

Congressional Debate (CD)

1. A **session** is defined as including:

- A. Minimum of three hours.
- B. 18-20 students as the optimum number for a three-hour session; otherwise, a session should be lengthened by ten minutes per each additional student beyond 20. Chambers may not be larger than 30 students.
- C. Election of a presiding officer. The presiding officer must be elected with a majority of the vote. If one candidate does not receive a majority of votes, eliminate the candidate with the fewest votes and vote again. If candidates are tied for the fewest number of votes, vote to determine which of the tied candidates should remain in contention. Repeat this process until one candidate receives a majority of votes.
- D. New seating chart (necessary accommodations for students with special needs may be made).
- E. Resetting of precedence/recency. See 'Recognizing Speakers' below.
- F. New legislation that has not been debated in a previous session at that tournament.
- G. Optional rule for districts: Time for debate per legislation item should last no more than one-third of a session's floor time. It will not be used at the National Tournament.

2. **Recognizing Speakers**

- A. When more than one speaker seeks the floor, the presiding officer must follow the precedence/recency method:
 - 1. First recognize students who have not spoken during the session.
 - 2. Next recognize students who have spoken fewer times.
 - 3. Then recognize students who spoke earlier (least recently).
- B. If a tournament is not using preset recency, before recency is established, the presiding officer should recognize speakers fairly and consistently. They may not link recognition of speakers to previous recognition of students asking questions, moving motions, or longest standing (standing time). Before precedence is established, the presiding officer should explain their recognition process and it must be fair, consistent and justifiable.
- C. Preset, randomized recency will be used in every round of Congressional Debate at the National Tournament. All district tournaments must use preset, randomized recency in Congressional Debate.
- D. During any session, precedence/recency should not reset, to ensure that all students in a chamber have an equal opportunity to speak and receive evaluation from scorers. When a new session begins, precedence/recency will be reset along with a new seating chart, and election of a presiding officer.

- E. Scorers will include answers to questions when evaluating speeches.
 - F. A speaker may yield time on the floor during debate (for questions or clarifications) but that speaker will remain in control of their three minutes (see #6 below regarding questioning).
3. **Speeches introducing legislation** are allotted up to three minutes, followed by two minutes of questioning by other delegates. A student from the school (or at the national level, the district) who wrote the legislation gets the privilege of recognition (called *authorship*), regardless of precedence; otherwise the presiding officer may recognize a “sponsor” from the chamber, provided this recognition follows the precedence guidelines above. Regardless, this speech of introduction must be followed by two minutes of questions. Should no student seek recognition for the authorship/sponsorship, the chamber will move to lay the legislation on the table until such time that a student is prepared to introduce it.
 4. **The first negative speech** must be followed by two minutes of questions.
 5. **Following the first two speeches** on legislation, the presiding officer will alternately recognize affirmative and negative speakers, who will address the chamber for up to three minutes, followed by one minute of questioning by other delegates. If no one wishes to oppose the preceding speaker, the presiding officer may recognize a speaker upholding the same side. When no one seeks the floor for debate, the presiding officer may ask the chamber if they are “ready for the question,” at which point, if there is no objection, voting may commence on the legislation itself. There is no “minimum cycle” rule; however, if debate gets “one-sided,” the chamber may decide to move the previous question.
 - A. In the event a student speaks on the wrong side called for by the presiding officer and the error is not caught, the speaker shall be scored and the speech shall count in precedence, but the speaker must be penalized at least three points for not paying close attention to the flow of debate.
 - B. In the event a student speaks on an item of legislation *not currently* being debated, said speech shall count in precedence, but zero points shall be awarded.
 6. **The presiding officer fairly and equitably recognizes members to ask questions** following each speech. The presiding officer starts timing questioning periods when they have recognized the first questioner, and keeps the clock running continuously until the time has lapsed. There are two different questioning methods.
 - A. **Traditional questioning:** Speakers are encouraged to ask brief questions, and may only ask one question at a time. Two-part/multiple-part questions are not allowed. There is no formal “permission to preface,” however; presiding officers should discourage students from making statements as part of questioning, since that is an abusive use of the limited time available.

