



2020-2021

Updated October 8, 2020

SECTION 3: Pilot District Tournament Operations Manual

The National Speech & Debate Association is committed to providing every student with the opportunity to qualify for the National Tournament in a fair and impartial manner. When running the district tournament, due diligence must be made to ensure fairness and avoid any perception of impropriety. The Board of Directors has established and approved these procedures to be piloted for all district tournaments. The Executive Director must approve specific exceptions to these rules in writing. Each competitive event is governed by the rules established in the Event Rules Manual. During each tournament, an ombudsperson is available through the national office to adjudicate disputes regarding these rules. Please contact the national office to identify who your ombudsperson will be as well as to clarify any of the rules or procedures regarding district tournament operations.

This document provides the specific pilot procedures for determining the national qualifiers in each district. The Congressional Debate pilot qualification rules have now been implemented as the permanent set of rules governing district tournaments beginning in 2020-2021. Those rules can be found in the Unified Manual. All event-specific competition rules, rules surrounding online district tournaments, rules surrounding registration and allotment for districts, can be found in the Unified Manual: www.speechanddebate.org/high-school-unified-manual

Prior to reading this manual, you are encouraged to read the NSDA's rationale for piloting and updating this new method: www.speechanddebate.org/pilot-district-qualification-method

For questions not answered here, please contact the national office at info@speechanddebate.org or call (920) 748-6206.

Committee-Determined Tabulation Rules

In speech and debate events, the District Committee may determine the number of judges they will use in preliminary and elimination rounds. In debate events, the District Committee will decide whether to use a full, half, or tenths speaker point scale.

By default, speech events will hold three preliminary rounds, but districts may choose to hold more. In speech events, the District Committee may set the number of clearing entries in each event prior to the start of the tournament, as long as it meets minimum standards. See the section on scheduling elimination rounds in speech for more information. The number of clearing entries does not need to be the same for each speech event. By default, 25% of an event's entry total (rounded up to the nearest whole number) and all entries whose rank totals are tied with an advancing entry will clear.

In debate events, the District Committee may choose between three methods to run their tournament. If they have a small number of entries in all debate events, they may choose to hold a round robin in each event to determine their winner. Alternatively, the District Committee may hold preliminary rounds and then choose to break to a double or single elimination bracket. By default, debate events will hold four preliminary rounds and break to a single elimination bracket.

Finally, the District Committee must determine the method used to break ties between alternates in debate events. See the section on breaking ties for alternate spots for Debate districts for more information.

Each of these options must be decided on by the District Committee, not the chair alone. The district's policies for each event must be decided and communicated to coaches of schools attending the tournament before the start of round 1 of each event. These policies may not be changed after the start of round 1 in each event. In the absence of a publicized policy, the default policies specified above must be used.

Running the District Debate Tournament

The following rules apply to Lincoln-Douglas, Policy, Public Forum, and Big Questions debate events at the district tournament. Any tournament violating these rules will be invalid, with no national qualification granted.

A district may choose to use one of three methods to run their district debate tournament: round robin, single elimination bracketed, or double elimination bracketed. This selection must be finalized and publicized at least one week prior to the start of round 1. All debate events must use the same method.

Method 1: Round Robin Tournament

Districts with a small number of entries in a debate division may elect to hold a round robin for their qualifying tournament. If a district uses this method, all entries in an event will debate all the other entries in that event once. A round robin requires one fewer round than there are entries in the division. For example, if an event had six entries, five rounds would be held.

All rounds of the tournament must be pre-scheduled before the tournament begins using approved software. The rounds must be paired so each entry hits every other entry once, and in LD and CX, each entry should end up with an even number of affirmative and negative rounds. They will not necessarily alternate sides round to round.

Round robin tournaments may elect to use 1 or 3 judge panels, but all debates in the entire tournament must have the same number of judges as all other rounds.

