



2023-2024

Updated March 14, 2024

Middle School Unified Manual

Tournament Procedures, Rules, and Judging Instructions

The **National Speech & Debate Association** is the largest interscholastic speech and debate organization serving middle school and high school 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.

OUR MISSION: We believe communication skills are essential for empowering youth to become engaged citizens, skilled professionals, and honorable leaders in our global society. We connect, support, and inspire a diverse community of honor society members committed to fostering excellence in young people through competitive speech and debate activities.

OUR VISION: We envision a world in which every student has access to competitive speech and debate activities. We are the leading voice in the development of resources, competitive and ethical standards, curricular and co-curricular opportunities, and recognition systems for our vast network of student, coach, and alumni members.

Editor's Note: For quick reference throughout this document, new changes for the current year are highlighted in **yellow**. Other recent changes made within the past one or two years remain highlighted in **gray**.

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SECTION 1: Middle School National Tournament Procedures

Overview

This manual offers an overview of competition procedures at the **Middle School National Speech & Debate Tournament**. Coaches must be familiar with the tournament information posted at www.speechanddebate.org/msnats. The following document serves as a guide to help you understand the tournament's structure; however, the deadlines and requirements found on the National Tournament website (not included here) are expectations that must be followed by all participants.

Please refer to the *Middle School Competition Event Rules* section for specific rules of the various events offered at the tournament. Also see *Middle School Judging Instructions* as additional guidance for judges.

New Release and Updates

Note: New changes for the current year are highlighted in **yellow**. Other recent changes made within the past one or two years remain highlighted in **gray**.

Harassment and Discrimination Policy

The National Speech & Debate Association is committed to providing its participants, judges, coaches, and staff the opportunity to pursue excellence in their endeavors. This opportunity can exist only when each member of our community is assured an atmosphere of mutual respect. The NSDA prohibits all forms of harassment and discrimination. Accordingly, all forms of harassment and discrimination, whether written or oral, based on race, color, religion, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, citizenship, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, or any other characteristic protected by any applicable federal, state, or local law are prohibited, whether committed by participants, judges, coaches, or observers. Individuals who are found to have violated this policy will be subject to the full range of sanctions, up to and including removal from the tournament premises. Any individual or group of individuals who believes they have been a victim of harassment and/or discrimination should report it to the ombudsperson immediately.

(Updated February 3, 2019)

I. Tournament Entry

A. The 2024 Middle School National Tournament will be held in person.

B. **Eligibility:** Students must have been in the fifth, sixth, seventh, or eighth grade during this academic school year. There is no qualification process; this is an open tournament.

1. Students involved with non-school clubs must instead be registered with the school at which they are enrolled. Contestants found to be violating this rule will be disqualified.
2. **Membership Notice:** The Board of Directors affirms the creation, support, and development of speech and debate programs at the middle and secondary levels through accredited public and private schools. All members of the Association must be school-based. For any club or organization that does not currently have a school-based membership, the NSDA is eager to work with you to create school-based speech and debate teams. Students who are currently members through their area non-school-based clubs and organizations may request to have their memberships transferred to their accredited public and private schools. Homeschools and virtual schools that are recognized by the state in which those schools compete may join the National Speech & Debate Association. Please contact info@speechanddebate.org for more information.

C. Entry Limits:

1. Entries, judges, and payment are due May 15.
2. Coaches must acquire a signed Entry Release Form for each competitor before the first day of competition, retain these signed forms through December 31, and be ready to produce them at any point during or following the Middle School National Tournament. Forms do not need to be turned in to the national office during registration.
3. Debate events **Big Questions**, Lincoln-Douglas, Policy, Public Forum, Congress, and World Schools will be offered. No double entry is permitted in debate events. Students may not register for a debate event and speech events.
4. Speech events are split into two patterns. Students may enter up to four total events (no more than two per pattern). Students cannot double enter in Pattern A if they are registered for Extemporaneous Speaking.
 - a. Pattern A: Duo Interpretation, Humorous Interpretation, Mixed Extemporaneous Speaking, Original Oratory, Poetry, and **Storytelling**.
 - b. Pattern B: Dramatic Interpretation, Declamation, Prose, Informative Speaking, Program Oral Interpretation, Original Spoken Word Poetry, and **Impromptu**.
5. A school may enter up to 8 entries per event.
6. Visual aids are optional in Informative Speaking.
7. Once we reach capacity, we will close registration in applicable competition events. This may happen before the entry deadline.
8. Events with fewer than 25 entries may be canceled.

