BIG QUESTIONS
National Speech & Debate Association

NATIONAL SPEECH & DEBATE ASSOCIATION
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Big Questions Debate: **Judge Training**

Thank you for your contribution and commitment to students as they grow their speaking skills through debate. As a judge, your role is very important to this process! This training should help answer some of the questions you may be having prior to judging your first round of debate. If you are already a seasoned judge, it should serve as an overview on the basics of Big Questions debate.

BIG QUESTIONS DEBATE

There are a number of debate events that students can choose to participate in. Some events are one-on-one, whereas other events allow students to work together in partners. Each event discusses a different type of topic, allowing students to showcase skills in different subject areas.

Big Questions is a particular debate format designed to promote discussion surrounding the complexities of science and philosophy. The goal of this event style is to encourage students to engage in life discussion that may not align with their previously held beliefs. These debates seek to help students advance their knowledge, comfort, and interest in learning more about the subject matter. Students debating the Big Questions format have a choice to compete individually or with a partner, leaving room for two-on-one debates depending on how the students choose to compete. Big Questions resolutions often present students with more abstract concepts than other debate styles.

Previous examples of Big Questions topics include:

- Objective morality exists.
- Belief in the supernatural is incompatible with belief in science.
- Humans are primarily driven by self- interest.
- Humans are fundamentally different from all other animals.
- Science leaves no room for free will.

INTRODUCTION TO BIG QUESTIONS ROUNDS

Begin by watching this brief, one-minute long video to gain an understanding of what happens in a Big Questions round: **https://vimeo.com/226799553/aafe109e85**

DEBATE STRUCTURE

Below is a visual that outlines the formatting of Big Questions debate, including time constraints for each side.

Speech	Time Limit
Affirmative Constructive	5 minutes
Negative Constructive	5 minutes
Question Segment	3 minutes
Affirmative Rebuttal	4 minutes
Negative Rebuttal	4 minutes
Question Segment	3 minutes
Affirmative Consolation	3 minutes
Negative Consolation	3 minutes
Affirmative Rationale	3 minutes
Negative Rationale	3 minutes

(Each side side gets 3 min. of prep time to use at their discretion)

Constructives. In Big Questions, the first speech you will hear is the Constructive. This is a pre-written, five-minute speech that clearly lays out the arguments supporting your side. While there is no rule requiring a specific structure, there is a traditional approach to constructing this pre-written speech. Often, a constructive starts with a thesis statement as an introductory lead-in to the student's position. Next, students will typically define key terms and discuss the metrics for successfully evaluating a round (sometimes called "framework" or "weighing mechanisms"). Following this introduction, students will offer their main arguments following the claim, warrant, impact structure for each. Each main argument is called a "contention." Contentions may include quotes from qualified authors, scientific studies, or one's own analysis. Given the five-minute time limit, most constructives will likely have two to three substantial contentions.

Refutations. After each debater's constructive speech clearly establishes the arguments for both sides in the debate, there will be a series of speeches that allow debaters to rebut, clarify, and crystallize the debate. In the rebuttal, students will deliver a speech addressing the contentions of the opponent. This speech should address where there are weaknesses or opposing evidence, identify main areas of clash and how arguments interact with one another, rebuild contentions, and offer additional evidence for the position.

Consolidations. In the consolidation speech, students will reduce the debate to its core elements. Students should work to identify the areas garnering the best advantage while also strengthening the analysis and argumentation in those areas. Additional analysis on existing points of contention will be given, but new arguments are discouraged during this section.

Rationale. In the final rationale speech, students will give a summation of the main arguments that prove why they feel they have won the debate. No new arguments are offered in the rationale speech; students will focus entirely on the activity that has taken place earlier in the debate.

JUDGING INFORMATION

Prior to the start of each debate round, judges will receive a ballot from the tournament organizer. The ballot is where judges will record who they believe won the debate, suggestions for improvement, and general feedback for the debaters. At the end of the tournament, each school in attendance will receive all the ballots written about their competitors so contestants can use your feedback to improve! We will discuss the judging feedback process more later in this document.

When evaluating any debate event, there are some important considerations to have in mind throughout your role as a judge. Several guidelines are outlined below.