The round robin concludes after the preliminary rounds; no elimination rounds are necessary. Qualifiers and alternates are determined first by total ballot count, and next by the winner of the head-to-head debate between two tied competitors. If a tie still exists, a runoff debate with an odd number of judges should be held between the tied competitors.

Rounds between entries from the same school may either be debated or decided at the coach's discretion; all ballots must be awarded to one entry by the coach decision.

Methods 2 & 3: Single and Double Elimination Bracketed Tournaments

General Rules for Single and Double Elim Bracketed Events

1. **Minimum Rounds:** At least four preliminary rounds are held in all debate contests unless only four entries compete. If only four entries compete, three preliminary rounds may be held.
2. **Number of Judges:** One or three judges may be used in preliminary round debates, as determined by the District Committee. All debates must have the same number of judges as all other debates in a round throughout the tournament. Elimination rounds must use three or more judges per round. All judge panels must consist of odd numbers of judges, and no elimination or final round may use fewer judges per panel than any previous round.
3. **Forfeits:** Judges should notify the District Committee of a student who arrives to their round more than 15 minutes after the posted start time of the round. If there are multiple judges in the round, all must agree that the student was more than 15 minutes late. Debaters who are 15 minutes late forfeit the round, but the District Committee may waive the penalty. For a speech competitor, the District Committee may choose to drop each judge score in the round by two ranks. The judge(s) should not adjust the student's ranks themselves. The District Committee may waive the penalty.
4. **Judges** in preliminary rounds must award a win/loss, with no ties permitted, and speaker points to each individual debater on a 30 point scale. The District Committee must decide and communicate whether speaker points will be assigned using a full, half, or tenths point scale before the start of round 1. Judges in elimination rounds only award a win/loss without points.

Pairing and Tabulation Rules

Rounds 1-2 are randomly preset, and any subsequent rounds must be powermatched.

Pairing Presets (Rounds 1-2)

Preset rounds are sectioned with the following priorities in order:

1. Avoid two entries from the same school debating each other
2. Avoid entries debating each other more than once
3. Avoid any entry in CX and LD debating on the same side of the topic more than once
4. Avoid any entry drawing a bye (due to uneven numbers) more than once
5. Avoid any entry debating more than one opponent from the same school
6. Avoid any school drawing a bye (due to uneven numbers) more than once

Pairing Powermatched Rounds (Preliminary Rounds after Round 2)

After round 2, entries are ordered or seeded by the following:

1. Highest number of rounds won
2. Highest ballot count
3. Highest total entry speaker points with highest and lowest ballots' scores dropped (drop the highest and lowest total team score in CX and PF, not the lowest score of each speaker)
4. Highest total entry speaker points
5. Lowest average opponent seed
6. Coin flip/random number

Debates are assigned within brackets. All entries with the same win count are grouped in the same bracket.

Pull Ups

Begin with the top bracket (the most wins). In a non-side-locked round, which is all rounds in PF, and odd numbered rounds in LD and CX, pull ups are required either if numbers are uneven or there is no way to avoid scheduling a debate between entries from the same school or entries that have previously debated. In side-locked (even rounds in CX or LD), pull ups are also required if the number of teams due to debate affirmative is not equal to the number due to debate negative. Until these conditions are met, pull up an entry or entries from the brackets below according to the following priorities in order:

1. Pull entries up only if they are due to debate the short side in a sidelocked round
2. The pull up should not force a debate between entries in the same school
3. The pull up should not force a debate between entries that have previously debated
4. The pull up should come from the nearest bracket possible
5. The pull up should have the worst (highest) average opponent seeding

Do not avoid pulling an entry up because they have been previously pulled up. Pull ups are re-seeded into their new bracket as they would be based on the tiebreakers other than win/loss. For example, if a pull up has the eighth best high/low speaker points out of 12 entries in a bracket, they are given the eighth position despite having fewer wins.