- B. **Direct questioning:** The presiding officer will open the floor for questions following each speech. The presiding officer will recognize questioners for a cross-examination period of no more than 30 seconds. Questioners will be chosen according to a separate questioning recency.
 - C. Direct questioning will be used in every round of Congressional Debate at the National Tournament. All district tournaments must use direct questioning in Congressional Debate.
7. The presiding officer will pause briefly between speeches to recognize any motions from the floor; however, they should not call for motions (at the beginning of a session, the presiding officer should remind members to seek their attention between speeches).
8. **Amendments** must be presented to the presiding officer in writing with specific references to lines and clauses that change. This must be done in advance of moving to amend.
- A. The parliamentarian will recommend whether the amendment is “germane”—that is, it upholds the original intent of the legislation—otherwise, it is considered “dilatary.” The title of the legislation may be changed.
 - B. A legislator may move to amend between floor speeches. Once that motion is made, the presiding officer will read the proposed amendment aloud and call for a second by one-third of those members present, unless they rule it dilatary.
 - C. Should students wish to speak on the proposed amendment, the presiding officer will recognize them as per the standing precedence and recency, and the speech will be counted toward their totals, accordingly.
 - D. Simply proposing an amendment does not guarantee an “author/sponsor” speech, and any speeches on amendments are followed by the normal one minute of questioning.
 - E. Amendments are considered neutral and do not constitute an affirmative or negative speech on the original legislation.
 - F. If there are no speakers or the previous question is moved, the chamber may vote on a proposed amendment without debating it.
9. **All major voting** (such as the main motion/legislation) which a congressperson’s constituents should have a record of, shall be done with a counted vote. Secret balloting is used when voting for presiding officer.
10. Students should ask permission to leave and enter the chamber when it is in session (move a personal privilege). However, do not interrupt a speaker who is addressing the chamber.
11. **Use of Evidence (also see the section on Congressional Debate Evidence Rules)**
- A. Visual aids are permitted in Congressional Debate, provided they do not require electronic retrieval devices in the chamber.

- B. All evidence used is subject to verification. Honesty and integrity are of utmost importance in legislative debate. Falsification or deliberate misuse of evidence may result in the legislator being suspended by tournament officials.

12. Since the rules above ensure fairness for competition, they may not be suspended; the presiding officer should rule such motions out of order; except to extend questioning and allow for open chambers provided the tournament staff permits doing so.

Current Guidelines for Use of Internet-Enabled Devices in Congressional Debate

These rules will be used at the National Tournament. These rules are required for any district tournament whose Congressional Debate events are held online. If a district tournament does not state otherwise, these guidelines will govern their contest. If a district holds their Congressional Debate qualifying events in person, they may choose to use the Previous Guidelines for Use of Internet-Enabled Devices in Debate Events provided the decision is announced 60 days in advance of the event.

The use of internet enabled electronic devices is permitted. Students may not use the internet to gain help from coaches, other students, or any person, such that it would prevent the speech from being the original work of the competitor. Electronic device use must comply with the “Current Guidelines for Use of Internet-Enabled Devices in Debate Events.”

The rules regarding use of generative artificial intelligence at the 2025 National Tournament can be found in the [National Tournament Operations Manual](#) section.

Previous Guidelines for Use of Internet-Enabled Devices in Congressional Debate

These rules will no longer be used at the National Tournament. If the district tournament is held in person, districts may choose to use these [guidelines](#), provided 60 days advance notice is given to the district. If a district tournament does not state otherwise, the Current Guidelines for Use of Internet-Enabled Devices in Congressional Debate will govern their contest.

Congressional Debate Legislation Guidelines

Most legislation should have a national/domestic focus that the U.S. Congress would have *jurisdiction* over, taking the form of a **bill**. A bill establishes details behind *how* a particular law must work, including when it takes effect, how much tax levy would be appropriated (if applicable), how infractions/violations will be dealt with, etc. A bill may answer the who, what, when, where—and most specifically how—but it will never answer “why.” Legislators explain rationale behind bills in their speeches, and how a bill implements its solution can spark deeper, more meaningful debate.

