



CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Congressional Debate



Brigadier General Henry M. Robert

// Where there are no laws, or individuals have their own rules and laws, there is the least of real democracy.”

— Gen. Henry Martyn Robert,
Robert’s Rules of Order

Congressional Debate is a mock legislative assembly competition where **students draft bills** (proposed laws) and **resolutions** (position statements), which they and their peers later **debate** and **vote** to pass into law and then take action on by voting for or against the legislation. While coaches aren’t always required to



submit legislation to tournaments, it gives their students the right to an **authorship speech**, introducing the bill or resolution to the chamber. In advance of the tournament, a **docket** of submitted titles or full legislative text is distributed to participating schools, so students may research and prepare themselves for the debate. Many tournaments allow students to caucus in committee(s) to determine the **agenda**, wherein they strive to select topics that will yield even and engaging debate, as well as balancing authorship privileges among the schools participating in the chamber.

The National Speech & Debate Association is committed to educational development of the

individual through the vehicle of Congressional Debate, which promotes leadership and communication skills through rigorous interaction and debate on issues confronting our democracy. These skills will prepare them for learning and leadership throughout our lives.

Unit 1

Glossary of congressional debate terminology

Oath of Office: "I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter, so help me God."

Legislation

A specific, written proposal ("bill" or "resolution") made by a member or committee for assembly to debate.

Bill

A type of legislation that describes the details of how a policy would be enacted, if voted into law by the assembly.

Resolution

An expression of conviction, or value belief of an assembly, which may urge, request or suggest further action by another decision-making authority.

**Constitutional
Amendment**

A resolution to add a specific provision to the United States Constitution, requiring 2/3 vote of the chamber to pass.

Docket	A complete packet of legislation distributed by a tournament.
Agenda	The order of legislation as suggested by a committee or member, and voted on by the assembly (sometimes called the calendar).
Presiding Officer (PO)	A leader who runs meetings by recognizing members to speak or move. Also called the chair. Modeled after the Speaker of the House of Representatives, or the Vice President or President pro tempore of the Senate.
Floor	When a member has the full attention of the assembly to speak (also refers to the area where the assembly meets, where its members speak, and where it conducts its business).
Committee	A small group of members who meet and bring recommendations to the full assembly.
Amendment	A specific change to an item of legislation, explaining exactly which words it modifies, and not changing the intent of the legislation itself (germane). An amendment not pertinent is ruled dilatory.
Sponsorship Speech	A constructive speech of up to three (3) minutes given by a member, which introduces an item of legislation for debate by the chamber. It is called an authorship speech if given by a student affiliated with the school the legislation originated from. All author/sponsorship speeches are followed by a two-minute questioning period. The first negative speech also may have two minutes of questioning.
Questioning	The period where the members of the assembly ask individual questions of the speaker. Multiple-part (or two-part) questions are not allowed (unless the rules are suspended for that instance, or direct questioning rules are used), because they take time from other members who may wish to question the speaker. For all speeches that follow an authorship—except the first negative speech under National Speech & Debate Association rules—the speaker may speak for a maximum of three (3) minutes, followed by one minute of questions. All affirmative and negative speeches that follow an authorship speech should introduce new ideas (arguments) and respond to previous arguments (refute or rebut).
Precedence	Rule requiring the presiding officer to choose speakers who have spoken least (or not at all). The only exception to precedence is when a speaker has authorship privileges to legislation when it is introduced for debate. In those cases, the presiding officer must recognize the author first. If no author is present, selecting a sponsor is based on precedence.
Recency	A rule, in addition to employing precedence, also selects speakers based on who has spoken least recently (or earliest).
Parliamentarian	A type of judge who often sits with the PO, holistically evaluating debate, and supervising the chamber by advising the PO when necessary.
Scorer	A type of judge who often sits in the back or side of the room and evaluates speakers and the PO.

Unit 2

Competition Chronological Order

WHAT'S IT CALLED?

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Legislation

Participating schools may submit legislation when they register entries for competition. If the purpose of legislation is to effect change in the status quo, then ideas should stem from a desire to solve problems or meet needs. The best legislation is debatable, meaning there is some degree of controversy in either the topic or how the legislation intends to address the issue(s). Before students draft legislation, they should research the scope of jurisdictional power Congress has for lawmaking on the given topic, and what agency (or agencies) of the federal government would be responsible for enforcement and implementation of that legislation. See the Writing Legislation section of this guide.

Researching the Docket

Tournaments send to participating schools or post online a docket of legislation. Each squad then brainstorms affirmative and negative arguments and finds supporting evidence through research. Students should have a firm working knowledge of issues in the docket, but should not write word-for-word speeches ahead of time; rather, they should be prepared to dynamically respond to arguments given by peers at the tournament.

Role Playing

Contestants act in the manner of a senator or representative, weighing needs of theoretical constituents whom they represent, and in a larger sense, all American citizens. This includes speaking as a legislator would talk, and acting genuinely nice to other delegates. If students think of the purpose of Congress as serving a higher need of solving problems in our society (rather than as a debate competition), they will take it more seriously. Humor is acceptable in the right context, but shouldn't be the emphasis of speaking or conduct. Contestants should dress the part: professional legislators wear business attire. Dress shoes are highly recommended with restraint toward tasteful accessories that would not distract an audience.

Chamber Opening Business

Upon arrival at a Congressional Debate session, students are assigned to chambers, sometimes labeled as a "Senate" or "House (of Representatives)," where they would be assigned the appropriate courtesy title (Senator or Representative). When tournaments prepare placards (name cards) with students' names (or make cardstock paper and markers available) or have name tags, it enhances the dignity of the event, and makes identification of speakers by judges more efficient. The first task a chamber assumes is to determine seating arrangement. Either the tournament will provide a seating chart with assigned placements, or students will fill in a blank seating chart. This facilitates easier identification by student presiding officers and judges.

WHAT'S IT CALLED?

