

WISCONSIN DEBATE COACHES' ASSOCIATION
Virtual Debate Rules and Recommendations

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Rules for Virtual Tournaments

WDCA Standing Rules

Where the Rules for Virtual Tournaments conflict with the Standing Rules, the Rules for Virtual Tournaments will control.

Tournament Procedures

Wisconsin State Debate Tournament Qualifications

The qualification requirements for the Wisconsin State Debate Tournament are waived. Teams may enter an unlimited number of entries in each division; provided, however, that each student (1) has competed in that division at least two times; and (2) meets the standard/definition for a debater of that division as provided in the WDCA Standing Rules.

Tournament Registration Deadlines

Virtual debate platforms require tournament hosts to purchase the service no later than the Thursday morning before the tournament. As a result, the tournament registration deadline for entries will be Wednesday evening prior to the tournament.

Tournament Officials

The tournament invitation should clearly identify all tournament officials and staff, including their roles and contact information.

Evidence Violation Appeals

No changes are made to the Standing Rules on the process for evidence violation appeals at sanctioned tournaments. A summary is below:

Per the current Standing Rules, all tournament directors must identify a 3-person appeal committee for hearing evidence violation appeals by a team. The 3-person appeal committee must be identified in the tournament invitation.

Per the current Standing Rules, a team has 10-minutes from judge's decision to make an appeal.

Preparation Time

Preparation time is extended for all formats as follows:

Lincoln Douglas: 5 minutes

Policy: 10 minutes

Public Forum: 4 minutes

Partner Communication

How partners will communicate during preparation time must be determined by each school.

In-Round Observers

No unauthorized in-round observers will be permitted in any round. Because the tournament is only accessible via login information received by the tournament competitors and judges, unauthorized in-round observers will not be able to access competition space. Any unauthorized persons will be immediately removed from that competition room by tournament officials. If the tournament has elimination rounds, tournament officials will make provisions for observers to watch late elimination rounds.

Only individuals registered for the tournament, such as coaches and students, are individuals that the tournament director may authorize to observe non-elimination rounds, subject to the approval of the teams in such round.

Debater Locations

Whenever possible, debaters shall debate in separate rooms. For example, debaters competing virtually from school buildings shall, whenever possible given building resources and restrictions, debate in separate rooms.

Judge Check-In & Lounge

The following procedure shall apply to at least the first two tournaments:

All judges must check-in before the tournament begins to the designated virtual judge lounge. Judges must remain in the virtual judge lounge the entire tournament. When judge assignments are released, judges must leave the virtual judge lounge and report to their assigned virtual debate room. When not actively judging, the judge must return to the virtual judge lounge. Judges may have their video off and be muted whenever in they are in the virtual judge lounge.

Depending on how well judges are reporting to rounds and communicating with tournament officials, tournaments will be able to use a live check-in procedure in which judges call a designated tournament official to check-in. Judges will be contacted by tournament officials, whether by Tabroom and/or phone call, as needed throughout the tournament. A virtual judge lounge would still be available for judges wishing to use such a room.

File and Evidence Disclosure – Novice Policy

Novice policy debaters will be locked to the packet released by the WDCA. Evidence outside of the novice packet is not permitted during this season. At least one booster set of evidence and files will be distributed later this season.

Any school with a novice policy debate team may request a paper copy of the packet for each debater free of charge.

Novice policy debaters should reference the file and page number when answering questions about which specific cards were read.

File and Evidence Disclosure – All Other Formats

All debaters, except for novice policy debaters, should be prepared to share files and evidence in Google doc format. If all debaters agree upon a different evidence sharing mechanism, such as email chain, dropbox, etc, all debaters must state that they are agreeing to this in the virtual debate round's chat.

For Lincoln Douglas and public format debates, students competing with paper still have an obligation to share their files and evidence within a round. Regardless of sharing method, the sharing and disclosure must be equitable to the information opponents would have received had the debate occurred in person. Such methods include, but are not limited to, sharing the URL of the original source in the round chat, a PDF of the original file and clearly indicating the page number for where the information may be found; a picture or scanned image of the page or evidence; and holding the paper evidence to the webcam.

Coin Toss

All coin tosses for public forum debate and any elimination rounds will be done by computer.

