



2020-2021

Updated June 11, 2021

USA World Schools Debate Invitational Manual Debate Rules/Procedures/Protocols

World Schools Debate features a dynamic form of debate combining the concepts of “prepared” topics with “impromptu” topics, encouraging debaters to focus on specified issues rather than debate theory or procedural arguments. This highly interactive style of debate allows debaters to engage each other, even during speeches. This challenging format requires good teamwork and in-depth quality argumentation.

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 nearly two million members to become engaged citizens, skilled professionals, and honorable leaders in our society.

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.

The following manual outlines the debate rules, procedures, and protocols for the USA World Schools Debate Invitational.

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**.



1. The Status of These Rules

1.1 These rules govern the United States World Schools Debate Invitational (USWSDI) held by the National Speech & Debate Association as part of its National Speech & Debate Tournament.

1.2 The Executive Director of the National Speech & Debate Association is empowered to make reasonable and defensible extrapolations of these rules, the bylaws, or official tournament rules to ensure a fair, accurate, efficient, and enjoyable tournament experience consistent with the mission of the National Speech & Debate Association. The Executive Director may appoint an Ombudsperson to make initial rulings on his or her behalf. Decisions of the Executive Director are final.

2. Eligibility of Participant

2.1 Teams

2.1.1 A team shall have at least three (3) and no more than five (5) members.

2.1.2 Each NSDA district may enter up to three teams to the National Tournament.

2.1.3 Each team must furnish one judge. The judge may not be entered into any other judging pool at the National Tournament. This judge must be available for the entirety of the tournament.

2.2 Age

2.2.1 A member of a team:

2.2.1.1 Must be an active member at an active member school of the National Speech & Debate Association at the high school level; or

2.2.1.2 Must

a. Be from a country other than the United States and attending with that country,

b. Have reached their 14th birthday by the first day of debates at the National Speech & Debate Tournament, AND

c. Not have reached their 20th birthday by the day of the Final at the National Speech & Debate Tournament.

2.3 Education Status

2.3.1 All students competing in the USWSDI must be enrolled at a secondary school. Recent graduates of a secondary school may compete if that graduation occurred between January 1 and the start of the competition in a given year.

2.3.2 No student who has graduated from secondary school and is now enrolled and attending post secondary classes may compete in the USWSDI.

2.4 School Consent

2.4.1 Each student who will compete in the same room as another student must make their school administration aware that students will be competing in the same physical room and receive approval from their school administration that students will be compliant with school safety requirements while competing in the same room. The coach must certify that they have taken these steps before beginning the online Nationals registration process through Tabroom.com by agreeing to the Tabroom.com disclaimer.

3. Format

3.1 Teams in a Debate

3.1.1 In a debate there are two teams.

3.1.2 One team proposes the motion for debate; the other team opposes it.

3.2 Speakers in a Team

3.2.1 For each debate, there are three speakers.

3.2.2 Before a debate begins, each team must inform the chairperson of the names of their three speakers, the Reply speaker, and the order in which they will be speaking.

3.2.3 The only persons who may speak in a debate are the three speakers for each team announced by the chairperson at the start of that debate.

3.2.4 Each speaker gives only one constructive (substantive) speech.

3.2.5 After each speaker has spoken, the first or second speaker for each team gives a reply speech, with the opposition reply going first and the proposition reply second.

3.3 Timing of Speeches

3.3.1 The speaking time for substantive speeches is 8 minutes and for reply speeches is 4 minutes.

3.3.2 The judge shall provide time signals for each speech.

3.3.3 In addition to the time signals provided by the judge, team members may give time signals to a speaker provided that the signals are discreet and unobtrusive.

3.3.4 Speakers may also keep their own time, but the timing of the judge is the official time.

3.4 Interruptions

3.4.1 During a substantive speech (an 8-minute speech) a competitor from the opposite team may verbally interrupt or indicate on camera that they wish to offer a Point of Information.

