



Colonial Williamsburg

Congress Judges Guide

Your Role

You evaluate individual speeches on their merit as persuasive, well-constructed arguments. You are **not** scoring overall participation. That is the Chair/Speaker's job. Your focus is purely on speech quality.

Ballot Basics

Fill in the top of your ballot completely. You can pre-fill some of the information on a stack of ballots before the tournament starts to save time later.

Note that the first speech on each bill is given by the sponsor/author and is known as an authorship speech. Please check the box on your form designating that the speech is an authorship speech to help the Speaker's Office in properly tabulating results.

The scoring scale is 1-25 points.

What You Are Evaluating

1. Argumentation & Analysis

Strong speeches demonstrate:

- Clear thesis that directly addresses whether the bill should pass/fail
- Logical reasoning that connects claims to conclusions
- Anticipation and refutation of counterarguments
- Strategic framing that advances their position
- Understanding of the bill's implications and context

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- Extends previously made arguments or adds new compelling ones

Weak speeches demonstrate:

- Unclear position or meandering argumentation
- Assertions without reasoning ("this bill is good because it is good")
- Ignoring obvious counterarguments
- Misunderstanding the bill's actual provisions
- Generic talking points disconnected from this specific legislation
- Reiterates previously made arguments without adding anything new

2. Evidence & Research

Strong speeches demonstrate:

- Specific, relevant evidence (historical examples, data, expert testimony)
- Proper contextualization of evidence (when, where, why it matters)
- Period-appropriate references (1750-1769) when relevant
- Integration of evidence into argumentation, not just listing facts
- Credible sourcing (even if implicit)

Weak speeches demonstrate:

- Vague generalities ("everyone knows," "studies show," "many people say")
- Anachronistic references (citing things that have not happened yet)
- Evidence dumps without an explanation of relevance
- Fabricated or implausible "evidence"
- No factual support whatsoever

3. Organization & Structure

Strong speeches demonstrate:

- Clear introduction that previews the argument
- Logical progression through the main points
- Effective transitions between ideas
- Strategic ordering (strongest points first or last)
- Conclusion that reinforces thesis without mere repetition

Weak speeches demonstrate:

- No clear introduction or roadmap
- Random jumping between unrelated points
- Abrupt transitions or no transitions
- Burying the main argument
- Trailing off without a conclusion

4. Delivery & Presence

Strong speeches demonstrate:

- Confident, conversational tone appropriate to a legislative chamber
- Effective vocal variety (pace, volume, emphasis)
- Natural gestures and movement
- Strong eye contact with the chamber (not just the Chair)
- Professional demeanor befitting the setting

Weak speeches demonstrate:

- Monotone or robotic reading
- Excessive filler words or vocal hesitations
- Distracting mannerisms or total stillness
- Staring at notes or avoiding eye contact
- Inappropriate tone (too casual or overly theatrical)

What You Are Not Evaluating

You may not factor any of the following into your scores: gender, race, disability, culture, appearance, sexual identity, religion, accent, or similar factors of personal identity.

Scoring Guidelines

21-25: Excellent

Compelling, well-researched speech with sophisticated argumentation. Clear command of the material. Persuasive delivery. Would influence votes.

16-20: Strong

Solid speech with clear arguments and decent evidence. Well-organized. Competent delivery. Makes valid points effectively.

11-15: Adequate

Basic speech that makes its point but lacks depth. Some logical gaps or weak evidence. Acceptable but not memorable delivery.

6-10: Weak

Fundamentally flawed speech. Unclear arguments or poor reasoning. Little evidence. Organizational problems. Delivery issues that interfere with the message.

1-5: Very Weak

A complete and utter trainwreck. Incoherent arguments, no evidence, severe delivery problems. Does not meet basic standards.

Special Considerations

Authorship Speeches

Apply the same criteria, but recognize that authors should:

- Demonstrate deep understanding of their own bill
- Present the strongest possible case for passage
- Anticipate major objections
- Set the tone for the entire debate

Do not inflate scores just because it is an authorship.

Question Periods

You do **not** score questions or answers to questions. However, strong answers during the Q&A after authorship speeches can demonstrate a competitor's command of their material—you may consider this when evaluating their overall authorship speech quality.

Amendment Speeches

Brief speeches proposing or debating amendments (typically 1 minute) are **not scored** by you.

Closing Speeches

Optional closing speeches by bill sponsors are **not scored**. These are strategic opportunities for authors, not evaluated performances.

Party Affiliation

Do **not** consider party affiliation in your scoring. A Loyalist speech supporting Crown authority and a Patriot speech opposing it should be evaluated purely on speech quality, not ideology. You are judging argumentation, not politics.

Voting Records

Do **not** penalize competitors for how they vote or what bills they support/oppose. Your job is to evaluate speeches, not legislative strategy. A competitor who gives a brilliant speech against a bill, then votes for it to prevent gridlock, still deserves the high speech score.

Ballot Management

Complete each ballot immediately after each speech. Include:

- Competitor name and speech type (authorship/regular/pro/con)
- Numeric score
- Brief written comment explaining the score

Your comments help competitors improve and provide accountability for your scoring. Note specific strengths and areas for improvement. Three to four sentences is a good goal, but you can write more. Less is often not enough detail for the competitor to learn from.

At session end:

- Verify you have scored the minimum required speeches for each competitor
- Give zero scores for any missing required speeches
- Submit all ballots to the clerk
- Do not discuss scores with competitors or other judges

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Do not score based on agreement: Your personal views on whether the militia bill is necessary are irrelevant. Score the quality of the argument, not whether you would vote for it.

Do not compare to other speeches: Each speech is scored independently, not ranked against others. The session could have ten excellent speeches, all scoring 20+.

Do not penalize brevity: A crisp, efficient 90-second speech can be stronger than a rambling 2-minute speech. Score quality, not length. That said, if you feel they could have gone deeper or provided more analysis had they used more time, that is worth noting too.

Do not overlook fundamentals: Brilliant analysis delivered inaudibly or incomprehensibly deserves a reduced score. Communication matters.

Do not get distracted by performance: A theatrical delivery with weak argumentation should score lower than solid reasoning delivered plainly. Substance over style, but both matter.