D. Judging:

1. **Middle schools are required to bring judges for each division** in which they have students (Policy, LD, or PF, Speech, World Schools, and Congress) as a condition of registering
2. **Judge requirements by event group:**
 - a. Policy Debate: For every 2 teams or fraction thereof, one judge must be provided by the school.
 - b. LD Debate: For every 3 entries or fraction thereof, one judge must be provided by the school.
 - c. PF Debate: For every 3 teams or fraction thereof, one judge must be provided by the school.

- d. BQ Debate: For every 3 teams or fraction thereof, one judge must be provided by the school.
 - e. Speech: For every 5 entries or fraction thereof, one judge must be provided by the school.
 - f. Congress: A minimum of one judge must be provided by the school.
 - g. World Schools: For every 2 teams or fraction thereof, one judge must be provided by the school.
3. If a school owes more than one judge in a category, they may choose to buy-out their obligation for \$160 per judge. However, at least one judge must be provided by the school in each category owed.
 4. Judging paradigm questionnaires for Policy and Lincoln-Douglas Debate judges must be completed on Tabroom.com by May 15.
 5. All judges are committed through the end of the tournament and are expected to judge any round assigned within their event group. Schools whose judges, including parent chaperone judges, do not report for assignments on time will forfeit their judge bond.
 6. If a school enters high school students to judge, they must have been juniors or seniors with at least 250 Honor Society points in the last academic year. No underclassmen or upper classmen without 250 Honor Society points will be permitted to judge. A rising junior does not meet this criterion. Students competing at the high school National Tournament cannot cover a school's judging obligation.
 7. All judges must be registered on the registration site by May 15. All judge paradigms are due by May 15. All judges must certify they have completed the required judge training by May 15. Failure to meet this deadline may result in forfeiture of entry to the National Tournament.

E. Fees:

1. **School Membership Fee: \$75.** Every school registered in the Middle School National Tournament must first be registered as a paid NSDA member school. School membership costs \$75, and the school will remain a member until the end of the current school year. Sign up for membership at www.speechanddebate.org/join.
2. **Student Membership Fee: \$10.** Every student registered in the Middle School National Tournament must first be registered as a paid NSDA member student. Each student membership costs \$10, and students will remain members until they enter high school. Sign up for membership at www.speechanddebate.org/join.
3. **Entry Fee:** An annual fee will be charged per entry and can be found on the National Tournament website. Payment must accompany your registration materials. Schools staying within the NSDA hotel block receive a discount on entry fees. Schools must select the hotel they are staying at in their Tabroom.com registration, and this discount will be automatically applied. All fees are non-refundable after registration closes on May 15.
4. Each school must post a judge bond of **\$200**. This bond is in addition to entry fees and judge fees. If all judges from a school complete all judging assignments, the \$200 will be returned after the tournament using the method selected during registration (on the general tab of your tournament registration): refund check by mail or credit toward 2024 NSDA membership. Judge bond refunds will be processed by July 31. A school will not be permitted to gain membership or compete the following year unless all outstanding fees have been paid.
5. Overpayments will be processed by July 31 and refunded via the same method selected for judge bond refund.
6. Payment for hired judges must be received by May 15. No judges may be hired after this date.

F. Entry Requirements and Deadlines:

1. Coaches can register online at **MSNats.tabroom.com**. Entries are due **May 15**.

2. Title, author, and ISBN information for Interpretation events, title, works cited, and topic for Original Oratory, Informative Speaking, and Program Oral Interp, and title for Declamation, must be posted on the registration website by **May 15**.
3. Judge names and judge conflicts are due **May 15**.
4. Entry release forms, signed by each student's parent/guardian, must be procured by the first day of competition and retained by coaches until December 31. Coaches will agree to a disclaimer certifying that they will procure these forms prior to registering. No forms need to be uploaded, but evidence that a school has violated this agreement could result in disqualification of the school's entries.
5. Coaches must certify that EACH contestant entered under their school name is a student at this middle school and will be under the supervision of a supervising adult who is the student's parent/guardian, coach, or school administrator, approved by the school principal by agreeing to the disclaimer prior to registering. No forms need to be uploaded, but evidence that a school has violated this agreement could result in disqualification of the school's entries.
6. All fees, including judge bond, must be postmarked or received by the national office by **May 15**.

G. Supervision and Logistics Information:

1. Each student shall be under the supervision of an adult coach, parent/guardian, or other adult approved by the school principal. The adult supervisor must be the student's coach, a school district faculty member or administrator, or the child's own parent(s). The supervising adult must stay at the same lodging with student(s) under their supervision. Students without an accredited supervisor staying in the same lodging will not be permitted to participate in the tournament. Coaches from other school districts may not be the adult supervisor without prior written permission of both school district superintendents.
2. Students are not allowed to enter competition rooms without judges present. Students are required to wait outside the room until judge(s) arrive.
3. The tournament may limit spectators in accordance with fire safety codes and room capacities.
4. All rounds at the Middle School National Tournament are open to any spectator.