3.4.2 A Point of Information may be a question or a statement.

3.4.3 The first full minute of a substantive speech and the last full minute of a substantive speech are considered protected time. No Points of Information may be given during this time.

3.4.4 The speaker may choose to accept a Point of Information or to reject or waive down a Point of Information.

3.4.4.1 Rejection can take the form of an obvious hand gesture or a verbal comment from the speaker.

3.4.5 Speakers are discouraged, though not prohibited from:

3.4.5.1 Offering Points of Information that exceed 15 seconds.

3.4.5.2 Rising more frequently than every 20 seconds during unprotected time to offer Points of Information.

3.4.6 There are no other interruptions in the flow of debate. Teams have no preparation time once the debate begins, nor is there any time dedicated to questioning speakers or providing cross-examination.

3.5 Communication

3.5.1 During a debate, speakers may not communicate with their coach, other team members who are not speaking in that debate, or any person in the audience.

3.5.2 Debaters who are speaking in that debate may communicate with one another via whatever means they deem appropriate (instant messaging, texting, etc).

4. The Schematic

4.1 Preliminary Rounds

4.1.1 Every team shall debate six other teams in the preliminary rounds.

4.1.2 The first two of these six preliminary debates shall be randomly paired by a computer program avoiding same district and same state conflicts.

4.1.3 The remaining four preliminary debates shall be determined by a computer program using a traditional high/low pairing procedure system.

4.1.4 In the preliminary rounds, a team shall not debate another team originating from the same district.

4.1.5 In the preset rounds, a team shall not debate another team originating from the same state. For the purposes of better facilitating pairing and judge placement procedures at the National Tournament, any state that has seven (7) or more NSDA districts will be as evenly divided as possible into two separate groups. The districts will be divided by the national office based on geographic location and district size equalization.

4.1.6 In the powermatched preliminary rounds, a team may debate another team originating from the same state but not its same district.

4.1.7 In subsequent elimination rounds, a team may debate another team originating from the same state or the same district.

4.1.8 In the preliminary rounds, one team may not hit another team more than once.

4.1.9 If there are an odd number of teams, a team may receive a bye.

4.1.9.1 In the preset rounds, the bye is randomly assigned by the computer.

4.1.9.2 In the powermatched preliminary rounds, the bye is awarded to the lowest ranked team that has not already received the bye.

4.1.10 Unless unavoidable, all teams will compete on the Proposition and Opposition side an equal number of times in the preliminary rounds.

4.2 Alterations to the Draw

4.2.1 On the day of tournament registration, the National Speech & Debate Tournament shall provide to the teams participating the schematic or draw for the preset preliminary rounds.

4.2.1 If a team withdraws after the schematic or draw has been printed, the tournament director may make a new schematic or adjustments to the draw, but is not mandated to do so. This decision is the sole discretion of the National Tournament Director.

4.2.2 All teams who would have debated against a team that has withdrawn are taken to have won the debate by forfeit.

4.2.3 Where a team has either won or lost a debate by forfeit, the team will be taken to have received speaking points equivalent to the average of their speaking points in all other rounds.

5. The Break

5.1 Preliminary Round Break

5.1.1 All teams with a 4-2 record or better shall advance to the elimination debates and be seeded in rank order.

5.1.2 At the end of the preliminary rounds, teams shall be ranked according to the number of wins.

5.1.3 If teams are tied on the same number of wins, they shall be separated by tiebreakers on the following priority

- a. The sum of the judges' scores for the team less the sum of the highest score and the lowest score for that team.
- b. The sum of the judges' scores for the team.
- c. The sum of the number of wins by the preliminary opponents of the team.
- d. The sum of the judges' scores for the team less the sum of the two highest scores and the two lowest scores for the team.
- e. The sum of the judges' scores for the preliminary opponents of the team.

