
PUBLIC DEBATE PROGRAM

Judging Guide

Overview

This guide is designed for new and experienced judges attending Middle School Public Debate Program (MSPDP) competitions. The MSPDP develops student public speaking and argumentation skills for academic and career success. The program uses debate competitions as a laboratory setting to practice those skills. Certified debate judges assist students – they observe debates, take notes, and evaluate performances. Judges offer constructive feedback to guide student learning for future debates, as well as academic and pre-professional presentations.

The MSPDP was developed to ensure rigorous debating in a format that is dynamic and accessible to public audiences. Adept debaters should be able to communicate their ideas with clarity and authority to persuade judges. Judges – teachers, parents, high school students, volunteers – must understand the rules and guidelines to fairly assess competitions but are not expected to be ‘debate specialists.’

Objectives

The Public Debate Program is the only debate format in the world that requires judge certification for its competitions. In judge training/certification, prospective judges learn the debate rules, the core elements of debating (public speaking, argumentation, refutation), debate note taking, judging ethics, debate evaluation and rubric-based individual performance assessment, and feedback. This guide is available to prospective judges prior to and during formal certification training.

The Judging Manual

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Middle School

Public Debate Program Format

Grades 5th – 8th

2018-2019

Materials

Tournaments have judging guides, rubrics, sample debate ballots and other materials to assist judges.

Other Resources

For information on judging, note taking, examples of effective flowsheets and ballots, please review other Public Debate Program resources –

middleschooldebate.com

highschooldebate.org

learntodebate.org

Speak Out! Debate and Public Speaking in the Middle Grades (John Meany and Kate Shuster)

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1. DEBATE RULES

There are few rules for MSPDP debating. These are the basic rules:

- Number of teams in a debate – 2; the teams are known as the proposition and opposition
- Number of students per team – 3
- Number of speeches in a debate – 6; each student delivers one speech
- Speaking order and time limits – the proposition opens and closes the debate; there is no preparation time during the debate – at the conclusion of a speech, the following speaker is called forward to deliver the next speech in the debate

First proposition speaker – 5 minutes

First opposition speaker – 5 minutes

Second proposition speaker – 5 minutes

Second opposition speaker – 5 minutes

Third opposition speaker – 5 minutes

Third proposition speaker – 5 minutes

The first 4 speeches in a debate are known as constructive or main speeches; the final 2 speeches are also known as rebuttal speeches.

There are 3 special rules for the event.

- No new arguments in rebuttal speeches – Rebuttal/third speakers may continue or further develop a line of argument from an earlier time in a debate. They may amplify established arguments with analysis or evidence, if the new material does not fundamentally alter an established position. Third speakers may NOT introduce entirely new arguments, those that do not have a foundation established in the constructive speeches of a debate. New arguments are not considered by judges in the debate evaluation.
- Points of Information (POI) – This is a request of the person delivering a speech by one or more members of the opposing team to yield time to the opponents to make a statement or ask a question. POIs may be attempted only during the constructive speeches (5-minute speeches) of a debate. POIs may be attempted only after the first minute and last minute of an opponent’s speech (referred to as ‘protected time’ to allow a speaker to begin and end a speech on her or his own terms). A judge or timekeeper signals that protected time begun by slapping a hand on a desk or tabletop one time – this happens one minute into each constructive speech and with one minute remaining in each constructive speech. A student attempts a POI by standing or standing and saying “Information.” The speaker may accept or reject (usually by using a gesture to wave opponents to their seats) a POI. The number of accepted POIs depends on the number of attempted POIs by an opponent but experienced debaters usually accept 2, perhaps 3 POIs. If the speaker accepts a POI, an opponent has up to 15 seconds to deliver the POI.
- Argumentative Heckling – This is a respectful interruption during an opponent’s speech. Heckles are directed to the judge. They have an argumentative purpose and must be 1-2 words only (e.g., “New” as a heckle by opposition debaters on listening to a new argument in the final proposition rebuttal in the debate, a counterexample during the presentation of an argument from the opposing side). Heckling is meant to add substance to the debate, not interfere with a speaker’s ability to deliver a speech. Argumentative heckles may be made during any of the speeches of the opposing team.

2. DEBATE SET-UP

PODIUM / DESK



[Students sit at a 30 degree angle, facing the opponents and judge/audience]

JUDGE

AUDIENCE

3. JUDGING ETHICS

A judge must be fair to all participants. A judge should presume that the debaters are acting in good faith.

- Judges must not ‘pre-judge’ the debate based on the participating teams.

Each debate is evaluated on its merit. A more experienced or successful team may not have the better arguments in a particular debate. Less experienced but extraordinarily bright debaters (a 5th/6th grade student with strong analytical ability) may not sound as polished as more experienced opponents but might have a more sophisticated understanding of the debate topic. A judge should base the outcome of a debate on what it is that students accomplish in their speeches.

