

The Judges Workshop¹

Good morning. My name is Everett Rutan, and I'm with Xavier High School. Like you I'm a volunteer. I'm not a teacher; I work in New York City, and I help coach the Xavier debate team. On behalf of the Connecticut Debate Association I'd like to thank you for coming today. In order to run a tournament, we need one judge for every four debaters, a much higher ratio of adults to students than most high school activities. If you weren't here, we wouldn't be able to do this.

How the Tournament Works

While we are here, the students are preparing to debate. They saw the resolution for the first time just a few minutes ago, when we left for this workshop. By the time we finish in about one hour, they have to be ready to debate both for and against the resolution. Keep that in mind as you judge. I think that you will be impressed by how well they do.

After one hour of preparation, there will be two rounds of debate, the first from approximately 10AM to 11:30, and the second from 11:30 to 1PM. These two rounds are randomly matched, and the teams will switch sides, debating as Affirmative or in favor of the resolution in one round and as Negative or against the resolution in the other. The third round starts at 2PM after lunch. This round is power matched, with the strongest teams meeting each other. They will flip a coin to decide which side, Affirmative or Negative, each team debates. After the third round, the two varsity teams with the best records meet in a final round that is public from about 3:30PM to 5. We then present the awards and leave for home around 5:30PM.

You should have picked up copies of three things when you came in: a handout with the "10 Steps to Good Judging" on the back, a copy of the ballot, and a large sheet of paper for taking notes which we call a flow chart. The back of the flow chart will have a variety of additional information about CDA debate. You will need one ballot for each round—you should take an extra ballot in case you spoil one—a flow chart and a pen or pencil to take notes. You will also need a stopwatch of some kind to keep time. We have a few that you can borrow for the day.

If you need anything during the tournament, we run things from the **Tab Room**, named because it's where we tabulate the ballots. There will be extra ballots and flow charts, copies of the schedules, and advice if you have questions. It's also where you should bring your ballots after each round. If we can be of help to you during the day, please ask.

In the next hour, I'm going to take you through what you need to know to judge your first round. We've broken it down into 10 steps that are easy to follow. Please note that a lot

¹ In 2002 I was asked to take over the CDA judges' workshop and I ran it for many years. This is a written version of how I like to think I presented it, without the verbal stumbles and mistakes. To the best of my knowledge it has been updated to cover the latest version of the ballot and all changes in CDA rules and procedures. If you notice any errors, please let me know: ejrutan3@acm.org.

of what I will say is based on how I judge debates. You should know that not all judges—even experienced judges—would judge the same way. If someone else teaches the workshop next month, they may do things a bit differently. As you become more experienced, or speak to other judges, you will probably develop an approach that works for you. But these 10 steps are a good place to start.

Step One: Make sure you're in the right room at the right time.

In order to keep things on time it's important that we keep to schedule. Towards the end of this session, someone will come by with the schedule for the first round, one for Novice and one for Varsity. It will list a room number, the school and debaters for each team, and the name of a judge. When you find your name you should go directly to the room assigned.

We have extra judges—if we didn't the scheduling computer would have fits—so you may not be assigned every round. If you aren't assigned for the first round, please don't leave. The scheduling algorithm will assign you in later rounds. Please stay near the tab room until we are sure we don't need to assign you to this round. Sometimes we make a mistake, or a judge doesn't show up, and we need to assign another. Otherwise you are free to spend the round observing a debate or reading a book or whatever.

As I said, the tab room is the nerve center from which we run the tournaments. If you have any questions or need a clean ballot or flow chart, you can get these at the tab room. If you aren't sure about the schedule or where you need to be, you can get that information at the tab room. It's also where you should bring your completed ballot at the end of each round. There will be signs posted so you can easily find it.

When you get to the room, make sure that the two teams are the teams listed on the schedule. You should never be judging a team from your own school—the school you are judging for—and you shouldn't be judging a team you judged in a previous round (though you can judge teams you've seen in other tournaments). If anything is incorrect, please don't try to fix it yourself. Send one person to the Tab Room to let us know, and we'll get the problem fixed. If changes are made that we don't put into the computer, it will cause problems when we try to schedule later rounds. So send one person to Tab and ask everyone else should stay in the room. That way, when we get the problem fixed, you can start your debate promptly.

