Policy Debate FAQ

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Please Leave in the Room

Team Policy Debate Judge Frequently Asked Questions

These FAQs and the attendant answers are intended to help you as the judge work through the most common issues in a debate round. If you desire more detailed background information, it is available at www.ccadebate.org; select the "Debate" and follow the debate document links at the bottom of the page.

1. What do I do if the students claim that a rule has been violated?

In the event of an alleged rule violation that you are unsure of, simply take careful note of the accusation and seek out the debate judge orienteer at the tournament. They or the tournament director will be able to help you evaluate any rule infractions.

2. On what basis do I judge the debate?

In matters of ethics, the judge is asked to evaluate the students' argumentation using the knowledge and wisdom they possess as the teacher in the round.

In the event of a perceived intentional ethical violation, the judge has the authority to issue any penalty up to and including a loss of the round for the violation. If you deem it necessary to issue a loss, please consult with the tournament director prior to handing in your ballot.

The judge is asked to only render a decision on the basis of the arguments *presented in the round*, and to refrain from using personal knowledge or insight of the topic or arguments presented as a criterion for the decision.

If a team makes an argument that you through personal knowledge know to be incorrect, and the opposing team fails to address the incorrect argument, you should treat the incorrect argument as valid within the round. It is helpful to tell the students about the argument on your ballot. Both teams will benefit from this information; the team that made the argument will see the error, and the team that failed to address it will see the missed opportunity. However, the win/loss should be based *only* on the student in- round arguments.

The measurement mechanism we use is called the stock issues and is covered elsewhere in these FAQs.

3. What are stock issues and how do I apply them?

The stock issues are the criterion upon which your decision should be based unless there is an ethical violation that overrides them. The four stock issues are like the legs of a stool; the affirmative team must build the stool with all four legs intact to win; the negative team only needs to kick out one of the four legs to win.

Inherency

The affirmative must prove the relationship between the status quo and the probability of future harm or inability of the status quo to fully meet a specific goal. The affirmative team must prove that each significant harm or unachieved goal that it identifies is built into the essential nature of the status quo such as through legal structures or societal attitudes, and that the needs identified by the affirmative can only be met by adopting the affirmative case.

Significance

The degree of importance or impact attached to an issue. The affirmative must prove that the essential elements of the case are quantitatively and/or qualitatively important. The distinction between qualitative and quantitative can be debated in the round. Whether or not both are necessary, which matters more, and whether the affirmative case does in fact bring up significant harms are issues.

Disadvantages are arguments brought up by the negative team that are not in the affirmative case but do oppose it. A disadvantage is usually designed to show a problem that would be caused by the affirmative case if it were enacted. Such arguments must also be weighed into consideration when deciding if the affirmative plan has solved significant harms. If the disadvantages of passing the affirmative plan outweigh the benefits, the affirmative has lost the round.

Solvency

The ability of a plan to work and to solve or significantly reduce the harm(s) identified by the affirmative.

The affirmative plan must successfully solve or at least reduce in a significant manner the problems the affirmative presents or the affirmative identification of a problem is useless. The negative can attack this issue both by showing that the plan will not solve the harms sufficiently, or that it simply cannot be enacted as stated by the affirmative.

Topicality

Topicality is the state of conformity to the debate resolution. A plan is topical if it justifies the resolution as a direct result of the planks in the plan that implements the resolution.

Topicality must be brought up in the first negative constructive speech if it is to be considered in the round. If the issue of Topicality is raised, the judge must vote on it after the cross-examination period following the second negative constructive. If the judge decides that the affirmative case is non-topical, the

round ends and the negative team wins the round. If the judge determines that the Affirmative case is topical, no further topicality arguments are permitted.

Do not hesitate to make a topicality decision because it is awkward to end the round abruptly. This is done so that the affirmative team has an opportunity to correct the flaws in their plan prior to the next round. If we were to allow the round to continue, the team would not know of their problem until the completion of the tournament.

To recap the stock issues:

The affirmative must be topical -- they must fulfill the intent of the resolution; they must be significant -- their plan must be weighty enough to justify the risk of changing the system; the plan must be inherent -- the issues cannot or will not be solved without the affirmative case; and they must be solvent -- the case presented must solve for the problems presented.

