

Congressional Debate Tournament Rules

1. **In addition to rules provided herein**, we use National Speech & Debate Association (NSDA) rules, which cannot be altered or suspended. Where these rules are silent, Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, 11th edition shall prevail.
2. **Technology:** [NSDA pilot rules](#) allow for internet access. Under no circumstances is video recording by any person allowed. Competitors may not use the internet to communicate or receive aid with other persons.
3. **Presiding Officer (PO):** Presiding Officers will be provided by the tournament administration in order to ensure equity and fairness. The Presiding Officer will recognize speakers and questioners.
4. **Agenda & Sessions:** Multiple agendas may be proposed; the winning agenda must receive approval by a majority vote. Debate on legislation may not continue from one round to the next. Anyone may sponsor a piece of legislation, as legislation will be written by the tournament directors.
5. **Debate Structure :** The PO ends debate on legislation when a delegate moves for the previous question. **This triggers a Closing Appeal speech of up to 120 seconds by the sponsor of that legislation and the first negative**, scored for points, but not counting toward precedence or recency. There will be no questioning period for the Closing Appeals. After this speech, the PO immediately takes a vote on the legislation, without any motion.
6. **Questioning:**
 - a. All rounds will use **direct questioning**. **Prefacing is unregulated by the PO during direct questioning**, but judges may take excessive use of it into account when evaluating questioners.
 - b. Rules may not be suspended to alter questioning periods or format.
7. **Penalties:** Judges will be instructed they may reduce ranks/points for the following:
 - a. A speech on the wrong side is ruled out of order by the PO (after confirming with the parliamentarian). The speech counts toward recency, but receives zero points.
8. **Voting:** The PO determines the voting method on each question before the chamber. Notes:
 - a. Final votes on legislation, amendments, and motions to appeal chair require a recorded vote, and vote totals are based on the total number of legislators in the chamber (not just present and voting). A majority of the total is required for passage; therefore, a PO may cast a vote following the count of colleagues. Only aye votes cast count toward passage in those cases.
 - b. A recorded vote must be taken if any legislator calls for a division of the chamber; roll call votes are prohibited. The PO may choose to utilize the reaction features or a show of placards to count votes. The chair determines whether the chamber agrees with the motion/question using the number of legislators present in the chamber at the time of the vote. Because of this system, the PO must track the number of legislators in the chamber at all times.

9. Amendment Process:

- a. Legislators move personal privilege to submit written amendments in the chat (or may do so prior to a session convening or reconvening after recess.
- b. Anytime after the sponsor speech, a motion to amend is in order. The PO — who may first consult with the parliamentarian — will announce if the amendment is germane and will read the contents to the chamber; or rules it dilatory and the process stops.
- c. A one-third second vote of all members is required to debate the amendment. Legislators may move to lay on the table or call for the previous question on the amendment at any time.
- d. If a speech on the amendment is recognized, the first is a sponsorship speech, and speaker recognition is on basis of precedence/recency; the author of the amendment is not guaranteed the sponsorship speech. The sponsor accepts responsibility for mechanics of the amendment and yields to two minutes of questioning.
- e. All amendment speeches receive a score and count towards precedence/recency. Speeches should focus on the amendment itself, and how it affects the original outcome of the legislation. A majority vote is necessary for the chamber to adopt the amendment. If the amendment carries, further debate should consider the legislation as amended.

10. Recesses & Sessions: There is no limit on the amount of recesses that may be taken.

Sessions may not end more than 15 minutes early without permission of the tab room.

11. Decorum: Preliminary chambers are designated as a house; members are “Representatives.”

Elimination round chambers are senates; members are “Senators.”

Note: Some rules are unchanged from NSDA, but are included because they are often confused with regional/state differences.

