



NATIONAL SPEECH & DEBATE ASSOCIATION

Culturally Competent Judging

Every ballot has the following language:

We are all influenced by implicit bias or stereotypes that, when unchecked, influence our judging in ways that may negatively impact the students we are called to judge impartially. Before writing comments or making a decision, please take a moment to reflect on any preconceived notions you may hold that may impact your decision-making process and/or jeopardize the student experience.

As you learned in the [Cultural Competence Video Training](#), judges play an important role in supporting students' educational and competitive endeavors. In order to ensure that speech and debate tournaments are a more equitable environment, it is important for judges to ensure they are providing culturally competent and inclusive performance feedback and decisions that meet students where they are in order to create safe spaces and healthy competition. This brief document is designed as a companion to the judge training course.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE ENCOMPASSES THE LIFELONG LEARNING PROCESS OF:

- Being aware of one's own view and perception of the world
- Striving to expand understanding and awareness of different cultural practices and worldviews
- Developing the skills to communicate and interact effectively with people from different life experiences

Increasing our knowledge and awareness about our own self and subsequent identities can help to open our understanding to the wide breath of characteristics that meld together to create the life experiences of others. Project Implicit also has several free [Implicit Association Tests](#) that you can take to become more aware of your biases.

Please be intentional and deliberate about how you will incorporate this training into your judging at the National Tournament. Take a few minutes to make a plan, which takes into account the potential implicit bias you may bring to judging based on your own lived experience, as well as the difficult and sometimes stressful process of evaluating and deciding rounds. The best approach is an active process. For example, you could write a short statement to remind yourself of this training and commit to re-reading it before you write or submit a ballot.

While awareness of these issues is important, it is insufficient without corresponding action to make sure that awareness is consistent and the problem is addressed in a meaningful way.

Please also ask yourself how each participant in the round might interpret your ballot or judge comments. Remember each participant is an individual, with their own identity and background, instead of just a neutral competitor.

Judging Feedback

Please be aware that students may have filled in pronouns on their **Tabroom.com** profiles. In order to make the tournament a better experience for students, take a few moments to review the email/text blast with the round's pairing and use the pronouns students have given.

It is important to remember that the feedback provided to students will be utilized as a tool to further their development, and as such should stand as productive and educational in its content. Comments provided on the ballots should center around the content of the presentation, avoiding any comments related to dress, appearance, pitch of voice, etc. **Please remember that although some comments may seem well-intentioned, they may actually reinforce the status quo of societal norms, potentially creating a non-inclusive space for students.**

Below are examples of comments that can have detrimental effects on students in our speech and debate communities.

EXAMPLE COMMENTS:	PROBLEMATIC BECAUSE ...
"You were dressed professionally and seemed well prepared for this speech."	Students will come from a wide variety of socioeconomic AND cultural backgrounds. What is available and "professional" to students may vary based on these factors. Female-presenting students and people of color most often receive comments on their dress. In general, try to focus your comments on the performance itself. It is important to remove personal biases and expectations in regards to dress so that we can be inclusive of all bright young minds who want to participate.
"Your body language was awkward."	While speech and debate involve physical movement, judges assuming all bodies can "perform" in the same way perpetuates ableism. Keep in mind that many disabilities can be invisible and many students may not disclose their disabilities to you. Almost 20% of Americans experience some form of disability. Use of ableist language as described in this article can hurt our students. (Washington Post, 2015).

EXAMPLE COMMENTS:	PROBLEMATIC BECAUSE ...
<p>“Don’t be so aggressive in CX.”</p>	<p>This comment does not provide action steps that support the growth and continued learning of the student. Also, consider the connotation associated with the word aggression when layering in gender stereotypes.</p> <p>A recent study showed that female-presenting debaters are criticized on ballots for being “aggressive” at twice the rate than male-presenting debaters. (Lynn and Kawolics, Rostrum, 2018).</p> <p>A research team at Stanford’s The VMware Women’s Leadership Innovation Lab “uncovered patterns of ambiguity in how performance reviews are written that can lead to a disadvantage for women” (Mackenzie, Harvard Business Review, 2019). While comparing reviews, men were more likely to receive lengthy feedback that focused on technical skills. Women were more likely to “receive vague feedback that did not offer specific details of what they had done well and what they could do to advance.”</p> <p>Another study stated that “when acting authoritatively, women leaders are disliked much more than men.” This article also notes that women are “often penalized when they behave in ways that violate gender stereotypes” (Cooper, Harvard Business Review, 2013).</p>
<p>“The pitch of your voice could use some work, try not to be so shrill.”</p>	<p>With the increasing usage of technology for speech and debate competitions, it is important to consider how technology may be impacting your perception of the competitor.</p> <p>Technology and sound transmission equipment has been optimized to accommodate lower voices, thereby disadvantaging higher pitched voices. (Tallon, The New Yorker, 2019). One researcher found that technology reduced the intelligibility of female speech as a result.</p> <p>Recent study showed that female-presenting debaters are criticized on ballots for being “emotional” 10 times more often than male-presenting debaters. (Lynn and Kawolics, Rostrum, 2018).</p>

Judge Paradigm Guide

EXAMPLE COMMENTS:	PROBLEMATIC BECAUSE ...
<p>“Next time, please find a quiet space in your home from which to compete.”</p> <p>“You should plan ahead to have backup technology available to give your speeches.”</p>	<p>Our participants come from a diverse set of backgrounds and as such, not all have access to back up technology or quiet homes. Their location may be further impacted by proximity to the internet, lighting, and other family members’ presence in the home. Please do not assume that they have control over their environment.</p> <p>Please remember that implicit bias means we are more likely to assume someone whom we have unconscious bias against has failed to prepare properly. For others, we’d assume they have bad luck.</p>
<p>“You have chosen a piece that isn’t commonly known. It wasn’t clear what the intent of the speech was.”</p> <p>“For your next presentation, consider choosing something that your audience will know more about so that we can relate more to it?”</p> <p>“Another piece on race? There’s so much more out there.”</p> <p>“Since my personal experience is different from yours, I couldn’t connect with your piece. I just resonated with other performances more fully.”</p> <p>“You made us all uncomfortable when you started speaking in Spanish.”</p>	<p>Through speech and debate, students are empowered to choose pieces that are meaningful to them. The comments to the left overlook the importance that the piece may hold for the student, potentially overlooking or ignoring a part of someone’s identity. Students may choose pieces that are more culturally relevant to their own background or personal experiences, which may not always be commonly known to all judges.</p> <p>In order to create a diverse speech and debate community, we want to welcome a wide spectrum of speeches, authors, and topics, honoring the diversity that they represent. New pieces provide us with the opportunity to learn and grow.</p>

EXAMPLE COMMENTS:	PROBLEMATIC BECAUSE ...
<p><i>“The Wall Street Journal is a bad source, so I ignored your point.”</i></p> <p><i>“I personally disagree that paternity leave is a necessity, so I ranked you lower.”</i></p>	<p>An open-minded and considerate approach from judges is essential to encourage young students to delve into topics from various angles without fear of bias. These comments suggest that the judge’s political ideology and/or value system is forming the basis for their ranks or decision. Instead of allowing personal feelings about a source or topic to determine who wins, judges should focus on the objectives of the event, which can help empower students to question and analyze important issues from multiple perspectives.</p>



Be sure to ask yourself if your feedback is related to the **content and quality of the presentation/speech**—or if feedback denotes things that the student cannot change, or might not be able to change due to a variety of circumstances.

Remember, judging and supporting a diverse community of students requires you to be open and curious about yourself and others around you.

Thank you for your commitment to supporting students in this activity!