Pairing

Once the bracket has an even number of entries, schedule entries such that the entry with the best (lowest) SOP score debates the entry with the worst (highest) SOP score. Then the second best debates the second worst, and

so on. The following priorities should be used in pairing powermatched debates:

1. Avoid two entries from the same school debating each other
2. Avoid entries debating each other more than once
3. Avoid any entry in CX and LD debating on the same side as a previous round in sidelocked rounds
4. Pair entries according to their position in the bracket as determined by SOP scores

SOP (Seed + Opponent Seed) scores are calculated by adding the seeding of the entry together with their average opponent seed up to that point in the tournament. The top seeded debaters might end up lower in the bracket than worst seeded debaters if they debated against worse opponents. The goal of SOP is to even out the difficulty of the brackets over the course of the tournament.

Break this pattern of SOP as minimally as possible to avoid higher pairing priorities. In an event with an uneven number of entries, the bye goes to the entry with the worst SOP score overall that has not yet been awarded a bye. If two entries must debate against each other a second time in either preliminary or elimination rounds, in LD and CX, the second debate must have sides reversed from the first debate; in PF, the coin flip is still used.

In all cases, the computer should be primarily used to create pairings in preset and powermatched rounds to ensure impartiality and true randomness where necessary; however, the debate tabulation staff should check the computer to ensure pairing priorities are correctly followed.

Elimination Rounds

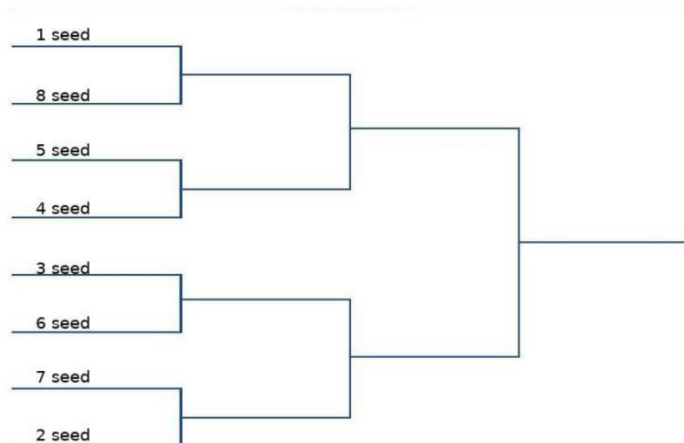
After preliminary rounds, the entries should be ranked in order based on the same seeding rules used for powermatching. The District Committee may choose either to advance all entries with a winning record or only advance all entries with one or zero losses.

If your district is using the single elimination bracket, proceed with the “Method 2: Single Elimination Bracket” rules found below. If your district is using the double elimination bracket, skip to “Method 3: Double Elimination Bracket” to finish your tournament.

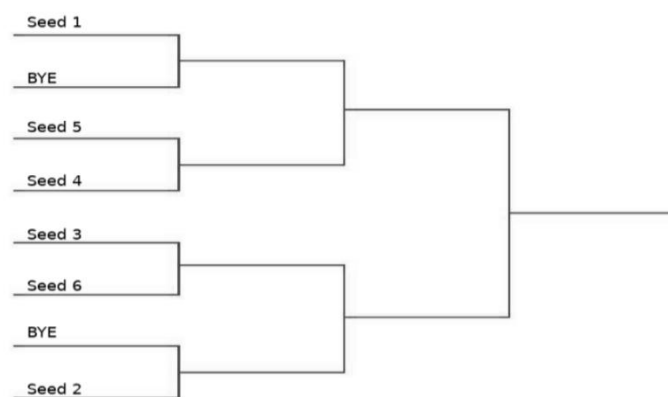
Method 2: Single Elimination Bracket

Advancing entries will be placed in a single elimination round bracket. The best seeded entry debates the worst seed, the second best seed debates the second worst, and so on. If the number is not a power of two, then the top seeded debaters are given byes until the bracket is complete. The winner of the best/worst debate should debate the winner of the middle debates, the winner of the second best debate the next middle, and so on.

