



# Congressional Judge Training

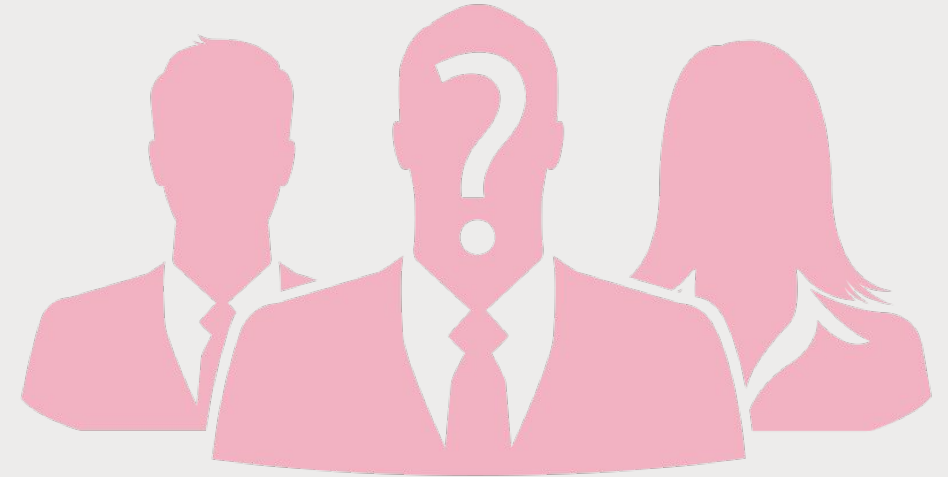
# A brief rundown of **Congressional Debate**



- **Who:** a group of 10-20 students playing the roles of legislators (Senators or Representatives)
- **What:** debating a series of proposed items of legislation
  - *Bills – would-be laws*
  - *Resolutions – statements expressing the will/opinion of the body*
  - *Constitutional amendments – articles that would reframe the foundational legislative document of our nation*
- **How:** utilizing parliamentary procedure to take turns delivering 3-minute speeches for or against each item of legislation (plus cross-examination questions after each speech)
- **When:** over the course of a 3-hour session (usually)
- **Where:** in a single “room” (called a chamber) – either in-person or virtually
- **Why:** because it’s beneficial and, more importantly, fun!

# Your goals as judge...

- To assess and score each speech (on an 8-point scale)
- To provide detailed, specific, constructive feedback to enable students to understand their scores and ranking and thus to help them improve
- Crucially, to determine which student was “the most outstanding legislator”
  - *And who was the second most outstanding legislator*
  - *And the third...*
  - *And the fourth...*
  - *Etc etc etc*



# Becoming a culturally competent judge

- The most important rule: **Judge the performance, not the student (e.g. clothing, appearance)**
- **Cultural Competence Training**
- **Beware of ableist language:**
  - ***“While speech and debate involve physical movement, judges assuming all bodies can ‘perform’ in the same way perpetuates ableism. Keep in mind that many disabilities can be invisible and many students may not disclose their disabilities to you. Almost 20% of Americans experience some form of disability.”***  
—NSDA
  - ***Here’s a great Washington Post article to learn more.***
- **This handout from the NSDA is a great shortcut guide to appropriate language on a ballot.**
- **And of course, your personal political opinions should have no bearing either.**



# What makes a legislator “the most outstanding”?

- The most outstanding legislator is the student who most fully and dynamically contributed to the overall quality of debate across the entire session, balancing their various legislative duties in a manner that is at once active and selfless
- The legislative duties:
  - Delivering speeches (but only when those speeches further the debate)
  - Asking questions (but only when those questions put arguments to the test and clarify uncertainties)
  - Making motions and rising to points (but only those which benefit the overall flow of debate and promote fairness)
  - Engaging in parliamentary procedure through prompt seconds and votes (in manners that bring about illuminating and equitable discourse)
- It's not about “showboating”! It's about students consistently using their skills, experience, and preparation to contribute to illuminating, compelling discussions -- and also about knowing when it's time to let other voices be heard!

