

Vassar Invitational Parliamentary Judge Instructions

We generally follow the college American Parliamentary Debate Association (APDA), of which the Vassar Debate Association is a member. More details can be found on their web site: <http://apda.online/>. There is a style guide written to accompany these instructions which explains the basics of parliamentary debate.

Basics

The judge (or Speaker of the House) has three basic duties: see that the debate moves along expeditiously, rule on certain issues that arise during the debate, and decide the round by returning a completed ballot.

Starting the Round

One to three motions will be given before each round, and a different set of motions will be used for each round (or flight if the round is double flighted).

The motion is chosen as follows:

1. If the motion(s) have not been made public, the judge reads the motion(s) to the two teams.
2. The judge flips a coin, and one team calls it in the air. The winner of the coin flip decides whether that team would prefer choice of motion or choice of side (if only one motion, choice of side).
3. The team that has the right to choose the motion as the result of the coin flip picks a motion.
4. The team that has the right to choose the side then makes its choice of side.

The teams should make their choices promptly, the whole process taking no more than a minute or two. The teams then have fifteen minutes to prepare their cases. They are not permitted to use research materials.

For some rounds—particularly the second flight of double flighted rounds—the debaters may have been given the motion, made their selections and begun case preparation before arriving at the room, in which case the judge will simply need to wait until their prep time is finished (or start immediately if prep time has expired).

Script

The Judge may follow a script, patterned after English parliamentary practice, though this is not required.

Constructives

- To begin the round: “I call this house to order and call upon the honorable Prime Minister to deliver the first speech of the round not to exceed seven minutes.”
- Before LOC: “I thank the honorable Prime Minister and call upon the Leader of the Opposition to deliver a speech not to exceed eight minutes.”
- Before MGC: “I thank the honorable Leader of the Opposition and call upon the Member of Government to deliver a speech not to exceed eight minutes.”
- Before MOC: “I thank the honorable Member of Government and call upon the Member of Opposition to close out the constructive portion of the round in a speech not to exceed eight minutes.”

Rebuttals

- Before LOR: “I thank the honorable Member of Opposition and call upon the Leader of Opposition to deliver the first rebuttal speech of the round not to exceed four minutes, reminding him/her that while new examples are welcome, new arguments are not.”
- Before PMR: “I thank the honorable Member of Opposition and call upon the Prime Minister to deliver the final speech of the round not to exceed five minutes, reminding him/her that while new examples are welcome, new arguments are not.”

There is no prep time between speeches, and speakers should rise in turn with only a reasonable delay to collect their papers and move to the podium.

Questions

There are three types of questions: Point of Clarification (POC), Point of Information (POI) and Point of Order (PO). The judge should be aware that time stops during a POC and a PO, but not during a POI. The POC and the POI are managed by the debaters, but the judge is required to make a decision if a Point of Order is raised.

Keeping Time

Debaters will usually time themselves and their opponents and raise a Point of Order if a speaker exceeds their grace period. The judge may want to also keep time to monitor the round. Remember time stops during a Point of Clarification (POC) or a Point of Order (PO), but not during a Point of Information (POI). See the Style Guide for a discussion of these questions.

After the Round

After the final speech, the judge may give a *brief*—no more than 5 minutes—oral critique to the debaters. Then the judge should decide the round and fill out the ballot. The ballot should always include a clear reason for decision, and a justification for any points awarded below 23 or above 28. If a low point win is intended, this should also be clearly explained. Ballots should be returned to tab promptly. However, a judge hearing both flights of a single round should hold and return both ballots when the second flight is over.

Making the Decision

We suggest the following approach to deciding the round:

- First decide which side won. Make your decision based on which team carried the more important issues in the round. The teams should tell you which issues they think are most important during rebuttals, why they believe that they won those issues, and why they are more important than issues they may have lost. If they fail to do so explicitly, then you must use your discretion. In a tie, the decision should go to the Opposition.
- Second, rank the speakers from best to worst. A speaker's rank should consider that speaker's contributions to the round. While not recorded, ranking the speakers will help you in the next step.
- Assign each debater points from 23 (generally weak debater), 25 (average debater, average round) to 28 (excellent debater). Debaters may tie in speaker points. Points above 28 or below 23 should be justified on the ballot and may be questioned by the tab director. They should be rare. Ties or low point wins should be explained on the ballot, may be questioned and should also be rare. *Half points are permitted.* Points below 23 or above 28 should be justified on the ballot.
- The ballot should always have a clear, written reason for the decision. Additional feedback may be provided at the judge's discretion.
- If you are giving a low-point win, i.e. the winning team has fewer total speaker points than the losing team, you should check the indicator on the ballot and include a brief explanation of your reason. Low-point wins are exceptions and should be rare.

Again, we emphasize the need for judges to balance their desire to provide detailed feedback with the need to keep the tournament running on time.

Evidence

Debaters are not given the motions or subject areas prior to the tournament and are not permitted to use research material or prepared briefs during their case preparation before a round. This does not mean they cannot use facts, data, quotations or other information to support their arguments, only that what they use either be generally known or clearly explained. The evidentiary standard is “what a well-read person should know” or “The New York Times standard,” that is, what someone who regularly reads a national newspaper should know. Debaters may introduce more obscure facts provided they explain them thoroughly, including any aspects that may weaken their usefulness and benefit their opponents. As this is difficult to enforce, using obscure information is discouraged.

Debaters may often present “facts” that their opponents will claim are false, or that the judge does not believe are true. We all innocently present such facts every day. As noted, there is no research prior to the round, and no opportunity to check facts prior to the decision. A judge has no choice but to use discretion in these cases whether and how to consider these facts in awarding the ballot.

Our suggestion is that debates are won by arguments that are clearly explained, illustrated, and weighed in terms of importance against those presented by the other side. In our experience, debates rarely come down to the truth or falsehood of specific data presented by either side.