

## 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 “dilatory.” 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 dilatory.
    - 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 2026 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.