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Setting the Agenda

With the legislative docket provided to schools, students in each chamber will:

- Offer proposed agendas, which are presented in the order they wish to debate legislation on the docket. The chamber will conduct a single-ballot election until one agenda receives a majority vote; or
- Convene an Agenda Committee, comprised of one representative from each school, who will collaboratively determine an agenda for the duration of the session. By virtue of procedure, whatever order this committee settles upon becomes binding unless rules are suspended; or
- Convene several committees based on issues (whereby all members of a chamber serve on a committee).

Care should be taken when setting the agenda to place legislation with authors in the chamber in a higher/earlier position for debate, so students have an opportunity to introduce their bills/resolutions. Once the agenda is set, it is considered part of the standing rules of the chamber; changing it (beyond laying an individual bill or resolution on the table) requires a motion to suspend the rules. This is considered ill-advised, because it has the potential to be manipulative and consumes time better spent facilitating speeches.

Presiding Officer Election

Using a single ballot election, presiding officers are elected for each session (or fragment thereof as established by each individual tournament's procedural rules).

**A template for election voting can be found at
www.speechanddebate.org/congressional-debate-judging-forms/**

Competition Structure

There are many methods of determining who earns a trophy or gavel as the "Best Legislator/Speaker," or "Best Presiding Officer." These methods vary in their degree by tournament. The recommended method by the National Speech & Debate Association is for judges to rank the top students in the chamber, and for a cumulative rank total to determine who advances and placement. At some competitions, the top-rated students by judges may be considered a slate of nominees for the chamber to cast a preferential ballot ranking their peers, in order of favor.

Unit 3

Understanding Civics

A grasp of civics forms the foundation for substantive legislation on issues, since ultimately, Congress passes laws the federal government must implement. Understanding politics and government begins with acknowledging the relationship between those who govern and the constituents (citizens) they represent.

One bedrock principle, the **social contract** finds its roots with the Enlightenment philosophers who inspired the founding of the United States, and holds that citizens give up certain rights for protections by their government. A prime example of this is airport security, where passengers sacrifice a certain amount of privacy with government officials, who inspect

their luggage. Further investigation into how the social contract, different **moral codes** and understanding of **fundamental rights** will help a Congressional debater understand theories upon which debate relies. The U.S. *Bill of Rights* as well as the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* illustrate an imperative to recognize certain rights. Of course, the *Bill*



of Rights, as part of the *Constitution*, underlies all laws made in the U.S., whereas the UN's rights are recommended, but not required.

The **Constitution** is the supreme law of the land, so understanding its articles—particularly those that relate to the three branches of government—is important. We start by investigating the central **powers of Congress**, which dictate the lawmaking jurisdiction of U.S. Congress, something Congressional Debaters must bear in mind before writing legislation. Some examples include, but are not limited to:

- Empowers House of Representatives to originate taxation and impeachment, and Senate for trying impeachment (2/3 vote = conviction), concurring or amending taxation.
- Regulate Commerce and Banking
- “Necessary and Proper” clause: “elastic” – implied powers, U.S. Code

Understanding checks and balances between the branches is important, too. For instance, while the executive branch (the President and agencies directed by cabinet-level *secretaries*) is responsible for operating functions of the national government, Congress has the authority to tax and provide oversight of executive

branch activities, as well as appointing their chief officials.

Additionally, while the Department of State is responsible for international relations, and while the President has the responsibility for negotiating treaties, these must be presented to the Senate for approval. Foreign aid is supervised by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), whose budget is appropriated by the House of Representatives, and co-approved by the Senate.

FEDERALISM

One of the most important concepts of governing is that of **federalism**, the concept that authority is shared between the national or central government, and the governments of states and territories, which further grant

authority to municipalities (cities, towns, counties). The Constitution holds that where authority is not specified, it is up to states to govern, but that states are subordinate to the national government, particularly in management of international affairs and regulation of interstate commerce and disputes.

Over time, cooperation has increased between the state and national governments, and the national government has become more powerful in its regulatory oversight of such items as education, interstate highway construction, environmental protection and health, labor issues, and social security. Often, funding grants issued by the national government to states dictates that certain policies are followed. The Supreme Court becomes the arbiter for any conflicts in the federal system.

CORE VALUES

As members of the National Speech & Debate community, we share a commitment to:

- Uphold the Association's Code of Honor.
- Promote ethics in research and competition.
- Promote respect for diversity of ideas and of community.
- Promote seriousness of purpose and demeanor.
- Promote empowerment gained through knowledge.
- Promote tools of effective and ethical leadership.
- Promote active participation in democratic processes.
- Provide an opportunity for developing higher level thinking skills and critical analysis of issues.
- Develop interaction skills and cooperative decision making skills used in an assembly or in a committee.
- Learn the basic principles of parliamentary procedure and its use in a democratic society.

Unit 4

Research Sources

These sources are a great place to start when writing legislation, or investigating issues surrounding legislation sponsored by other schools, which you are preparing to debate. All evidence used is subject to verification. Honesty and integrity are of utmost importance. Falsification or deliberate misuse of evidence may result in suspension of legislators by tournament officials.

FACT AND BIAS CHECKING

Snopes	snopes.com
FactCheck.org	factcheck.org
Real News/Fake News: Fact Checkers	guides.lib.berkeley.edu/c.php?g=620677&p=4333407
All Sides: Media Bias	allsides.com/media-bias/media-bias-chart
Media Bias Chart	adfontesmedia.com/interactive-media-bias-chart/

POLICYMAKING THINK TANKS, ALSO KNOWN AS POLICY INSTITUTES

Always read “About” links to note bias in sites.

