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## Constitution and Bylaws

The National Speech & Debate Association is the largest interscholastic speech and debate organization serving middle school, high school, and collegiate students in the United States.

The Association provides competitive speech and debate activities, high-quality resources, comprehensive training, scholarship opportunities, and advanced recognition to more than 150,000 students and coaches every year. For more than 90 years, the National Speech & Debate Association has empowered more than 1.5 million members to become engaged citizens, skilled professionals, and honorable leaders in our society.

This document outlines the constitution and bylaws of our organization. For questions not answered here, please contact the national office at [info@speechanddebate.org](mailto:info@speechanddebate.org) or call (920) 748-6206.

***Our Mission:*** *The National Speech & Debate Association connects, supports, and inspires a diverse community committed to empowering students through competitive speech and debate.*

***Our Vision:*** *We envision a world in which every student has access to membership in the National Speech & Debate Association, providing the educational resources, competitive opportunities, and expertise necessary to foster their communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creative skills.*

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## ARTICLE I – Name

The name of this organization shall be the National Speech & Debate Association.

## ARTICLE II – Purpose

It shall be the purpose of this organization to promote the interests of interscholastic debate, oratory, and public speaking by encouraging a spirit of fellowship and by conferring upon deserving candidates a worthy badge of distinction.

## ARTICLE III – Members

### A. Admission

1. *Eligibility.* Any instructor or student in a school holding membership in the National Speech & Debate Association, who is deemed worthy of membership by the administration of their school, and who, if a student, has participated in speech and debate activities, has represented high academic standards and character reflective of the Honor Code of the Association, and has paid the membership fee, shall be eligible to become a member of the National Speech & Debate Association. A majority of the Board of Directors may elect anyone for membership.

### B. Classes of Membership

1. *Active.* Only students in 12th grade or below and instructors in debate or speech at diploma-granting schools shall be eligible for active membership.
2. *Alumni.* All active members in good standing become alumni members upon graduating or withdrawing from their chapter institutions.
3. *Honorary.* Any chapter or national officer may nominate, and the Board of Directors may elect, honorary and associate members who may receive special insignia, but not the right to vote.
4. *General.* The Board of Directors may elect members to the General Chapter.

### C. Degrees of Membership

1. *Merit.* Eligible persons who have 25 credit points, 10 of which were earned in competitive speaking, shall receive the Degree of Merit.
2. *Honor.* Members who have the Degree of Merit and a total of 75 credit points shall receive the Degree of Honor.
3. *Excellence.* Members who have a total of 150 credit points shall receive the Degree of Excellence.
4. *Distinction.* Members who have a total of 250 credit points shall receive the Degree of Distinction.
5. *Special Distinction.* Members who have a total of 500 credit points shall receive the Degree of Special Distinction.

6. *Superior Distinction*. Members who have a total of 750 credit points shall receive the Degree of Superior Distinction.
7. *Outstanding Distinction*. Members who have a total of 1,000 credit points shall receive the Degree of Outstanding Distinction.
8. *Premier Distinction*. Members who have a total of 1,500 credit points shall receive the Degree of Premier Distinction.

#### D. Seals

The seal of the society shall be affixed to all certificates of membership. For the Degree of Merit the seal shall be white; for the Degree of Honor, bronze; for the Degree of Excellence, silver; for the Degree of Distinction, gold; for the Degree of Special Distinction, rose; for Degree of Superior Distinction, blue; for the Degree of Outstanding Distinction, purple; and for Premier Distinction, black.

## ARTICLE IV – Credit Points

#### A. Debate

Students earn points for participating in interscholastic debates according to the following standards:

1. *Association Main Events*. Policy Debate, Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Public Forum Debate, World Schools Debate, and Congressional Debate are considered main events. Policy Debate, Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Public Forum, and World Schools Debate are worth 6 points per win and 3 points per loss or non-decision. Congressional Debate contestants may earn up to 24 points per calendar day. Consult the *Unified Manual* for complete information.
2. *Non-Association Main Events*. Other debate events, including Parliamentary Debate, Extemporaneous Debate, and Mock Trial are worth 4 points per win and 2 points per loss or non-decision.
3. *Ratings*. If wins and losses are not used, a round of competition shall be recorded as a loss.

