be of age you are advocating child prostitution.

Must show that the model addresses a problem and reduces it.

Some detail, but not too much. Judges dislike models that have too much self-serving detail.

OTHER MATTERS

Might be in more than one category.

THBT parents should not hit their children.

This could be done as a policy or as a value motion (with “should not” being the value).

Pick the version that makes it easier for you to win:

Policy: investigate and prosecute all parents who hit their children (losing option).

Value: parents should not hit their children because it is morally wrong, for a number of reasons (better option).

Make it international, not local.

Agent might be specific, like “developing nations” or such.

Anticipate interpretations when you are opposition. Anticipate several possible interpretations, and remodel your strategy based on the one they choose.

WHICH TYPE?

- THW execute convicted war criminals.
- THBT humanity will not reach the 22nd Century.
- THBT state-run media cannot serve the function of a free press.
- THBT it is wrong to eat whales and sharks.

- THW not watch videos of beheadings.

MORE....

- THBT viewing violent media leads to violent behavior.
- THBT NATO is an outdated institution.
- THBT standardized testing is the enemy of learning.
- THW require all candidates for national office to undergo lie detector tests with questions submitted by their opponents.

VIDEOS

Geetha Creffield, Singapore coach

Motion Analysis - <https://vimeo.com/99471267>

Alfred Snider

Motion Analysis for Beginners - <https://vimeo.com/72703007>

Patricia Johnson-Castle, McGill University, Canada

Motion Analysis for Different Motion Types - <https://vimeo.com/71375180>

Stephen Boyle, Irish National Champion

Motion Analysis Methods - <https://vimeo.com/14211625>