SAMPLE SINGLE ELIMINATION BRACKETS



8 ENTRIES ADVANCING



6 ENTRIES ADVANCING (PARTIALS)

Debaters should flip a coin in any LD and CX debate where the entries have not previously debated. If LD and CX debaters have previously debated, they should debate on the opposite sides of the topic from the previous round. PF debaters always flip for sides/position and may choose the same sides and speaker positions as previous debates.

At least three judges must judge each elimination debate. Every round must have an equal or greater number of judges than all previous rounds, and all debates of a given round must have the same number of judges. Brackets may not be broken to avoid same-school debates. Coaches of debaters in same school debates may either decide who advances without a debate or elect to hold a debate as normal.

The winner of the majority of ballots in each debate advances, while their opponent is eliminated. The tournament must continue until the number of entries active is equal to or lower than the number of qualifiers; further rounds for recognition may be held at the discretion of the District Committee.

Determining National Qualifiers

Qualifying spots are always determined by wins in elimination debates. A district which qualifies one entry must conduct a final round (if there are multiple entries advancing to elimination rounds). A district which qualifies three entries must conduct a debate between the two non-advancing semifinalists for the third slot to the National Tournament.

Determining Alternates

Alternate placement is determined by one of two methods. By default, the preliminary round seeding method is used; District Committees that opt for run-offs must publicize that decision before the start of round 1 of each event.

OPTION 1: PRELIMINARY ROUND SEEDING

The order of the finishers is determined by the following tie-breakers in order:

1. Winner of the final round
2. The last round competed in, e.g., a student in finals places better than a student that does not advance from semifinals
3. Preliminary round seeding as determined by the tie-breakers used to break

OPTION 2: RUN-OFFS

Entries who are eliminated in the same elimination round are considered tied for alternate positions, and a series of run-offs must be held to determine the final ordering. If a slot for the National Tournament falls to the quarterfinalists, for instance, then all debaters willing to attend the National Tournament will be scheduled so the highest seed debates the lowest seed, and the middle two seeds debate; the winners of those two debates then debate for the slot to the National Tournament.

Method 3: Double Elimination Bracket

Districts may elect to use a double elimination bracket for the elimination rounds of their district debate tournament. A double elimination bracket requires that an entry must lose two debates in elimination rounds before they are eliminated from the tournament. This method requires more elimination rounds than a single elimination bracket.

Tournaments using a double elimination bracket will use the same rules as a single elimination bracketed tournament for preliminary rounds and determining which entries will clear to elimination rounds. The first elimination round will also be conducted according to the same rules as the single elimination bracketed tournament. The best seeded entry debates the worst seed, the second best seed debates the second worst, and so on. If the number is not a power of two, then the top seeded debaters are given byes until the bracket is complete.

Pairing Elimination Rounds

After the first elimination round, a double elimination format bracket is divided into a “winner’s bracket” of debaters who have not lost in elimination rounds, and a “loser’s bracket” of debaters who have already lost one debate in elimination rounds. The winner’s bracket operates exactly like a single elimination format bracket, except that when an entry loses, they are moved to the loser’s bracket instead of eliminated from the tournament.

The loser’s bracket is paired among teams with one loss. The loser’s bracket teams are ‘seeded’ with either a) the better seed of the last loser’s bracket debate they won, or b) the worse seed of the last winner’s bracket debate they won. For example, the loser of a winner’s bracket debate between the 1 and 8 seed is seeded 8 going into the next loser’s bracket debate. The winner of the loser’s bracket debate between the 5 and 11 seed in the loser’s bracket is seeded 5 going into the next loser’s bracket debate.