4. Topicality is confusing, how do I know if a case is topical?

The affirmative team must *satisfy* the following regarding topicality. (Whether or not the plan *succeeds* in doing these things is a question of solvency, significance, or inherency.)

- **The United States Federal Government**
- **must attempt to reform its policy or policies for the regulation of**
- **non-agricultural wastewater discharge into navigable waters**

The affirmative case must satisfy ALL the above for a topical case. If a case does not do ALL of these, it is not topical.

One final note -- the affirmative team should enter the round prepared to show how and why their case fulfills the resolution. In the event of a topicality challenge, the affirmative must *convince you, the judge,* that their case is topical; it is not enough that they believe it to be so. The negative team must convince you that the affirmative team did not try to do the things that the resolution calls for. Your decision needs to be based on the arguments that the students make, not what you believe to be true about the case.

5. What does it mean that a case must be prima facie?

An affirmative team also has the responsibility to present a prima facie case in their first constructive speech -- a case that in and of itself provides good and sufficient reason for adopting the resolution. It must provide effective issue statements to answer each of the stock issue questions. If this burden is not met, the negative has the responsibility to bring this up in their first constructive. The judge may not stop a round but should allow the round to finish before deciding based on this issue.

The failure to have a prima facie case is a failure to fulfill the stock issues, and a failure

to overcome negative presumption in the first affirmative speech.

6. What if neither team convinces me?

First, be certain you are basing your decision on the arguments the students made in the round, not your personal stance on the issues.

Presumption is the term we use for approval given based on assumptions always in favor of the status quo, (negative team), because change is assumed to be bad. It is the job of the affirmative to overcome presumption and prove the need for change.

Presumption simply means that if the affirmative has not made the case for change, then the negative would win. (Remember; this is to be based solely on the arguments made by the students in the round)

7. Who has the responsibility to prove what they are saying?

The Burden of Proof is an obligation of the affirmative, in order to overcome presumption; to give good and sufficient reasons for affirming the resolution.

The obligation to respond to opposing arguments, (applies to affirmative and negative), is called a burden of proof or the burden of rejoinder. Failure to fulfill the burden of rejoinder results in the acceptance of the unrefuted argument. On this basis, an argument dropped is won by the opposing team.

As you can see, both teams have a responsibility to prove or justify their arguments.

8. What does it mean to drop an argument?

Any arguments not addressed by the opposition in the subsequent speech are awarded to the presenter. The primary reason is to prevent a team from creating a moving target by dropping arguments in alternating speeches. Allowing arguments to be dropped and picked back up also prevents meaningful clash. Additionally, the person who drops an argument has failed to fulfill their burden of rejoinder on that point. Teams may strategically drop or concede minor arguments for purposes of focusing on those they think are stronger, so the fact that a team drops arguments does not mean it should lose the round.

9. What am I to look for when evaluating the speaker points?

Detailed descriptions of each of the speaker point categories are provided below. Speakers are to be given points, one (1) being low and four (4) being high in each of the following categories within the round.

Organization

A well-organized speech has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. It uses main points, transitions, signposts, internal previews (a statement in the body of the speech that lets the audience know what the speaker is going to discuss next), and internal summaries (a statement in the body of the speech that summarizes the speaker's preceding point or points) which will enable the listener to understand the thesis and its development in the speech. Organization utilizes harmony, unity, correlation, arrangement, and classification. Each speech should be systematic and methodical.

Organization also refers to the effective use of time by a speaker or team.

Argumentation

Argumentation is challenging the opponents' points by showing flaws or weaknesses in their arguments, overcoming the opponents' arguments, and re-explaining or rebuilding one's own arguments.

A well-argued presentation includes tearing down an opponent's case by refuting their evidence with stronger, more credible, and current evidence, as well as challenging the opponents' justification with stronger, clearer, logical reasoning using direct refutation, linking arguments, and showing the significance of arguments.

Argumentation implements appeal, explanation, illustrations, evidence, and logic.

Cross-examination

One member of the opposing team stands side-by-side with his opponent and directly questions the opponent about the case.

An effective cross examination will employ assertive, thoughtful, pertinent questions and responses. The ability to think and respond spontaneously without much preparation time is an important facet of cross-examination.