1. Do not let your personal views shape the outcome of the decision. Evaluate the argumentation of the competing debaters.
2. Students should offer well-reasoned arguments that present a thesis, argument justifications, and reasons why their argument is significant.
3. At the end of the round, you will be asked to determine who did the best job debating, which is centered on argumentation and not purely persuasive speaking.

We will touch on these considerations, along with strategies to support their implementation, in greater detail throughout this training document.

Debate terms

The following information outlines general terminology that might be helpful for you as you embark on your journey as a debate judge. Although you certainly don't need to memorize any of these, they might be helpful to see once before you begin.

Debate topics are released at different intervals for the various styles of debate. For Big Questions, there is a new topic for students to debate each year. We refer to the topic as the **resolution.** There are two sides to every resolution. One side will support or affirm the resolution. One side will negate, or attempt to disprove the resolution. In Big Questions Debate, students will alternate debating both sides of the resolution. Students will debate each side of the resolution multiple times over the course of a tournament.

All debate events have a unique order to the round, divided into three parts: **speeches, cross-examination,** and **prep time**. **Speeches** are where the bulk of the debating is done, with each side presenting and reinforcing their arguments while refuting their opponents'. It is common for judges to **flow** a debate, which means the judges will take notes about the speeches in order to keep track of the debate.

Cross-examination is a period of time where debaters can ask each other questions. The purpose of **cross-examination** is to clarify their opponent's position and ask questions that set up the debater to make stronger arguments in their speeches. It is up to you whether or not to **flow** this part.

Each event gives debaters a set amount of prep time, where competitors can take a moment to prepare for the next part of the debate. Competitors can take prep time at any point between speeches or cross-examination in the debate and should notify the judges when they begin and end prep.

The judge will watch the entirety of the debate and then decide which side won. Depending on the tournament, judges can give an oral critique or disclose the results of the round. An oral critique is when the judge provides the debaters with immediate feedback by talking with both sides after the debate. Similarly, a disclosure is when the judge reveals which side won the debate right after the round. Be sure to check with the tournament organizer before giving oral critiques or disclosing. When filling out the ballot, you will be asked to assign each competitor speaker points, in addition to choosing a winner. Speaker points are typically assigned on a scale from 25-30, with 30 being outstanding. After the decision has been made, judges should submit their ballots to the tournament organizer.

During preliminary rounds of the tournament, there is usually only one judge per round. However, when students begin competing in elimination rounds, rounds will have more than one judge. This is called a panel. Typically, a panel will have three judges who independently evaluate the debate and determine the winner. The side who receives a vote from at least two judges wins the debate.

Debate jargon can be confusing! Keep this list of debate terms nearby when you are judging as a reference: www.speechanddebate.org/wp-content/uploads/Big-Questions-Judge-Training-Jargon.pdf

THE JUDGE'S ROLE

Being a judge for Big Questions debate means that you are playing a vital role in the development of students' creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication skills. Aside from making decisions about who wins and loses, you also make assessments and comments that shape the overall experience of the student. Therefore, every judge plays a significant and long-lasting role.