5.2 Elimination Debates

5.2.1 Bracket

5.2.1.1 The teams ranked according to rule 5.1 shall debate using a traditional bracketing system.

5.2.1.2 Brackets will not be broken to avoid same district or same state conflicts.

5.2.2 Type of Debate

5.2.2.1 All preliminary rounds will be prepared motions.

5.2.2.2 Elimination rounds will be a mix of impromptu and prepared motions. The motion types will be announced when the schedule is released.

5.2.3 The Final Round

5.2.3.1 The winners of the Semifinals shall debate in the Final round.

5.2.3.2 The motion for the Final round shall be a motion announced at the same time as the motions for the preliminary rounds.

6. Motions

6.1 Motion Format

6.1.1 Motions shall take the format befitting debate in a House of Parliament, always beginning with the phrase “This House,” which will often—but not exclusively—be followed by the verbs “would,” “believes that,” or “regrets.”

6.2 Prepared Debates

6.2.1 The National Speech & Debate Association will announce a list of motions for prepared rounds on May 1 of the year of the competition.

6.2.2 Motions for prepared debates shall be written by officers of the National Speech & Debate Association in consultation with community members.

6.3 Impromptu Debates

6.3.1 The National Speech & Debate Association will prepare motions for impromptu debates in consultation with community members.

6.3.2 The motions for impromptu debates shall be assigned by the National Speech & Debate Association, taking into consideration difficulty, subject variety, and other qualities as appropriate.

7. Language

7.1 All debates shall be in English.

8. Prepared Debates

8.1 Prepared Debates Definition

8.1.1 This part of the rules applies to any prepared debates.

8.2 Preliminary Rounds

8.2.1 At the discretion of the National Speech & Debate Association, no fewer than one half of the debates for any team in the preliminary rounds will be prepared debates.

8.3 Preparation

8.3.1 From the release of the prepared motions on May 1 of the tournament year, teams may use as much or as little time to prepare for the prepared motions as they choose.

8.3.2 All team members may participate in preparation of prepared motions.

8.3.3 Coaches, team managers, parents, fellow students, and other interested parties may assist in preparing for prepared motions.

8.4 Materials

8.4.1 During preparation, any materials may be used that are conducive to their education and preparation.

8.4.2 During the debate, students may use notes from electronic devices, but students should not use the internet for active research during the round. Students may use Google docs to communicate throughout the debate. Non-competing students must close out of the Google doc before the round begins.

9. Impromptu Debates

9.1 Impromptu Debates Definition

9.1.1 This part of the rules applies to any impromptu debates.

9.2 Preliminary Rounds

9.2.1 No impromptu motions will be used in preliminary rounds.

9.3 Preparation Time and Procedure

9.3.1 Both the team supporting the motion and the team opposing the motion shall have one hour from the time the motion is released until the beginning of the impromptu round.

9.3.2 All members of the team—both those who will be speaking in the round and any other members who may speak in other rounds—may participate in preparation. Up to five members of a team may participate. Team members may not consult coaches or anyone other than the five members.

9.4 Materials

9.4.1 During preparation, students may take notes on electronic devices, but students should not use the internet for active research during the round. Students may use Google docs to communicate throughout prep with all members of their team. Non-competing students must close out of the Google doc before the round begins.

9.4.2 During preparation, teams may **not** bring any handwritten, printed, or published materials with them into their preparation room (or area) for impromptu debates aside from the following: a published English language dictionary or a published bilingual dictionary and a published single-volume encyclopedia or almanac. Students may use a published digital dictionary, a published single-volume encyclopedia, or a published almanac in place of a physical version, e.g. [The World Factbook](#). Each team member must use the same digital resource, i.e. students may not use different digital almanacs in one round.

9.4.3 The use of hand-held cellular phones is permitted as a timing device only. The cellular phone must be kept in airplane mode during preparation and the debate. Use for any purpose other than timing may result in the loss of a round.

9.4.4 During the debate, students are permitted to bring with them hand-written notes prepared during the preparation period, an English language dictionary or a bilingual dictionary and a single-volume encyclopedia or almanac (or digital versions of these items). **No other** printed or published materials are permitted.