Cross examinations provide the opportunity to investigate, clarify, and interrogate using the following types of questions:

- *Question of Fact*: A question about the truth or falsity of an assertion.
- *Question of Value*: A question about the worth, rightness, or morality of an idea or action.
- *Question of Policy:* A question about whether a specific course of action should or should not be taken.

- *Question of Clarification*: A question about a specific assertion made in the speech. E.g., "When you said ___, did you mean to include ____?" or "Does you mandate to repeal ___ include the repeal of ____?"

Justification

Is there a fundamental problem or need that requires a change from current policy? Is this problem widespread and is it significant enough to require change? A well-justified speech will present evidence and reasoning in a winsome manner by using Aristotle's theory of the Available Means of Persuasion: logos (logical appeal), pathos (emotional appeal), and ethos (the speaker's character or presence).

Justification applies reason, defense, explanation, influence, and plausibility.

Communication

A well-communicated speech sounds spontaneous and genuine no matter how many times it has been rehearsed and makes use of vocal techniques – including changes in a speaker's rate, pitch, and volume – that give the voice variety and expressiveness. In addition, effective verbal communication is characterized by proper pronunciation and enunciation. The second facet of communication is the use of non-verbal communication. This communication occurs because of appearance, posture, gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, and other non-linguistic factors.

Communication is meaningful delivery which includes description, expression, reception, summary, information, accessibility, and conversational tone.

10. Do I keep track of time for the speakers?

Timing will be done by the competitors and will be done on the honor system. Every competitor must have a countdown timer with an audible alarm (two timers per team.) One timer will be taken with them to the podium for their speech. The other timer, to keep track of prep time**,** remains at the table. Before a team takes prep time, they must inform the judge; for example, "the negative team is now taking prep time," and then announce how much prep time remains: "the negative stopping prep time with two minutes remaining."

11. What is the purpose of the ethics box on the ballot, and how should I fill it out?

CCA believes that academic policy debate should be a practical, educational experience that first and foremost is glorifying to God, while reflecting the stylistic and analytical skills that should be rewarded in typical public forums (i.e., church, courts, congress, the classroom, and civic gatherings).

In matters of ethics, the judge is asked to evaluate the students' argumentation using the knowledge and wisdom they possess, as the teacher in the round. Conduct and attire should reflect respect for other participants, the debate activity, and the mission of the CCA. Participants are encouraged to err on the side of caution, do everything decently and in order (1 Cor .14:40, 1 Cor. 16:14), and avoid even the appearance of wrongdoing (1 Thess. 5:22).

While it is impossible to determine the motives of the students, you *should* judge the appearance of their presentation. If a student is misrepresenting an argument (be it their own or an opponent's), or evidence, you need to evaluate if it is blatantly intentional or merely a misunderstanding. Do not hesitate to tell a student that their presentation appears unethical even if you are uncertain that it is intentional. In these circumstances, no penalty should be issued.

Other ethical issues include but are not limited to abusive argumentation (style or content), profane language, immodest attire, falsification of evidence, and rude behavior.

In the event of a perceived intentional ethical violation, the judge has the authority to issue any penalty up to and including a loss of the round for the violation. If you deem it necessary to issue a loss, please consult with tournament director prior to handing in your ballot.

12. What is expected of me during the oral critique?

We encourage you to offer a brief oral critique at the end of the round to help the students improve throughout the course of the tournament. This critique should not reveal your decision but rather should highlight the weaknesses and strengths of the speakers and their arguments. This critique may include:

1. A review of the progress of the debate.
2. Examples of effective application of argumentation principles.
3. Suggestions for improvement in argumentation and delivery.

The students should time the oral critique using their own timers in the same countdown fashion they will use for their speeches.

13. How do I fill out the ballot?

The ballot is the record of the round that is used by students, coaches, tournament directors, and parents to guide the student in evaluation and further study. An effective ballot should do the following:

1. Record the decision on each of the four stock issues.

2. Record the decision on the debate. Remember, the affirmative must win all four stock issues to be awarded the win in the debate round; the negative need only win one stock issue to win the round.
3. Explain the reason(s) for the decision.
4. Record the points given each speaker in each of the five-speaker criteria.
5. Record the total number of points given for each speaker.
6. Rank the speakers: The speaker with the highest total speaker points should be ranked first, the speaker with the second highest total speaker points should be ranked second, and so on. In the event of a tie in the total speaker points between two or more speakers, the judge shall break the tie using his/her own discretion. Ties in speaker ranks are prohibited.
7. Provide a written critique of the round and the debaters.

