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Debate Events

Congressional Debate

Lincoln-Douglas Debate

Public Forum Debate

World Schools Debate



CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE

JUDGE GUIDE

OVERVIEW

Congressional Debate simulates the U.S. legislative process. Students act as representatives debating bills and resolutions through structured speeches, questioning, and parliamentary procedure. A student Presiding Officer (PO) runs the chamber by recognizing speakers, managing debate flow, and maintaining order. Your role is to score every speech, evaluate legislative engagement, and rank the top performers.

WHAT TO JUDGE

CONTENT:

- Speech addresses the bill/resolution
- Clear structure + logical arguments
- Accurate evidence and relevant sources
- Direct response to previous arguments
- Original, meaningful contributions (not repeating earlier points)

DELIVERY:

- Professional tone
- Clear voice, appropriate pace
- Confident presence and controlled demeanor
- Effective eye contact
- PO evaluation: fairness, efficiency, knowledge of procedure

TIMING

- Speeches: Up to 3 minutes
- Questioning:
 - 2 minutes for sponsorship speeches
 - 1 minute for all others
- **Session length: 2-hour hard stop** (including a short recess)

Judge responsibilities:

- Score every speech 1-6 (6 is the best; 1 is the worst)
- Keep notes on participation & decorum

BALLOTS

- Score each speech 1-6 based on argument quality & delivery.
- Score the Presiding Officer once per hour, so the P.O. should get 2 speech scores.
- Rank only the top 8 legislators; all others receive a rank of 9.
- Provide specific written comments (strengths + areas to grow) about clarity, organization, and delivery for every single speaker
- No verbal disclosure allowed.



LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATE

JUDGE GUIDE

OVERVIEW

Lincoln-Douglas (LD) is a one-on-one, values-based debate. Each debater argues the Affirmative or Negative side of the resolution (pre-assigned in Speechwire). LD centers on: (1) A value (the core principle being defended), and (2) A value criterion (the method to achieve the value). Your role is to judge which debater better supports their framework and arguments, evaluates ideas logically, and responds effectively to their opponent.

WHAT TO JUDGE

CONTENT:

- Clear explanation of value + criterion
- Logical structure and organized arguments
- Factual accuracy and credible support
- Strong reasoning and clear analysis
- Effective refutation of the opponent
- Arguments relate directly to the resolution
- Framework applied consistently throughout the debate

DELIVERY:

- Professional and confident tone
- Clear speaking, strong pacing, persuasive style
- Effective use of signposting and organization
- Respectful communication in cross-ex
- Overall clarity & command of the room

TIMING

(Follow exact speech order & times on the ballot)

General LD elements:

- Constructive speeches
- Cross-examinations
- Rebuttals
- Students typically time their own speeches
- Prep time: 3 minutes per debater

Judge responsibilities:

- Track prep time for each debater
- Do not allow speeches to exceed allotted lengths
- Flow the debate (take notes on arguments)

BALLOTS

- Judge the round only on arguments presented, not personal opinion.
- Select a winner (Aff or Neg) and provide a brief Reason for Decision on your ballot which both teams will see.
- Assign speaker points (25-30); winner must receive the higher points.
- Give clear written feedback highlighting strengths and areas to improve for both teams.
- No verbal disclosure allowed.



PUBLIC FORUM DEBATE

JUDGE GUIDE

OVERVIEW

Public Forum (PF) is a two-on-two debate on a current, practical policy topic. Teams debate the Pro or Con side of the resolution (pre-assigned in Speechwire). PF focuses on real-world logic, clear clash, weighing, and evidence, not philosophical frameworks. Judges evaluate which team best supports their case, refutes the other side, and explains why their impacts matter more.