9.4.5 Use of the Internet to do research or any communication with anyone who is not one of the five team members during preparation may result in the loss of the round.

10. Judging

10.1 Number of Judges

10.1.1 All preliminary rounds shall be judged by a single judge.

10.1.2 Elimination rounds through quarterfinals shall be judged by a panel of three judges per debate who shall make their decision independently of one another.

10.1.3 Semifinals shall be judged by a panel of five judges who shall make their

decision independently of one another.

10.1.4 Finals shall be judged by a panel of not less than five judges who shall make their decision independently. If more judges are used, an odd number must be maintained.

10.2 Affiliation

10.2.1 A judge shall not judge a team from their own district.

10.2.2 A judge shall not judge a team from their own state unless deemed unavoidable by the National Tournament Director.

10.2.3 A judge shall not judge a team where to do so would lead a reasonable person to believe that the judge could not judge the team impartially.

10.3 Judging Repetition

10.3.1 A judge will not judge the same team more than once during preliminary rounds.

10.3.2 A judge who has judged a team in the preliminary rounds may judge that team during elimination rounds but preference will be given to judges who have not yet judged the team.

10.4 Winning a Debate

10.4.1 In preliminary rounds, a debate is won by the team who receives the highest team score from the judge. There are no low-point wins or tied team points.

10.4.2 In elimination rounds or any rounds with a panel of judges, the debate is won by the team who receives a winning ballot from a majority of judges in the round. The sum of team scores determines a winning ballot. There are no low-point wins or tied team points.

10.5 Judging Criteria

10.5.1 The decision of who won a debate shall be the sole discretion of the judge(s) of the debate.

10.5.2 Judges will use electronic ballots available through Tabroom.com.

10.5.3 Judges will use the following scoring criteria as outlined on the official ballot:

a. **Style:** 40% of total score. Speakers should communicate clearly using effective rate, pitch, tone, hand gestures, facial expressions, etc. The use of notes should not be penalized unless it hinders delivery; however, speakers should not read their speeches. Notes are to be used only for reference.

b. **Content:** 40% of total score. This portion of the score should focus on the argumentation used by the speaker, divorced from the style. Weak arguments should be marked accordingly, even if the other team does not expose a weak argument. Judges should not be influenced by their own personal beliefs or specialized knowledge when making this decision.

c. **Strategy:** 20% of total score. Strategy consists of whether or not the speaker understands the importance of the issues in the debate and the structure/timing of the speech. Debaters should indentify the most substantive issues and allocate their time to covering issues based on the relative importance. Strategy may also consider answers to points of information and choosing when/how to address them. Strategy is not

content: a speaker who answers the critical issues with weak responses should get poor marks for content but good marks for strategy.

10.5.4 A judge's scoring decisions using the above criteria are at the sole discretion of the judge(s) in the round and cannot be protested.

11. Evidence and Argumentation

11.1 Use of Evidence

11.1.1 The assessment of the quality and appropriate use of evidence as it relates to the scoring of the debate is the sole discretion of the judge(s) in the round. This assessment cannot be protested.

11.2 Validity of Evidence and Argumentation

11.2.1 The adjudication of the validity of evidence and argumentation used in a debate and its effect on scoring is the sole responsibility of the judge(s) in the round. This assessment by the judge cannot be protested.

12. Protests/Complaints

11.1 All complaints and/or protests should be made through the official protest form process.

11.2 No protests will be adjudicated by the Adjudication Panel until a formal protest form has been completed and filed.

11.3 Protests must be filed within 60 minutes of the end of the round in which the proposed violation occurred to be considered by the Adjudication Panel.

13. Penalties

13.1 Failure to arrive within 10 minutes of the stated start time of a debate round may result in forfeiture of the round.

13.2 Penalties for violations of any rules will be determined by the Adjudication Panel and Executive Director. This decision shall be final.