



104 London Debaters

Coaching at 104

Guidelines and essentials for coaching a
debate team at 104 London Debaters





Purpose of coaching

- To improve and maintain the quality of debates at 104
- To facilitate learning and share best practises
- To benefit from the accumulated knowledge and experience of long-time debaters

Purpose of coaching

How do we achieve it?



- Offer guidance to a team of debaters - it is NOT the role of the coach to dominate the discussion, nor decide how a case should be argued
- Help the team to think through the quality of their various claims, premises and warrants, by playing Devil's advocate
- Suggest angles if the team is stuck or is straying too far from the core of the controversy in question (keep to topicality)
- Encourage the use of good quality sources - it's not the role of the coach to do the research (apart from helping with a few suggestions)
- Remind the team of the the rules of debating - generally and at 104
- Discourage squirrelling of the motion: make sure the real controversy is addressed
- Offer inexperienced debaters help in drafting their speeches – make use of the opening speech template, if relevant
- Point debaters to educational resources for debating

Dos and don'ts

Do:

1. Encourage the team to DEFINE the motion (exactly how they intend to interpret it) early on in the process
2. Share this with the Opp (if coaching Prop) latest THE FRIDAY before debate
3. Ask critical questions
4. Help team to structure their argument
5. Play Devil's advocate
6. Approach sensitive issues with care

Don'ts:

1. Allow squirreling or moving too far away from the central controversy (off topic)
2. Dominate the discussion or steer too much
3. Dismiss angles/points because you personally disagree
4. Allow the Nazis to be used as example (it's lazy debating)



Shared approach for definition of the motion

A good interpretation is:

1. Topical - it doesn't stray too far from a reasonable understanding of the motion text
2. It spells out the major exemption/exclusions

Example:

Motion: THW abolish the NHS

Intepretation/definition of the motion:

THW get rid of the current NHS structure for providing public healthcare and replace it with another model for providing public healthcare.

Exclusions: We are not proposing to get rid of public healthcare as such.

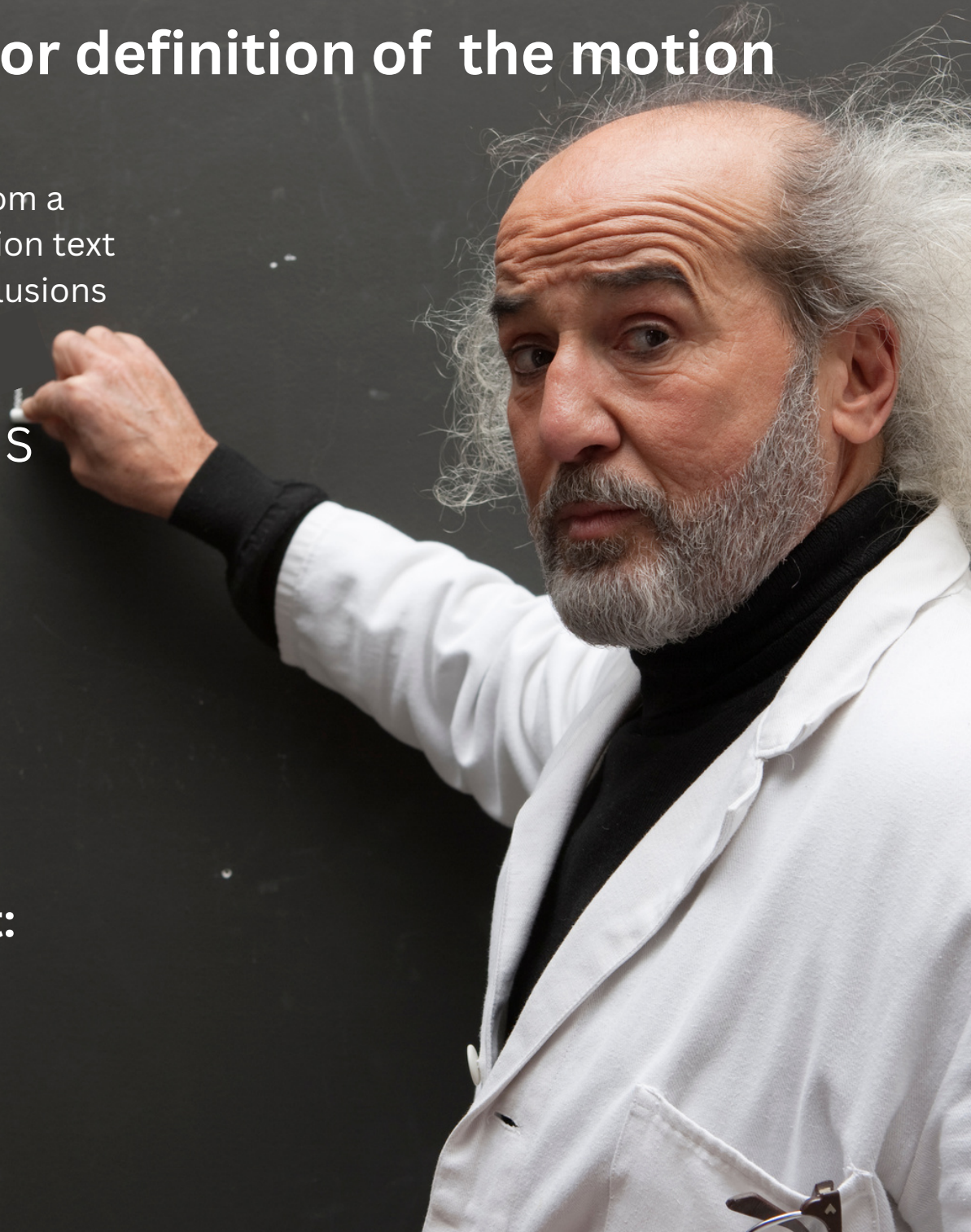
Example of how NOT to do it:

