

# What to Expect Competing in Policy Debate

**Policy Debate** is a two-on-two event that focuses on a policy question for the duration of the academic year. This format tests a student's research, analytical, and delivery skills. Policy debate involves the proposal of a plan by the affirmative team to enact a policy, while the negative team offers reasons to reject that proposal. Throughout the debate, students have the opportunity to cross-examine one another. A judge or panel of judges determines the winner based on the arguments presented. **Dalton Nunamaker** gives us an insiders take on Policy Debate.

## Why did you choose your event?

My teacher decided to teach policy debate as the first lesson in Debate I and a class requirement was to go to one debate tournament every semester. I loved the argumentative flow of policy debate so my good friend and I decided to compete in novice policy debate at our first tournament, and we broke! That weekend was exhilarating, significantly different than any competition I've done before. I was officially hooked. The level of argumentation present in every round, the research base required for success, and the excitement of rebuttals and analysis in round never ceases to amaze me.

## What skills are important in Policy?

Being quick on your feet and good at refuting in round is key, but policy has such a dramatic workload pre-tournament that what you do outside of rounds is just as important as what you are able to do in round. Before a tournament even begins, the year-long topic has to be extensively researched and prepared for, on both sides of any argument. Dozens of hours must be spent scouring the corners of the internet for that perfect piece of evidence or piecing together the right articles to present a winning case.

## What kind of challenges did you face in round?

One of the most difficult aspects of policy is the inconsistency and massive topic area to cover. Winning consistently is difficult in policy

because of the vast range of arguments, opponents, and judges available. No round is ever the same, which can make it harder to learn from round to round and build on previous experience. Far too often I find myself struggling to respond to all of my opponent's arguments and claims within the time limit. It is also difficult to choose what responses to make against arguments and which points to focus on later in the round.

## What does a typical tournament look like for a Policy debater?

Once the tournament starts, it's just hours of running from room to room until the rounds for that day are over and we can finally relax a little bit. This provides a great opportunity to grow closer as a team as we grab dinner after an electrifying day of competition. During day two, the school is filled with hope and anticipation as we move closer to crowning the champion. After a few more rounds, the final decision is made and a winner is announced. Win or lose, tournaments help debaters realize that all of the hard work, late nights, pen stains, speaking drills, and frustrating rounds are worth it. Tournaments are the reason we debate, a way to show the world our talent, our determination, and our powerful voice. Who knows, maybe someday we'll walk away from debate with something a little more than a trophy.



“The level of argumentation present in every round, the research base required for success, and the excitement of rebuttals and analysis in round never ceases to amaze me.”

— Dalton Nunamaker, student,  
Rock Bridge HS, MO