Step 2: Fill out the ballot correctly before the debate begins

Take a look at your copy of the ballot. It has room for three types of information: administrative data, the decision and scores, and a critique. Each of these is important in different ways. We need the administrative information—round, division, team names, judge's name—in order to record the results correctly. The decision and score tells us who won and how well they did, and are used to award trophies at the end of the tournament. The critique is the feedback you give the debaters so they can help them improve their skills. Obviously the decision and the critique should wait until the round is over.

You should fill in the administrative information before the debate starts, so you are sure it's correct. If you leave it until the end, and the debaters leave, you may have trouble remembering something. On the front of the ballot at the top fill in the round number (one, two or three), the division (Varsity or Novice) and your name as Judge. Generally, the two teams will each write the side they are debating (Affirmative or Negative), their school name and their own names on the blackboard (or whiteboard) in the classroom. That information needs to be placed on both the front and back of the ballot in the places indicated. Make sure you get the names of the First and Second speaker for each team in the right order. Each team can change that order from one debate to the next, so it may not be the same as the order of their names on the schedule. And it's important later that the scores you assign go to the right debaters.

Once I've filled in the round information, I put the ballot aside and I don't touch it again until after the debate is over. Not all judges do this. Some judges make notes on the ballot during the debate, or adjust the score based on what they observe. I find it works better for me to take notes on another piece of paper, and then put the results on the ballot at the end. You'll have to work out your own style as you judge more debates.

Step 3: Keep time and keep order during the debate

At this point you are ready to start the debate. The second page of the handout has the timing for all of the speeches. The debaters have all been through this before, and they will largely go through it almost automatically. You do need to keep track of the time for each speech so that they don't speak for longer than they are allowed. Speaking time is an valuable resource in a debate, so it's important to try to be reasonably accurate.

Each debater gets a six minute constructive speech, followed by a three minute cross-examination by the other team. The teams alternate through the constructive speeches and cross-ex, starting with the First Affirmative, then the First Negative, the Second Affirmative and the Second Negative. Each debater then gets a four minute rebuttal, though the order is a bit different: First Affirmative, First Negative, Second Negative, Second Affirmative.

Note that the Affirmative starts and ends the debate, very similar to the role of a prosecutor at a trial. This advantage is balanced by the fact that the Affirmative team has the burden of proof. They need to convince you to accept the resolution, whereas the Negative need only show that the Affirmative hasn't done this. Again, this is like a prosecutor at trial, who has to prove the defendant guilty. The law presumes that the defendant is innocent. However, in a criminal trial the prosecution has to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. The standard in a debate is closer to what holds in a civil trial, one side only needs to carry the preponderance of arguments.

In each speech, as the time gets down towards the end, you should signal the speaker:

- at two minutes, by holding up two fingers;
- at one minute, by holding up one finger; and
- at 30 seconds, by holding up you thumb and first finger to form a "pinch" to indicate only a "little bit" of time is left.

When time runs out, I put my pen down—if I’m not taking notes I’m not listening—let the speaker finish a sentence, and then say aloud, “time is up” or “that’s time.” Most debaters will stop promptly at that point.

In addition to their speeches and cross-examination, each team gets six minutes of preparation time. They can use this in increments of one minute, but only just before one of their speeches. The debaters will generally ask you for prep time if they need it before a speech. When the minute is up, I usually ask them if they would like another. Debaters may also ask for more than one minute at a time, in which case you should tell them as each minute passes. I usually say something like, “that’s one minute, you have four minutes of prep time left” and a minute later, “that’s two minutes, you three minutes left.” You should keep track of the minutes of prep time used on your note pad. You will notice that the flow chart has space at the bottom left to mark off the minutes used.

If a debater doesn’t seem to be getting up to speak, and hasn’t asked for prep time, then you should ask them if they want a minute of prep time. If they don’t respond, or don’t get up to speak, you may charge them with a minute of prep time. Remember each team only gets six minutes total prep time during the debate.