#### B. Speech

Students earn points for participating in interscholastic speech contests according to the following standards:

1. *Association Main Events*. Extemporaneous Speaking, Original Oratory, Informative Speaking, Program Oral Interpretation, Dramatic Interpretation, Humorous Interpretation, and Duo Interpretation are considered main events and are worth 6, 5, 4, 3, and 2 points for ranks of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5+, respectively.
2. *Non-Association Main Events*. Other speaking contests, including supplemental events, are worth 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 points for ranks of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5+, respectively.
3. *Small Contests*. A minimum of four schools must be present at a tournament for merit points to be earned in all events.
4. *Ratings*. Where contestants are awarded a rating instead of a ranking, the advisor shall record a rank that is comparable to the quality of the rating. Ranks of 1 only shall be converted from ratings of a superior nature, ranks of 2 shall be converted from ratings of an excellent standard, and so forth. (*Note: A thorough explanation*

*of rating and ranking points is available in the Unified Manual.)*

### **C. Congress**

A participant shall be awarded 1-6 points by an official scorer for each individual speech, hour of presiding, or hour of active committee participation at interscholastic Congresses or legislative assemblies, up to a maximum five speeches and 24 points per day.

### **D. Service Speeches and Novice Judging**

For speaking to a radio or television audience or to 25 adults, a student shall receive 1 point.

A student may receive 2 points for judging novice competition; limit 4 rounds per day.

Additional point allocations for service are available in the unified manual.

### **E. Instructors**

For every point awarded to a contestant coached by them, an instructor shall receive 1/10 of a point, except as noted in Bylaw 25.

### **F. Supplementary**

The Board of Directors may grant additional points for excellence in district or national competition and reduce points for practice tournaments. With the concurrence of the Board of District Chairs, it shall have authority to establish schedules of credit points for speech activities other than those named in this constitution; however, such schedules shall expire on July 31 following enactment.

### **G. Allocation Determination**

Credit point allocation shall be determined by majority consent of the Board of Directors and shall be published in the official chapter manual(s) of the organization.

## ARTICLE V – The Local Chapter

### A. Chapter Classifications

1. *Member Chapter*: a chapter that has not earned charter status, or not meeting charter renewal requirements over a three-year period.
2. *Charter Chapter*: the Association's highest school membership honor. Chartering requirements are enumerated in section B.

### B. Chartering Requirements

1. *Eligibility*. Any senior high school shall be eligible for a **charter** if it shall have engaged in forensic activity to such an extent that would have enrolled 50 new degrees in a three-year period.
2. *Enrollment Exception*. Schools with grades 9-12 enrollment of less than 500 students must enroll at least 25 new degrees in a three-year period.
3. *Dues*. Annual dues established by the board must be paid in full for each year a charter is held in order to keep the charter.
4. *Charter Status*. An award shall be granted to each local chapter earning charter status. It shall be valid for a period of three school years. On expiration, it may be renewed for three years upon payment of annual dues and attainment of the minimum standards prescribed for charter eligibility.

### C. Powers

1. *Constitution*. Each local chapter may adopt a constitution of its own choosing, not inconsistent with the national constitution and the bylaws made thereunder; and elect its own officers, which shall be at least a president and a secretary.
2. *Suspension and Expulsion*. The local chapter shall have power to suspend, reinstate, or expel any member by two-thirds vote.

### D. Votes

1. *Number*. The number of votes cast by each member shall be one, if they hold the Degree of Merit or higher.
2. *Chapter Strength*. Each active member school shall have one vote in district and national matters.
3. *Use*. In any and all votes taken by local chapter, district organization, or national organization (except Board of Directors or District Committee); or in any election, referendum, or question whatsoever coming before any body of the National Speech & Debate Association, this method of voting shall be employed in good faith, a majority of the votes cast controlling unless otherwise provided in this constitution. No decision shall be valid if otherwise arrived at.