II. Competition Event Procedures

- A. **Judges:** At least one judge evaluates each preliminary round. At least three judges will evaluate elimination rounds.
- B. **Judging Conflicts:** Contestants scheduled to be judged by someone who has, at any point in time, coached or taught them or with whom they have a close personal relationship are responsible for reporting that conflict on Tabroom.com prior to **May 15**. If someone is scheduled to judge a student that is a conflict, they must report that fact to the tournament office immediately. Failure to comply may result in disqualification from the tournament.
- C. **Public Forum, Lincoln-Douglas, Policy, Big Questions, and World Schools Debate:**
 - 1. If fewer than 25 participants sign up for a particular debate event, that event may be cancelled.
 - 2. Preliminary Round Pairing Procedures
 - a. There shall be no fewer than five preliminary rounds for each debate category in which all entries are guaranteed participation (except in the event of a bye), unless there are under 40 entries, where at least four preliminary rounds will be held.
 - b. In the event of an odd number of entries in a given debate format, one entry in each round will be awarded a bye. That bye will be tabulated as a win, and entry receiving the bye will be awarded speaker points equal to their speaker point average in the other four rounds of competition. The bye will be assigned randomly in rounds one and two. In powermatched rounds, the bye will be assigned to the entry with the lowest SOP scoring entry that does not create a side, school, or repeat debate conflict and has not yet received a bye. If possible given other pairing priorities, the same school will not draw the bye more than once in preliminary rounds.
 - c. Where possible, entries will be constrained from meeting other entries from their school, and other entries they have previously met in prelims. Where possible, entries will be constrained from meeting entries from the same state or region in pre-sets. This cannot be guaranteed.
 - d. Rounds one and two of all debate divisions will be paired randomly with exception of the previous mentioned constraints. All rounds following round two will be paired using a high-low within the brackets method of powering.
 - e. For Public Forum, a coin toss will be used to determine sides and speaker order in all rounds.
 - f. Scheduling judges for preliminary rounds:
 - i. All preliminary rounds of debate will be decided by one judge.
 - ii. No school-affiliated judge shall be scheduled to judge their own entry where possible.
 - iii. A judge will not be scheduled to judge an entry more than once.
 - 3. Pairing Procedures for Elimination Rounds
 - a. All entries with winning records will advance to elimination rounds in a single-elimination bracket.
 - b. Once elimination rounds begin, school constraints no longer apply. An entry may be paired to debate another entry from the same school. In such situations, the coach of record for entries involved may opt to advance either entry without holding the actual debate, or the coach may decide to require the debaters to debate, in which case the tournament will provide necessary judges for the round to take place. NOTE: the final round must be debated for students to earn the awards, and they will be crowned co-champions. This is to ensure a public showcase of the tournament's best talent, as well as to complete the video archive.
 - c. When determining which entries advance to elimination rounds, all entries will be seeded based on the following:

- i. Total number of wins.
 - ii. Adjusted speaker points with highest and lowest single-ballot points dropped.
 - iii. Opposition seed.
 - iv. Total speaker points.
 - v. Speaker points dropping the two highest and two lowest point values.
 - vi. Judge variance.
 - vii. Opposition points.
 - viii. In the event of an unbreakable tie, the seeding of the teams in questions will be determined by a coin toss.
- d. The following guidelines will be used to pair elimination rounds.
- i. In the first elimination round the highest seed will debate the lowest seed, the second seed will debate the second lowest seed, so on. For example, in octafinals the 1st seed would debate the 16th seed, the 2nd seed would debate the 15th seed, the 3rd seed would debate the 14th seed, the 4th seed would debate the 13th seed, and so on ending with the 8th seed debating the 9th seed.
 - ii. If the 16th seed defeats the 1st seed in octafinals, for example, then they assume the 1st seed.
 - iii. For Policy and LD - If the entries paired to debate in out rounds met in prelims, then they will debate on opposite sides in the elimination round. If the two entries have not met previously at the National Tournament, then they will flip a coin for sides. In elimination rounds of World Schools Debate, all teams will flip a coin to determine sides. Sides in Public Forum will always be determined by coin toss.
- e. Scheduling judges for elimination rounds
- i. All elimination rounds of debate will be judged by a minimum of three judges.
 - ii. No coach shall be scheduled to judge their own entry.