50 Most Influential Think Tanks in the U.S.	https://thebestschools.org/features/most-influential-think-tanks/
Think Tank Directory (Harvard Kennedy School)	https://guides.library.harvard.edu/hks/think_tank_search
Congressional Research Service Report Search	https://www.congressionaldebate.org/resources/crs-report-search
Univ. North Texas Library's CRS Report Collection	http://bit.ly/eXw7KS
Pew Research Center	pewresearch.org and people-press.org
Brookings Institution	brookings.edu
Hoover Institution at Stanford University	hoover.org
Center for Strategic and International Studies	csis.org
American Civil Liberties Union (Libertarian)	aclu.org
American Enterprise Institute (Conservative)	aei.org
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	carnegieendowment.org
Cato Institute (Conservative/Libertarian)	cato.org
Council on Foreign Relations	cfr.org
Heritage Foundation (Conservative)	heritage.org

Progressive Policy Institute (<i>Liberal/Progressive</i>)	progressivepolicy.org
Rand Corporation (<i>reports, research briefs</i>)	rand.org

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES/INFORMATION

Read real legislation for inspiration!

Federal Government Portal	usa.gov
Congressional Budget Office.	cbo.gov
Congressional Legislation (Lib. of Congress)	congress.gov
Independent Legislation Tracking	govtrack.us/congress/bills
Federal Reserve System	federalreserve.gov
Government Accountability Office	gao.gov
Social Security Administration	ssa.gov
U.S. Courts	uscourts.gov
Law Library of Congress Law	loc.gov/law/

GENERAL REFERENCE

Bartleby Language Reference	bartleby.com
VirtualLibrary	vlib.org
FindLaw.com	findlaw.com
Internet Public Library	ipl.org
RefDesk	refdesk.com
United Nations News Service	news.un.org/en
Journalist's Resource (see "Policy Studies," "Reference")	journalistsresource.org

Unit 5

Writing Legislation

Inspiration for legislation comes from a desire to solve current problems facing our country, and should have a **national** focus.

A **bill** must have national *jurisdiction* (i.e., when passed into law, the federal government would have the authority to implement it). Bills enumerate details of how a particular law must work, including when it takes effect, how much tax levy would be appropriated (if applicable), how infractions/violations will be dealt with, etc. A bill may answer the who, what, when, where—and most specifically how—but it will never answer “why.” Legislators ex-

plain rationale behind bills in speeches, and a solution is implemented can spark deeper, more meaningful debate.

Students should be mindful of how controversial an issue is; for example, is it likely that students would argue against a bill to assist starving infants? Of course not! There needs to be two sides. Frequently, arguments over bills stem from the amount of funding. Since there are countless problems needing

solutions, funding projects often comes down to whether one item should be prioritized over another.

Since the Executive Branch runs most agencies that enforce federal laws, understanding those helps. While foreign affairs often fall under the jurisdiction of the Executive Branch, funding efforts such as USAID can have an impact on the success or failure of United States involvement

in other countries, and therefore, can be framed as a bill. See the research links page for good starting points.

Writing an effective bill involves more time and research than researching one written by someone else. Students must ask themselves what the legislation does, who is involved (government agencies), where it happens, when it is feasible to take place, pay for and how much time is needed for implementation, and how it should be carried out (a plan of action). All of these questions must be answered in writing the sections of the bill, with thoughtful consideration as to how thoroughly each section explains its plank of implementing the overall bill's plan of action.

Resolutions are simply position statements on issues Congress does not have jurisdiction over (such as a foreign issue, although a bill can suggest foreign aid), a recommendation to another party (such as the President, Supreme Court, or United Nations) or further action (such as **amending the Constitution**).

Resolutions lack the force of law, and never establish enforcement.

TOPICS & FORMAT

Appropriate topics exhibit seriousness of purpose. The action proposed should be feasible, and such that the actual United States Congress might debate it. Topics should be debatable, meaning substantive argumentation exists on both sides. Legislation should be typed and double-spaced with line numbers, not exceeding one page. Capitalizing the words “WHEREAS” and “RESOLVED” in resolutions, and “SECTION” in bills, as well as inverse-indenting each clause or section helps to distinguish between ideas and concepts. The title should be descriptive, specific, and brief. The samples above show proper formatting. In the resolution, note the semicolon, and how it precedes the word “and” at the end of each “whereas” clause, and the phrase “now, therefore, be it” at the end of the last “whereas” clause. Templates for legislation may be downloaded at <https://www.speechand-debate.org/legislation-templates/>. New sample dockets are released every month for NSDA members at www.speechanddebate.org/resources.

SAMPLE LEGISLATION

A Bill to [Action Word] [article] [Object] to [Summarize the Solution Specifically]

1 BE IT ENACTED BY THE CONGRESS HERE ASSEMBLED THAT:

2 **SECTION 1.** State the new policy in one or a few brief declarative sentence(s).

3 **SECTION 2.** In one of the sections, you may define ambiguous terms not obviously
4 clear or technical in nature (consult U.S. Code, [uscode.house.gov](https://www.uscode.house.gov), if
5 necessary).

6 **SECTION 3.** Name the government agency(ies) that will oversee enforcement along
7 with the specific enforcement mechanism.

8 A. Subsections may be used to elaborate further details, but only
9 needed if you need to have more than one subsection.

10 B. This would be a second subsection.

11 **SECTION 4.** This legislation will take effect on [insert date here, formatted as “FY
12 2021” or “July 1, 2021” but not “July 1st”]. All laws in conflict with this
13 legislation are hereby declared null and void.

Introduced for Congressional Debate by _____.

SAMPLE LEGISLATION

A Resolution to [Action Word] [article] [Object] to [Summarize the Solution Specifically]

- 1 **WHEREAS,** State the current problem (this needs to be accomplished in one brief
2 sentence); and
- 3 **WHEREAS,** Describe the scope of the problem cited in the first whereas clause (this
4 clause needs to flow logically from the first) and the inherent need for a
5 solution; and
- 6 **WHEREAS,** Explain the impact and harms perpetuated by the current problem (once
7 again, the clause needs to flow in a logical sequence); and
- 8 **WHEREAS,** Use additional “whereas” clauses to elaborate rationale for the problem
9 that needs to be solved; now, therefore, be it
- 10 **RESOLVED,** That the Congress here assembled [describe recommendation for
11 solution/call for action]; and, be it
- 12 **FURTHER RESOLVED,** That (this is an *optional* additional recommendation; if not used,
13 end the previous “resolved” clause with a period).

Introduced for Congressional Debate by ____.

