

Rules and mechanics of SPAR

Each spar panel consists of approximately eight competitors. Two students will spar at a time.

The judge will assign first or second speaker for each debate. Then there will be a coin flip and the winner of the flip chooses the topic from the choice of two. The loser of the flip chooses the side – for or against, which of the two options in the ‘vs’ topics, etc. Each pair will consider a single issue/resolution which is presented to the debaters by the judge right before each pair debates. The debater to speak first will have one minute of prep before speaking must commence. The first speaker will give a two-minute speech in favor of their position on the topic; immediately after that speech, the second speaker will refute the first speaker’s position and support their own position in a two-minute constructive. Strict adherence to the exact wording of the topic is not required, but the debaters should at least regard the topic as a common frame-of-reference.

Following the opening statements, there will be a five-minute open cross-examination period – anyone in the room can ask questions of the debaters. The pair should question each other, and should be prepared to take at least a few questions from the audience of other competitors. Since speakers do not have to offer questions or accept them while they are speaking, this aspect of the process may vary from round to round. Judges should look for debaters who aggressively offer questions and confidently accept at least one or two questions from competitors in the audience during their CX. Questions and comments should be a forum through which the speakers can develop their arguments for rebuttals. Debaters who do not take full advantage of the questioning process will not do as well as those who do.

Each speaker will have one rebuttal to complete the round. Judges should make sure that no speech exceeds the allotted time so that the round may end on time. No preparation time during the debate is allowed.

Times: First speaker-2; Second-2; CX-5; First-2; Second-2.

Judge Responsibilities: Unlike judges of prepared debate, spar judges do not have to render decisions. Judges merely rank the debaters in terms of how well they defend their side, the quality of their arguments, the quality of their presentation, their use of questions, and the like. Judges will rank students from 1st through 8th (or through as many competitors are in the round). The judge is also responsible to assign speakers to their various positions. Judges may use tab-room suggestions, but are empowered to vary those suggestions in any way necessary to facilitate the process. For example, many students are double entered and if a debater does not show up at the start of the round, that debater should not be placed in the first constructive spot. If an odd number of students show up for the round, one student may give a repeat (unscored) additional performance. Answers by debaters to questions from the audience during the open CX period should be used in the scoring of the competitors who are actually debating, but should not be considered as relevant in the scoring of those who are merely asking the questions, particularly since many students are double-entered and will not have the opportunity to participate in the questioning process.

Spar Theory: Each speaker should advocate a specific idea and defend a clear position. For example, a debater could argue that voters should vote for women on the basis of their gender; American History should be taught from the Native American perspective; or that the Electoral College is good.

The important thing to remember is that spar competitors should be judged on the basis of overall wit, persuasion and quality argument construction.