- Judges must not ‘pre-judge’ the debate based on the topic.

Debate topics are not used to poll judge opinions, to identify if the judge agrees/disagrees with the topic. It should not matter if the judge has a particular opinion about a debate topic. If the judge has a bias regarding a topic, a fair judge would work to limit that bias. A judge evaluates what debaters have to say about a topic. Is it the case that a judge might disagree with a “truth” as expressed by the debaters? Of course. But the judge should not impose her or his ‘truth’ on the debate. The facts and opinions in a debate are developed and disputed by the debaters. The judge evaluates their success in making a better argument than the opposing side.

- Judges must take careful notes.

It is both respectful to the speaker and necessary for fair evaluation. The speeches determine the outcome of a debate and a judge must know the content of a speech.

- Judges must evaluate the debate in private.

There is a single judge for each debate. A judge should not speak to or listen to other individuals/observers before making and announcing debate results. These results are final – they may not be disputed by debate participants or observers.

- Judges must use the performance rubric for individual speaker evaluation.

A debate decision is not simply a private matter. The results of each debate are entered in tournament tabulation software and scores are added to determine awards. If a judge decides that debaters are ‘charming’ or showed ‘energy at the end of a long day’ or otherwise rewarded debaters with outlandishly favorable individual speaker points for factors unrelated to the rubric, those points affect the award outcomes of other debaters who were not present at that particular debate. A judge must apply points in a rigorous manner and avoid point inflation to be fair to all student contestants at a debate competition. Students should be able to view the rubric, judge ballots, and their debate notes and re-evaluate their performances to reinforce strengths and identify and minimize weaknesses.

- Judges must disclose the debate results.

Debates and outcomes are transparent. Each judge must announce the debate outcome – the team winner of the debate and individual scores for each student-debater.

- Judges should teach.

The debate classroom is an extension of the daily classroom. Judges help students prepare for future success by using a debate as an one-time illustration of student skills. Judges should help students learn public speaking and argumentation strengths and weaknesses to improve in future debates and presentations. A judge should provide team and individual constructive feedback to assist students.

- Judges must not manufacture rules or apply standards from other debate formats.

Students should be able to know and prepare for a specific debate event, not for any and all debate formats. It is unfair to subject students to rules and standards with which they are not expected to have advanced knowledge. In addition, some of the ‘manufactured rules’ mis-educate students about serious argumentation and MSPDP rules (e.g., telling students that an argument position may consist of claim-warrant-impact, that POIs must be in the form of a question, or that debaters applying for a POI must extend a hand or place a hand on top of one’s head are popular examples of inappropriate advice or a misunderstanding of the MSPDP rules). The individuals responsible for creating the MSPDP are well aware of the rules and tactics used in other debate formats. Many are excluded from the MSPDP to offer a more rigorous, substantive debate model.

4. JUDGE NOTE TAKING

Judges learn the flowsheet method of note taking in certification training. This is a note taking method for transcribing information from multiple presenters (appropriate for team teaching, roundtable or panel discussions, etc.) This note taking system allows judges to carefully record information from each speaker. This technique also makes clear the patterns of argument development in a debate. Flowsheet Paper is made available to judges at a debate tournament.

1 st Proposition	1 st Opposition	2 nd Proposition	2 nd Opp /Opp Rebuttal	Prop. Rebuttal

5. INFORMATION ABOUT DEBATING

A. PUBLIC SPEAKING

The MSPDP encourages students to learn to speak for themselves, to persuade. In general, students should display energy and confidence. They should be insistent about the merits of their individual arguments and those of teammates. They should be professional and avoid a callous, obnoxious, or dismissive attitude to opponents.

The primary skills of public speaking include:

Non-verbal communication

- Eye contact, with judge and audience (minimum eye contact with opponents and maximum eye contact with judge)
- Gestures, controlled but animated delivery using arms, hands, head nods, etc.
- Supportive heckling, applause by slapping a desk or tabletop – support for all speakers at the beginning and end of speeches but special applause during a debate partner's speech to recognize key arguments made by the teammate

Verbal communication

- Organization, a clear introduction, body, conclusion; easy-to-follow as the speaker moves from the arguments for one side to the replies and arguments from the other team
- Volume, slightly louder than conversational, demonstrating confident command of the material
- Pace, slightly faster than conversational, altered pace throughout the speech to avoid a monotone
- Emphasis, use of power language and tone to highlight select phrases and arguments that the judge should record and highlight in notes, as well as consider in deliberation

B. ARGUMENTATION

MSPDP students are taught a simple but highly effective argumentation model – **A-R-E-S-R**. Superior debaters use this technique to establish their team position and give them a relative advantage in a debate.

The first 3 steps create an argument – A-R-E.