Keeping order generally means keeping the debate moving along. The students are usually good about this. They know what they have to do and generally do it promptly.

In a debate with cross-ex, the debaters will occasionally get a bit excited. This is fine, so long as they don’t become insulting or offensive. I generally try not to interfere in the debate unless things get out of hand. I have occasionally had to say something to debaters who were talking or making noise when the other team was speaking, but very rarely.

Of course, if you think their behavior is getting out of hand, you should say something. If one team is particularly offensive you may stop the debate and direct a victory to the other team. Note that I’ve never had to do this, and am not aware of anyone who has. If this happens, you must go and speak to the tournament director, usually the Executive or Assistant Executive Director of the CDA and inform them of what happened. Should this ever happen, please do not speak to the debaters or their coach about it outside of the debate. Let us deal with that.

Step Four: Take notes

In addition to keeping time and moving the debate along, it is important for you to take notes. The debate will take over one hour. If you haven’t taken notes, by the end of the debate you won’t remember what was said at the beginning.

The debaters are taught to present their arguments in the form of contentions, each with supporting arguments. Please note that the debaters are only required to support or attack the resolution in whatever matter they see fit—there is no required format or terminology. But you will hear most teams present two to four contentions for or against the resolution. Some Affirmatives may present a plan, some Negatives a counterplan, but not often. As

you take notes, you will want to write down these contentions and proposals as well as the major supporting arguments. These will or should become the major points of contention in the debate. As the debate progresses you will also want to note the other team's responses and counter arguments as they are presented.

Everyone takes notes in their own way. The recommended way for debate is to use a flow chart, a large piece of paper divided into eight columns, one for each speech. During each speech you take notes down the appropriate column, keeping the Affirmative contentions towards the top of each column, and the Negative contentions lower down. As the debate progresses, the responses to a particular argument are written down in the column opposite the earlier argument. You can read the "flow" of the arguments across the page. In a good debate, where the teams clash back and forth, each argument will be followed by a counter-argument, then a further reply and so forth.

Step Five: When the debates ends, give a useful, balanced comment to the debaters

Okay. The debate has been progressing, the speakers taking their turns, asking questions during cross-ex and using their prep time. You've been keeping time, giving hand signals, taking notes and generally keeping things moving along. Finally you come to the last rebuttals, and the debate ends. The two teams will usually rise and shake hands, and offer to shake yours.

If you are comfortable, you can take a quick minute or two to comment verbally on the debate. Remember that they are students, so try to be positive about what you say. I try to find something to compliment each team on, and something to suggest that they can improve. These can be comments on the presentation style, their organization or the arguments they use. As you become more experienced, you may want to comment on debate tactics and strategy.

Please be careful not to say anything that gives away your decision. We have a strict rule not to release any results until after the tournament is over, when we distribute copies of the ballots to all of the teams. You should not disclose your decision to the debaters or to anyone else until after the tournament ends. Disagreements over the results could be a serious distraction during the day.

Step Six: Decide Who Won!

After you've spoken to the debaters, ask them to leave the room and close the door. There may be other debaters, even another Judge, waiting to enter the room for the next round. Ask them to stay outside and while you take a few minutes to fill out the ballot. And I mean only a few minutes! We want to keep the tournament on schedule, so you have to get the ballot filled out and returned to the Tab Room so that you can go on to your next assignment as a judge.

This is when you pick up the ballot that you put aside after Step Two. As I said, I don't touch the ballot during the debate, though I know some Judges who will write notes or update point totals. I prefer to have heard the whole debate, consider my decision and

scoring and then mark the ballot. Other Judges want to develop their decision and scoring concurrently with the debate. There is no right or wrong here, it is simply a matter of preference. As you develop as a Judge—and we certainly hope that you will come to other CDA tournaments to help us as Judges—you will develop your own approach and style.

Your decision is composed of three parts: who won the debate, the speaker ranks and the speaker points. At the end of the tournament, we award trophies for the best teams and the best speakers. The best team is decided on the basis of best win/loss record, highest total speaker points and lowest total speaker ranks, in that order. We have additional tiebreakers if needed that look at the record of the opponents each team faced. The best speaker awards are decided on the basis of highest total points, lowest total ranks and best win/loss record, in that order. Again, we have additional tiebreakers based on the record of the speaker's opponents if needed.