A judge quiet room will be provided for you to sit and complete your ballot. It is most important to the students that you tell them *why* they won or lost, and *how* they can improve.

Be sure to turn the ballot in at the designated ballot return station and wait for the personnel there to check the ballot for completeness prior to leaving.

14. Is judging debate difficult?

Judging debate is comprised of one quite easy component and one that is difficult.

- Your decision will always be supported. (Easy)
- Judge on what is argued in the round, not your knowledge or beliefs about the policies being debated. (Difficult)

As a judge, you have complete control of the round. Your decision in favor of one team or the other is the rule of law for the debaters, and it will stand. You are always right, in effect. This brings responsibility too, of course, for you want to make a good decision. Consider this quotation to help you with the concept of "always right."

> *"We are not final because we are infallible, but we are infallible only because we are final*." Brown v. Allen, 344 U.S. 443, 540 (1953), at 540 (Jackson, J. concurring)."

The judge *must* render a decision *based only* on the arguments presented in the round and *must* refrain from using personal knowledge or insight into the topic or arguments presented as a criterion for the decision.

The proper way to evaluate the students' arguments is not whether you liked what they had to say**,** but whether their argument was well made, even though you may have disagreed. Using the metric of an argument well made, you can avoid an improper conclusion that comes naturally because of the tendency to be convinced more easily of things we agree with than of those we disagree with.

Example: If you believe small government is good and large government is bad, it is very easy for a student to convince you of the limited government position, and nearly impossible for the opposition to convince you that central command and control is desirable.

15. Is the debate all about who has the best idea for public policy?

Debate within our league is an exercise in argumentation, not in policy making. The reason for this emphasis comes back to the purpose for debate, which is educational. As the judge, you are there to assist an exercise in argumentation, one which bears fruit in the training of students. You are not to vote for the team whose arguments you personally agree with. For the debate to be good training for argumentation, you must judge the students' arguments *independent* of your view of their respective strengths and weaknesses in the real world.

This is not a legislative session, nor even a mock legislature, it is a debate round. It is limited to certain material so that the focus will remain on the training, not the tools for that training. If debate were about the best policy, once that policy was found, every round would end in an automatic affirmative win, making the exercise pointless.

16. What topic will the students argue about?

The students' arguments will revolve around this year's resolution which was presented during the judge orientation.

The resolution serves two principal functions in the debate round:

- It limits the discussion
- It exposes students to timeless policy issues

While an issue must be discussed for the debaters to practice and to learn, the resolution severely limits the scope of that discussion. Were the topic choices endless, it would be impossible for the students to adequately prepare to have intelligent discussion and learn proper argumentation skills.

These topics are not chosen at random; they are selected from issues that are timeless, have affected society for centuries, and will continue to do so. This exposes students to policy issues, a secondary benefit of debate.

17. What kind of notes should I take?

Note taking in the debate round is referred to as flowing. Flowing is the taking of notes in a systematic fashion to track the arguments made in the round. It is necessary for the judge to fairly examine all the arguments and to make sure that each team did not drop

arguments. You have been provided with a flow sheet that will assist you in this process. By taking notes in the vertical column allotted to each speech, you will see the flow of the arguments across the page. The flow sheet contains hints and reminders to help you with the process.

18. What is the role of evidence, and how should the students give it?

Evidence is the raw material of argumentation. It consists of facts and qualified opinions used to generate proof. The advocate brings together the raw materials, and by the process of reasoning, produces new conclusions.

Critical thinking cannot occur without sound evidence. The use of evidence is not limited to debate although debate provides an excellent way to learn about and apply evidence. Even in unstructured disputes in informal settings, individuals must necessarily seek evidence.

Students must give a citation for the evidence they present. It must include the source, author, and date of publication.

Analysis, explanation, and appeals to common sense are appropriate argumentative strategy; however, statements not developed, applied, and supported are mere assertions.

The students have the right to request and receive opponents' evidence for review during their prep time. The judge also has the right to review evidence, but doing so should be reserved for extreme situations, such as in the event of an ethical charge regarding evidence.