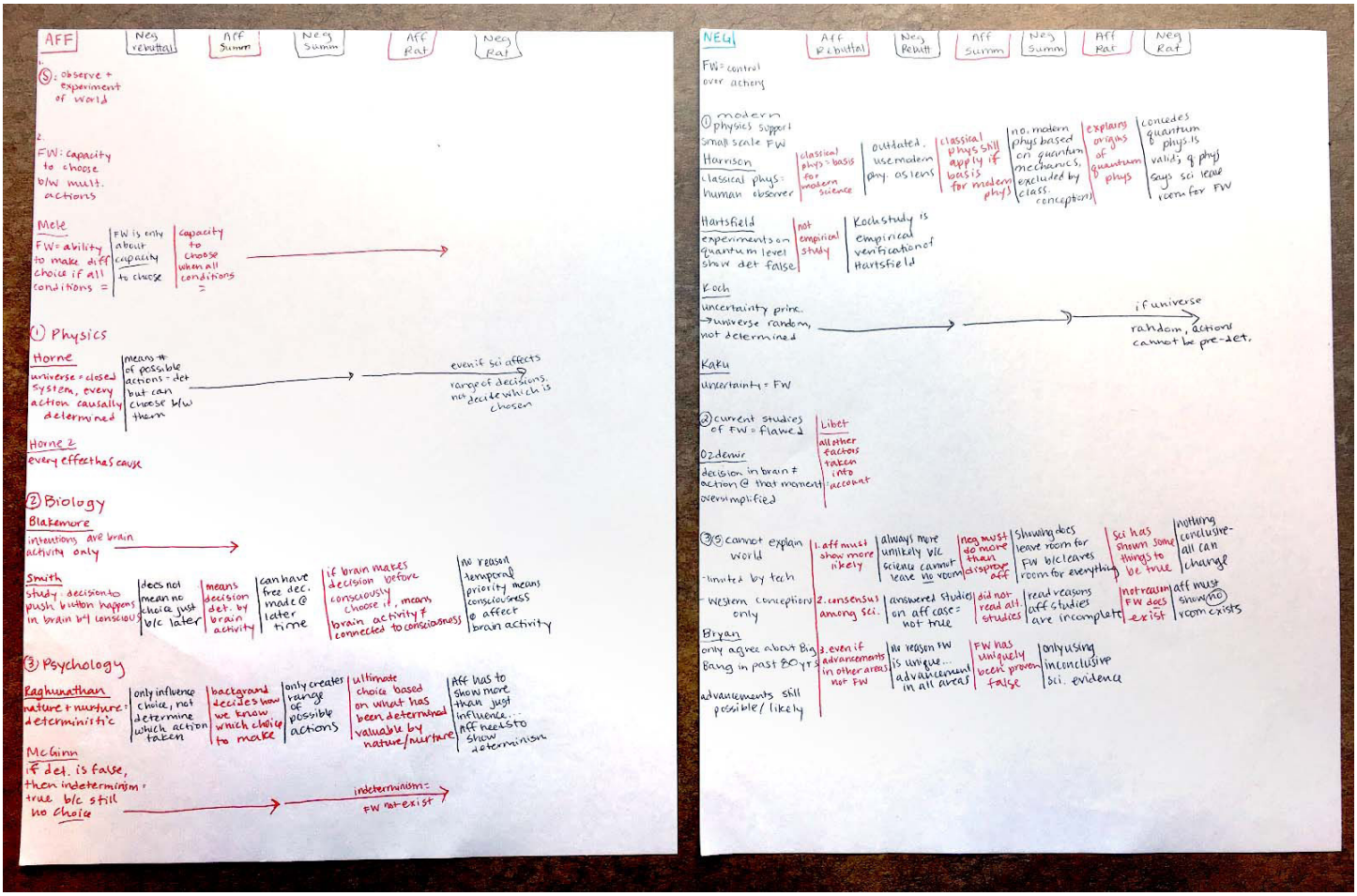
Evaluating arguments

As an adjudicator, you are helping teach students critical thinking skills through the creation of developed, complete arguments. An important part of your judge role is evaluating the arguments at the conclusion of the round. Judges are asked to decide "Who did the better debating?" and will generally provide reasoning as to how they made their decision. Each judge has discretion to decide what better debating looks like; judges should consider argumentative aspects (important arguments won, number of arguments won, etc.) and may to a reasonable degree also evaluate performative aspects (tone, vocal quality, pace of delivery, rhetorical devices, etc.).

Flowing. After the debate begins, many judges will utilize a note-taking method called "flowing" to track students ideas as they move through the debate process. Flowing is a specialized form of note-taking developed specifically for debate. It involves grouping arguments in logical places, making it easier to look back over what happened during a round when making a decision. Keeping related notes together increases the chances of following along and tracking how each team responded to important arguments and remained in the central clash of the debate.

Helpful suggestions for flowing are bulleted below:

- A sheet of paper per contention, plus one for framework. Don't try to flow a whole case on one sheet—argumentation is too deep and specific for that. Keep track of the different contentions on different sheets of paper.
- At least one pen, but we recommend two, in different colors.
- If the opponent is speaking, write (don't try to determine what's important at the outset—just write as much as you can).
- Orient pieces of paper vertically, like a book. Note that columns will be narrow, which will increase the need for accurate/efficient abbreviations.