WHAT TO JUDGE

CONTENT:

- Clear, organized arguments relevant to the topic
- Strong evidence and reliable references
- Logical comparison and weighing of impacts
- Effective refutation of the opponent's claims
- Consistent focus on the resolution
- Accurate explanation of key issues in the summary & final focus

DELIVERY:

- Confident, professional tone
- Clear speaking and pacing
- Persuasive, audience-friendly style
- Respectful crossfire participation
- Strong team communication and cohesion

TIMING

(Follow exact speech order & times on the ballot)

General PF elements:

- Constructive Speeches: Present case positions
- Crossfire: Debaters ask questions to clarify or expose weaknesses
- Rebuttals & Summary: Refutation and weighing
- Final Focus: Most important issues + voting justification
- Prep time: 3 minutes per team

Judge responsibilities:

- Track prep time for each debater
- Do not allow speeches to exceed allotted lengths
- Flow the debate (take notes on arguments)

BALLOTS

- Judge the round only on arguments presented, not personal opinion.
- Select a winner (PRO or CON) and provide a brief Reason for Decision on your ballot which both teams will see.
- Assign speaker points (25-30); winner must receive the higher points; each speaker should get different points.
- Give clear written feedback highlighting strengths and areas to improve for both teams.
- No verbal disclosure allowed.



WORLD SCHOOLS DEBATE

JUDGE GUIDE

OVERVIEW

World Schools Debate (WS) is a team debate event in which schools may have up to five students on a team, though only three compete in any given round. Students are assigned either the Proposition or Opposition side and work together to present arguments, respond to opponents, & defend their team's position. World Schools combines elements of both prepared and impromptu debate and allows debaters to ask brief questions called Points of Information during speeches.

WHAT TO JUDGE

CONTENT (40%):

- Quality of arguments
- Reasoning and examples
- Refutation and impact analysis

STYLE (40%)

- Clear communication
- Eye contact and engagement
- Effective speaking delivery

STRATEGY (20%)

- Prioritization of issues
- Organization and time management
- Effective use of refutation

Accents, appearance, or clothing should not affect scores.

TIMING

Judges should invite each speaker to begin their speech.

- All three Proposition/Opposition Team Speakers: 8 minutes
- Proposition/Opposition Reply: 4 minutes

POIs

- Allowed during speeches 1-6 only
- No POIs in first or last minute
- No POIs during reply speeches

BALLOTS

SCORING RANGES:

Main Speeches:

- Style: 24-32
- Content: 24-32
- Strategy: 12-16
- Total: 60-80

Reply Speeches

- Style: 12-16
- Content: 12-16
- Strategy: 6-8
- Total: 30-40

Score Benchmarks

- Below Average: 65-68
- Average: 69-71
- Strong: 72-74
- Exceptional: 75+
- Average speech = approximately 70 points

[More Scoring Info Linked Here](#)

DETERMINING THE WINNER

When the round is complete:

- Total all speaker points.
- The team with the higher total score wins.
- Select the winning side on the ballot.
- Provide constructive feedback that addresses style, content, and strategy
- Judge arguments presented in the round, not your personal views.

[Link to NSDA World Schools Judging Guidelines](#)

[Link to NSDA World Schools Example Ballots](#)

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Interpretation Events

Dramatic Interpretation

Duo Interpretation

Humorous Interpretation

Poetry

Storytelling



DRAMATIC INTERPRETATION

JUDGE GUIDE

OVERVIEW

Dramatic Interpretation (DI) is an individual interpretation event in which students perform a memorized cutting of a published work of serious literature. Competitors use only their voice, facial expressions, and physicality to bring characters and stories to life—no props, costumes, or sets are permitted. Successful DI performances create an authentic emotional journey, demonstrate strong character development, and communicate meaningful themes through powerful storytelling.

WHAT TO JUDGE

CONTENT:

- Strong and appropriate piece selection
- Clear understanding of the script's themes and emotional arc
- Effective cutting that preserves a coherent story
- Meaningful character development and relationships
- Thought-provoking message or insight
- Strong introduction (title, author, context, and mood)

DELIVERY:

- Distinct and believable characterizations
- Vocal variety, clarity, pacing, and emotional control
- Purposeful facial expressions and physical choices
- Authentic emotional connection (not melodrama)
- Strong audience engagement and storytelling
- Smooth transitions between characters and scenes
- This is a memorized event; no script is allowed!
- If students do use a script, they must be ranked last with the lowest speech score (90).