## ARTICLE VI – The District Organization

### A. Organization

The chapters of the National Speech & Debate Association in each state shall constitute a district, but the Board of Directors may divide or consolidate states to create districts of approved size.

## B. Function

Each district shall hold an annual tournament and congress of representatives of its chapters and shall carry into execution such other functions as may hereafter be assigned to it.

# ARTICLE VII – National

## A. Board of Directors

1. *Members.* The national officers provided for in Section B shall constitute the Board of Directors.
2. *Powers.* The Board of Directors shall be vested with the supreme legislative and executive power of the National Speech & Debate Association and its decisions shall be final unless appeal therefrom is made and sustained by general referendum as hereinafter provided.
3. *Meetings.* The Board of Directors shall meet at least once each year at the call of a majority of its members.

## B. National Officers

1. *Personnel.* The Board of Directors consists of a president, vice president, at least six directors, one representative from secondary school administrators, and additional Board appointed directors. The number of Board appointed directors is not to be equal to or greater than the total number of appointed directors. Appointed directors are not eligible to be president or vice president. The Board, by majority vote, may expand or decrease the number of elected and appointed directors as long as the action does not violate the above provisions.
2. *Election.* Eight directors and an alternate director shall be chosen by the active members in even numbered years in such manner as the Board of Directors shall prescribe. The board will elect the president and vice president from the elected directors. The Board shall elect a school administrator and any additional appointed directors.
3. *Terms.* Elected directors shall serve four-year terms. Fifty percent of the elected directors shall be determined in each even numbered year. The fifth placed candidate will be the alternate for two years. Appointed directors will serve terms of two years.
4. *Vacancies.* If a vacancy occurs in an office filled by the votes of the active members, the board alternate shall serve out that term. Additional vacancies shall be filled by alternates according to the order of finish in the last general election. School administrator vacancies shall be filled by a vote of the Board of Directors.
5. *Duties*
  - a. *President.* The president shall be responsible for the enforcement of all provisions of this constitution and all regulations enacted under its authority.
  - b. *Vice President.* The vice president shall act as president in case of the temporary vacancy of that office or for the unexpired term if that office becomes vacant, and shall perform such other duties as may hereafter be required.



c. *Executive Director.* The executive director shall be responsible for all administrative work required by the provisions of this constitution. The executive director shall keep a complete record of the standing of each member; file applications for membership; issue charters and certificates of membership; collect chapter fees, membership fees, and other sums due the league; pay all legitimate bills of the league from the treasury; and conduct nominations, elections, referenda, and votes of the national organization.

6. The executive director's compensation shall be determined by the Board of Directors.

7. The executive director shall not be a member of the board, nor shall the executive director have a vote on issues which come before the board. The executive director shall report to and advise the Board of Directors as the board requires. The Board of Directors determines policy; the executive director has full responsibility for implementing policy.

### C. Fees

1. *Regular.* The chapter fee and membership fee shall be established each year.

2. *Special.* Additional or special fees may be levied only by a majority vote of active members.

### D. Suspension and Expulsion of Chapters

1. *Suspension.* A chapter which does not pay dues in a given fiscal year becomes inactive. A chapter may be suspended for other reasons representing due cause by the Board of Directors.

2. *Suspension and Reinstatement.* Any chapter which under any provision of this constitution or for due cause by vote of the Board of Directors is suspended, shall be reinstated upon removing the cause of suspension.

3. *Expulsion.* The Board of Directors may expel for due cause.

### E. Initiative and Referendum

1. *Initiative.* Any question shall, at the request of three members of the board or 10% of the chapters, be submitted to a vote of all active members. If a majority of all eligible votes is cast in favor of the proposed question and reported to the executive director within 30 days from the date of submission, it shall be declared effective as the will of the society.

2. *Referendum.* Any action by a local chapter, district organization, or national organization, shall at the request of three members of the board or 10% of the chapters, be submitted to a vote of all active members. If a majority of all eligible votes is cast in favor of repealing such action, and reported to the executive director within 30 days from the date of submission, then such action shall be repealed.

