NATIONAL SPEECH & DEBATE ASSOCIATION

Judge Paradigm Standards

High school debate serves as a dynamic platform where young learners explore diverse perspectives and ideas, challenging their intellectual boundaries. Judges play a pivotal role in fostering an environment where students can be free to test these ideas.

An open-minded and considerate approach from judges is essential to encourage young students to delve into topics from various angles without fear of bias. This environment not only allows students to refine their debating skills but also cultivates a broader understanding of complex issues, nurturing critical thinking and effective communication skills that extend beyond the realm of debate. Ultimately, a judge's open-mindedness becomes the catalyst for a rich educational experience, where students are empowered to question and analyze important issues from multiple perspectives.

However, we acknowledge that all judges have pre-existing beliefs, values, and backgrounds that influence how they are best persuaded. Aristotle, a foundational thinker on rhetoric and persuasion, had a model of communication known as the "rhetorical triangle." It consists of three main elements: the speaker's credibility (ethos), appeal to the audience (pathos), and a well-constructed message (logos). In this model, the audience is considered an essential part of the communication process. According to Aristotle, the speaker should acknowledge that audiences' experiences and values influence their reception of messages, and thus, their ability to be persuaded.

As a communication activity, debate involves students striving to persuade a judge to support their side. Because an essential element of persuasion lies in the ability to adjust communication to resonate with the audience, especially when their audience has differing levels of experience in competitive debate, the judge's paradigm serves as a tool for judges to articulate their background and experience that may be relevant to judging a debate. Students often craft arguments designed to appeal broadly, and their strategic choices in an individual round may consider what will be most compelling to their specific audience.

As you gain more experience judging, your preferences will likely change! The paradigm is meant to be a living document that is reviewed and updated as your experience changes. This resource is intended to help you write and modify your paradigm over time.

Consider including the following items in your paradigm:

1. **What is your experience level?** Have you been actively coaching or judging, and how long? How often have you judged rounds on this topic?
2. **Describe your preferences as they relate to debaters' rate of delivery and use of** jargon or technical language.
3. **Describe your personal note-taking during the round.** Do you write down key arguments? Keep a rigorous flow?
4. **Do you value argument over style? Style over argument? Argument and style equally?** Are there certain delivery styles that are more persuasive to you?
5. **What are the specific criteria you consider** when assessing a debate?
6. If you have judged before, **how would you describe the arguments you find most persuasive** in previous debate rounds?
7. **What expectations do you have for debaters' in-round conduct?**

In your paradigm, do NOT include:

1. **Preferences unrelated to the content and quality of debaters' arguments.** Avoid sharing preferences related to students' attire, use of technology, or other items that may be out of the student's control. While it is okay to share preferences related to in-round conduct in your paradigm, like a desire for the students to be respectful, be aware that most issues of inappropriate conduct should be handled by tournament officials.
2. **Preferences that reward debaters for things beyond their argumentation in the round.** It is not appropriate to say you will reward debaters who bring you snacks, skip grand crossfire, or quote your favorite musician.
3. **Absolutes related to argument preference.** Instead of saying you will never vote for a debater who speaks quickly, try sharing that you prefer debaters speak at a conversational rate and that a fast rate of delivery has made it difficult for you to understand arguments in the past. Instead of saying that you hate judging theoretical arguments, share that you find arguments grounded in real-world impacts to be the most persuasive. Your paradigm should not shut down types of argumentation or share what types of debate you will or will not allow; it should share what types of debates you find persuasive and what arguments may help a debater receive better speaker points.
4. **Specific biases about the topic or argument content.** We acknowledge that some topics may elicit strong reactions; providing a space where different points of view are valued can cultivate civil discourse that positively addresses issues in our communities.
5. **Language that is not tailored for young students.** Debate is an activity that occurs in an educational setting. Even if you only judge debates for high school or college students, remember that Tabroom.com is a site frequented by minors, including middle school debaters.

The NSDA monitors paradigms on Tabroom.com. Paradigms that fail to meet these standards may be modified or removed, and we will work with judges to make revisions when needed. If you have concerns about the content of a paradigm, please email *info@speechanddebate.org*.

Judge Paradigm Guide

As you write your paradigm, remember the principles of judging that contribute to making students' debate experience fair, educational, and enjoyable.

1. IMPARTIALITY

- **Objective Evaluation:** Judge each debate based on the arguments presented, not personal opinions or biases.
- **Equitable Treatment:** Ensure all participants are treated equitably, regardless of their style, background, or reputation.

NOTE: At an NSDA sponsored event, if a judge cites their personal or political beliefs as the basis for their decision on their ballot, that decision will be overturned and the judge will be removed from the tournament.

2. ACTIVE LISTENING

- **Attention to Arguments:** Pay close attention to the content and structure of arguments.
- **Note-Taking:** Keep detailed notes to accurately recall and assess the points made by each side.

3. OPEN-MINDEDNESS

- **Receptiveness to Ideas:** Be open to diverse perspectives and arguments.
- **Avoiding Pre-judgment:** Refrain from making assumptions about arguments or debaters before they are present.

4. FAIRNESS

- **Consistency:** Apply the same standards and rules to all teams in the debate.
- **Rule Adherence:** Ensure all participants adhere to the format and rules of the debate.

5. RESPECT

- **Respectful Interaction:** Treat all participants with kindness and courtesy.
- **Respectful Conduct:** Maintain a demeanor that upholds the educational and competitive spirit of debate.

6. ADAPTABILITY

- **Flexibility in Judging:** Be adaptable to different debating styles and strategies.
- **Responsiveness to Context:** Understand and adjust to the specific context and level of the debaters.

7. ENCOURAGING ENGAGEMENT

- **Promote Free Speech:** Encourage debaters to explore all ideas and perspectives to allow for research, learning, and reflecting.
- **Foster Learning:** Use the debate as an opportunity to foster critical thinking and learning.

8. UPHOLDING INTEGRITY

- **Honesty:** Be honest in assessments and decisions.
- **Avoiding Conflicts of Interest:** Steer clear of any situations that might compromise impartiality.

9. CLARITY IN DECISION-MAKING

- **Transparent Criteria:** Clearly communicate the objective criteria used for evaluating the debate.
- **Reasoned Decision:** Provide a well-explained rationale for the decision, highlighting key points and turning points in the debate.

10. CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

- **Positive Reinforcement:** Highlight strengths and effective strategies used by debaters.
- **Constructive Criticism:** Offer specific, actionable advice for improvement.