TIMING

- Speaking time: up to 10 minutes
- Grace period: 30 seconds (10:30)
- If anyone goes past 10 minutes & 30 seconds, they cannot be ranked first
- You should be timing the students as they speak
- Please use hand signals for time if students ask!

BALLOTS

- Rank all speakers 1-7 (1 is best)
- Assign speaker points 90-100, aligned with their rank (100 is best)
- Provide specific written comments (strengths + areas to grow) about clarity, organization, and delivery
- Do not verbally disclose your decision



DUO INTERPRETATION

JUDGE GUIDE

OVERVIEW

Duo Interpretation (DUO) is a two-person performance event in which students memorize and perform a cutting of a published script—either dramatic or humorous. Because partners cannot look at or touch each other during the performance (except during the introduction), the piece must rely on precise staging, synchronized timing, and clearly defined characters. Most DUOs condense longer scripts, so part of your evaluation includes assessing the clarity and cohesion of the edited storyline, as well as how smoothly transitions and pacing flow. A strong DUO performance showcases teamwork, character contrast, emotional connection, and a clear, engaging plot.

WHAT TO JUDGE

CONTENT:

- Clear, cohesive plot (the cutting should still make sense)
- Effective introduction (title, author, context, mood)
- Smooth transitions between moments or characters
- Well-chosen script that matches performers' strengths
- Strong thematic or emotional build

DELIVERY:

- Distinct, consistent characterizations from each partner
- Strong vocal control, pacing, and projection
- Synchronized timing and clean blocking
- Students cannot make eye contact with each other or touch each other
- Purposeful, non-distracting movement
- Engaging emotional or comedic commitment

TIMING

- Speaking time: up to 10 minutes
- Grace period: 30 seconds (10:30)
- If anyone goes past 10 minutes & 30 seconds, they cannot be ranked first
- You should be timing the students as they speak
- Please use hand signals for time if students ask!

BALLOTS

- Rank all teams 1-7 (1 is best)
- Assign speaker points 90-100, aligned with rankings (100 is best)
- Provide specific written comments (strengths + areas to grow) about clarity, organization, and delivery
- Do not verbally disclose your decision



HUMOROUS INTERPRETATION

JUDGE GUIDE

OVERVIEW

Humorous Interpretation (HI) is an individual interpretation event in which students perform a memorized cutting of a published work with the primary goal of entertaining the audience. Competitors use characterization, vocal variety, facial expressions, and physical choices to bring humorous stories and characters to life without the use of props, costumes, or sets. Successful HI performances feature strong comedic timing, clear character differentiation, effective pacing, and a cohesive storyline that keeps the audience engaged from beginning to end. While humor is the focus, strong performances also communicate meaningful themes, relationships, or messages through the literature.

WHAT TO JUDGE

CONTENT:

- Strong, age-appropriate script selection
- Clear and cohesive storyline
- Effective cutting that preserves the humor and plot
- Strong introduction (title, author, context, and mood)
- Well-developed characters and relationships
- Meaningful themes or messages beyond the comedy

DELIVERY:

- Distinct and believable characterizations
- Strong comedic timing and pacing
- Vocal variety, projection, and clear articulation
- Purposeful facial expressions and physical choices
- Smooth transitions between characters and scenes
- Strong audience engagement and entertainment value
- Confident stage presence and energy
- This is a memorized event; no script is allowed. If a student uses a script, they must be ranked last with the lowest speaker points (90).