All three components of your decision matter. The importance of the win/loss decision is obvious. The speaker ranks essentially compare the debaters among themselves within the debate. The speaker points compare debaters across debates, and ideally should be consistent across the debates that you yourself judge and the debates judged by others. Every debate will have one winner and one loser, and every debate will have a speaker ranked one—the best rank—two, three and four. But deciding whether the speaker you saw in the second round deserves the same score, say a 27, as a debater you saw in the first round, and whether another judge would have assigned the same number of points, can be tricky. I'll spend some time later discussing assigning point totals.

I find that the easiest way to score the debate is in three steps: decide who won, rank the speakers and finally assign points. This process starts with the most important, yet in some ways the simplest decision, and moves on to those that are more difficult. As I said before, other judges may score the debate differently, but this is the method I will describe to you.

So, the first thing is to decide who won. Most of the time, by the end of the debate, you will know who you believe won. That feeling that you have at the end of the debate as to which team did the better job of convincing you to accept their side of the Resolution is probably the right decision. I always review my notes, and go over the major points of clash between the two teams, to make sure my feeling is justified. But most of the time the review will confirm my first impression. This isn't to say that some debates will be closer than others, and take more time to decide, but some times Judges spend too much time worrying over the result. At least make sure you note down your first thought as to which team won and which lost, and start from there.

The ballot has a place on the front page to note who won, and you should list both the school name and the side—Affirmative or Negative—as a check for the Tab Room. Below that is an area that begins “Reason(s) for decision” followed by a blank space for you to write a brief explanation of why made the decision you did. It is very important

that you give the debaters a reason for your decision. I'll talk more about your written comments a bit later.

Step Seven: Rank order the speakers from 1 to 4

Once you've decided who won the debate, the next step is to decide how to order the four speakers from first to last. The ballot requires that you rank them 1, 2, 3 and 4, with no ties, where 1 indicates the best speaker.

These ranks must correspond to the decision you made in Step Six as to who won. So if you rank the speakers on one team 1 and 2, that team must be the team that won the debate, because you believe both speakers were better than those on the other team that you ranked 3 and 4. Similarly, if you rank the speakers on one team 1 and 3, as 1 is better than 2 and 3 is better than 4, that team must be the one you believe won the debate. The only ambiguous case is if you rank the speakers on one team 1 and 4, and the speakers on the other team 2 and 3. While 1 is better than 2, 3 is better than 4, so either team may have won the debate.

It is easy to get confused with ranks and points because sometimes the team that has the best speakers—in the sense of the best orators—does not have the best arguments. You should award the victory to the team that wins on the arguments. This means that when you assign speaker ranks you must consider not just oratory, but all the duties of the speaker, including the quality of their arguments. A speaker who has presented superior arguments and done a better job of clashing with and answering the arguments of his opponents is the better debater, even if he is less articulate than his opponents.

Step Eight: Assign points to each speaker

The final step in scoring the debate is to assign speaker points. You've decided which team won the debate, and you've ranked the debaters from first to last, 1 to 4. The points you assign should correspond to the ranks you assigned: the speaker ranked 2 should not receive more points than the speaker that you ranked 1. Unlike ranks, however, speakers may receive the same number of points. So while the speaker ranked 2 should not receive more points than the speaker ranked 1, the two could receive the same number of points if you felt their performances were very closely matched.

The number of points to assign each speaker can be a difficult decision. We have a number of guidelines. First, the maximum number of points you can assign is 30. We also ask that you not assign fewer than 20, so you are really working on an 11 point scale. Second, remember that we have two divisions, Varsity and Novice. Varsity debaters are generally more experienced than Novice, and we make allowance for that in the scoring, expecting better performance from the Varsity. An excellent Novice debater who might earn a 27 or 28 might only be an average Varsity debater, scoring only 25 or 26.