Each loser’s bracket round must have a number of entries equal to a power of 2 (powers of 2 are 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, etc.). If there are more debaters than that, give byes to the *best* seeded debaters until there is a power of 2 number of rounds. For example, if there are five entries in the loser’s bracket, one will receive a bye and the bottom four seeds will debate. If there are 13 entries in the loser’s bracket, five will receive byes and the bottom eight seeds will debate. If there are six entries in the loser’s bracket seeded 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 11, byes are given to

the 5 and 6 seeded entries.

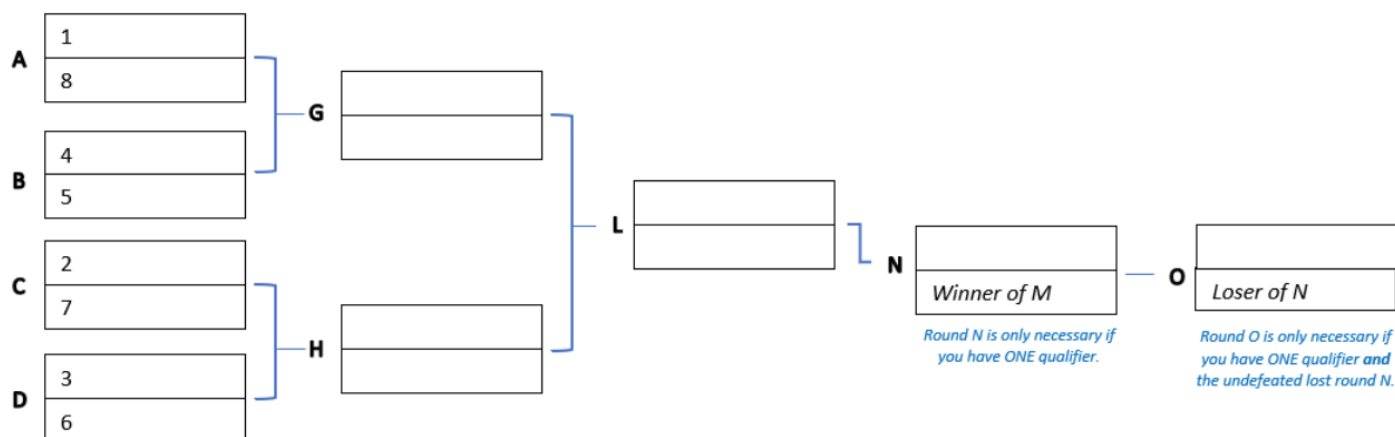
Pair the debaters in the loser's bracket so that the *average total seed* of the two debaters competing against each other is the same as all other debates in the loser's bracket. Using the above example, the 7 and 11 seeds would debate (sum 18) and the 8 and 10 seeds would debate (sum 18).

Debaters may debate the same opponents they have already faced in preliminary rounds, but they may not debate twice in elimination rounds. When the seeding schedules two entries to debate for a second time in elims, *flip* one half of the opponents such that the seed total of all debates are as close as possible to each of the others while avoiding repeat debates. In these cases, the “worst” seed sums will be 2 higher than the “best” seed sums. Using the above example, imagine the 8 and 10 seeds had already debated in elims. Instead of keeping each seed sum at 18, the 7 and 10 seeds would debate (sum 17) and the 11 and 8 seeds would debate (sum 19).

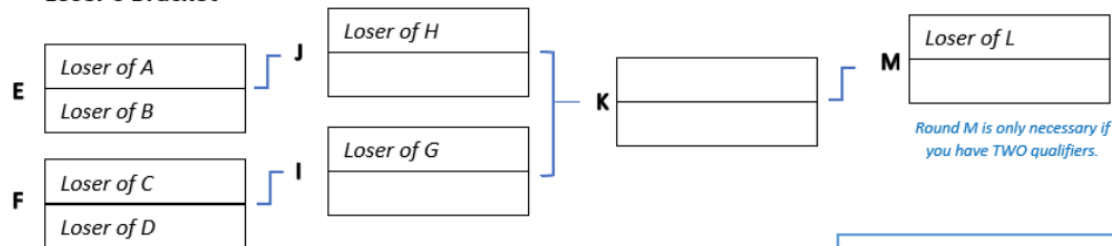
Rounds between entries from the same school may either be debated or decided at the coach’s discretion; do not break brackets to avoid same-school debates.