Assertion – an unsupported claim or opinion, usually brief and clear for easy note taking

Reasoning – the logical support for an assertion, the explanation or justification for it

Evidence – the empirical information that verifies the reasoning, evidence includes generalizable statistical information and research reports (e.g., hundreds of thousands of Americans are made ill or die annually from tobacco products), specific statistical information and research reports (e.g., According to the NOAA National Climatic and Data Center 2013 Global Analysis, that year was the 4th warmest since record-keeping began in 1880), historical examples, contemporary examples, anecdotes (representative or typical ones), expert testimony, and hypothetical scenarios based on well-established facts.

Students add to the importance of an argument with the next step – S.

Significance – Qualitative significance – the degree of change or importance of an issue in an individual case; Quantitative significance – the number of cases (e.g., Qual/Quant – specific privacy loss that genuinely matters and affects hundreds of thousands of people)

Students conclude an argument with the final step – R.

Result – What is the result of using the argument in a debate? Does it prove the proposition team's case? Does it undermine the case? How does the argument help the judge decide the outcome of the debate?

C. REFUTATION

The first major skill that students develop in debating is public speaking.

The second major skill is argumentation – the ability to produce a credible, reasoned, and defensible opinion.

Both teams in a debate will produce arguments to reveal a conflict. The skilled debater identifies key elements of clash and works to RESOLVE those conflicts on behalf of her or his team/side of the debate. This is the skill of refutation – the ability to answer the opposing side’s arguments or use them for your advantage. In the assessment rubric, individual scores increase marginally for public speaking skill and a bit more for argumentation skill. But individual scores increase dramatically for demonstration of refutation skill, as refutation distinguished “debate” from other public speaking endeavors and competitions.

Debaters use direct and indirect refutation. Both approaches may be effective. A debate team selects a strategy for a debate and determines its mix of direct or indirect argumentation.

Direct refutation – This is disagreement with the precise argumentation of an opponent. It is based on clash with the details of an opponent’s argument (challenges to its reasoning, evidence, significance, result).

Indirect refutation – New material, relevant to an opposing team’s position, that undermines an opponent’s argument.

6. JUDGE DECISION-MAKING

At the conclusion of a debate, a judge makes 2 decisions. There are team and individual speaker awards for successful participants (wins are used to calculate team awards and individual speaker points are used to recognize the top individual debate performers. In addition, there are other school, team, and individual awards that leagues might include at a tournament.

A. Team Outcome – Debate Win/Loss

The judge determines which team won the debate.

There is a topic for a debate. The proposition team makes a case to prove that the topic is more likely to be true than false or describes a problem and offers a beneficial solution. The opposition team must prove that the case is more likely to be false than true or that a proposed solution is counterproductive.

If the proposition proves its case, in whole or in part, and there are no other opposition arguments in the debate, the proposition wins the debate. If the proposition team proves a case with a comparative or relative advantage, it wins the debate. If the opposition shows that the case is entirely false or that it produces more cost than benefit, the opposition team wins the debate.

B. Individual Student Evaluation – Performance Rubric

The judge assigns individual scores based on the Public Debate Program rubric. The rubric integrates public speaking, argumentation, and refutation skills.

Judges should review the rubric prior to event judging. Just like debate skill development, judges become more adept and discriminating decision-makers with review and practice.

Two versions of the rubric are included. The basic rubric summarizes student scores. The official rubric provides comprehensive information to maximize student learning. Judges should read and practice with the official rubric to prepare for a competition.

The judge records information from an individual debate on a debate ballot. Ballots are produced before individual debates at a tournament competition. They are found at the event's tabulation table. They are returned to the same place after a debate. At the end of a debate, a judge has approximately 10-12 minutes to deliberate, make team win/loss and individual point decisions, and offer constructive feedback to students. A judge should use a timer to measure deliberation and feedback. After 10-12 minutes, the judge must return her or his ballot to the tournament tabulation desk (this keeps the tournament on schedule). It is possible for the judge to continue to offer comments to debaters after the ballot is returned.

Sample Ballot

*Middle School and High School Public Debate Program
Ballot*

ROUND: _____ LOCATION: _____

JUDGE'S NAME _____

****Judges - Please use the rubric to rank debaters on a scale of 60-100 points.****

PROPOSITION TEAM: _____

OPPOSITION TEAM: _____

1ST: _____ POINTS: _____

1ST: _____ POINTS: _____

2ND: _____ POINTS: _____

2ND: _____ POINTS: _____

3RD: _____ POINTS: _____

3RD: _____ POINTS: _____

IN MY OPINION, THE TEAM THAT WON THE DEBATE WAS THE (CIRCLE ONE) **PROP / OPP.**

SIGNATURE: _____ AFFILIATION: _____

PLEASE USE THE SPACE BELOW TO INDICATE YOUR **REASON FOR DECISION** AND TO PROVIDE HELPFUL COMMENTS TO THE DEBATERS.