Students should consider what the U.S. Congress has jurisdiction over. Since the Executive Branch runs most of the agencies that enforce federal laws, understanding those helps; for more information, visit www.usa.gov/Agencies/Federal/Executive.shtml. While foreign affairs often fall under the jurisdiction of the Executive Branch, funding efforts such as USAID can have an impact on the success or failure of United States involvement in other countries, and therefore, can be framed as a bill. Inspiration for legislative ideas can be found at thomas.loc.gov.

Writing an effective bill involves more time and research than researching one written by someone else. Students must ask themselves what the legislation does, who is involved (government agencies), where it happens, when it is feasible to take place and how much time is needed for implementation, and how it should be carried out (a plan of action). All of these questions must be answered in writing the sections of the bill, with thoughtful consideration as to how thoroughly each section explains its plank of implementing the overall bill’s plan of action.

A Bill to Establish a Specific Policy

- 1
- BE IT ENACTED BY THIS CONGRESS THAT:
- 2
- SECTION 1.

State the new policy in a brief declarative sentence, or in
- 3
- as few sentences as possible.
- 4
- SECTION 2.

Define any ambiguous terms inherent in the first section.
- 5
- SECTION 3.

Name the government agency that will oversee the
- 6
- enforcement of the bill along with the specific
- 7
- enforcement mechanism.
- 8
- SECTION 4.

Indicate the implementation date/timeframe.
- 9
- SECTION 5.

State that all other laws that are in conflict with this new
- 10
- policy shall hereby be declared null and void.

Introduced by Name of School

Resolutions are simply position statements on issues Congress does not have jurisdiction over (such as a foreign issue, although a bill can suggest foreign aid), or further action (such as amending the Constitution). Resolutions lack the force of law, and never establish enforcement.

Appropriate **topics** exhibit seriousness of purpose. The action proposed should be feasible, and such that the actual United States Congress might debate it. Topics should be debatable, meaning substantive argumentation exists on both sides. Legislation should be typed and double-spaced with line numbers, **not exceeding one page**. Capitalizing the words “WHEREAS” and “RESOLVED” in resolutions, and “SECTION” in bills, as well as inverse-indenting each clause or section helps to distinguish between ideas and concepts.

The samples above show proper formatting. In the resolution, note the semicolon, and how it precedes the word “and” at the end of each “whereas” clause, and the phrase “now, therefore, be it” at the end of the last “whereas” clause.

Note: Legislation that is submitted for consideration at the district and/or national tournament may be rejected if serious issues exist with the adherence to these guidelines.

Templates for bills, resolutions, and resolutions to amend the Constitution are available online at www.speechanddebate.org/legislation-templates/.

A Resolution to Urge Further Action on a Specific Issue

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------|--|
| 1 | WHEREAS, | State the current problem (this needs to be accomplished |
| 2 | | in one brief sentence); and |
| 3 | WHEREAS, | Describe the scope of the problem cited in the first |
| 4 | | whereas clause (this clause needs to flow logically from the |
| 5 | | first); and |
| 6 | WHEREAS, | Explain the impact and harms allowed by the current |
| 7 | | problem (once again, the clause needs to flow in a logical |
| 8 | | sequence); now, therefore, be it |
| 9 | RESOLVED, | By this Congress that: state your recommendation for |
| 10 | | addressing the problem (this resolution should be a clear |
| 11 | | call for action); and, be it |
| 12 | FURTHER RESOLVED, | That (an <i>optional</i> additional recommendation; if not used, |
| 13 | | end the previous clause with a period). |