TIMING

- Speaking time: up to 10 minutes
- Grace period: 30 seconds (10:30)
- If anyone goes past 10 minutes & 30 seconds, they cannot be ranked first
- You should be timing the students as they speak and use hand signals for time if students ask

BALLOTS

- Rank all speakers 1-7 (1 is best)
- Assign speaker points 90-100, aligned with their rank (100 is best)
- Provide specific written comments (strengths + areas to grow) about clarity, organization, and delivery
- Do not verbally disclose your decision



POETRY

JUDGE GUIDE

OVERVIEW

Poetry (POE) is an interpretation event in which students perform published poetry from a manuscript. Competitors may present a single poem or a thematic program of multiple poems connected by a common message or idea. Poetry emphasizes the creative use of language, imagery, rhythm, and emotional expression. Through vocal variety, characterization, and purposeful physical choices, students bring poetry to life while helping audiences connect with meaningful themes, experiences, and perspectives. Poetry performances may be serious, humorous, or a combination of both. Judges should focus on how effectively the performer communicates the meaning, emotion, and artistry of the literature.

WHAT TO JUDGE

CONTENT:

- Strong poem or program selection
- Clear theme, message, or purpose
- Effective organization with clear beginning, development, & conclusion
- Meaningful use of language and imagery
- Emotional and intellectual impact
- Effective transitions between poems in a thematic program
- Literature that is appropriate, engaging, and thought-provoking

DELIVERY:

- Vocal variety, pacing, and emotional expression
- Clear articulation and effective communication
- Strong audience engagement and stage presence
- Effective interpretation of poetic language and imagery
- Purposeful gestures, facial expressions, and physical choices
- Distinct voices and characterization when appropriate
- Smooth transitions between poems, speakers, or perspectives
- Natural and effective use of the manuscript (typically a small black binder that must be held throughout the performance and may be referenced as needed)

TIMING

- Speaking time: up to 5 minutes
- Grace period: 30 seconds (5:30)
- Students exceeding 5:30 may not be ranked 1st
- Judges should time each performance
- Manuscripts are required

BALLOTS

- Rank all speakers 1-7 (1 is best)
- Assign speaker points 90-100, aligned with their rank (100 is best)
- Reward strong interpretation, expression, and storytelling
- Provide specific written feedback on content and delivery
- Do not verbally disclose your decision



STORYTELLING

JUDGE GUIDE

OVERVIEW

Storytelling (STO) is a 5-minute interpretation event (with a 30-second grace period) in which students perform a single published story from memory as though presenting to a group of young children. Competitors use expressive voices, characterization, movement, and narration to bring the story to life while maintaining a clear and engaging narrative. Stories are often drawn from children's literature, folktales, fables, myths, or legends and should be appropriate for young audiences. Storytelling emphasizes creativity, entertainment, and audience engagement while conveying a complete story with a clear beginning, middle, and end. A chair may be used but is optional and subject to event rules.

WHAT TO JUDGE

CONTENT:

- Clear and easy-to-follow storyline
- Strong introduction and conclusion
- Effective narration and storytelling
- Appropriate story selection for young audiences
- Meaningful lesson, theme, or moral
- Consistent plot development and pacing

CHAIR RULES:

- Chair use is optional
- All chair legs must remain stationary
- Competitors may not stand or kneel on the chair

DELIVERY:

- Distinct and believable character voices
- Clear character differentiation through posture and expression
- Strong audience engagement and energy
- Effective facial expressions and gestures
- Purposeful movement and stage use
- Clear narration and transitions between scenes
- Appropriate use of humor & entertainment value
- Effective and creative chair usage if used

TIMING

- Speaking time: up to 5 minutes
- Grace period: 30 seconds (5:30)
- Students exceeding 5:30 may not be ranked 1st
- Judges should time each performance and give hand signals for each speech

BALLOTS

- Rank all speakers 1-7 (1 is best)
- Assign speaker points 90-100, aligned with their rank (100 is best)
- Reward strong interpretation, expression, and storytelling
- Provide specific written feedback on content and delivery
- Do not verbally disclose your decision

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Public Address Events

Declamation

Extemporaneous Speaking

Impromptu

Informative Speaking

Original Oratory



DECLAMATION

JUDGE GUIDE

OVERVIEW

Declamation is an event in which students memorize and perform a speech originally delivered by someone else—such as TED Talks, commencement speeches, eulogies, or public addresses. Because the words are not their own, the student's job is to deliver the message with clarity, control, and genuine interpretation, without imitating the original speaker. The declaimer should present the speech so that it feels natural, meaningful, and accessible, demonstrating strong connection to the material while preserving the author's intent.