Above is a visual example of how flowing can be done throughout a round. **Please remember that it is most important that you take notes in a way that makes sense to *you***. Doing so will make it easier for you to make a fair, informed decision at the conclusion of the round. Flowing is simply one method that can support judges throughout the decision making process.

- View this page for a more in depth introduction to flowing techniques: **www.speechanddebate.org/wp-content/uploads/Big-Questions-Judge-Training-Intro-to-Flowing.pdf**
- To practice flowing a Big Questions speech, watch this flowing video: **vimeo.com/224381031/e1e465986f**

De-biasing techniques. While listening to debates about worldview questions, it can be hard to divorce your personal opinion from your evaluation of the arguments. However, your preconceived ideas and beliefs about a resolution should not factor into your decision. Since debaters are required to argue both sides of the topic, it is necessary to remove these personal biases. Because Big Questions topics tend to question our deeply held beliefs, there are certain safeguards in place to help you check your bias before the round.

One strategy Big Questions judges use to eliminate personal bias from their decisions is the judge primer. The primer will be given to each judge at the beginning of a Big Questions tournament. Judges will read through the topic overview to become familiar with arguments on both sides of the issue. Then, judges will write down whether they personally agree with the affirmative or negative. By recognizing their feelings about a topic, judges are better able to remove their personal beliefs from their decision. By making judges aware of their bias, we anticipate judges will evaluate the debate in the more rigorous and objective manner, processing the logic of the arguments without viewing them through the lens of personal biases. Visit this page to see the current BQ judge primer: **www.speechanddebate.org/big-questions**

The ballot will also ask judges to write reasons why each side may have won the debate. By forcing judges to counter-argue their own decision and to make the strongest

possible case for the opposite side, judges will reprocess information and may recognize the interaction of bias in their decision. After these steps, judges will indicate which side did the better debating and has won the round. While this method does \not completely eliminate the issue of bias, the affirmative steps taken by the ballot and primer mitigate the impact of bias on the competitive fairness of the tournament.

Cultural competency. Please take this free, one hour long course created in partnership with the National Federation for High Schools. This resource helps to provide further education on how to adjudicate a round of debate while taking into consideration students' different cultural backgrounds, identities, and beliefs. **www.speechanddebate.org/judge-training-introductory-courses**

Feedback to debaters. Constructive feedback from judges is an important tool to help students grow as debaters. All judges will fill out a ballot at the end of the debate with feedback. Depending on the tournament, judges may be also asked to give a brief oral critique at the conclusion of the debate.

You will decide the winner of the debate based only on the arguments made in the given round. Your feedback should only address these arguments. It is important not to judge based on what arguments you have heard in other debate rounds, what arguments you would have liked to be made, or the way that the arguments were presented.

- BQ judge ballots for the current topic can be found here: **www.speechanddebate.org/big-questions**

Best practices. Aside from flowing, we have gathered a few other important reminders for judges to be cognizant of throughout the round.

- Judges should be silent spectators that are attentive to the debaters throughout the entire round.
- Judges should time each student's speech. An online timer, kitchen timer, or cell phone timer can be used. If a student is still speaking past their allotted time, you may inform them that their time has expired.
- Judges should also time each student's preparation time. Each side receives 3 minutes of time to use at their discretion. Judges should keep track of how much time each side has remaining throughout the debate.

Practice! **Watch a full length Big Questions debate round in action: www.speechanddebate.org/big-questions**

Remember that this video is a showcase of the nation's best, and as a judge, you are here to help debaters of all skill sets learn and judge.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Please review additional resources as you think is necessary. The following links provides access to a variety of resources that can help prepare you for your judging experience. Resources include analyses of the topics, demonstration videos, the student format manual, an evidence packet, and lesson plans for teachers. The more experienced you are with the topic, ballot, and demonstration rounds, the better!

Big Questions Resources can be found at:
www.speechanddebate.org/big-questions

JOHN TEMPLETON FOUNDATION

Thanks to a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, the National Speech & Debate Association is able to award thousands of dollars to schools who host their own Big Questions debates. Learn how you can earn money for your team or classroom by holding a tournament, scrimmage, or classroom event. All you need is 10 students to do three rounds! Review the website at **www.speechanddebate.org/big-questions** or email **info@speechanddebate.org** to get involved.