3. *Recall:* For malfeasance or professional misconduct in office an officer or director of the Board of Directors may be removed from office for cause upon motion by five members voting.

Recall of officer(s) and/or director(s) may be initiated by the membership at large following the same standards as outlined in initiative and referendum procedures. In cases of initiative and referendum or recall:

a. Each chapter petitioning must submit a separate request, signed by or sent by the chapter advisor.

- b. When an issue is put up for a vote, a position statement explaining the pros and cons of the proposition must accompany the ballot.
4. *Limitations.* No action by initiative or referendum shall be valid if it is contrary to any provision of this constitution.

## ARTICLE VIII – The Emblem

### A. Description

The official emblem of the National Speech & Debate Association shall be a key or pin, duplicates of the originals filed as such with the executive director.

The emblem for the student shall be silver; the emblem for the instructor shall be yellow gold.

### B. Jeweling

1. *Members.* Emblems may be jeweled to designate the highest degree held by the member: Emerald for the Degree of Honor; Blue Sapphire for the Degree of Excellence; Ruby for the Degree of Distinction; Two Rubies for the degree of Special Distinction; Three Rubies for the Degree of Superior Distinction; Four Rubies for the Degree of Outstanding Distinction; Five Rubies for the Degree of Premier Distinction.
2. *Instructors.* A diamond-set key or pin shall be awarded to an instructor attaining 1,500 points; additional diamonds for 3,000, 6,000 and 10,000 points; and an additional diamond for each 3,000 instructor credit points over 10,000. A minimum of five years coaching is required for each diamond.

### C. Procurement

The emblem shall be procured only on order registered in the national office.

## **ARTICLE IX – General**

### **A. Magazine**

The national organization shall publish at stated times a magazine devoted to furthering the purposes of this society and advancing the interests of interscholastic forensic contests. The Board of Directors shall select the editor.

### **B. Secrecy**

No chapter of the National Speech & Debate Association shall engage in any secret practices or impose any obligation of secrecy upon any of its members.

## **ARTICLE X – Amendment**

Amendments may be added to this constitution when proposed by five members of the Board of Directors and ratified by a majority vote of the active members.

Ballots cast on an amendment shall be counted 30 days after submission of the amendment, or as soon thereafter as a majority of the membership has reported its vote.

## BYLAWS

### Bylaw No. 1

No application for membership shall be accepted by the Association unless it is complete and accurate.

### Bylaw No. 2

No certificates of membership and no advanced degrees shall be granted except in consequence of credit points duly recorded.

### Bylaw No. 3

The procedure in voting by district or national organization, unless directed otherwise by the board, shall be as follows:

1. Each chapter advisor may cast a ballot online for members of the district committee or question at issue.
2. Each ballot shall count as one vote.
3. In counting ballots in any preferential voting, the executive director shall first separate the ballots according to the first choice expressed thereon. The person receiving the lowest number of votes shall be declared defeated and their votes distributed according to the next choice expressed on those ballots. The person who then has the lowest number of votes shall be declared defeated and their votes distributed.
4. This process shall be continued until all have been eliminated except the number to be chosen, and the person or persons remaining shall be declared chosen.
5. The executive director shall preserve the original ballots for one year.
6. When a ballot is incorrectly marked, the obvious intentions of the voter, as reasonably construed, shall govern; and the ballot counted accordingly.

### Bylaw No. 4

The organization shall publish an official publication, *Rostrum*, as a membership benefit.