SAMPLE DOUBLE ELIMINATION BRACKETS

Winner's Bracket

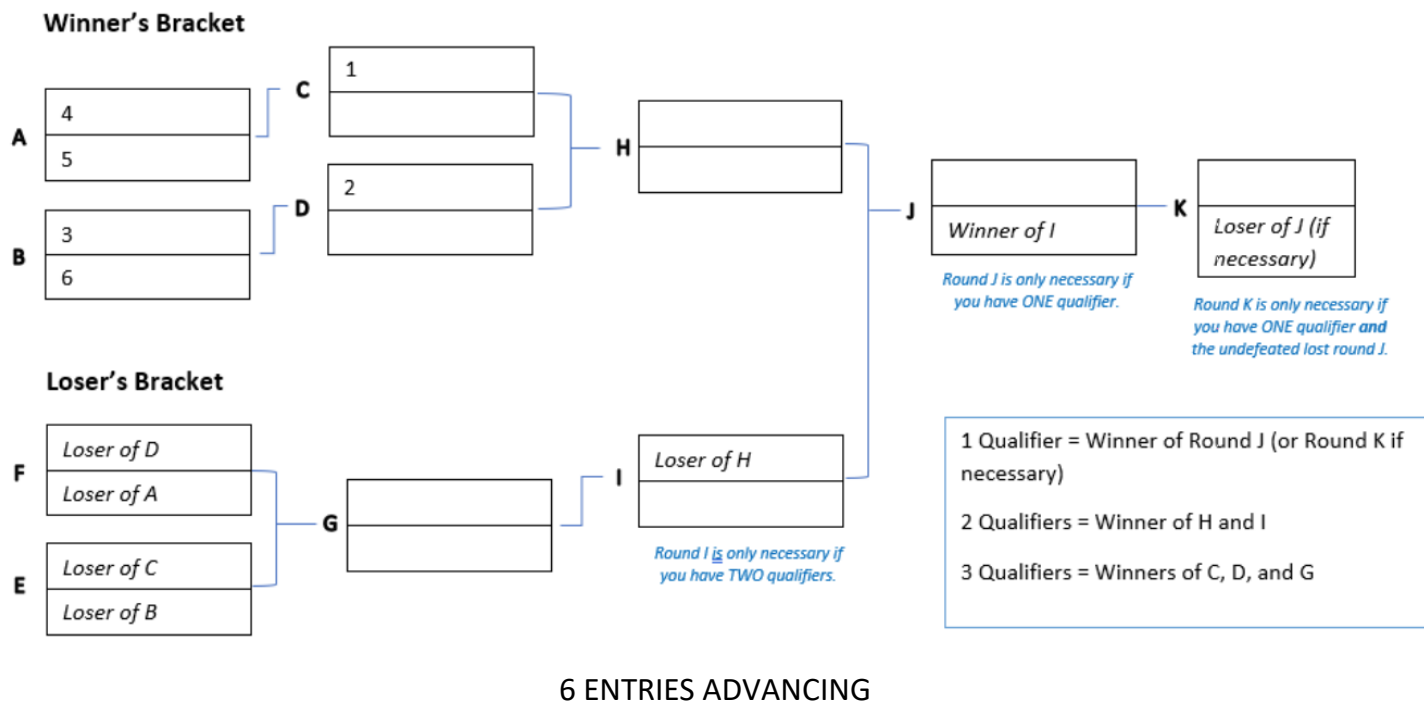


Loser's Bracket



- 1 Qualifier = Winner of Round N (or Round O if necessary)
- 2 Qualifiers = Winner of L and M
- 3 Qualifiers = Winners of G, H, and K