D. Congressional Debate:

1. Preliminary Round Sectioning

- a. Students will be assigned to chambers of no more than 24 students.
- b. Students from the same school will be separated, except to allow for an affiliated judge to score in a chamber without students from their school.
- c. Preliminary sessions will be evaluated and ranked by at least two judges and a parliamentarian, who will score individual speeches and answers to questions, as well as preferentially rank the students in each session.
 - i. A parliamentarian will be assigned to each chamber (or one of the judges will be designated as “parliamentarian”). They will supervise each chamber: to call roll, intervene in case a chamber becomes too deeply involved in parliamentary rules, and correct gross errors in procedure. They should remain in the background, but step forward firmly when their presence is required. The purpose of the Congress is to debate legislation, and it is the parliamentarian’s duty to see that this is done.
 - ii. Interested students may run for election as presiding officer. If no students step forward, the parliamentarian assigned to the chamber shall preside. The presiding officer shall call contestants to speak, serve as timekeeper, and ensure that tournament rules and parliamentary procedure are adhered to. The parliamentarian will assist the presiding officer as necessary.

2. Agenda: To facilitate maximum time for debate, the agenda will be set in the order legislation appears in the docket packet. Students may move to *Suspend the Rules* and alter the agenda in individual chambers, but the parliamentarian may step in and overrule this, if they believe this motion is being used abusively or excessively.
3. Elimination Rounds:
 - a. If there are fewer than 19 contestants in the preliminary session, no final session will be held. If there are 20-40 students, the top 10-14 will advance straight to finals; if there are 41 or more, at least the top 24 will advance to semifinals and at least the top 12 will advance to finals. The following priorities determine advancement and placing:
 - i. Low cumulative rank total
 - ii. Judge Preference
 - iii. Sum of Reciprocal Fractions
 - iv. Low adjusted rank total, after high and low ranks are dropped
 - v. Judge preference of adjusted ranks
 - vi. Reciprocal Fractions of adjusted ranks
 - vii. Parliamentarian's ballot
 - b. If held, semifinal sections will seed entries into sections of approximately equivalent strength, based on preliminary rounds performance, protecting for school constraints *first*.
 - c. Presiding Officer: if the final session is split into multiple segments, two separate elections may be held for presiding officer.
 - d. Judges: The Final Congress will feature a panel of 3 or 5 judges. No school-affiliated judge shall be scheduled to judge a student from their school.
 - e. Awards: The top placing six students will be recognized; remaining students will be designated as "finalists." The final session presiding officer(s) also will be recognized.

E. Speech Events:

1. If fewer than 25 participants enter a particular event, the event may be cancelled or collapsed with other events.
2. Material: students may not use speeches or literary selections they used in a previous academic year. They also may not duplicate same material in different events. Costumes or props may not be used.
3. Students may enter up to four total events (no more than two per pattern). Students cannot double enter in Pattern A if they are registered for Extemporaneous Speaking.
 - a. Pattern A: Duo Interpretation, Humorous Interpretation, Mixed Extemporaneous Speaking, Original Oratory, Poetry, and Storytelling.
 - b. Pattern B: Dramatic Interpretation, Declamation, Prose, Informative Speaking, Program Oral Interpretation, Original Spoken Word Poetry, and Impromptu.
4. Speech Preliminary Round Sectioning
 - a. Each contestant is guaranteed three randomly sectioned preliminary rounds.
 - b. When possible, no student should be placed in a section with another student from their school.
 - c. Each student should meet a variety of opposition in each round.
 - d. Each student should be assigned a variety of speaker positions in preliminary rounds.
 - e. Scheduling judges for speech preliminary rounds

- i. Preliminary rounds of speech events will be evaluated and ranked by one judge.
- ii. Where possible, no school-affiliated judge shall be scheduled to judge a student from their school.
- iii. No judge shall judge the same student in the same event more than once during prelims.

5. Speech Elimination Rounds

- a. The number of entries in each speech event will determine the number of individuals that can advance to elimination round competition in that event. If an event has fewer than 24 entries, the event will break directly to a final round of six contestants. If an event has more than 24 but fewer than 60 entries that event will break to semifinals, and any event with more than 60 entries will break to a quarterfinal round. If there are 100+ entries in an event, an octafinal will be held.
- b. Prelim scores will not carry over to elimination rounds except that for the purpose of scheduling the first elimination round or as a tiebreaker. From that point on, scores reset after each round.
- c. Scheduling judges: elimination rounds of speech events will be judged by at least three judges. No school-affiliated judge shall be scheduled to judge a student from their school. When possible, a judge will not see a student more than once.
- d. First elimination round: Contestants will advance to the first elimination round after prelims using the following tiebreaks. If the first elimination round is an octafinal, the top 48 entries will advance. If it is a quarterfinal, the top 24 entries will advance. If it is a semifinal, 12 entries will advance.
 01. Lowest cumulative ranks
 02. Reciprocal fractions
 03. If a tie is unbreakable by this formula, all tied contestants shall advance.
- e. Sectioning in elimination rounds will be snaked as follows in the example of a quarterfinal, protecting school constraints *before* seeding (speaker order will not necessary follow the seed strength listed):

