***A process for adapting to the judge:***

1. Prior to the tournament, have your coach provide you with a copy of the judges’ instruction sheet. Many leagues provide verbal judges’ instructions as well. Ask your coach to attend and review how the judges in your league are being trained and what information they are being provided to assist them in making a decision.

2. Before the round, ask for the judges’ philosophy if it is not available online. Remember the tips and questions your coach gave you to ask this question. If you don’t remember, be sure to ask your coach.

3. When you learn your judge’s name (if it is on the postings), try to find out as much as you can before the round. Ask a teammate or your coach. Some tournaments ask judges to write a judging philosophy. If these are available, take advantage of them. Some of these circuit philosophies exist on debate apps and remain available for years. Make a list of your judges as the year progresses and make notes to yourself as you continue to build other cases, make changes to your initial case, or read your judges’ RFD and comments on ballots.

4. Once you have made your assessment, test the judge as you present your arguments. Present your first constructive, paying close attention to the way the judge reacts to your argumentation. If he or she agrees by nodding his or her head, or does **not** show overt signs of disagreement, you should operate on the assumption that he or she is moving toward a decision. If, on the other hand, the judge seems to be confused, lost, or otherwise distressed, change your pattern!

5. Where possible, unless required by the topic, your best bet is always to stay close to the middle of the road when making political statements.

6. Debaters often think it is a weakness to admit that the other debater is right on certain issues, but when done correctly, judges often see this as a positive thing. Failure to admit your opponent may have some good points will lose your credibility in the eyes of the judge. Whether it’s a definition or a question in cross examination, choose those agreements very carefully because you want to show your reasonability, yet not concede the debate.

7. If your judge is a former policy debater remember that an argument is just an argument, regardless of the shape, size, or form that it comes in. A *disadvantage*, for example, is just another reason why what the affirmative does is bad. A *plan* is just a specific instance of the resolution being proven true. *Topicality* is just a burden that the affirmative has to meet to win. Just because we adapt and couch these arguments in fancy Policy terms does not mean we are making any substantive changes in the argument’s merit. If your team has one, be sure you keep a glossary of terms for your area that lend themselves to debate cases handy.

8. Learn how many rounds the judge will need to judge in this particular tournament. Some judges are struggling through each and every round looking for their next chance to catch up on sleep they lost the night before. This means that judges are going to be much more irritable than you might expect. Make sure the judge is engaged.

9. After the debate, read your ballots carefully! You can learn a great deal about judges from carefully reading ballots after tournaments. Even if you do not agree with what a judge has to say (or the way in which he or she voted), read the ballot carefully and try to determine why the judge voted a certain way. Keep your ballots and add your observations to your judges’ list.