8 ENTRIES ADVANCING



Determining National Qualifiers

Qualifying spots are always determined by wins in elimination debates. A district which qualifies one entry must conduct a final round (if there are multiple entries advancing to elimination rounds) between the champion of the winner's bracket and the champion of the loser's bracket. If the undefeated entry loses the final round, the two entries in finals must switch sides and debate again. The winner will qualify to the National Tournament. A district which qualifies three entries must conduct a debate between the two non-advancing entries that were eliminated in the round before the final round, one from the winner's bracket and one from the loser's bracket.

Determining Alternates

Alternate placement is determined by one of two methods. By default, the preliminary round seeding method is used; District Committees that opt for run-offs must publicize that decision before the start of round 1 of each event.

OPTION 1: PRELIMINARY ROUND SEEDING

The order of the finishers is determined by the following tie-breakers in order:

1. Winner of the final round
2. The last round competed in, e.g., a student in finals places better than a student that does not advance from semifinals
3. Preliminary round seeding as determined by the tie-breakers used to break

OPTION 2: RUN-OFFS

Entries who are eliminated in the same elimination round are considered tied for alternate positions, and a series of run-offs must be held to determine the final ordering. If a slot for the National Tournament falls to the quarterfinalists, for instance, then all debaters willing to attend the National Tournament will be scheduled so the highest seed debates the lowest seed, and the middle two seeds debate; the winners of those two debates then debate for the slot to the National Tournament.

Running the District Speech Tournament

General Rules for Speech Events

1. **Minimum Rounds:** At least three preliminary rounds must be held in all speech contests.
2. **Number of Judges:** One, two, or three judges may be used in preliminary rounds, as determined by the District Committee. All sections of an event must have the same number of judges as all other sections in a round throughout the tournament. All speech events must use the same number of judges in the preliminary rounds. Elimination and final rounds must use three or more judges per section. All elimination round judge panels must consist of odd numbers of judges, and no elimination or final round may use fewer judges per section than any previous round.
3. **Judges** in all speech rounds should rank each entry in order, best to worst, 1-7. Ties are not permitted; points are not necessary.

Preliminary Rounds

Preliminary round sections are assigned with at least four and no more than seven entries each; the ideal is sections of six. The priorities for paneling these rounds, in order, are:

1. Avoid entries from the same school in the same section
2. Avoid entries competing against each other multiple times
3. Avoid schools competing against each other multiple times

Speaker order is varied within preliminary rounds so that every entry's average speaker position is as equal as possible to all other entries in the same event. Each entry should speak early in a round (first 2 speakers) and late in a round (last 2 speakers) at least once during preliminary rounds.

In all cases, the computer should be primarily used to create pairings to ensure impartiality and true randomness where necessary; however, the speech tabulation staff should check the computer to ensure pairing priorities are correctly followed.

If there are sections with uneven numbers of students, students receiving the lowest rank in the larger section will have their rank truncated. That is, if section A has 6 students and section B has 5, both the fifth and sixth ranked students in section A will receive a rank of 5.

Preliminary Round Breaks

After the preliminary rounds are concluded, the entries are ordered by rank total, lowest being best. If each entry is given four or more scores (if there are four prelims with one judge, or three prelims with two judges each, etc.) then the worst (highest) rank score is dropped from their rank total.

If there are less than eight entries, no elimination rounds are required. Any event with eight or more entries must break to elimination rounds.

The District Committee may choose how many entries will advance to elimination rounds in each event. The break point for elimination rounds must meet the following standards:

- Number of entries that will advance in each event will be announced prior to the start of round 1.
- A minimum of 25% of an event's entry total (rounded up to the nearest whole number) must advance in each event. No final may be smaller than four entries. For example, an event with twelve entries must clear a minimum of four students to finals.
- All entries whose rank totals are tied with an advancing entry also advance. For example, if the target to advance is six, but a rank total tie exists between sixth and seventh, the top seven entries advance.