Motion: THW abolish the NHS

Intepretation/definition of the motion:

Dictionary definiton of "abolish".

"NHS": the health system in Britain



Good sources

A key task of the coach is to ensure the team uses good, credible sources. Here are some examples (non-exhaustive) - always be source-critical!

Office for National Statistics

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/>

House of Commons Library

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/>

Our World in Data

<https://ourworldindata.org/>

News agencies

Left-leaning:

The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk>

BBC

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news>

Right-leaning:

The Spectator

<https://www.spectator.co.uk/>

The Daily Telegraph

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/>

Medical journals such as **The Lancet** (<https://www.thelancet.com/>) and **published research papers** are credible sources, but make sure quotes represent what the authors actually said (do not lift a quote out of context to fit an argument).

Consider what the audience will think of as credible!

Stats and facts are
NOT arguments
but can SUPPORT an
argument





Suggested timeline

Initial meeting
How will the
motion be
intepreted?

Second meeting

Third meeting
SHARE
INTERPRETATION OF
MOTION BY LATEST
FRIDAY BEFORE
DEBATE

Debate meeting
Be at hand in case
help is needed

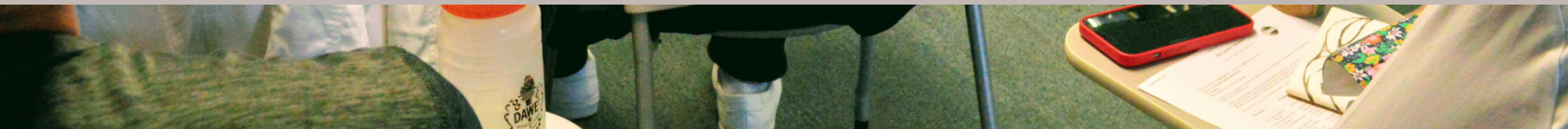
Post meeting
Have a debrief
with team

8–14 days before debate

5–8 days before debate

1–5 days before debate

1–4 days after the debate





Resources

Internal:

- [104 London Debaters website](#)
(see DOCUMENTS AND RESOURCES)
- [Template for Prop opening speech](#)
- [Club wiki](#)
- [Club blog](#)
- [Club podcast](#)

External:

- Antony Weston: [A Rulebook for Arguments](#) (recommended by Paul Carroll)
- K. Shuster, J. Meany: [Art. Advocacy and Argument](#)
- [The Art of Debate](#), lectures by Jarrod Atchison (free with Audible)



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