SAMPLE LEGISLATION

A Resolution to Amend the Constitution [to...]

1 **RESOLVED,** By two-thirds of the Congress here assembled, that the following article
2 is proposed as an amendment to the Constitution of the United States,
3 which shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution
4 when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several states
5 within seven years from the date of its submission by the Congress:

ARTICLE --

7 **SECTION 1:** State the first part (note: keep two hyphens after the
8 article above, since an amendment to the Constitution
9 doesn't get numbered until it has been ratified).

10 **SECTION 2:** The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by
11 appropriate legislation.

Introduced for Congressional Debate by ____.

Unit 6

Speaking

Debate on each legislation starts with a speech introducing it to the chamber, called an **authorship** if it's delivered by the student (or member of a team if the legislation is submitted by a school), or **sponsorship** if delivered by a student from a different school. This first speech on each legislation is always followed by a two-minute questioning period. Questions and answers are timed continuously (the clock does not stop) once the first questioner is recognized. Also, the National Speech & Debate Association requires a two-minute questioning period for the **first negative speaker** on each legislation.

After the introductory speech for each legislation, students deliver **alternating negative and affirmative speeches**. Each of these speeches allows a maximum of three minutes, with

a one-minute questioning period (National Speech & Debate Association rules) or balance of unused speaking time (rule in some leagues). If a speech is particularly controversial, a mem-



ber may move to suspend the rules to extend questioning for an individual speaker, but this should be done with restraint.

While a speaker technically has the option to not yield to questions, this is extremely inadvisable, since under National Speech & Debate Association rules, scorers are instructed to take answering questions into account when evaluating speeches.

Speeches should be delivered **extemporaneously**, which means spoken spontaneously based on an outline of notes, rather than recited word-for-word from a manuscript. To do this, a speaker must be well researched and prepared with ideas before arriving at the contest. They will develop specific arguments

that **refute** (argue against) the opposition and introduce new ideas and perspectives rebuilding their own side of debate, rather than simply repeating ideas shared by speakers on the same side, or ignoring points raised by the opposing side. Authorship speeches may be more scripted since they are guaranteed the first speech and have no opposing arguments to refute.

In refuting, speakers should refer to specific arguments made by peers and **never** attack the individual (*ad hominem* fallacy). Be kind, generous and gracious with remarks, for example: “While Sen. Smith’s argument to close the military base is well-intentioned...” It is also effective to refer to general themes/threads



made in arguments on a particular side, synthesizing and weighing the overall “big picture” impact. After debate gets one-sided, a speech of summation is a welcome relief.

Effective speeches that respond to other arguments made on legislation come as a result of **critical listening and taking notes**—called **flowing**. Keeping track of arguments made on both the affirmative and negative sides, and any proof or evidence that may be questionable, is the only way to keep debate dynamic or interactive.

Speakers should use effective word choice, correct sentence structure, and clear transitions to signpost ideas (outline that the audience can follow). Connect with the audience through

sustained eye contact, and avoid positioning behind a podium if possible, since it is a barrier to the audience.

Asking **questions** helps clarify confusing points in debate and shows a genuine interest in what other speakers are saying. Questions usually are not scored by judges, but how well **speakers answer** is scored. Answering questions well shows a judge the speaker can defend their arguments and has sound knowledge of the topic. When answering, it’s best to succinctly answer just the question—no more, no less. Do not avoid answering questions; give your best effort, but if you don’t understand the question paraphrase by saying “what I think you’re asking is...” and then answer. If you don’t

know the answer to a question, redirect your answer to what you do know about the topic. Additionally, when judges are determining who to rank, they may remember the questions that legislators asked during the session. The impact

you have on the judge is undeniable when both asking and answering questions. It's courteous for speakers to thank the presiding officer when they recognize them to ask a question.

SPEECH ORGANIZATION

Below is a suggested time allocation and structure for speeches in Congressional Debate.

SECTION	LENGTH	DESCRIPTION
Introduction	15 to 30 seconds	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relate the speech to ideas that are, or might be, brought to the floor for debate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a quotation; and/or • Use an analogy; and/or • Use statistics to raise awareness of a problem 2. State purpose/thesis (about 10 seconds)
Body	approximately 2 minutes	<p>Each claim you make (whether constructive or refuting the opposition) should be supported with analytical reasoning and/or evidence with a good combination of quantitative statistics or facts, and qualitative case studies and quotations from experts. Be sure to state the importance, or impact that claim has for the overall topic of debate and why it supports or opposes those views. Example structure:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Claim: issue of debate; point or points that are in conflict. 2. Proof: evidence and reasoning to support the argument; explain how the proof relates to the claim (link). 3. Impact: why the argument is important/significant, especially to the particular side debated. Challenge 4. the opposition to respond to an issue. <p>Give two to three meaningful arguments.</p>
Conclusion	about 30 seconds)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. State primary points and issues 2. Summarize key arguments

DIRECT QUESTIONING GUIDELINES



Select tournaments have piloted this innovative and engaging format (often in elimination rounds). The National Speech & Debate Association uses direct questioning at the National Tournament and district tournaments have the autonomy to use it as well. Please check with your district leadership or local tournaments hosts to find out if this practice is common in your area.

The same speaking and questioning times used in earlier rounds are in place for designated semifinal and final rounds, except that all periods are broken into 30-second segments, with one questioner per segment, who may ask multiple questions of the speaker. Additionally:

- The PO must keep separate questioning recedence/recency (to ensure equal opportunity for legislators to ask questions), and should promptly adjudicate the end of each 30-second period.
- If a questioner does not use their full 30 seconds, the presiding officer has the discretion to call on another speaker, or absorb the time.
- No suspensions of the rules to extend questioning are permitted.
- Questioners may not prefer questions with information external to the speaker's remarks.
- Questioners may interrupt a speaker during their response, but the manner in which they do so is subject to critique by judges—remember, this is Congress—there is a standard of decorum and courtesy that members should be held to!