Elimination Rounds

If more than seven entries advance, section a quarter or semifinal round. Sections should have no fewer than four and no more than seven entries. If more than 21 entries advance, quarterfinals must be held. If 15-21 entries advance, semifinals in three sections are held unless the District Committee has set and communicated a lower threshold for quarterfinals.

Snaking Sections

Elimination rounds are snaked: the top placing entry is placed in the first section, and the next entries are assigned in order by the rank totals going into the round until the number of sections is exhausted. The next entry is placed in the last section and the rest filled in up to the first section. Then, the next entry is placed in the first section and filled in to the last, and so on.

SAMPLE SNAKED ELIMINATION ROUND

Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4
Seed 1	Seed 2	Seed 3	Seed 4
8	7	6	5
9	10	11	12
16	15	14	13
17	18	19	

Sections are then adjusted by swapping entries with the same rank total to avoid entries from the same school competing in the same section, where possible.

Speaker Order

Speaker order in elimination rounds is determined by totaling the entries' past speaker orders and ordering the section by the reverse of their previous speaker position totals, so the entry with the highest total of past orders speaks first, the next highest speaks second, and so on. Speaker order may be adjusted to accommodate double entry.

Advancing from Elimination Rounds

After each elimination round, placement order is determined first by lowest total ranks in all preliminary rounds, dropping the worst (highest) preliminary round rank for each entry whether or not each entry received four or more scores in prelims. Then add the total of all ranks earned in elimination rounds multiplied by two. Ties are broken by the lowest rank totals from the last elimination round only.

Six entries advance out of a semifinal round (an elimination round with two or three sections), together with any entry tied with an advancing entry on both overall rank total and ranks in the previous elimination round. Twelve entries should advance out of a quarterfinal, together with any entries tied with an advancing entry on both overall rank total and ranks in the last elimination round. Advance the top overall entries, not equal numbers from individual sections. If more than seven entries are tied to advance to finals from semifinals, or more than 14 are tied to advance to semifinals from quarterfinals, then all entries tied for the last spot on both scores are excluded from advancing.

Final Round

If the number of entries clearing to finals is equal to or lower than the number of slots the district will send to Nationals, it may be skipped; otherwise, finals must be held. Speaker order in finals is determined by the same

method as elimination rounds. Final round judge panels should consist of an odd number of at least three judges and should never be smaller than the number of judges used in any previous round of that event.

Determining National Qualifiers and Alternates

If elimination rounds were held: Qualifiers are determined by the cumulative scores of finalists based on the factors below. After finals, the order of placement overall is determined by, in order:

1. The last round competed in. *This means that when determining the overall final rank of every student in an event, a finalist places better than a semifinalist, a semifinalist places better than a quarterfinalist, etc.*
2. Lowest total overall ranks score, dropping the worst prelim rank and multiplying elimination and final round ranks by 2.
3. Highest total reciprocal of all ranks, dropping the worst prelim rank, and multiplying elimination and final reciprocals by 2.
4. Lowest total ranks in the final round
5. Judge's preference (head to head) in the final round
6. Highest total reciprocal of ranks in the final round
7. Judge's preference (head to head) in elimination round(s)
8. Judge's preference (head to head) in prelim round(s)

If ties still exist for a spot to Nationals, hold a run-off round with three judges. The winner of the run-off, on ranks, judges' preference, then reciprocals, wins the tie.

If no elimination rounds were held: The order of placement overall is determined by, in order:

1. Lowest total overall ranks score
2. Highest total reciprocal of all ranks
3. Judge's preference (head to head) in prelim rounds

If ties still exist for a spot to Nationals, hold a run-off round with three judges. The winner of the run-off, on ranks, judges' preference, then reciprocals, wins the tie.