# Speeches

## the foundation of rankings

- **As speeches are the primary way students contribute to debate, they should be scored carefully so that those scores can reliably form the basis of final rankings**
- **8s, 2s, and especially 1s should be awarded rarely**
  - *An 8 is a speech that is, more or less, flawless*
  - *A 2 is a speech that was off-topic or shockingly brief*
  - *A 1 is a speech that is unquestionably offensive*
- **PRO TIP! When a speech begins, consider it a 6 – then add or subtract points as the speech progresses and you notice elements that are or are not particularly compelling (see next slide for a guide to this process)**
- **The NSDA's Congressional Speech Rubric asserts that, in most circumstances, a speech that lacks cited evidence should be scored no higher than a 3**

# Determining Speech Scores:

Start each speech at a 6, then...

## ■ Going **UP** a point (or more) for...

- **Compelling delivery (eye contact, gesturing, body language, intonation)**
- **Strong phrasing – engaging use of pathos/emotion**
- **Exceptional clarity of organization/ signposting**
- **Illuminating establishment of context of debate (esp. if authorship, sponsorship, or first negation)**
- **Solid flow and clash with arguments of prior speakers (if not authorship or sponsorship)**
- **Deft handling of questions**

## ■ Going **DOWN** a point (or more) for...

- **Overreliance on a script/limited eye contact**
- **Unclear and/or specious citations**
- **Infrequent use of evidence**
- **Over reliance on anecdote, hypotheticals, and/or speculation**
- **Redundant argumentation**
- **Monotonous delivery**
- **Insufficient analysis/ contextualization of evidence**
- **Points ceded under questioning**
- **Too long (over 3:05/gaveled out) or too short (under 2:45)**

# **Presiding:** a totally different *but equally important* dimension of Congress

- Each session is voluntarily administered by students known as **Presiding Officers (POs)**
- POs are tasked with running the chamber smoothly, competently, and equitably
- To a certain extent, the less you notice or think about a PO, the better job that PO is doing
- One hour of presiding is roughly equivalent to one speech and should be scored and evaluated accordingly (even though, yes, it's like comparing apples and oranges)
- Presiding well requires a firm understanding of the nuances and complexities of parliamentary procedure, as well as extensive practice and experience – it's tough!
- Therefore, POs should **ALWAYS** be seriously considered for top rankings (the NSDA's Congressional Guide instructs judges who choose not to rank a PO to "include an explanation as to why the PO failed to keep order in the chamber or demonstrated a lack of leadership" [44])





# Last but certainly not least: Ranking the Chamber

- When the session is over, you will rank the 8 most outstanding legislators
- As scores (whether earned through speaking or presiding) constitute the most significant dimension of student participation, start with those
- As a general rule, fewer scores indicate the student missed opportunities to contribute to debate, so the number of scores a student earned should be fairly predictive of that student's final ranking, and score differentials greater than 2 should be quite rare
- However, remember that your ranking should be a holistic measure of all the ways a competitor can contribute (i.e. through questioning and engagement in parliamentary procedure)
- And some speeches add little to nothing to the overall quality of debate – or even detract from it by taking time away from other items of legislation and the preparation less aggressive students may have done on those topics
- Similarly, a PO can run the chamber so inefficiently that they impeded debate and thus do not deserve a top ranking

# Resources to help you judge Congress

- [How to complete a Congress ballot on Tabroom](#)
  - [Congressional Debate Round Guide](#)
  - [Judging resources from congressionaldebate.org](#)
  - [Final Round of Congress Debate-NSDA Nationals](#)
  - [Congressional Debate Introduction Video](#)
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- [Legislation for the Cottonwood Classic](#)
  - [Legislation for the Atsá Invitational](#)

In the end, trust your gut,  
and, above all, strive to be  
**consistent and impartial!**

And thank you  
for judging!!!