Questioners should strive to expose flaws in the speaker's arguments by asking a series of questions about the speaker's remarks. These questions should subject the speaker's arguments to intensive and focused scrutiny. There should be no "softball questions." The segment is for asking questions; not for making new arguments or rehash old arguments. Questions and answers should be concise and to the point. To that end, questioners may politely interrupt speakers during their responses when, for instance, they ramble or do not directly answer the question.

DIRECT QUESTIONING JUDGING CONSIDERATIONS

Speakers always should be evaluated on how well they answer questions, and this should factor into the score for each speech. There also is a space on the evaluation sheet for judges to comment on the quality of questions asked, which should factor into the holistic ranking of legislators at the end of the session.

Evaluation of Speakers:

- Brevity of responses (short and clear, to the point)
- Non-evasiveness (is the speaker answering the question being asked?)
- Quality of argument defense (does the speaker successfully defend their argument?)

Evaluation of Questioners:

- Coherence and relevance of questioning line (are questions connected? Do they expose flaws in arguments?)
- Brevity of questions (short and clear, to the point)
- Quality of follow-up questions (is the questioner responsive to the speaker's initial responses in the CX segment?)
- Quality of argument scrutiny (does the questioner successfully probe or poke holes in the speaker's arguments?)
- Degree of courtesy and decorum in necessary interruptions

Evaluation of the PO:

- Adherence to time guidelines (does the PO enforce the 30 second limit?)
- Fairness in calling on questioners (fairly distribute opportunities among those who want to ask questions?)

Unit 7

Procedure For Debate

Time

Time is of the essence, and the ultimate goal of a chamber is to share time equally among legislators for speaking. The more time spent on motions, amending, etc.; the less time is available for speeches. The National Speech & Debate Association suggests that a session of floor debate be 10 minutes for each contestant assigned to a chamber to allow for two speeches per student.

Agenda

Setting the agenda at the beginning of the session is important. Invest thoughtful discussion in caucusing to set the agenda to **avoid laying items on the table during sessions**, which often annoys judges. Also, when calling the previous question fails to achieve a 2/3 vote, do not move to “Lay on the Table” by a simple majority. Remember, moving the previous question protects the voice of the minority prior to when the vote will rest on the majority.

Recognizing Speakers

Legislators seek recognition if they wish to move, to speak, or to vote on the main motion (legislation). The presiding officer will recognize speakers first *who have not spoken*, next, based on *precedence*, and finally, based on *recency*. Before precedence has been established, the presiding officer should recognize speakers in a fair manner, which is in accordance with the rules. During a session, precedence and recency should not reset to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to speak and receive evaluation from scorers. When a new session begins with a new presiding officer and scorer(s), both precedence and recency should reset.

Questioning

Only the presiding officer recognizes legislators who wish to question the speaker. Neither questioners nor speakers must ask or grant permission to yield; this is implied by the set questioning period. Legislators may only ask one question at a time; two-part questions are not allowed. Some tournaments may use a direct questioning format; this is only allowed if stated in tournament rules. Scorers should take quality of answers into account when evaluating speakers.

Speaking Time

Do not yield remaining speaking time to another legislator. The elected presiding officer

may not give a speech while presiding, unless a tournament's rules specifically allows for it.

Be Respectful

Be respectful of others in the room. If the presiding officer makes a minor mistake, give them the benefit of the doubt unless someone has been wronged. The PO is elected by the chamber to run the meeting and should be allowed to fulfill this duty efficiently and effectively. Move the *previous question* only if debate gets one-sided; do not use it to prevent someone from speaking.

Voting

Votes on motions other than the *main motion* are usually taken by *voice vote*, with a "Division" called by a member when the vote is not clear *and* that member believes someone's right to speak is being abridged. Voting results for a simple majority decision (except on the main motion, i.e., legislation) are based upon the number voting (ayes plus noes); not the number seated in the chamber at the beginning of the session. When debate has exhausted and no one wishes to speak (or the chamber moves to end debate), the chamber will vote on the legislation. This vote is based on the number seated in the chamber, since Congress members' voting records are ostensibly tracked by their constituents.

Amendments

Amendments must be presented to the presiding officer in writing (an official form



is available in this manual's appendix), with specific references to lines and clauses that change. This must be done in advance of moving to amend.

- 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.
- Between floor speeches, a legislator may move to amend, and 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.
- Should students wish to speak on the proposed amendment, the presiding officer will recognize them as per the standing precedence in the chamber, and the speech will be counted toward their total, accordingly.
- 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.
- Amendments are considered neutral and do not constitute an affirmative or negative speech on the original legislation.
 - o If there are no speakers or the previous question is moved, the chamber may vote on a proposed amendment without debating it.

Gavel Signals

A suggested set of gavel procedures follows for presiding officers. It is recommended that the PO review their gavel procedures after starting the session.

- **1 strong tap** = call meeting to order; also used to end questioning time (presiding officer also may gesture a cue to questioners to be seated as the speaker finishes answering the final question)

Speech time signals:

- **1 tap** = 1 minute remaining
- **2 taps** = 30 seconds remaining
- **3 taps** = time has lapsed
- **Multiple taps** (*until speaker stops talking*) = grace period has ended (speech should not exceed 3 minutes, 10 seconds)

HELPFUL PHRASES

YOU WANT TO:	YOU SAY:
Move a motion	<i>"I move that (or to)..."</i>
Leave the room (restroom, etc.)	<p>Legislator seeks recognition: <i>"I rise to a point a personal privilege."</i></p> <p>Chair says: <i>"State that privilege"</i></p> <p>Legislator says: <i>"To leave the room."</i></p>
Make an amendment	See "Amendments" above. <i>"Move to amend."</i>
Close debate on the current issue	<i>"I move the previous question."</i>
Ask about an error	<p>Legislator seeks recognition: <i>"Motion... I rise to a point of parliamentary inquiry (or order)."</i></p> <p>Chair says: <i>"State that point."</i></p> <p>Legislator describes the issue. The chair may confer with the parliamentarian.</p>
Second a motion	<i>"Second!"</i>
Table	<i>"I move to lay the question on the table."</i>
Take from the table	<i>"I move to take from the table..."</i>

Tracking Speaking Order

Keeping record of who has spoken ensures fairness in speaker recognition, and can be done with a simple table as demonstrated below. When students track recency, documenting the order of speeches also helps with this process. Speaker side is also noted—S (sponsor), N (negative), A (affirmative)—the examples below show where more than one speech on the same side was given.