Student No Show

Students will be given 15 minutes to report to rounds. Students that fail to report to a round within 15 minutes of a round's start time will be considered a no-show and forfeit the round.

Judge No Show

Judges will be given 15 minutes to report to rounds. Judges that fail to report to a round within 15 minutes of a round's start time will be replaced. Depending on the circumstances, a team may be penalized for their judge's failure to report to a round.

Student Behavior

Conduct

The same expectations for behavior that apply to in-person debate extend to the online round. Harassing, bullying, and other behaviors that would not be tolerated by a school cannot be tolerated. Students should not use fabricated technological complaints or issues to falsely influence the outcome of the round.

Outside Assistance

Students follow the same guidelines for assistance as if they were in person. Outside communication regarding the content of the round during the round is not permitted.

Video & Audio

Teams should remain on screen for the duration of the round, including disclosure by the judge to the extent possible. To efficiently use bandwidth, a debater may pause video display during their speeches. Following the conclusion of the round and judge's disclosure, teams should leave the room before the judge.

Students should be on mute during the competition when not presenting or participating in cross-examination.

Report to Round

Debaters should go to their round as soon as possible after schedules are sent out. If the judge still has not arrived within 5 minutes of the round being posted, students should inform tournament officials.

Cross-Examination

Understanding that online debate has differences from in-person debate, cross-examination generally require the debater asking questions to wait for a complete response.

Judge Behavior

Round Evaluation

Judges must evaluate the round based on the content of the round, not on the location of the debaters. Some debaters might be at home, others at school or some other location. Judges should evaluate the round based on the quality of speeches, not the quality of audio/video a student is using.

Disclose Decision

Following the round and before exiting the room for all divisions, the judge should verbally inform the teams of their decision following WDCA standing rules by identifying the code/school and side of the winning team.

Reason for Decision Details

Judges can comment if there was a technology issue (static, feedback from a mic, etc.), but such feedback must be very factual and only something that would allow the student to potentially fix the issue prior to the next round of competition.

The environment a student is speaking from should not be a consideration in speaker points or a judge's decision. There should not be any comments, negative or positive, on a ballot regarding the background or environment from the debater is speaking/presenting, including, but not limited to, comments or remarks about the quality of furniture, quality or quantity of decorations, perceived affluence of the student's environment, or the student's technology cost/choice.

Round Chat Log

The judge must leave the room last, following all debaters. The judge should also save any chat and forward it to the tournament host/director.

Mandatory Reporting

The WDCA considers all judges to be mandatory reporters. Please refer to the guide on Wisconsin Mandatory Reporting – Children.

If you witness, or reasonable believe, a situation that does not trigger a duty for mandatory reporting but is concerning, judges must privately inform the student's coach or, if the tournament uses school/team codes, the tournament director/host.

Technology

Round Recordings

Rounds may not be recorded by any individual.

Virtual Backgrounds

Virtual backgrounds or green screens are prohibited.

Flexibility and Understanding

Online debate requires additional flexibility on the part of teams and judges in order to be successful. Every student deserves the best possible round whose winner is decided by the best debating, not the best technology.

Technology Problems – Teams

Each team will have 15 minutes to resolve any technological issues or problems. When a team experiences a technology problem, the round will pause. When the team resolves the technology issue, the time needed to resolve the technology issue will be subtracted from the technology time of the affected team; and the judge will confirm the point at which the technology issue started, resume the round from that point, and, if necessary, award the team that was speaking additional speech time.

If a team is unable to resolve a technology issue, or if a team uses all 15 minutes of their technology time, the team will forfeit the round or, in team debate, the remaining partner may decide to continue debating maverick.

Technology Problems – Judges

Each judge will have 15 minutes to resolve any technological issues or problems. If a judge experiences a technology issue prior to, or within fifteen minutes of, the start of the round, then a new judge will be assigned to the round. If a judge experiences, and is unable to resolve, a technology issue during a round, the round will end, and a double win will be awarded.

Technology Time Not Preparation Time

If one team or the judge requires technology time during a round, the other team may not prep or use any preparation time. Prepping during technology time will constitute stealing preparation time.

Miscellaneous

Additional Information

Surveys and feedback will be collected regularly throughout the season to gather data on virtual tournaments and identify areas of improvement.

