
Strategy and Points of Information (for Adjudicators)

STRATEGY COLUMN

1. Strategy covers two concepts:

- (a) Whether the speaker understands the issues of the debate, and
- (b) The structure and timing of the speaker's speech.

2. Understanding the issues

- (a) Debaters should understand and be able to demonstrate an understanding as to what the important issues are in the debate. It is poor strategy if, in rebuttal, a speaker deals with trivial points by the other team while crucial arguments are left unanswered. Such a speaker would not show an understanding of the important issues of the debate, and should not score well in strategy. By contrast, a speaker who shows an understanding of the important issues by dealing with them thoroughly should score well in strategy.
- (b) Understanding the issues includes **accepting** Points of Information (POIs.) (**Accepting** POIs is marked in the **strategy column**. **Offering** POIs in a manner different from the substantive speech is marked in the **POI column**. See below.) A speaker who fails to accept any POIs will lose marks for strategy (for not showing an understanding of the role of the speakers in this style, or, to put it another way, for cowardice!!) and may lose marks for content (failing to allow the other side to make points thus reducing the amount of direct clash between the two teams.) A speaker who takes too many POIs will almost certainly lose control of the speech and therefore lose strategy marks and possibly content marks as well (for omitting important points of team case or rebuttal while being swamped with POIs.)
- (c) Adjudicators and coaches should understand the difference between strategy and content. For example, imagine a debate where a speaker answers the critical issues with some weak rebuttal. This speaker should receive poor marks for content, because the rebuttal was weak. But the speaker should attain reasonable marks for strategy, because the right arguments were being addressed.

3. Structure and timing

- (a) A good speech has a clear beginning, middle and end. Along the way there are signposts to help us see where the speaker is going. The sequence of arguments is logical and flows naturally from point to point. This is as true of a Proposition or Affirmative first speaker outlining the team case as it is of the Opposition or Negative third speaker rebutting the Aff/Prop case. Good speech structure therefore is one component of strategy.
- (b) Timing is also important, but it must not be taken to extremes. There are two aspects to timing.

- (i) Speaking within the allowed time limit, and
- (ii) Giving an appropriate amount of time to the issues in the speech.

(i) **Time limits.**

- a. A speaker who goes significantly over time (for example, more than about 8 m 15 s in an 8 minute speech) will be penalised.
- b. Equally, a speaker who speaks significantly under time (for example, 7 minutes or less in an 8 minute speech) will also receive a penalty.
- c. Bear in mind, however, that timing is only one element of strategy. A speaker whose only sin is to go over time might still get a reasonable strategy mark if every other aspect of strategy was quite outstanding. It would not be a brilliant mark - there would still be a penalty - but it would not automatically be a very low mark either. It all depends how good the rest of the elements of strategy were.

(ii) **Prioritising/allocating time.**

- a. A speaker ought to give priority to important issues and leave unimportant ones to later. For example it is generally a good idea for a "rebuttal speaker" (i.e. anyone other than the first Affirmative speaker) to begin with the attack on the other side before going on to the speaker's positive case. This is because it is more logical to get rid of the opposing argument first before trying to put something in its place.
- b. A speaker should also give more time to important issues. If there is a critical point that buttresses the whole of that team's case, it ought to receive a fair amount of airtime so that it can be properly established. But if there is a point that is fairly trivial, it doesn't deserve more than a trivial amount of time.
- c. Therefore, the adjudicator must weigh up not only the strength of the arguments in the content category, but also the proper time and priority that was given to them in the strategy category.

POINT OF INFORMATION COLUMN.

1. It is relatively easy to mark **accepting and responding** to POIs, because each response is incorporated in the speech and that is where it is marked.
2. The challenge arises in marking the **offering** of POIs because debaters offer POIs at a time other than their own speeches and at a time when the adjudicator is making notes about another speaker altogether.
3. Accordingly, the POI column has been devised. It permits an adjudicator to increase or decrease the speaker's marks by up to 2 marks in that column. It should only be used where the speaker's contribution during the debate through offering POIs **differed significantly from the speaker's contribution in his/her speech**.
4. "Contribution during the debate through offering POIs" involves both the **quantity** of POIs offered and the **quality** of those accepted. Of course, speakers should not be penalised if they offer plenty of POIs but none is accepted.
5. A speaker whose speech deserved 70, but who offered remarkably good POIs might receive an overall mark of 71 (i.e. 70 with a +1 in the POI column) or perhaps 72 (70 and +2) if the POIs were truly outstanding. A speaker whose speech deserved 76, but who offered almost no POIs might receive an overall mark of 74 (76 and -2 in the POI column) or 75 (76 and -1). However, a speaker whose speech deserved a 64 should not lose marks for failing to offer many POIs because his/her contribution through POIs was no worse than his/her speech. Likewise, a speaker whose speech deserved a 78 does not attain extra POIs for making a couple of very good points of information because those points were no better than his/her speech.
6. In summary,
 - (a) The primary component of a speaker's mark is the speaker's speech.
 - (b) That mark can increase by up to 2 points if the speaker offered POIs throughout the rest of the debate which were significantly better than the speaker's contribution in his/her speech.
 - (c) That mark can decrease by up to 2 points if the speaker:
 - (i) offered no points of information or almost none during the rest of the debate so that his/her contribution through POIs was significantly worse than his/her contribution in his/her speech; or

- (ii) offered poor POIs during the rest of the debate so that his/her contribution through POIs was significantly worse than his/her contribution in his/her speech.

Sources:

<http://www.schoolsdebate.com/judgnots.asp>

Notes for Adjudicators, 2005 ConocoPhillips World Schools Debating Championship Feb 9-18, Calgary, Canada