- In **Example 1** (at right), speakers' names are snaked from top to bottom, left to right, and crossed out when a speaker is subsequently recognized (the speech numbers are noted in parentheses). This makes it easier to determine who has spoken least and least recently.
- In **Example 2** (at right), an alphabetized list is kept. In both examples, the presiding officer serves for two hours, which counts as two speeches.

Ethics and Evidence

(from National Speech & Debate Association rules)

- Conduct
 - A congressperson's conduct shall be above reproach and they should never be guilty of intentional harassment. Impeaching and censuring other participants is not allowed.
 - Participation in this event demands the seriousness of purpose and maturity possessed by real world policymakers.

Example 1

	1	2	3
1	Smith (PO)	Smith (PO)	Wilson (20N)
2	Lincoln (1S)	Jones (7A)	Clinton (22A)
3	Jones (2N)	Clinton (12A)	
4	Washington (3A)	Wilson (14A)	
5	Roosevelt (4N)	Nixon (17N)	
6	Jackson (5A)	Carter (18A)	
7	Reagan (6N)	Lincoln (19N)	
8	Clinton (8N)		
9	Bush (9N)		
10	Wilson (10S)		
11	Harding (11N)		
12	Kennedy (13N)		
13	Carter (15N)		
14	Nixon (16A)		
15	Ford (21N)		

Example 2

	Name	1	2	3
1	Bush	8N		
2	Carter	12A	19A	
3	Clinton	7A	16A	22N
4	Ford	14A		
5	Harding	10S		
6	Jackson	5A		
7	Jones	2N	15N	
8	Kennedy	11N		
9	Lincoln	1S	20N	
10	Nixon	13N	18A	
11	Reagan	6N		
12	Roosevelt	4N		
13	Smith	PO	PO	
14	Washington	3A		
15	Wilson	9N	17N	21A

All adult officials, including scorers, will hold each participant to this standard.

- iii. Congresspersons should have a cooperative nature and if there is a problem, then the student should take any concerns to an adult official.
 - iv. Participation in the legislative debate is essential. Extended absence from the chamber during a session will affect a contestant's overall impression and performance. The practice of "open chambers" interferes with the parliamentarian's ability to monitor student participation.
- b. Evidence and Use of Electronic Devices
- i. Visual aids are permitted in Congressional Debate, provided they do not require electronic retrieval devices in the chamber.

Please see the NSDA manual or check local rules for guidelines regarding use of evidence and electronic devices.

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.

Unit 8

Presiding

Supplies

Table of Parliamentary Motions, legislative docket packet, stopwatch, paper (notebook or otherwise), gavel.

Order of Procedure

1. If you give a candidacy speech for election, state that you will be fair and work to make sure time is best spent giving speeches.
2. After you are elected, say “this chamber will come to order.” State that you will use your best effort to recognize speakers around the chamber in a fair and balanced

manner. Describe gavel time signals. Explain procedures clearly: i.e., how you will recognize speakers, etc., that you **will not call for motions at any time** (speakers should seek your attention when they wish to move something), and that when it is clear that debate has exhausted on a bill/resolution, you will ask the chamber if they are ready for the question, rather than waiting for the *previous question* (which should be reserved for forcing end to debate that has become one- sided or repetitive in arguments). Always be visible when addressing



- the chamber (to project authority). Use a calm, controlled and caring voice to show a genuine interest in the chamber's business.
3. When you are ready to begin, say "Who would like to sponsor the first legislation?" When you recognize speakers, use the third person: "The chair recognizes..."
 4. When a speaker concludes, say "That speech was __minutes and __seconds; those wishing to question, please seek recognition." *Call on one legislator at a time, until the questioning period is over. You should keep track of questions to allow a fair distribution.*
 5. *You may gesture for questioners to sit down when it is apparent time is running out.* Afterward, say: "The questioning period has concluded, and the speaker may be seated."
 6. "Those wishing to speak in opposition, please seek recognition." *Call on a speaker, using **recency** and balancing areas of the room as much as possible.*
 7. "That speech was 2 minutes and 15 seconds; questioners, please rise."
 8. When you have called on the last person who wishes to speak on a bill/resolution, say "since this is the last senator/representative who wishes to speak on this issue, if no one objects following their speech, we will immediately move the question following their speech." (That way, a

separate vote to call *previous question* is unnecessary).

9. When it is time to debate the next legislation, say “The next item of business is —” (say the legislation’s title).

General Notes

- Legislators should refer to you as: Mr./Madam chair, *Speaker*, or *President*. Legislators may not approach the front table without rising to a point of personal privilege.

Handling Motions

- At the beginning of the session, remind members to seek recognition when they wish to move. Do not call for motions; rather, pause briefly between speeches.
- **Recognizing Members:** “The chair recognizes...” or “State your point/question.” Say their title (Representative or Senator) and last name.
- **Second:** (if the chamber is silent) “Is there a second?”
- **Stating Motions:** “It is moved and seconded that...”



Taking Votes

- **Negative votes and abstentions** are only counted for *recorded* votes (such as the main motion, i.e., legislation); votes taken where a fraction of members are needed are based on those casting a vote each time.
- **Voice Vote** – “On the motion to [read the motion title] those in favor, say aye. (Pause) Those opposed, say no.” *If the result is not clear, especially evidenced by particularly loud members, or if a member moves for a **Division** of the vote, then a counting vote is taken.* Do not call for abstentions, since a voice vote is not recorded.
- **Rising Vote** (*You may substitute “raise hands”*) “Those in favor of the motion to [read the motion title] “please indicate your vote.” [Count vote.] “Those opposed please indicate your vote.” [Count vote.] “Be seated.” Calling for abstentions is unnecessary, except for the main motion (legislation).
- Voting for individuals (presiding officer, awards) is done by **secret ballot**.