### Bylaw No. 5

1. In each district there shall be a district committee to provide stewardship and leadership to its chapters, conduct the district tournament, and perform such other duties as may be assigned to it.
2. The chapters in each district shall elect a chairperson and committee of voting members by weighted ordinal ballot; the ballot for each chapter to be counted equally. Ties will be broken by voter's head-to-head preference, then the number of first place votes, then the number of second place votes, and so on. The term of office shall begin on August 1, and continue for two years or the current term length as approved by the Board of Directors

3. When prescribed by the Board of Directors, the district committee may be allowed to appoint additional member(s).
4. A position shall become vacant upon the death or resignation of the duly elected member or upon their transfer to another Association district. If a vacancy occurs, it shall be filled by the person next in line for the position vacated.
5. The district chairs from each of the several districts shall constitute the Board of District Chairs and shall serve as an advisory body to the Board of Directors.
6. The district chairs shall by virtue of their office, be candidates for members of the Board of Directors upon filing nomination papers as may be prescribed. Past district chairs may be candidates for members of the board of Directors upon filing nomination papers. Any coach who has served for at least 5 years may also run.
7. All names submitted for election to the executive director shall be placed on the ballot along with incumbents who file for reelection at the regular election of the Board of Directors.

#### **Bylaw No. 6**

1. The National Organization shall grant a Distinguished Service key to any member earning 20 citations according to the published schedule online, and a Distinguished Service plaque to any member earning 50 citations.
2. In cases of variable number of citations to be granted, the Executive Director shall determine the number.
3. Requests for citations must be filed within one year from the date of service.

#### **Bylaw No. 7**

Any coach on the national records shall be marked "inactive" if such person does not appear on the active roster for any school.

Any student on the national records shall count toward school strength if their membership is paid and they have not yet graduated. To be district eligible, the student will also require a valid, unique email address in the system.

#### **Bylaw No. 8**

A student's points record becomes the basis for their instructor record in accordance with the current manual.

#### **Bylaw No. 9**

1. A trophy to be known as the Pi Kappa Delta / Bruno E. Jacob Trophy, shall be given at the close of each National Speech & Debate Tournament to the participating chapter which then has the largest number of tournament points as herein provided.
2. One point shall be recorded for each round of participation in individual contest events in the National Tournament and two points for each round of debate participation.
3. The record shall begin with the first National Tournament in 1931, and all points gained by a school shall remain to its credit until it has received the trophy.

4. If more than 50% of the points necessary for the procurement of the award were gained under the direction of one instructor, such instructor shall receive a miniature replica of the trophy in recognition of their service in effective speech education.

#### **Bylaw No. 10**

1. The Board of Directors hereby elects to Honorary Membership persons nominated therefore as herein prescribed:
  - a. Chapter Honoraries nominated by a chapter in good standing, not more than one a year nor more than one for each 100 degrees enrolled by that chapter.
  - b. State Honoraries nominated by chapters casting a majority of the votes in the state at the time of nomination, not more than one a year.
  - c. National Honoraries nominated by the Board of Directors, but not more than one for each 10,000 degrees enrolled in the National Organization.
2. The insignia for national honorary membership shall be a yellow gold key. Appropriate certificates shall be issued by the executive director.

#### **Bylaw No. 11**

1. A trophy shall be awarded at the close of each National Congress to the participating school which then has the largest number of Congress points as herein provided.
2. One point shall be recorded for each legislative day of participation by a member; five points for Most Outstanding award; four points for Outstanding; two points for Superior; and two points for Presiding Officer.
3. The record shall begin with the first National Congress in 1938. A chapter receiving the trophy shall thereupon begin a new record.

#### **Bylaw No. 12**

1. The members and degrees enrolled by each school shall be carried on a cumulative record at the national office.
2. The school having the largest totals on record on July 1 in each district shall receive a National Award for Excellence in speech. Not more than one award may be given in a district each year. Thereupon, new cumulative records shall be opened for such chapters.
3. An award shall be presented to the leading chapter in each district. No school shall receive this award in less than five years.

#### **Bylaw No. 13**

1. No credit points shall be awarded for an interscholastic contest if the actual speaking time for a participant is less than two-thirds of the prevailing time for each event: specifically, less than ten minutes for a debater, seven minutes for Oratory or Interpretation, five minutes for Extemp or Reading, 40 minutes for Discussion, two minutes for Impromptu, or five minutes for other contests.

2. No points for interscholastic debates or contests shall be awarded for events held during the normal summer vacation. National Tournament and Congress are excepted. Boys' and Girls' Nation Conventions are allowed.
3. No service speaking points shall be awarded for announcing over a public address system in the high school. No points shall be awarded for any service speaking less than four minutes in duration.