Section x	Section y	Section z	Section n
24 th seed	23 rd seed	22 nd seed	21 st seed
17 th seed	18 th seed	19 th seed	20 th seed
16 th seed	15 th seed	14 th seed	13 th seed
9 th seed	10 th seed	11 th seed	12 th seed
8 th seed	7 th seed	6 th seed	5 th seed
1 st seed	2 nd seed	3 rd seed	4 th seed

- f. Advancing from an elimination round
 - i. The top 3 participants from each section of an elimination round will advance to the next elimination round. Determine who advances using the following tiebreaks. These are also the tiebreaks for determining final placement after the final round.
 01. Lowest round rank total from previous round

02. Judge preference of ranks in previous round
03. Reciprocal fractions of previous round ranks
04. Cumulative rank total
05. If a tie is unbreakable by this formula, all tied entries shall advance.

III. Protests and Disqualification

- A. **Forfeits:** Judges should notify the tournament office of a student who arrives to their round more than 15 minutes after the posted start time of the round. If there are multiple judges in the round, all must agree that the student was more than 15 minutes late. Debaters who are 15 minutes late forfeit the round, but the ombudsperson may waive the penalty. For a speech competitor, the ombudsperson may choose to drop each judge score in the round by two ranks. The judge(s) should not adjust the student's ranks themselves. The ombudsperson may waive the penalty.
- B. **Wrong Room/Section:** If an entry competes in the wrong section of a speech event or against the wrong opponent in a debate round—at no fault of their opponent or the tournament—that student/team will automatically receive last in the section in which they were assigned and zero speaker points for that round. Debaters will receive a loss for that particular round and zero speaker points.
- C. **Protest Process:**
 1. An ombudsperson will investigate and adjudicate protests of alleged violations of tournament rules and standards.
 2. Protests must be presented by a school's designated adult or "coach of record"—student complaints and protests will not be acknowledged.
 3. Protests are filed using the online protest form. The form includes:
 - a. Name of the school advisor or authorized adult representative(s) filing protest and school, city, state. To file a protest, the advisor or adult representative must be on site. School advisors may appoint one or more adult representatives who are permitted to file protests in case the advisor is absent or incapable of filing a protest due to a tournament-related commitment. Authorized adult representatives must be approved by the school's administration and explicitly appointed prior to the tournament.
 - b. Code of person/team being protested.
 - c. Round being protested.
 - d. Section/room and speaker number of person/team being protested.
 - e. Specific infraction being protested described with supporting detail.

After the infraction has been observed/discovered, the protest must be filed in a timely manner. After filing a protest, the coach must report to the tournament office. For coaches initiating protests, decisions of the ombudsperson are final; coaches may not appeal. If a perceived violation occurs in a subsequent round, another protest may be filed.

The National Tournament Director and/or ombudsperson may reduce the prescribed penalty for a rule violation based on the severity of the infraction.

In case of a disqualification of an entry, all previous ranks and decisions of other entries stand, and no revision of past round ranks will occur.

IV. Awards

- A. **Individual Awards:** Awards will be given to all students advancing to elimination rounds.

1. The top 10 speakers in Lincoln-Douglas, Policy, Public Forum, World Schools, and Big Questions will be recognized.
2. In Congressional Debate, the final session presiding officer will be recognized.

B. School of Excellence Awards:

1. Entries reaching elimination rounds will count toward School of Excellence Awards.
 - a. An entry earns their school one point per round they advance.
 - b. In Congressional Debate, students who place 1-6 receive an additional point in addition to one for breaking to the final session.
2. Debate: Presented to the top five point earning schools with at least one entry in debate and/or Congressional Debate.
3. Speech: Presented to the top five point earning schools with at least one entry in a speech event.
4. Overall: Presented to the top three point earning schools with at least one entry in both debate and speech. The winner of the overall School of Excellence Awards will not also be eligible to win the Speech and Debate School of Excellence Awards.



SECTION 2: Middle School Competition Event Rules

Overview

This manual provides official rules for events offered at the **Middle School National Speech & Debate Tournament**. Rules are mostly modeled after high school events, rules, and standards, but have been modified in some cases to more appropriately suit middle school students.

Please refer to the *Middle School Tournament Procedures* section for information on how the competition is operated. Also see *Middle School Judging Instructions* as additional guidance for judges. For other tournament logistics, visit www.speechanddebate.org/nationals.

New Release and Updates

Note: New changes for the current year are highlighted in **yellow**. Other recent changes made within the past one or two years remain highlighted in **gray**.

Policy Debate case limits can be found at www.speechanddebate.org/topics.