WHAT TO JUDGE

CONTENT:

- Appropriateness of the speech selection
- Effective introduction (title, author, context, relevance)
- Clear interpretation of the original message
- Smooth, well-paced structure
- Emotional authenticity and connection to the material

DELIVERY:

- Clear diction and projection
- Strong eye contact and confident presence
- Controlled pacing and fluent speaking
- Purposeful, non-distracting gestures and movement
- Tone and inflection that enhance—not overshadow—the meaning

TIMING

- Speaking time: up to 10 minutes
- Grace period: 30 seconds (10:30)
- If anyone goes past 10 minutes & 30 seconds, they cannot be ranked first
- You should be timing the students as they speak
- Please use hand signals for time if students ask!

BALLOTS

- Rank all speakers 1-7 (1 is best)
- Assign speaker points 90-100, aligned with their rank (100 is best)
- Provide specific written comments (strengths + areas to grow) about clarity, organization, and delivery
- Do not verbally disclose your decision



EXTEMPORANEOUS SPEAKING

JUDGE GUIDE

OVERVIEW

Extemporaneous Speaking (EXT) is a limited-preparation, research-based event in which students answer current-event questions using evidence, analysis, and public speaking skills. In a separate room, competitors draw three questions, select one, and receive 30 minutes to research and prepare a 5-7 minute speech. During preparation, students use research materials to gather information, organize arguments, and develop a clear response to the question. Competitors then deliver their speech from memory without reading a script, demonstrating knowledge of current events, critical thinking, organization, and effective speaking skills. A separate prep room is used where students receive topics and complete their 30 minutes of preparation before reporting to the competition room to speak. **No notes may be used.**

WHAT TO JUDGE

CONTENT:

- Clear, direct answer to the prompt
- Logical structure with 2-3 main points
- Accurate, up-to-date information
- At least 7 credible sources integrated naturally
- Strong analysis (not just repeating evidence)
- Strong, relevant reasoning supporting the argument

DELIVERY:

- Confident, fluent speaking
- Strong eye contact
- Clear volume and pacing
- Purposeful movement (not distracting)
- Professional tone and presence

TIMING

- Prep time: 30 minutes (happens in another room)
- Speaking time: up to 7 minutes
- Grace period: 30 seconds (7:30)
- If anyone goes past 7 minutes and 30 seconds, they cannot be ranked first
- Please give hand signals for every speech

BALLOTS

- Rank all speakers 1-7 (1 is best)
- Assign speaker points 90-100, aligned with their rank (100 is best)
- Provide specific written comments (strengths + areas to grow)
- Focus feedback on structure, support, and delivery
- Do not verbally disclose your decision
- The speech must directly answer the assigned EXT question. Strong speeches clearly address the question throughout and return to it in the conclusion.



IMPROMPTU SPEAKING

JUDGE GUIDE

OVERVIEW

Impromptu Speaking is a limited-preparation event in which students receive three prompts, select one, and have 7 minutes TOTAL to prepare and deliver a fully memorized speech from start to finish. There is no required balance between prep time and speaking time; students may spend more time preparing or more time speaking as long as the entire process stays within the 7-minute limit. Before the round begins, judges should pick up the envelopes containing the Impromptu prompts in the judge lounge. Prompts should be given to students one at a time so the student can review each option before deciding which prompt to keep. Once a student selects a prompt, they must return the two unchosen prompts back into the envelope. Prep time begins only after the two unchosen prompts have been returned. Students should read their chosen prompt aloud and may hold the prompt during the speech. After the student finishes their speech, the process restarts for the next competitor: the judge again distributes 3 prompts one at a time, the student selects one, returns the two unchosen prompts to the envelope, and then begins their 7-minute total time. Students may prepare on a blank piece of paper only and may not use technology or any paper that is not blank. **Students may not use notes or a script while speaking;** any student who uses notes must be ranked last. All competitors must remain in the room for the entire round.

