



Motion Types and How to Analyze Them.

Four common kinds of motion, how to recognise each, and a quick analysis routine with beginner-friendly, school-appropriate examples. Use it as a first-five-minutes guide during prep.

How motions are worded

NSDA World Schools motions often begin with the phrase **"This House"**. Common patterns (the abbreviations THW, THB, THS and THR are widely used in the debate community) include "This House would..." (an action), "believes that..." (a claim), "supports..." (a stance), and "regrets..." (judging a past or present choice). The words you see decide what you must prove. Motions often arrive with a short info slide explaining key facts, so read it carefully.

The four types at a glance

TYPE	CLUE WORDS	CORE QUESTION	BEGINNER EXAMPLE
Policy	would ban, would require, would fund	Should this action happen, and will it work?	This House would require every school to start after 9 a.m.
Value	believes that, values, prefers	Which principle matters more?	This House believes creativity matters more than test scores.
Actor	as [group], would...	What should this specific group do, given its goals?	This House, as a school council, would prioritise sports funding over music funding.
Comparative	prefers X to Y	Which of two options is better, and by what measure?	This House prefers learning in small groups to learning alone.

The four types are a coaching classification, not an official NSDA list. Examples are invented for practice and are not tournament motions. For current motions, ask your tournament or league.

Analysis routine (the first 5 minutes)

- 1 Underline the verb and the key nouns.** Is it an action, a belief, a comparison?
- 2 Find the burden.** What must your side prove? If the motion is an absolute (always, never), you need to prove it in a significant majority of cases for Proposition, or show a significant minority of exceptions for Opposition.
- 3 Define the terms.** Use the obvious meaning and keep the scope fair.
- 4 Identify the stakeholders.** Who gains and who loses?
- 5 Find the central clash.** Usually one or two values or outcomes the sides will fight over.
- 6 Choose a stance.** A simple, defensible line your team can repeat in every speech.

Worked mini-example

STEP	NOTES
Type	Policy
Terms	"Require", "community service" (unpaid help for local groups), "graduate" (high school)
Stakeholders	Students, schools, local groups, families
Proposition clash	Builds responsibility and skills versus forced volunteering
Opposition clash	Cost, time, and fairness for students with jobs or caring duties
Possible stance	Prop: service builds civic habits; Opp: voluntary service is more meaningful

Common mistakes and fixes

MISTAKE	FIX
Debating a different motion than the one given	Re-read the verb; restate the motion before building
Definition too narrow	Widen it to the level of the motion
Listing arguments with no weighing	Add a sentence on why your point matters more
No clash identified	Ask: where will the other side disagree most?

Practice idea

Make a deck of ten self-written motions, four types mixed. Draw one, spend five minutes on this routine, and share your analysis with a partner.

Built from public guidance: NSDA USWSDI Manual (2023) · NSDA World Schools Norms (2023) · NSDA World Schools Adjudicator Guide. Rules change by league and tournament, so always confirm against your tournament invitation and current league rules.

NOTES

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