

Judging Congressional Debate



This is individual debate in a large group setting. Legislative debaters research and write pieces of Congressional legislation that they feel will better the society in which we live. At a tournament, debaters will then speak on the legislation while using proper parliamentary procedure. Judges score each competitor based on argumentation ability, speaking technique, knowledge of parliamentary procedure, and overall participation.

Officials

Congressional debate judges serve in one of three capacities, depending on the tournament:

- A. **Parliamentarian:** assists the student presiding officer when there are questions of parliamentary procedure. The parliamentarian remains over the course of all sessions before tournament advancement (so all preliminary sessions before semifinals, or all semifinal sessions before finals). S/he will rank all the contestants in a chamber, accounting for their aggregate participation and performance, to be used as a final tie-break.
- B. **Scorer:** usually, these judges change each session, and evaluate every speech and the presiding officer. At the end of the session at most tournaments, scorers will rank the top students they felt performed the best in the session.
- C. **Presiding Officer:** some tournaments choose to use an adult presiding officer, who is tasked with recognizing participants to speak, ask questions, and to move business.

Event Rules

1. A **session** is defined as including:
 - a. Minimum of three hours of debate (not including elections and recesses)
 - b. 18-20 students as the optimum number for a three-hour session; otherwise, a session should be lengthened by 10 minutes per each additional student beyond 20. If a district offers a super session, it has the flexibility to have additional, smaller preliminary chambers before advancing students to the super session.
 - c. Election of a presiding officer
 - d. New seating chart (necessary accommodations for students with special needs may be made)
 - e. Resetting of precedence/recency
 - f. New legislation that has not been debated in a previous session at that tournament
2. **Recognizing Speakers**
 - a. When more than one speaker seeks the floor, the presiding officer must follow the precedence/recency method:
 - i. First recognize students who have not spoken during the session
 - ii. Next recognize students who have spoken fewer times
 - iii. Then recognize students who spoke earlier (least recently)
 - b. During any session, precedence/recency should not reset, to ensure that all students in a chamber have an equal opportunity to speak and receive evaluation from scorers. When a new session begins, precedence/recency will be reset along with a new seating chart, and election of a presiding officer.
 - c. Before precedence is established, the presiding officer should explain his/her recognition process and it must be fair, consistent and justifiable.
 - d. Scorers will include answers to questions when evaluating speeches. For the district congress, a student receives 1-8 points per speech or 4-8 points per complete hour of presiding, up to 40 points per day.
 - e. A speaker may yield time on the floor during debate (for questions or clarifications) but that speaker will remain in control of his/her three minutes (see #6 below regarding questioning).
3. **Speeches introducing legislation** are allotted up to three minutes, followed by two minutes of questioning by other delegates. A student from the school (or at the national level, the District) who wrote the legislation gets the privilege of recognition (called *authorship*), regardless of precedence; otherwise the presiding officer may recognize a "sponsor" from the chamber, provided this recognition follows the precedence guidelines above. Regardless, this speech of introduction must be followed by two minutes of questions. Should no student seek recognition for the authorship/sponsorship, the chamber will move to lay the legislation on the table until such time that a student is prepared to introduce it.
4. **The first negative speech** must be followed by two minutes of questions.
5. **Following the first two speeches** on legislation, the presiding officer will alternately recognize affirmative and negative speakers, who will address the chamber for up to three minutes, followed by one minute of questioning by other delegates. If no one wishes to oppose the preceding speaker, the presiding officer may recognize a speaker upholding the same side. When no one seeks the floor for debate, the presiding officer may ask the chamber if they

are “ready for the question,” at which point, if there is no objection, voting may commence on the legislation itself. There is no “minimum cycle” rule, however, if debate gets “one-sided,” the chamber may decide to move the previous question.