WHAT TO JUDGE

CONTENT:

- Clear focus on chosen prompt
- Logical structure and coherent flow with 2-3 main points
- Thoughtful ideas that go beyond restating the prompt
- Creative approach to the topic
- Effective transitions and purposeful organization

DELIVERY:

- Confident presence and strong eye contact
- Clear, audible voice with steady pacing
- Smooth fluency (minimal pauses or filler words)
- Purposeful, non-distracting movement
- Professional tone

TIMING

- 7 minutes TOTAL (prep + delivery combined)
- No separate prep period
- Students may brainstorm silently or with scratch paper, but may not use notes while speaking
- Grace period: 30 seconds (7:30)
- If anyone goes past 7 minutes and 30 seconds, they cannot be ranked first

BALLOTS

- Rank all speakers 1-7 (1 is best)
- Assign speaker points 90-100, aligned with their rank (100 is best)
- Provide specific written comments (strengths + areas to grow)
- Focus feedback on structure, support, and delivery
- Do not verbally disclose your decision



INFORMATIVE SPEAKING

JUDGE GUIDE

OVERVIEW

Informative Speaking (INFO) is a student-written, fully memorized, 10-minute speech designed to teach the audience about a topic of the student's choice. Speeches must be original, factual, logically organized, and may include visual aids that enhance—not distract from—the message. The purpose is to inform, not persuade. **No notes may be used.**

WHAT TO JUDGE

CONTENT:

- Clear, logical organization (typically: History/Definitions → Applications → Implications)
- Strong central message
- Effective explanation of information
- Engaging examples, definitions, and evidence
- Smooth integration of visual aids (if used)

DELIVERY:

- Clear voice, strong volume
- Natural gestures & purposeful movement
- Confident eye contact
- Smooth pacing & fluency
- Professional, polished presentation style

TIMING

- Speaking time: up to 10 minutes
- Grace period: 30 seconds (10:30)
- If anyone goes past 10 minutes and 30 seconds, they cannot be ranked first
- You should be timing the students as they speak
- Please use hand signals for time if students ask!

BALLOTS

- Rank all speakers 1-7 (1 is best)
- Assign speaker points 90-100, aligned with their rank (100 is best)
- Provide specific written comments (strengths + areas to grow) about clarity, organization, and delivery
- Evaluate visual aids (helpful? distracting?)
- Do not verbally disclose your decision



ORIGINAL ORATORY

JUDGE GUIDE

OVERVIEW

Original Oratory (OO) is a student-written, fully memorized persuasive speech up to 10 minutes long. The goal is to present a clear message about a meaningful issue through compelling structure, credible support, and strong delivery. Oratory must be original, organized, and designed to move and persuade—not to entertain or perform dramatically. There are no visual aids or notes allowed. Typically, the main points are structured in causes → effects → solutions.

WHAT TO JUDGE

CONTENT:

- Clear, compelling thesis
- Logical structure
- Strong evidence and impactful examples
- Effective development of ideas
- Smooth flow and coherence
- Original writing with purposeful language

DELIVERY:

- Confident, polished speaking
- Strong eye contact
- Clear voice and pacing
- Purposeful movement & gestures
- Professional tone
- Smooth transitions and overall poise

TIMING

- Speaking time: up to 10 minutes
- Grace period: 30 seconds (10:30)
- If anyone goes past 10 minutes & 30 seconds, they cannot be ranked first
- You should be timing the students as they speak
- Please use hand signals for time if students ask!

BALLOTS

- Rank all speakers 1-7 (1 is best)
- Assign speaker points 90-100, aligned with their rank (100 is best)
- Provide specific written comments (strengths + areas to grow) about clarity, organization, and delivery
- Do not verbally disclose your decision