Introduced by Name of School

Congressional Debate Evidence Rules

7.1. Responsibilities of Contestants Reading Evidence in Congressional Debate

- A. **Evidence defined.** Debaters are responsible for the validity of all evidence they introduce in the debate. Evidence includes, but is not limited to: facts, statistics, or examples attributable to a specific, identifiable, authoritative source used to support a claim. Unattributed ideas are the opinion of the student competitor and are not evidence.
- B. **Oral source citation.** In all debate events, contestants are expected to, at a minimum, orally deliver the following when introducing evidence in a debate round: primary author(s)' name (last) and year of publication. **Any other information such as source, author's qualifications, etc., may be given, but is not required.** Should two or more quotations be used from the same source, the author and year must be given orally only for the first piece of evidence from that source. Subsequently, only the author's name is required. Oral citations do not substitute for the written source citation. The full written citation must be provided if requested by an opponent or judge.
- C. **Written source citation.** To the extent provided by the original source, a written source citation must include:
 - 1. Full name of primary author and/or editor
 - 2. Publication date
 - 3. Source
 - 4. Title of article
 - 5. Date accessed for digital evidence
 - 6. Full URL, if applicable
 - 7. Author qualifications
 - 8. Page number(s)
- D. **Paraphrasing, authoritative source versus general understanding.** If paraphrasing is used in a debate, the debater will be held to the same standard of citation and accuracy as if the entire text of the evidence were read. For example, if a debater references a specific theory by a specific author, the debater must also be able to provide an original source. If a debater were to reference social contract theory in general, that would not be an authoritative source that would require citation. However, if the debater references "John Locke's Social Contract," evidence would need to be available.
- E. **Ellipses prohibited.** In all debate events, the use of internal ellipsis (...) is prohibited **unless it is a replication of the original document.** Debaters may omit the reading of certain words; however, the text that is verbally omitted must be present in the text of what was read for

opposing debaters and/or judges to examine. The portions of the evidence read including where the debater begins and ends must be clearly marked (as outlined in 7.1.G.2.).

F. Availability of original source.

1. When challenged, the original source or copy of the relevant (as outlined in 7.1.F.2.) pages of evidence read in round must be available to the student making the challenge within two speeches. In all debate events, for reference, any evidence that is presented during the round must be made available to the opponent during the round if requested.
2. **Original source(s) defined.** Understanding that teams/individuals obtain their evidence in multiple ways, the original source for evidence may include, but is not limited solely to, one of the following:
 - a. Accessing the live or displaying a copy of a web page (teams/individuals may access the internet to provide this information if requested).
 - b. A copy of the page(s) the evidence is on, the page preceding, and the page following, or the actual printed (book, periodical, pamphlet, etc.) source.
 - c. Copies or electronic versions of published handbooks (i.e., Baylor Briefs; Planet Debate, etc.).
 - d. Electronic or printed versions or the web page for a debate institute or the NDCA sponsored Open Evidence Project or similar sites.
3. Debaters, even if they have acquired the evidence other than by original research, are still responsible for the content and accuracy of the evidence they present and/or read.

G. Distinguishing between which parts of each piece of evidence are and are not read in a particular round. In all debate events, debaters must mark their evidence in two ways:

1. Oral delivery of each piece of evidence must be identified by a clear oral pause or by saying phrases such as “quote/unquote” or “mark the card.” The use of a phrase is definitive and may be preferable to debaters. Clear, oral pauses are left solely to the discretion of the judge(s) and parliamentarian.
2. The written text must be marked to clearly indicate the portions read in the debate. In the written text the standard practices of underlining what is read, or highlighting what is read, and/or minimizing what is unread, is definitive and may be preferable to debaters. The clarity of other means of marking evidence is left to the discretion of the judge.

H. Private communication prohibited. Private, personal correspondence or communication between an author and the debater is inadmissible as evidence.

7.2. Definitions of Evidence Violations in Congressional Debate

- A. “Distortion” exists when the textual evidence itself contains added and/or deleted word(s), which significantly alters the conclusion of the author (e.g., **deleting ‘not’**; **adding** the word **‘not’**). Additionally, failure to bracket added words would be considered distortion of evidence.
- B. “Non-existent evidence” means one or more of the following:
 - 1. The debater citing the evidence is unable to provide the original source or copy of the relevant pages when requested by their opponent, judge, or tournament official.
 - 2. The original source provided does not contain the evidence cited.
 - 3. The evidence is paraphrased but lacks an original source to verify the accuracy of the paraphrasing.
 - 4. The debater is in possession of the original source, but declines to provide it to a student who challenges, the chair, or the parliamentarian upon request.
- C. “Clipping” occurs when the debater claims to have read the complete text of highlighted and/or underlined evidence when, in fact, the contestant skips or omits portions of evidence.
- D. “Straw argument”

A “straw argument” is a position or argumentative claim introduced by an author for the purpose of refuting, discrediting or characterizing it. Reliance on a straw argument occurs in a debate round when a debater asserts incorrectly that the author supports or endorses the straw argument as their own position.

