

Spar

Spar is a short form of impromptu debate, often about less serious topics. As the judge, you will give the speakers their topics from an envelope the tournament provides you and they will prepare in just one minute.

- Your round will have a list of eight speakers. Divide them up into pairs in order from your ballot (the first two make a pair, the third and fourth make a pair, and so on). For each pair, flip a coin to decide which speaker is affirmative and which is negative. In the event that a debater does not show up at the start of the round, feel free to pair the debaters who are present. If the missing debater shows up, go ahead and pair him with the last person to speak. If you end up with an odd number of people, you can have the first person go twice (without scoring their second performance).
- Start with the first pair, give them a topic from your envelope, let them prepare for one minute, then call all the students into the room (speakers and other competitors). After that pair finishes, repeat.
- In each pair, the affirmative speaker will begin with a two-minute speech in favor of the resolution. The negative speaker will then give a two-minute speech. The speakers will then have a five-minute cross-examination, in which they can ask each other questions or accept questions from the remaining students in the audience. There is no strict number of questions that should be asked. Then, the affirmative gives a two-minute rebuttal, followed by a two-minute negative rebuttal.
- You should give the speakers time signals. The normal way to do this is by holding up your fingers to indicate the number of minutes remaining (for example, one finger when one minute is left). Form your hand in a C to show when thirty seconds are left.
- In judging the round, you should consider overall wit, persuasion and quality argument construction. Do not judge the students based on the questions they ask of other speakers, only their performance during their own speech. You will rank the debaters just as you would in any other event; you do not have to render a decision for the affirmative or negative in each individual spar debate.
- The affirmative position should not be truistic (it should not be an argument with which virtually everyone would agree). For example, the affirmative should not argue that racism is immoral, that rape is bad, or that Stanford is better than Cal (ok, maybe that last one is allowed ☺). You can penalize a speaker if you think they took an unfair position.
 - One option for advanced debaters is to allow the negative speaker to choose his position. For example, if the issue is greed, the affirmative could offer the negative the choice of defending or attacking greed. The affirmative would offer the issue and the choice at the outset. The negative must make an instantaneous choice, and the affirmative must proceed to speak immediately.
- The affirmative should also not interpret the topic in a way that requires unusually specific knowledge. The position should be debatable by any reasonably well-informed high school student. For example, the affirmative shouldn't propose that a particular type of gene sequencing is a good thing, or that some particular type of financial derivative was bad for the economy. Specific knowledge can be used to support a larger position, but should not be the focus of the debate.
- The affirmative speaker may set the debate in a specific time/space. Ex, the debate could be set in 1945, and the affirmative might suggest that the judge should consider themselves to be Harry Truman deciding whether or not to consent to dropping atomic bombs on Japan. In this type of situation, no future knowledge should be assumed or imparted.