Modifications

These Rules for Virtual Tournaments may be amended or changed by the Executive Committee by majority vote. Unless stated otherwise, any such amendments or changes will be effective immediately.

Recommendations for Virtual Tournaments

Tournament Procedures

- Have a statement of anti bullying/harassment in tournament invitation
- Ensure students and adults have an email and phone number to contact tournament officials.
- Outline in tournament invitations who should be contacted with forfeits technology issues.
- Possible tournament official positions: tournament director, technology contact, tab room assistant(s), evidence appeals committee.
- Have a virtual cafeteria and judge lounges.
- Have a "Round 0" where everyone practices logging into a room, muting/unmuting, speaking, and logged off
- Require coach and judge contact information at tournament registration (e.g. email and phone number). Download this list so that you have offline access in case the internet or competition platform goes down.
- Have confirmation within registration that coaches must indicate they have completed any processes their school district requires for students competing virtually
- Include time for room and the penalty for not checking in within 15 minutes of the schedule being released.
- Tournament size permitting, consider separating the judging pools for Lincoln-Douglas and public forum.
- Anticipate at least 30-45 minutes between rounds in case of technology issues and to give people a screen break. Have a more realistic schedule than people feeling behind.
- Possible schedule:
 - Schematic released at 8:30 for 8:45 start
 - Students log into room and begin disclosure and evidence sharing process
 - Judge logs into room
 - Students and judge test mic/camera for all in room
 - In the event of technology issues, round starts no later than 9am
- Consider a virtual awards ceremony. Tournaments should still provide awards of some sort that are either digitally delivered or mailed. If awards will be mailed, consider mailing to the coach's preferred address (which may be their home instead of school). If offering a virtual awards ceremony, consider having designated audience members who will cheer for each person (and then everyone else is muted and has camera's off).

Technology

- Consider a separate Google drive account to decrease the risk of crossing over between your school, private and debate emails.
- Ethernet/wired connection to the internet router will be a strong signal.
- Headphones of any kind with a microphone are recommended over a computer microphone alone
- Light source should be in front of your or to the side, not behind you
- Close game programs (steam, epic, blizzard, league of legends, etc.), close unneeded tabs in internet browser and potentially turn off any VPN's.
- Prior to a round, verify the following:
 - Internet connect is stable and computer power supply is set up
 - Microphone and webcam

- Chrome is working

Miscellaneous

- Students should consider speaking slower if needed to improve clarity over the microphone.

Judging Standards Reminder

- Judges can comment if there was a technology issue (static, feedback from a mic, etc.), but the feedback should be very factual that would allow the student to potentially fix the issue prior to the next round of competition.
- The environment a student is speaking from should not be a consideration in speaker points or your decision. There should not be any comments, whether positive or negative, on a ballot about the student's environment or background, including, but not limited to, the quality of furniture, quality or quantity of decorations, perceived affluence of the student's environment, or student's technology cost/choice.
- Be prepared to be judging the entire day of the tournament. Judges are obligated for the entire day, and tournaments will be longer than normal due to the virtual format.
- Once in a competition room, judges should verify code and names of students. If there are any discrepancies from the student's answers and the ballot, the tournament officials must be notified immediately.
- Judges should be conscious of their own background and evaluate if it is a good model for students to see.
- Judges should be patient with technology issues. This is a new world for us all. Students in general have high nerves during competitions. Adding in the stress of virtual tournaments and the lack of in-person moral support from peers and adults will be overwhelming for some students.
- Judges should give cues to students if they are speaking too fast, unclear, etc. These cues are allowed so long as they are brief, do not interfere in the round and do not deal with the substance or content of the round. Students need feedback and information if they are expected to change any behaviors.
- Please keep in mind that a student may have multiple monitors or a webcam on a separate device from where they may be speaking. This could lead a student to seem like they are looking off camera or be oriented differently than other competitors in the round.
- Judges should be the official timekeeper of the round even if students are also timing.
- Judges are considered mandated reporters. Please refer to the guide on Wisconsin Mandatory Reporting – Children. If a judge witnesses, or reasonable believes, a situation that does not trigger a duty for mandatory reporting but is concerning, a judge must privately inform the student's coach or, if the tournament uses school/team codes, the tournament director/host.