Note: A debater who acknowledges using a “straw argument” when verbally first read in the round, would **not** be misrepresenting evidence. However, if the debater fails to acknowledge the use of a “straw argument” and their opponent questions the use of such an argument, then that debater has committed an evidence violation.

7.3. Procedures for Raising Evidence Questions During a Congressional Debate Session

The procedures for making an In-round evidence question are as follows:

- A. Congressional Debate entries must rise to a point of information after a speech to formally request a copy of the evidence cited, the citation, or the original source of evidence. When requested during the point of information, the presiding officer will instruct the debater being challenged to produce the copy of the evidence, citation, or original source. The debater being challenged must produce the requested materials in a timely fashion. Should a debater feel they are not receiving the information they requested in a timely fashion, they may rise to another point of information for the presiding officer and parliamentarian to address the situation.
- B. Debaters who request the information may receive the evidence from the presiding officer within a period of two speeches. The round would not be put on hold for the request to be completed. For example, if a debater rises to a point of order after speech #4, then by the conclusion of speech #6, the requested evidence should be presented to the presiding officer.

- C. If after reviewing the evidence in question, a debater feels that an evidence violation has occurred, they may submit a formal allegation by completing an evidence challenge form (see Appendix) and, after making a motion to approach the chair, the debater will present the form to the presiding officer and parliamentarian.

7.4. Penalties for Resolving Evidence Violations During Congressional Debate

- A. All evidence challenges must occur during the session of Congressional Debate where an alleged violation took place, and should happen before a vote on the pending legislation. If the concern arises during the last cycle of speeches, the parliamentarian may grant a challenge after the vote, prior to the first speech on a new piece of legislation.
- B. Parliamentarians are responsible for resolving disputes between debaters regarding oral citations (7.1.B.); and written source citations (7.1.C.). When the parliamentarian has such a dispute in the round, the parliamentarian must submit the protest form to the tabulation committee. All protest forms will be submitted to the tabulation committee.
 - 1. The parliamentarian will determine the legitimacy of the challenge, and if the parliamentarian considers the request justified, the debater making the allegation will move a point of order to address the allegation to the chamber.
 - 2. The debater being challenged will be recognized by the presiding officer for a response to the evidence violation.
 - 3. The parliamentarian will evaluate the legitimacy and severity of the charge and make a recommendation to the presiding officer for action. The recommendation may be charged against either student involved in the dispute. Depending upon the severity of the offense, the parliamentarian may opt to censure the debater(s). Refer to section 7.5. for an outline of the severity of offenses and corresponding actions.
 - 4. The presiding officer will announce the parliamentarian's decision and recognize either/both debaters for consequent action.
- C. Procedures for Appealing the Parliamentarian's Decision
 - 1. An appeal can only be made if the issue-in-question has been raised, by a student, in the round. Appeals may only be made if the parliamentarian has misapplied, misinterpreted, or ignored a rule.
 - 2. A coach or school-affiliated adult representative must notify the tabulation committee of intent to submit an appeal of the parliamentarian's ruling within 20 minutes of the end of session as recorded by the Parliamentarian for that chamber.
 - a. The coach must submit the post-round appeal to the tabulation committee within 10 minutes of the formal notification of the intent to appeal. The allegation must be in writing and articulate the specific evidence violation and ruling that is being challenged.

