

Outline of a Prime Minister's Speech

To my thinking, the following are the keys to an outstanding Prime Minister's speech:

1. In a sentence, explain the need for the resolution, or make a reference to a recent event which makes it timely. For example (using the 2004 McGill topic as a point of reference): "Mr Speaker, Maher Arar was deported to Syria by the US so he could be tortured. Is it appropriate that a country, like Canada, agree to extradite its own citizens to face torture?" or, "Mr Speaker, Canada has recently decided that it is wrong to extradite its citizens, once convicted, to face the death penalty. Is it proper to extradite them to face torture, even before they are convicted?"

2. Definitions: Identify and define the key words. (See the case construction materials for some advice).

It is important that you not define the topic in a way that gives you an unfair advantage or makes the case easier to argue. However, there is nothing wrong about *arguing* the case in a way which gives you an advantage; that is the whole point, really. So the question which I posed at the beginning, ("Mr Speaker, Canada has recently decided that it is wrong to extradite its citizens, once convicted, to face the death penalty. Is it proper to extradite them to face torture, even before they are convicted?")—is perfectly fair as a matter of argument. The point is to ensure that there are strong arguments available to both sides.

3. Paraphrase the definitions in a sentence.

4. Caseline: tell us what you are discussing, *including any limitations on the debate*.

For example, "the Government case today is that, in the vast majority of cases, we should not extradite our own citizens, no matter what they are accused of".... Obviously we cannot prove that it is never appropriate to extradite someone; the government case is that this is true in the vast majority of cases...

5. If you have chosen a topic that requires the specialized knowledge to be debateable, give a one-sentence outline of why it is debateable. For example, if you are going to debate reform of the Electoral College in Canada, your audience may not know enough to understand the debate, and it would be unfair to your opponents to require them to debate it without outlining for them the background facts. "In the US, the president is not directly elected by the population. Instead, each state has a number of votes in the electoral college, according to its population. That means that a candidate who wins a bare majority of votes in a particular states, receives all of that states share of the electoral college votes. Opponents of reform argue that the existing system forces presidential candidates to campaign in small states."

6. State the points which the government will make:

"There are three arguments that we will rely on today, Mr Speaker. I shall deal with

-

- , while my colleague will deal with
- .

7. State your first point, and then prove it. The British have a formula they use, “sexi” -

State it, explain it, illustrate it. Content counts. We specialize in impromptu cases—sometimes with flabby content. Brilliantly structured cases are not enough: they need good content, too. When a Sacred Heart debater doesn’t know what to say, she simply spends more time outlining or summarizing her case. Content is as important.

This doesn’t always require research: it requires thinking. What is the most important issue on each side? Deal with those issues. In the example at the outset, the issues may be protecting Canadian citizens (even if they turn out to be terrorists) or protecting Canadian citizens (by extraditing terrorists). It may be that international relations trump civil rights. Whatever it is, decide what the key issues are, and deal with them during the debate.

Don’t just state the point, develop it. Let me give an example from the “same sex education” issue.

- The key issues in the debate are academic results vs social results. If you can prove that same sex education produces better marks and no social costs, you win. Conversely, if you can prove that same sex education has social costs and no academic benefits, you win. More challenging, may be to decide who wins when you have to balance some academic gains against some social costs.

Point “Students perform better academically in single sex classrooms”

Explain: “Studies done in Britain, Australia and the United States confirm that students in same sex classes achieve better test scores, with fewer discipline issues.”

Illustrate it: “In Britain, the Education department studied 9,000 students in grades 7-10 in an effort to decide what school configuration produced the best test results. In July, 2003, the study concluded, “(set out quote).” This result was true regardless of the social-economic background of the students.

In the US, schools have gone from co-ed to single sex, with astounding results, for example—

Conclude, “In fact, there is no study in which students have moved from co-ed classrooms to single sex classrooms *without* improving their marks

8. Summarize what you have covered.

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