Announcing the Result: “On the motion to...”

- **Voice Vote** – “The ayes have it and the motion is adopted [or “carried”.]” Or, “The noes have it and the motion is lost.” *If you are unsure of the prevailing side, announce that you will take a rising vote (before someone asks for a division... to save time).*

- **Counted Rising Vote or Show of Hands Vote** – “With a vote of 51 in the affirmative and 23 in the negative, the affirmative has it [or, “there are two-thirds in the affirmative] and the motion is adopted.” Or, “There are 29 in the affirmative and 33 in the negative. The negative has it and the motion is lost.”

Discipline

- **Motion Out of Order or Motion Not in Order** “The chair rules that the motion is out of order [or “not in order”] because . . .”
- **Member Out of Order** (serious offense) “The member is out of order and will be seated.”

Unit 9

Table of Parliamentary Motions

Following is the National Speech & Debate Association motion chart, annotated (non-shaded) to show motions used most often.

TABLE OF MOST FREQUENTLY USED PARLIAMENTARY MOTIONS

Adapted for use in National Speech & Debate Association Congressional Debate

			* Annotated (non-shaded) to show motions used most often.					
TYPE	MOTION		PURPOSE	SECOND REQUIRED?	DEBATABLE?	AMENDABLE?	REQUIRED VOTE	MAY INTERRUPT?
PRIVILEGED	24	Fix time for reassembling	To arrange time of next meeting	YES	YES-T	YES-T	MAJORITY	YES
	23	Adjourn	To dismiss the meeting	YES	NO	YES-T	MAJORITY	NO
	22	Recess	To dismiss the meeting for a specific length of time	YES	YES	YES-T	MAJORITY	NO
	21	Rise to a question of privilege	To make a personal request during debate	NO	NO	NO	DECISION OF THE CHAIR	YES
	20	Call for orders of the day	To force consideration of a postponed motion	NO	NO	NO	DECISION OF THE CHAIR	YES
INCIDENTAL	19	Appeal a decision of the chair	To reverse a decision	YES	NO	NO	MAJORITY	YES
	18	Rise to a point of order or parliamentary procedure	To correct a parliamentary error or ask a question	NO	NO	NO	DECISION OF THE CHAIR	YES
	17	Division of the chamber	To verify a voice vote	NO	NO	NO	DECISION OF THE CHAIR	YES
	16	Object to the consideration of a question	To suppress action	NO	NO	NO	2/3	YES
	15	Divide a motion	To consider its parts separately	YES	NO	YES	MAJORITY	NO
	14	Leave to modify or withdraw a motion	To modify or withdraw a motion	NO	NO	NO	MAJORITY	NO
	13	Suspend the rules	To take action contrary to standing rules	YES	NO	NO	2/3	NO

* Annotated (non-shaded) to show motions used most often.

			* Annotated (non-shaded) to show motions used most often.					
TYPE				SECOND REQUIRED?	DEBATABLE?	AMENDABLE?	REQUIRED VOTE	MAY INTERRUPT?
SUBSIDIARY	12	Rescind	To repeal previous action	YES	YES	YES	2/3	NO
	11	Reconsider	To consider a defeated motion again	YES	YES	NO	MAJORITY	NO
	10	Take from the table	To consider tabled motion	YES	NO	NO	MAJORITY	NO
	9	Lay on the table	To defer action	YES	NO	NO	MAJORITY	NO
	8	Previous question	To force an immediate vote	YES	NO	NO	2/3	NO
	7	Limit or extend debate	To modify freedom of debate	YES	YES	YES-T	2/3	NO
	6	Postpone to a certain time	To defer action	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	YES
	5	Refer to a committee *	For further study	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	YES
	4	Amend an amendment †	To modify an amendment	1/3	YES	NO	MAJORITY	NO
	3	Amend †	To modify a motion	1/3	YES	YES	MAJORITY	NO
MAIN	2	Postpone indefinitely	To suppress action	YES	YES	NO	MAJORITY	NO
	1	Main motion	To introduce a business	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	NO

*** NO. 5 SHOULD INCLUDE:**

1. How appointed?
2. The number
3. Report when or to what standing committee

T = TIME

† NOS. 3 AND 4 BY:

1. Adding (inserting)
2. Striking (deleting)
3. Substituting

Unit 10

Judging Instructions

Congress judges assess quality of research and analysis of issues, argumentation (including advancing debate), skill in asking and answering questions, use of parliamentary procedure, and clarity of delivery.

Types of Judges

All judges evaluate and rank independent of each other.

- **Parliamentarian:** sits in the front of the room, next to the presiding officer (PO); responsible for starting a session, advising PO, ensuring fairness; and holistically assesses debate. At the end of the last preliminary round (or end of elimination round), ranks through total participating legislators.
- **Scorer:** sits in the rear or side of the room, and evaluates every speech, as well as PO's performance. At the end of the round, they rank the 1st through 8th best legislators (which may include PO).



Role of the Presiding Officer (PO)

Students elect peers to this *leadership* position, entrusting them with facilitating debate through **recognizing speeches, questions, and motions** in a *fair* and *efficient* manner. These leaders **sacrifice** their opportunity to speak in service to colleagues.

- Weak POs erode a chamber's capacity for meaningful debate. Lack of order leads to chaos.
- Effective POs are rare, because experienced contestants shy away from presiding. This is a direct result of the perception that judges won't rank POs

because either they don't understand the value of the position or they are uncertain as to how to compare the PO to other competitors in the room.

- **When a judge does not rank the PO, they must include an explanation as to why the PO failed to keep order in the chamber or demonstrated a lack of leadership.**

Presiding Standards for Evaluation

- **Speaker Recognition:** methods are clearly explained at the beginning of the session and executed consistently. The PO is consistent in recognition (very few

errors) and rulings, distributing speeches throughout the room, equally between schools of the same size, and among individuals.