Time Limits

Declamation	10 min + 30-sec grace	Congressional Debate	Varies – see HS Unified Manual
Dramatic Interpretation	10 min + 30-sec grace		
Duo Interpretation	10 min + 30-sec grace	Lincoln-Douglas Debate	Varies – see HS Unified Manual
Extemporaneous Speaking	7 min + 30-sec grace	Policy Debate	Varies – see HS Unified Manual
Humorous Interpretation	10 min + 30-sec grace	Public Forum Debate	Varies – see HS Unified Manual
Impromptu Speaking	7 min + 30-sec grace	World Schools Debate	Varies – see WS Manual
Original Oratory	10 min + 30-sec grace	Big Questions Debate	Varies – see BQ Manual
Poetry Interpretation	7 min + 30-sec grace		
Prose Interpretation	7 min + 30-sec grace		
Storytelling	5 min + 30-sec grace		
Declamation	10 min + 30-sec grace		
Informative Speaking	10 min + 30-sec grace		

Topics

See www.speechanddebate.org/topics for National Tournament topics, available by May 1.

Events at the 2023 Middle School National Tournament

Overarching Rules for Debate

- A. Oral prompting, except for time signals, by a speaker's debate partner is not prohibited. Individual judges may determine their comfort with this practice and handle it in-round. No protests will be heard by the ombudsperson regarding this issue.
- B. Judging Conflicts: Entries in any debate event who are scheduled to be judged by someone who has, at any point in time, coached or taught them or with whom they have a close personal relationship are responsible for reporting that fact to the ombudsperson immediately. Failure to comply may result in disqualification from the tournament.
- C. Policy, Big Questions, Public Forum, Lincoln-Douglas, and Congress must use the evidence rules found in the High School Unified Manual.
- D. Policy, Big Questions, Public Forum, Lincoln-Douglas, and Congress must use the Current Guidelines for Internet-Enabled Devices found in the High School Unified Manual. The use of internet in round is permitted per these guidelines. Internet use is not permitted in World Schools Debate.
- E. Policy, Public Forum, Lincoln-Douglas, and Congress will use the event rules outlined in the High School Unified Manual.
- F. Congressional Debate will use preset recency and direct questioning in all rounds.
- G. Big Questions will use the event rules outlined in the Big Questions Format Manual. Only individual entries are permitted at the Middle School National Tournament in Big Questions, not partners.
- H. World Schools will use the event rules outlined in the World Schools Invitational Manual.

Overarching Rules for Speech

- A. Speech events will use the event rules outlined in the High School Unified Manual, except where described below.
- B. Poetry Interpretation and Prose Interpretation will follow the event rules outlined in the High School Unified Manual with the exception that **Prose and Poetry performance time limits are 7 minutes with a 30 second grace period** at the Middle School National Tournament.
- C. There is no cross-examination in Mixed Extemp.
- D. **New in 2024: The Middle School National Tournament will pilot a rule that allows Mixed Extemp and Impromptu competitors to use a notecard while speaking. Notes may not be prepared in advance; Extemp speeches, handbooks, briefs, and outlines are prohibited from the Extemp prep room. However, contestants may make notes during preparation time and use the front and back of a 4" x 6" or smaller notecard during their speech.**
- E. Declamation
 - a. Length: Declamation is a 10-minute event with a 30-second "grace period." Should a student go beyond the grace period, the student may not be ranked 1st. There is no other prescribed penalty for going over the grace period. No minimum time is mandated.
 - b. Source: The speech must have been delivered in public and available in print (copies from a publicly available website will also be sufficient).
 - c. The speaker should present an introduction that states the title, author, and date of the speech they are reciting.



SECTION 3: Middle School Judging Instructions

Overview

This is a general guide to assist judges in facilitating rounds at the **Middle School National Tournament**. Judges are expected to understand event rules. Coaches are not able to levy protests to the ombudsperson based upon judging instructions. Whatever your background or experience, you bring unique perspective to providing *constructive criticism* toward guiding young people in their growth as communicators and performers.

Please refer to the *Middle School Competition Event Rules* section for specific rules of the various events offered at the tournament. Also see *Middle School Tournament Procedures* as an overview of competition. For additional tournament logistics, visit www.speechanddebate.org/nationals.

New Release and Updates

Note: New changes for the current year are highlighted in **yellow**. Other recent changes made within the past one or two years remain highlighted in **gray**.

Reminder: If a school brings high school students to judge the Middle School National Tournament, they must have been juniors or seniors with at least 250 Honor Society points in the last academic year. No underclassmen or upper classmen without 250 Honor Society points will be permitted to judge. A rising junior does not meet these criteria.

A Note About Training: All judges should be adequately trained in evaluating rounds of competition. Additional training videos, handouts, and other materials are available online at www.speechanddebate.org/judge-training.