- a. In the event a student speaks on the wrong side called for by the presiding officer and the error is not caught, the speaker shall be scored and the speech shall count in precedence, but the speaker must be penalized at least three points for not paying close attention to the flow of debate.
 - b. In the event a student speaks on an item of legislation *not currently* being debated, said speech shall count in precedence, but zero points shall be awarded.
6. **The presiding officer fairly and equitably recognizes members to ask questions** following each speech. The presiding officer starts timing questioning periods when s/he has recognized the first questioner, and keeps the clock running continuously until the time has lapsed. Speakers are encouraged to ask brief questions, and may only ask one question at a time (two-part/multiple-part questions are not allowed, since they monopolize time and disallow others to ask their questions). There is no formal “permission to preface,” however, presiding officers should discourage students from making statements as part of questioning, since that is an abusive use of the limited time available.
7. The presiding officer will pause briefly between speeches to recognize any motions from the floor, however, he/she should not call for motions (at the beginning of a session, the presiding officer should remind members to seek his/her attention between speeches).
8. **Amendments** must be presented to the presiding officer in writing (an official form is available in this manual’s appendix), with specific references to lines and clauses that change. This must be done in advance of moving to amend.
- a. The parliamentarian will recommend whether the amendment is “germane” – that is, it upholds the original intent of the legislation – otherwise, it is considered “dilatatory.” The title of the legislation may be changed.
 - b. A legislator may move to amend between floor speeches. Once that motion is made, the presiding officer will read the proposed amendment aloud and call for a second by one-third of those members present, unless he/she rules it dilatatory.
 - c. Should students wish to speak on the proposed amendment, the presiding officer will recognize them as per the standing precedence in the chamber, and the speech will be counted toward their total, accordingly.
 - d. Simply proposing an amendment does not guarantee an “author/sponsor” speech, and any speeches on amendments are followed by the normal one minute of questioning.
 - e. Amendments are considered neutral and do not constitute an affirmative or negative speech on the original legislation.
 - f. If there are no speakers or the previous question is moved, the chamber may vote on a proposed amendment without debating it.
9. **All major voting** (such as the main motion/legislation) which a Congressperson’s constituents should have a record of, shall be done with a counted vote. Secret balloting is used when voting for presiding officer.
10. Student should ask permission to leave and enter the chamber when it is in session (move a personal privilege). However, do not interrupt a speaker who is addressing the chamber.
11. **Ethics and Evidence**
- a. Conduct
 - i. A congressperson’s conduct shall be above reproach and he/she should never be guilty of intentional harassment. Impeaching and censuring other participants is not allowed.
 - ii. Participation in this event demands the seriousness of purpose and maturity possessed by real world policymakers. All adult officials, including scorers, will hold each participant to this standard.
 - iii. Congresspersons should have a cooperative nature and if there is a problem, then the student should take any concerns to an adult official.
 - iv. Participation in the legislative debate is essential. Extended absence from the chamber during a session will affect a contestant’s overall impression and performance. The practice of “open chambers” interferes with the parliamentarian’s ability to monitor student participation.
 - b. Evidence and Use of Electronic Devices
 - i. Computers may be used to retrieve evidence per the NFL’s rules for laptops in debate events.
 - ii. Visual aids are permitted in Congressional Debate, provided they do not require electronic retrieval devices in the chamber.

- iii. All evidence used is subject to verification. Honesty and integrity are of utmost importance in legislative debate. Falsification or deliberate misuse of evidence may result in the legislator being suspended by tournament officials.
- iv. Computers, cell phones, music players and games are not to be used in the chamber during a session. Traditional timing devices are permitted.

Congressional Debate – applies to each new legislation	
Sponsor Speech	3 Minutes
Questioning of Sponsor	2 Minutes
First Negative Speech	3 Minutes
Questioning of First Negative	2 Minutes
<i>All subsequent speeches</i>	3 Minutes/each
<i>Questioning of all subsequent speakers</i>	1 Minute/each

Evaluation

1. When scoring a speaker, offer constructive comments about the speech. If there is questioning involved, the quality of answers by the speaker should factor into the overall speech score. Award each speaker between one and six points, with one reserved for the poorest of speeches and six for outstanding speeches. Reserve scores of “2” for students who show little effort, and “1” for students who make egregious errors (speaking on the wrong side, a speech that’s a mockery/not serious, or engaging in personal attacks of other students).
2. At the end of the session, each judge should complete a master ballot (without consultation) for the presiding officer. Score him/her 3-18 points (6 points per hour), the same way you would a speaker. The presiding officer score should be based on how effectively the presiding officer ran the chamber.
3. At the end of the session, judges will independently (without consulting one another) rank the best legislators on the ballot provided:
 - a. Ranking is of *legislators*, not of “speakers,” which means that you weigh the overall impact each individual student had during the session. In addition to speaking or presiding effectively, did s/he encourage the legislative problem-solving process in a collaborative manner by asking *meaningful* questions, *useful* motions, and showing *attentive* interest throughout the debate? Could you tell which students actually *listened* by making specific and accurate references to others’ arguments?
 - b. Ranking the presiding officer (PO) amidst speakers is like comparing apples and oranges. Therefore, consider the overall performance of the PO. Did s/he effectively facilitate debate in an assertive but not aggressive manner? Were motions and votes handled efficiently? Did s/he rely on a number of unnecessary “crutch phrases,” or was her/his word economy exquisite? Considering the PO’s aggregate performance, how would it compare to a speaker’s performance based on your expectations? Let that be your determining factor in how you might rank the PO.
 - c. Quality is more important than quantity. You may nominate the best legislators even if they didn’t give the most speeches.
 - d. A student must have spoken or presided to be ranked.
4. Stay in the background as much as possible. Although congress participants may appeal the decision of the student presiding officer to the judge, these cases are rare. Allow the chamber to remain in student control except for serious infractions.