- **Parliamentary Procedure:** command of parliamentary procedure (motions) to transparently run a fair and efficient session, seldom consulting written rules and ruling immediately on whether motions pass or fail, but consulting the parliamentarian when necessary to ensure accuracy.
- **Delivery/Presence:** dynamically fosters order and trust, and relates to peers well through vocal and physical presence. Word choice is economical and eloquent. The PO does not hesitate to rule abusive or inappropriate motions out of order. they foster trust by peers.

Presiding Officer Essentials

Speaker Recognition/Priority Rules:

1. When more than one speaker seeks the floor, the PO should:
 - a. First recognize students who have **not spoken** during the session
 - b. Next recognize students who have spoken **fewer times** (precedence)
 - c. Then recognize students who spoke **earlier** (least recently – recency)
 - d. Before above benchmarks are established—use a fair, consistent, and justifiable process.

2. The PO should open the round clearly explaining recognition process – and they should stick to it!
3. Within a round, precedence/recency does not reset, to ensure all students have equal opportunity to speak and receive evaluation. A new round begins with resetting of speaker priority, legislation not previously debated at that tournament, a new seating chart, and election of a presiding officer.

Motions: PO should pause briefly between speeches to recognize motions, and **not call** for them (at the beginning of a round, the PO may remind members to seek their attention between speeches).

Gaveling: appropriate times for the PO to gavel—to call the session to order, to denote when speaking/questioning time has lapsed, for speech time signals, and to establish order when decorum is lost. POs should **not** gavel for recognizing speakers or questioners – that only encourages *athleticism* and *ableism* for speakers to stand the fastest by emulating the start of a race.

Types of Speeches

– all equal value, and all demonstrate different skill sets.

- **Authorship/Sponsorship:** constructs advocacy by explaining need for the legislation to **solve/mitigate** a *problem*, and how it will do that.

- **First Negative:** constructs opposition by explaining how attempting to solve/mitigate a problem with the legislation will fail to meet objectives or will make the problem worse.
- **Rebuttal:** directly refutes opponents' *arguments* by explaining why they are incorrect – and **not** simply listing names of opposing legislators and/or saying they're wrong.
- **Extension:** taking a previous argument on the same side and extending the concept to a related concept or more in-depth exploration. These speeches are not rehash if new nuance is introduced.

Speeches may be a combination of rebuttal and extension.

- **Crystallization:** summarizing positions of both sides, and weighing the impacts to prove why one side wins over the other. This speech establishes key voting issues in the round.

Types of Questioning Periods

- **Traditional** – preliminary rounds – one delegate may ask one question at a time
- **Direct** – elimination rounds – questioning periods divided into 30-sec. blocks of exchange between the questioner and floor speaker.

Scoring Speaking and Presiding

- 6 – *Exemplary:* may have slight, nuanced room for improvement (recommend if necessary)
- 5 – *Accomplished:* could use a few improvements (suggest tactics)
- 4 – *Competent:* meets expectations, but should develop more depth/knowledge (offer specifics)
- 3 – *Developing:* barely meets minimum standards, and requires more growth (explain in detail)
- 2 – *Emerging:* underdeveloped skills [short arguments; lack of evidence] (describe what is needed)
- 1 – *Unacceptable:* offensive mockery or attack of peers, or (for speeches) spoke on wrong side

Going over time: When speakers extend beyond 3 minutes, their score should be lowered, and they should be downranked for monopolizing time by decreasing opportunities for others to speak.

Speaking Standards for Evaluation

- **Content**— organization, evidence and language: logical arrangement of ideas; depth of thought; support from a variety of credible quantitative (statistical) and qualitative (expert testimony) evidence analyzed to draw conclusions; compelling language; memorable introduction and conclusion; and cohesive



transitions to establish speaker's purpose and frame perspective of the issue's significance.

- **Argument & Refutation:** arguments have clear claims, are substantiated with sound, analysis and evidence, and explain the impact on those affected; these ideas are either new/fresh, or clear extensions rather than mere repetition of what has already been said; refutation of opposing arguments actually disproves them, rather than simply listening and saying they're wrong; answers to questions are given in similar structure.

- **Delivery:** vocal control and physical poise are deliberate, crisp and confident. Delivery should be extemporaneous and engaging others in the room, with few errors in pronunciation. Eye contact is effective and consistent.

Dispelling Myths of Congressional Debate

- Debate exists to advance arguments. ***Students should be prepared on both sides of legislation.*** One of the skills of Congressional Debate is being able to flip one's points if one really wants to give a speech on a particular piece of legislation, and more students seek

the opposite position. Hence, one-sided debate is highly frowned upon. If everyone is in agreement, then there is no debate!

- Students should feel comfortable ***moving the previous question*** when debate has become one-sided or debate has become stale – even if other students wish to speak. This is not rude,
- **IMPORTANT: Students do NOT need to speak on each item of legislation.** In fact, many tournaments limit debate on each legislation to prevent this from happening, and this also gives students the ability to not speak on a topic that might be a personal trigger for them.
- There is no “minimum cycle”, nor a “maximum cycle” rule, except at *certain* tournaments.
- There are **not** motions to “open the floor for debate,” “open the floor for presiding officer nominations,” nor “open the floor for agenda nominations.” These are part of the normal, established order of business for Congressional Debate, so the PO simply announces they will do these things.

RECENCY TABLE AND FRACTIONS OF VOTING

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# VOTES CAST	MAJORITY	TWO-THIRDS	ONE-THIRD
8	5	6	3
9	5	6	3
10	6	7	4
11	6	8	4
12	7	8	4
13	7	9	5

# VOTES CAST	MAJORITY	TWO-THIRDS	ONE-THIRD
14	8	10	5
15	8	10	5
16	9	11	6
17	9	12	6
18	10	12	6
19	10	13	7

# VOTES CAST	MAJORITY	TWO-THIRDS	ONE-THIRD
20	11	14	7
21	11	14	7
22	12	15	8
23	12	16	8
24	13	16	8
25	13	17	9