General Guidelines for All Judges

Judge Training: All judges must certify completion of the required judge training in Tabroom.com by May 15. All judges must also attend a judge training in person on Wednesday morning.

Implicit Bias: We are all influenced by implicit bias, or the stereotypes that unconsciously affect our decisions. When judging, our implicit biases negatively impact students who are traditionally marginalized and disenfranchised. Before writing comments or making a decision, please take a moment to reflect on any biases that may impact your decision-making process.

Assignments: Judges in the speech judging pool must be prepared to judge any speech event. Judges will not know whether they are being used for a round or which round they are judging more than 30 minutes before each round's pairing is made public. For each round you are assigned, arrive in the competition room at least 15 minutes prior to each round. Judges that do not receive assignments for a round must be on standby in the judge pooling room in case they are needed as a substitute. Do not swap/trade judging assignments with other judges. Schools whose judges do not report on time or swap assignments will lose their \$200 judge bond for the first round missed and then be charged \$100 for each subsequent round. Judges who failed to report conflicts prior to the tournament deadline will also lose their judge bond. All judges are committed through the end of the tournament.

Standby: If you are not called for a particular round, you are on standby and should report to the judge pooling room until tournament staff have verified that every room has judges. Failure to appear for standby assignments is the same as failing to appear to judge an assigned round. They can both disrupt and delay the tournament, and we will fine absentee standby judges' schools. Missing a standby assignment results in the same penalties as above.

Timeliness: Please report to rounds ASAP and do your best to keep the tournament on schedule.

Writing Evaluations: It is important that you write a complete evaluation. Do not wait until the round is completed to begin writing constructive feedback! Writing during students' presentations is permitted. It is critical for the contestants and their coaches to have the educational feedback that justifies judges' decisions. Please be objective (don't let your own opinions on an idea predetermine your impression of a student's presentation/argument). Determine your evaluation independently of other judges, and never confer regarding decisions/rankings/ratings. Sharing of decisions/ranks with students is NOT PERMITTED.

Demeanor: Maintain impartiality (never ask students what school/state they are from). While oral critiques can be a valuable teaching tool, they are no substitute for documenting your observations in writing so that the student's coach can also read the feedback for a more lasting impact. If the round finishes early, you may give brief, general comments that apply universally to all participants in the room. Limit all verbal criticism to constructive comments designed to assist the student. Judges removed from the pool for violating our expectations will result in a forfeiture of the judge bond, plus an additional fee of \$100 for each round the judge was assigned. Please give the contestants your undivided attention and respect. You're in the round to judge, not read books, play video games, text-message, etc. Please model appropriate conduct. Please alert the ombudsperson with conflicts of interest, i.e., you personally know a student who's in a room you're assigned to judge (e.g., past teammate, student you've coached, family/relative, personal friend).

Disqualification: Judges will not disqualify a student. Should you believe a student has violated rules, alert tournament officials to the situation with documentation. Evaluate the round as if there were no rules violations; tournament staff will adjust results as needed for disqualification.

Guidelines for Judging Speech Events

1. Make sure you're familiar with rules for each event or obtain a copy before judging.
2. When using online ballots through Tabroom.com, please click "start round" when you begin the round so the tab

room knows you are on time.

3. When you get to your room, you will generally follow the order of speakers as listed, but if students are cross-entered, they may need to go earlier before leaving for their other events, or they may come later.
4. Ask for the first speaker who is double-entered, and then the first speaker listed who is present. Before the speakers begin, ask them if and how they would like you to show them time signals. The speaker may ask you to show the amount of time remaining. Try to accommodate all speakers' requests for timing. (Time limits are on evaluation sheets. If the speaker does not wish it to be shown, you nevertheless keep time -- just don't show it. Please wait 10 minutes after the last speaker for any missing double-entered speakers and be sure to alert the ombudsperson if you had any no-shows.
5. The ballot should specify the title/topic of the speaker. During the speech, make comments on the ballot for each speaker. Try to make *constructive* suggestions on how the speaker can improve. Do not simply say "good" or "weak." Instead, explain HOW or WHY a student is doing well or poorly. If you give a student a poor score, make sure to indicate the problem with the presentation. It is better to focus on one or two specific ways a student could improve, than to give comments that are too general. *Begin writing evaluations during students' presentations*, so you are finished by the end of the round. If you spend a lot of time writing comments in between speakers, it makes the students nervous and delays the entire tournament. Where notes/manuscripts are allowed, you may weigh memorization and the effect that the use of notes has on the performance in your rank/scoring.
6. Please note the amount of time used by the speaker. If there are multiple judges in the round, all must agree that the student has gone beyond the grace period. Should a student go beyond the grace period, the student may not be ranked 1st. There is no other prescribed penalty for going over the grace period. The ranking is up to each individual judge's discretion. Judges who choose to time are to use accurate (stopwatch function) timing devices. No minimum time is mandated.

