



OSDA Congressional Debate Judging Instructions

Congressional Debate asks students to act as if they are legislators at the federal or state level. Students offer legislation, debate it, make motions, ask questions, and vote. Throughout, they follow parliamentary procedure. The Congressional Debate chamber should resemble a real congress or state legislative chamber.

Judging Speeches:

As a judge, your primary responsibility is judging speeches. Speakers deliver speeches alternating in support or opposition to a piece of legislation. This speech lasts for three minutes and includes an additional questioning period. You will judge the speaker based on the following criteria:

- speaker's strength of vocal delivery
- speaker's strength of logic
- speaker's understanding of the issue at hand and its impact
- speaker's use of research to support points
- speaker's ability to answer questions
- speaker's ability to advance the discussion without repeating previous speakers' arguments

You will judge from the time the speaker begins to the time he or she finishes answering questions. Do not score based on any activity outside of this speech time.

Entering Scores:

Tournaments will ask you to judge speeches based on a scale of one to six. Higher scores are better. Reserve scores of two or below for speeches demonstrating serious weaknesses, such as speaking for less than one minute or acting offensively. Most tournaments request that you complete a speech critique sheet as well. Be sure to provide positive and negative constructive comments. Speakers want to know what works and what does not. Be specific and clear.

Judge's Preference:

At the end of a session, tournament organizers will probably ask you to rank your favorite speakers from the room in order. The organizers may ask you to rank all the members of the chamber or just the top six, based on previously tabulated speech scores. Regardless, the procedure is the same. You decide how strong you felt each speaker was in speaking, answering questions, asking questions, following parliamentary procedure, and helping to create a respectful chamber. Ranks run in opposite approach from speech scores. Give a rank of number one (1) for the strongest congressperson, a rank of number two (2) for the next strongest, and so on.

Parliamentarian and Presiding Officer:

Unlike regular debate, you need not organize and run the room. The tournament has enlisted the efforts of an experienced adult to serve as parliamentarian. This person ensures that all members are observing rules. He or she settles disputes with reference to official Congress documentation.

The presiding officer is a member of the chamber elected to run the chamber. This member manages the legislation docket, hears motions, and handles votes. This person runs the room. The parliamentarian settles disputes, but good rooms rarely see them.

Judging the Presiding Officer:

Tournaments ask that you judge a presiding officer's performance based on the same point scale, judging his/her tenure as if it were one speech. Usually, service for one session equals one speech score. Judge the presiding officer based on his or her ability to run the chamber smoothly according to parliamentary procedure, treat all members fairly, and reduce conflict as much as possible.