

An Introduction to Evaluating Congressional Debate (CD)



Basic Understanding

Congressional Debate, or Congress, is a simulation of the United States legislative process. Congress is an individual event. Students author bills and alternate delivering speeches for and against a piece of legislation in a group setting. An elected student serves as a Presiding Officer (P.O.) to ensure the debate flows smoothly.

Evaluating the Round

There are three key areas to keep in mind when evaluating a Congressional Debate round. First, **argumentation**: students discuss a multitude of topics in a round. As the debate progresses, they should be prepared to present fresh, unique arguments. The judge ought to consider the research and logic students use in their arguments. Declarations relying on charismatic charm and delivery are not well-developed arguments. Instead, the student should establish their **claim** or response to their opponents claim. To formulate an argument, this claim must be backed by a **warrant**, or reasons why the claim is true and given an **impact**, or reason why the claim matters. Argumentation lacking this structure should not be given the same weight as fully developed arguments. There are no time limits for discussing a piece of legislation. As the debate progresses, arguments should advance. Students who are merely repeating arguments made by others are not advancing the debate or adding to the educational value of the round. Second, **delivery**: throughout the debate, judges should keep in mind the main areas of delivery skills. Use of **voice**, **movement**, and **expression** all combine to create a strong delivery. Students with excellent delivery skills will demonstrate sound logic and a confident demeanor. Judges ought to keep in mind that while students prepare multiple speeches for the tournament, adjustments are made based on the debate and minor fluency issues should not be heavily weighted. Third, **parliamentary procedure**: this process

is used to keep the debate moving. Roberts Rules of Order determine who should speak, the number of votes needed for a motion to pass, etc. Judges should take note of students who use these procedures.

Evaluating the Presiding Officer

The Presiding Officer, or P.O., runs the chamber to provide a smooth and efficient debate. The P.O. typically does not give speeches and thus should be evaluated on his/her ability to recognize speakers in a fair and consistent manner, keep the debate moving, and handle parliamentary procedure rules. Presiding Officers may be ranked at the end of the round if the judge believes their performance is worthy.



Filling out the Ballot

At the conclusion of the debate, the judge ranks the students. The student receiving the one ranking is the best legislator in the round. Depending on the tournament, the judge may indicate on the ballot how effective the student's argumentation was. The judge may also explain how the student may improve delivery through adjustments to eye contact, tone, inflection, etc., and what the student did well. ✎