#### Bylaw No. 14

1. A chapter not having paid annual chapter fee prior to a vote or district tournament shall not be allowed to participate in the activity at hand.
2. All rights shall be restored on payment of chapter fee.

#### Bylaw No. 15

An instructor shall receive no credit points for student points for work during the previous school year by a graduated student.

#### Bylaw No. 16

1. Ninth grade students in a junior high school may be elected to membership by the chapter at the senior high school they expect to attend.
2. Ninth grade students may, if local rules permit, participate as members of the senior high school team at interscholastic tournaments.

## Questions?

**We're here to help!** Email us at [info@speechanddebate.org](mailto:info@speechanddebate.org) or call (920) 748-6206. You may also find more information online at [www.speechanddebate.org](http://www.speechanddebate.org).

## Change Log

This section documents revisions made to the *Constitution and Bylaws*. Overarching modifications are indicated by a change in the second digit (i.e., 2.1.0), while minor edits or revisions to the current document are indicated by a change in the third digit (i.e., 2.0.1). The following are updates to the original version.

Date	Version	Change Description
09/15/11	2.0.0	Updated document formatting.  Revised sections pertaining to point recording (main events versus non-main events), point limitations/caps, and chapter chartering requirements.  Updated Bylaw No. 11, as passed by the Board of Directors at the spring 2011 Board meeting.

12/05/16	3.0.0	<p>Updated logo and branding to reflect the organizational name change from “National Forensic League” to “National Speech &amp; Debate Association.”</p> <p>Updated to include World Schools Debate (WSD), Program Oral Interpretation (POI), and Informative Speaking (INF) as main competition events.</p> <p>Updated Article III-A1, Article IV-G, Article V-D1/2, and Article VII-B per the Constitutional Referendum passed by the membership in Spring 2016. For complete voting results and rationale, consult the Summer 2016 <i>Rostrum</i>, pages 12-14.</p>
03/11/19	4.0.0	<p>Changed all pronoun references to singular they format.</p> <p>From Article III, removed items A2 and A3 that specified outdated membership procedures.</p> <p>Updated Article III, item B1 to incorporate students below high school.</p> <p>Updated Article IV, item F to end date that matches the current fiscal year.</p> <p>Updated Article V, items A1-3 to allow for charter and member status and eliminate provisional status.</p> <p>Updated Article V, item B4 to reflect current practice in charter recognition.</p> <p>Updated Article VII, item B5c to replace “charter fees” with “chapter fees.”</p> <p>Updated Article VII, item D to clarify to remove the stipulation that failure to pay dues by December 1 results in suspension, and to simply suspension/expulsion procedures.</p> <p>Updated former Bylaw 6, current Bylaw 3 to remove strength-based voting language.</p> <p>Updated former Bylaw 10, current Bylaw 4 to reflect current practices in <i>Rostrum</i> management.</p> <p>Updated former Bylaw 11, current Bylaw 5 to reflect current practices in district board elections.</p> <p>Updated former Bylaw 14, current Bylaw 6 to reflect current ways to earn coach citations.</p> <p>Changed former Bylaw 15, current Bylaw 7 to update definition of “active” student and coach.</p> <p>Changed former Bylaw 16, current Bylaw 8 to allow for integrated points records between students and coaches in lieu of the former “transfer” of records required.</p> <p>Changed former Bylaw 24, current Bylaw 14 to remove the school year deadline for renewal.</p> <p>Changed former Bylaw 25, current Bylaw 15 to remove the date previously allowed for submission of older points.</p> <p>Removed former Bylaw 26 because no longer relevant with digital record keeping.</p> <p>Changed former Bylaw 27, current Bylaw 16 to allow for competition between junior high schools and to remove the stipulation that high school students cannot earn points if at a tournament involving middle schoolers (this is covered in the unified manual).</p> <p>The bylaws have been renumbered to accommodate for past deletions and changes, resulting in 16 bylaws total.</p>