Advice & Clarifications

- **Decorum and professionalism:** Speakers should always use honorifics (Representative _____), and never just last names. Competitors in preliminary rounds shall be referred to as “Representatives”, and competitors in elimination rounds shall be referred to as “Senators”.
- **Final Appeal - Purpose:** The final appeal is designed to give a sponsor the ability to demonstrate refutation skill, and it should function similarly to the Final Focus speech of a Public Forum Debate round. In other words, the burden to the sponsor will be to flow the debate and determine what the most important issues were — and then group/ summarize (where are there thematic connections?), and then compel the room to vote in favor of the legislation based on those most important issues. This is not a speech to introduce a new point. One of these speeches would probably start with, “What this debate comes down to is...” — and then focus on one or two key themes. Then, reinforce why those points are important by connecting them to the central theme/reason from the earlier speech. Think about this last speech as being a way to bring everything in the debate back to the purpose/reason for needing the bill in the first place.

Congressional Debate Judging Instructions

Developed by Adam Jacobi with portions adapted from Dr. Alexandra Sencer.

Congress judges assess quality of research and analysis of issues, argumentation (including advancing debate), skill in asking and answering questions, use of parliamentary procedure, and clarity of delivery.

Types of Speeches – all equal value, and all demonstrate different skill sets.

- **Sponsorship:** constructs advocacy by explaining need for the legislation to solve/mitigate a problem, and how it will do that.
- **First Negative:** constructs opposition by explaining how attempting to solve/mitigate a problem with the legislation will fail to meet objectives or will make the problem worse.
- **Rebuttal:** directly refutes opponents' arguments by explaining why they are incorrect – and not simply listing names of opposing legislators and/or saying they're wrong.
- **Extension:** taking a previous argument on the same side and extending the concept to a related concept or more in-depth exploration. These speeches are not rehash if new nuance is introduced.

Speeches may be a combination of rebuttal and extension.

- **Crystallization:** summarizing positions of both sides, and weighing the impacts to prove why one side wins over the other. This speech establishes key voting issues in the round.

Types of Questioning Periods

- **Direct** – all rounds – questioning periods divided into 30-sec. blocks of exchange between the questioner and floor speaker.

Scoring Speaking

- 6 – Exemplary; may have slight, nuanced room for improvement (recommend if necessary)
- 5 – Accomplished: could use a few improvements (suggest tactics)
- 4 – Competent: meets expectations, but should develop more depth/knowledge (offer specifics)
- 3 – Developing: barely meets minimum standards, and requires more growth (explain in detail)
- 2 – Emerging: underdeveloped skills [short arguments; lack of evidence] (describe what is needed)
- 1 – Unacceptable: offensive mockery or attack of peers, or (for speeches) spoke on wrong side

Speaking Standards for Evaluation

- **Content— organization, evidence and language:** logical arrangement of ideas; depth of thought; support from a variety of credible quantitative (statistical) and qualitative (expert testimony) evidence analyzed to draw conclusions; compelling language; memorable introduction and conclusion; and cohesive transitions to establish speaker's purpose and frame perspective of the issue's significance.
- **Argument & Refutation:** arguments have clear claims, are substantiated with sound, analysis and evidence, and explain the impact on those affected; these ideas are either new/fresh, or clear extensions rather than mere repetition of what has already been said; refutation of opposing arguments actually disproves them, rather than simply listing and saying they're wrong; answers to questions are given in similar structure.

Dispelling Myths of Congressional Debate

- Debate exists to advance arguments. **Students should be prepared on both sides of legislation.** One of the skills of Congressional Debate is being able to flip one's points if one really wants to give a speech on a particular piece of legislation, and more students seek the opposite position. Hence, one-sided debate is highly frowned upon. If everyone is in agreement, then there is no debate!
- Students should feel comfortable **moving the previous question** when debate has become one-sided or debate has become stale – even if other students wish to speak. This is not rude,
- **IMPORTANT: Students do NOT need to speak on each item of legislation.** In fact, many tournaments limit debate on each legislation to prevent this from happening, and this also gives students the ability to not speak on a topic that might be a personal trigger for them.
- There is no “minimum cycle”, nor a “maximum cycle” rule, except at certain tournaments.
- There are not motions to “open the floor for debate,” “open the floor for presiding officer nominations,” nor “open the floor for agenda nominations.” These are part of the normal, established order of business for Congressional Debate, so the PO simply announces they will do these things.