The rubrics on the following pages are a guide for judges in awarding points.

Congressional Debate Rubric: Speaking

This table of evaluation standards may be used by any judge who would like assistance in determining scores for speeches. Each scorer independently (without collaborating) awards 1 to 6 points for each speech. Each speaker has up to three minutes to present arguments followed by a questioning period (the time length for which will vary, depending on specific league rules).

Points	3	4	5	6
	Mediocre	Proficient	Excellent	Superior
Content: Organization, Evidence & Language	The speech lacked a clear thesis and organizational structure. Claims are only asserted with generalizations and no real evidence. Language use is unclear or ineffective.	While the speaker's purpose is present, the speech lacks logical organization and/or developed ideas. Analysis of evidence, if present, fails to connect its relevance to the speaker's claims. Use of language is weak.	While a clear purpose is apparent, organization may be somewhat loose (weak introduction/conclusion; no transitions between points). Diction represents a grasp of language. Much evidence is presented, but not in a persuasive or effective manner; or the speaker relies on <i>one</i> piece of evidence, but does so effectively.	Content is clearly and logically organized, and characterized by depth of thought and development of ideas, supported by a variety of credible quantitative (statistical) and qualitative (testimony) evidence analyzed effectively to draw conclusions. Compelling language, a poignant introduction and conclusion and lucid transitions clearly establish the speaker's purpose and frame the perspective of the issue's significance.
Argument & Refutation	The speaker offers mostly unwarranted assertions, which often simply repeat/rehash previous arguments.	The speaker fails to <i>either</i> introduce new arguments (simply repeating previous arguments) <i>or</i> the speaker fails to refute previous opposing arguments; in other words, no real <i>clash</i> is present.	New ideas and response to previous arguments are offered, but in an unbalanced manner (too much refutation or too many new arguments). Questions are answered adequately.	The speaker contributes to the spontaneity of debate, effectively synthesizing response and refutation of previous ideas with new arguments. If the speaker fields questions, he/she responds with confidence and clarity.
Delivery	Little eye contact, gestures and/or movement are present. Vocal presentation is inarticulate due to soft volume or lack of enunciation.	Presentation is satisfactory, yet unimpressively read (perhaps monotonously) from prepared notes, with errors in pronunciation and/or minimal eye contact. Awkward gestures/movement may be distracting.	The presentation is strong, but contains a few mistakes, including problems with pronunciation and enunciation. The speech may be partially read with satisfactory fluency. Physical presence may be awkward at times.	The speaker's vocal control and physical poise are polished, deliberate, crisp and confident. Delivery should be extemporaneous, with few errors in pronunciation. Eye contact is effective and consistent.

Scores of less than three (3) are rarely encouraged, and should be reserved for such circumstances as abusive language, a degrading personal attack on another legislator, or for a speech that is extremely brief (less than 45 seconds) or delivered without purpose or dignity for the cause exhorted by the legislation. Substantial written comments and description of specific incidents should accompany such scores.

Congressional Debate Rubric: Presiding

This table of evaluation standards may be used by any judge who would like assistance in determining scores for a presiding officer (PO). Each scorer independently (without collaborating) awards 1 to 6 points for each hour of presiding.

Points	1-2	3-4	5-6
	Weak – Mediocre	Proficient	Excellent – Superior
Speaker Recognition	The P.O. needs to improve his/her communication with fellow delegates to gain their trust and respect relating to the rationale for rulings made. Frequent errors are made in speaker recognition, which lacks consistent method or impartiality.	While the P.O. does not adequately explain his/her preferences for running the chamber in advance, he/she does clearly explain rulings, when necessary. Speaker recognition may be somewhat inconsistent or biased.	Presiding preferences are clearly explained at the beginning of the session and executed consistently. The P.O. is universally respected and trusted by his/her peers, and is consistent in recognition (<i>very few</i> errors) and rulings, distributing speeches throughout the room geographically, equally between schools of the same size, and among individuals.
Parliamentary Procedure	The P.O.'s knowledge of parliamentary procedure is lacking, and he/she shows negligible effort to correct errors and/or consult written rules.	The P.O. demonstrates competency in procedure, but makes mistakes in determining the results of motions and votes, etc.	The P.O. has command of parliamentary procedure (motions) and uses this almost transparently to run a fair and efficient chamber, seldom consulting written rules and ruling immediately on whether motions pass or fail.
Delivery/ Presence	The P.O. needs to improve his/her vocal and physical presence and professional demeanor.	The P.O. displays a satisfactory command of the chamber in his/her vocal and physical presence. Word choice is usually concise.	The P.O. dynamically displays a command and relates well to the chamber through his/her vocal and physical presence. Word choice is economical and eloquent.