- b. If the tabulation committee determines the appeal has merit, both parties involved in the original dispute will be given 20 minutes to respond.
 - c. The tabulation committee will make a decision and has the discretion of extending the time limits for these actions if circumstances do not allow a coach or school-affiliated adult to be available within the prescribed time limits.
3. At the district tournament level, the tabulation committee's decision to disqualify a student's rankings for that session can be appealed by the coach or school-affiliated adult. The following procedure should be followed:
- a. The appeal must be submitted in writing to the tabulation committee within 10 minutes of the notification to disqualify.
 - b. The tabulation committee will then submit the appeal to the national office representative(s). The committee will contact the national office representative once the written appeal has been received. Both sides will be able to provide written explanations and supporting evidence to defend their individual side.
 - c. A decision will be rendered in a timely manner. The decision of the national office representative shall be final and cannot be appealed.
 - d. No elimination session may occur before a ruling is made by the national office.
 - e. If the appeal is successful, any student(s) involved will receive the appropriate rank as if the evidence challenge was never called into question.
 - f. At the National Tournament, the appeal will go directly to the Rules Protest Panel, and accepted procedures and practices will be followed.

7.5. Penalties for Evidence Violations in Congressional Debate

- A. If the parliamentarian determines that an entry has violated one of the rules listed in 7.1(A-D, F-H) (oral citation, written citation, indication of parts of card read or not read, use of private communication), the parliamentarian must notify the judge(s) of the violation. The judge(s) and parliamentarian may at their discretion disregard the evidence, diminish the credibility given to the evidence, take the violation into account (solely or partially) in the ranking of chamber participants, or take no action. These offenses are considered minor and a parliamentarian sanction is the only prescribed penalty.
- B. If a debater(s) commits an evidence violation of "distortion" (7.2.A.), uses "nonexistent evidence" (7.2.B.), uses a "straw argument" (7.2.C.) or the use of "ellipses" (7.1.E.) such action will result in the debater(s) committing the evidence violation not being ranked by the judge(s) and parliamentarian. These offenses are considered major and censure by the parliamentarian would be applied.
- C. Evidence infractions violate the Code of Honor. Depending on the severity, an offense may result in the notification of said offense to the contestant's high school administration and chapter

advisor, loss of all District and/or National Tournament merit points, including trophy and sweepstakes points for the offending student(s), and/or revocation of Association membership. These decisions would be left to the NSDA national office, and not the individual tabulation committee.

7.6. Tournament Adjustments in Congressional Debate

- A. Under no circumstance will a tournament or part of a tournament be re-run because of a violation of these rules.
- B. In the case of censure, all ranks and decisions made prior to the start of the round being protested stand and no revision of past session ranks will take place. Penalties listed in 7.4. will be applied.
- C. When a session has been held between the session being appealed and a final decision regarding the protest, the result of that session will be recorded as follows:
 - 1. If the protest is upheld, all ranks and scores will remain as recorded. The evidence violation would apply only to the session in which it occurred and not affect prior or subsequent sessions.
 - 2. If the appeal is upheld, the judge and/or parliamentarian will restore any ranks and scores that were earned by that debater.

Original Oratory (OO)

- 1. **Purpose:** The general purpose of the speech is to persuade. Any other purpose such as to inform or entertain shall be secondary.
- 2. **Contest:** This contest comprises only memorized orations actually composed by the contestants and not used by them during a previous contest season. No visual aids are permitted.
- 3. **Subject:** Any appropriate subject may be used, but the orator must be truthful. Any non-factual reference, especially a personal one, must be so identified.
- 4. **Length:** The time limit in Original Oratory is ten minutes with a 30-second “grace period.” If there are multiple judges in the round, all must agree that the student has gone beyond the grace period. Should a student go beyond the grace period, the student may not be ranked 1st. There is no other prescribed penalty for going over the grace period. The ranking is up to each individual judge’s discretion. Judges who choose to time are to use accurate (stopwatch function) timing devices. No minimum time is mandated.
- 5. **Quotation:** Not more than 150 words of the oration may be direct quotation from any other speech or writing and such quotations must be identified in a printed copy of the oration supplied prior to registration. Extensive paraphrasing from other sources is prohibited.
- 6. **Script:** The orator's script must identify the quoted materials, state the number of quoted words,