Time Limits:

10 minutes: DEC, DI, DUO, HI, POI, OO, INF

7 minutes (to *both* prep *and* speak): IMP

7 minutes: POE, PRO, EXT

5 minutes: STO, SW

7. After all speakers are finished, thank them (at which point, they should leave the room). Do not share any results with students.
8. On the ballot, write a rank (1-7) for each contestant. The best in the room receives a rank of "1," the second best a "2," etc. NO TIES.
9. Submit your ballot online. Make sure you have confirmed your decision is correct.

Guidelines for Judging Debate Events

1. Judges influence how much success young people have, so debaters are concerned with your reactions. Therefore, please say nothing throughout the debate. Since middle level students are deeply impressionable and desire success, they will often translate your mannerisms negatively. Be as neutral as possible, saying nothing except a greeting, and appearing interested and supportive.
2. When using online ballots through Tabroom.com, please click "start round" when you begin the round so the tab room knows you are on time. Ballots must be submitted within 10 minutes of the end of the final speech in the round.
3. When the debaters arrive, explain if or whether you will be timing. Tell them that they may finish a sentence when time is up, but no more. If they continue, simply stop taking notes and politely say time.
4. During cross-examination (LD, CX), time belongs to the contestant asking questions, which should be brief and not attempt to refute answers provided by the opposition. The contestant answering questions also should be brief and not argue with the questioner. Note: in partner events, the appropriateness of "tag teaming" during cross-examination is up to the individual judge during a round. An ombudsperson will not hear any protest over this issue.
5. During crossfire (PF), time is shared by both sides; questions and answers should be brief and specific. The team speaking first asks the first question. Speakers stand during regular crossfire and sit for the grand crossfire.
6. No new arguments should be introduced in the last rebuttals. Certainly, new information (data, quotes, etc.) can be used. Additionally, arguments can be extended and developed (or else the debaters would be reduced to mere repetition). However, a totally new idea should not be offered.
7. Take notes to diagram the flow of arguments offered by each side. Notate each claim made, placing opposing arguments next to one another. That way you can see who "drops" an argument and who misinterprets another's argument; you can also check when a debater claims the opponent did not attack an argument.
8. During prep time, write feedback on the ballot. At the end of the debate, determine the winner (Aff or Neg). Then assign points. No more than 30, no less than 20. Finally, fill out the *Reasons for decision*. Try to say something substantive, NOT "one was more persuasive," or "one spoke better." Try to list the winning or losing arguments. To aid in standardizing awarding of speaker/team points, please use the following as a guideline:

- 30 – Exceptional debating, with minor flaws
- 29 – Outstanding, with a few flaws
- 28 – Effective, perhaps with some overlooked details
- 27 – Effective, with more room for improvement
- 26 – Average, with some skills that need to be polished and developed
- 25 – Average, with a major flaw or two
- 24 – Below average or standards you would expect
- 23 – The debater spoke well, but had serious flaws in argumentation
- 22 – Debating, attitude, and/or delivery is lacking (please specify in written comments)
- 21 – Serious problems with debating, attitude and/or delivery (please specify in written comments)
- 20 – Performance was offensive, or attitude was inexcusable

Tenth-points and half-points are acceptable.

9. **Prep Time:** keep record of this and inform the debaters of the amount used/left. "Charge" it to the debater as follows: BEFORE the debater speaks, it is that person's prep time. If you have warned a debater that prep time has expired, and if they continue prepping, deduct that amount of time from the debater's next speech time.

Code of Honor

“As a student or coach member of the National Speech & Debate Association, I pledge to uphold the highest standards of humility, equity, integrity, respect, leadership, and service in pursuit of excellence.”

Humility: A member does not regard oneself more highly than others. Regardless of a person’s level of success, an individual always looks beyond oneself to appreciate the inherent value of others.

Equity: A member respects individuals and their individual differences as well as fosters equity, diversity, and inclusion. A member promotes empowerment for people from all backgrounds, including race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and ability.

Integrity: A member is honest, ethical, and adheres to the competition and conduct rules of the organization. A member follows the NSDA discrimination and harassment policy and abides by the rules of their schools, tournaments, and localities.

Respect: A member demonstrates civil discourse in their interactions with others. A member maintains and contributes to a safe space and welcoming environment for all.

Leadership: A member is aware their words and actions influence others. A member commits to thoughtful and meaningful words and actions that reflect NSDA core values.

Service: A member exercises their talents to provide service to peers, community, and the activity. At all times a member is prepared to work constructively to improve the lives of others.

(Adopted September 23, 2007 | Updated February 2021)