The ballot we use has changed over the years. The current version has a rubric on the to help you build up a score from smaller decisions on six performance categories: Case, Organization, Clash, Cross Examination, Presentation and Civility. Each category has can be scored as 3, 4 or 5, so as you go across you need only decide "low," "average" or

“high” in each category. This can help you develop the point totals in a consistent manner.

It’s not quite that simple of course. The scores still have to be consistent with the ranks you assigned. Because the categories look at individual skills rather than the debate and the debaters as a whole, it’s possible to build up a total score that does not agree with the decision you made as to which team won the debate and the ranks that you assigned to the speakers. For example, three of the categories directly address the quality of the arguments (Case, Organization and Clash), while one is more related to oratory (Presentation). Cross Examination could go either way. And it’s hard to see how any speaker could get less than a full marks in Civility. We also ask that you not give a score lower than 20, even though, if you selected the lowest score in each category the total would be 18. So you will probably have to play with the scores in some of the categories to get the numbers to work out. That’s okay.

Some judges, especially the more experienced ones, tend to decide the speaker points directly. When you have observed a lot of debates you develop your own sense of scale for assigning points. You tend to place the speakers on that scale very quickly. You then have to select a value for each of the categories on the ballot in a way that adds up to the scores that you assigned, and also gives the debaters some sense of their strengths and weaknesses. Judges who use the rubric in this way try to give the debaters higher scores in the categories that match their best skills. But again, to get the totals to work out you have to fiddle around a bit, and that’s okay.

There is no one correct way to judge, and assigning scores is no different. If you are a new judge, you may find the rubric useful in helping to build up the speaker points from individual skills. If you are an experienced judge, you can use the rubric to provide feedback to the debaters on their strengths and weaknesses. In either case you may have to make some compromises to assign reasonable scores.

One useful bit of information: if you selected the middle score in each category you would assign a point score of 24, just below the middle of the 20-30 point range. Each category where you select the highest value raises the score by one point, and each category where you select the lowest value lowers the score by one point. I find that if I remember this fact, it makes it easy to adjust the scores to get to levels that make sense.

One final word on speaker points. You are unlikely to see the best debater or the worst debater of the day in the first round that you judge. So be careful about scoring too high or too low. In all the years that I’ve been a judge, I’ve assigned very few 29’s and even fewer 30’s, and it’s rare that I’ve assigned a score below 23. So even if you are very impressed by the first team you see, remember the next team might be even better, and you may want to save a point or two in the range to recognize that difference.

Step Nine: Provide a brief written critique on the ballot

The ballot has five places for you to write your comments to the debaters. There is box for comments to each of the speakers individually, and the space I mentioned before labeled “*Reason(s) for decision*”

What you write is actually the most important information you will place on the ballot. While the debaters will focus on the ranks and the scores, it’s your written comments that will provide the feedback that can help them learn to become better debaters. For most debates the only people in the room will be the four debaters and the judge. You are the only one who can give them an unbiased opinion as to what they did well and what they did poorly.

The first thing you should write is to give an explanation of why you chose one side or another to win the debate. Try to be specific. If you were impressed by a particular argument that outweighed the others, then say so. If you felt one team did a better job responding to the other team’s argument, then tell them. Explaining why they won or lost is the most important feedback that you can give them.

The ballot also has space for comments directed to each speaker individually. Here you can tell each debater those things they did well or poorly. You can write about their speaking style, their performance in cross-ex, their arguments or anything else that you think is important. Remember that you are dealing with students, so try to phrase things in a positive fashion. Often a debater may be unaware that they are doing something that is ineffective or even annoying. Rather than saying that directly, you may want to write something like, “Your presentation would be more effective if you used fewer hand gestures, and looked at your audience when you spoke,” or “When you argued that the proposal would be too expensive, it would be more convincing if you gave examples or reasons why it would cost so much.”

You don’t have to give comments to each speaker individually. You can use the space to give comments to each team separately, or, as I often do, use all of the space to give a more detailed explanation of your decision. The open areas of the ballot are there for you to use as you see fit. However you choose to use that space, please be sure to write something so that the debaters can improve their skills. What you write on the ballot will be the only feedback they will get.

Also, feel free to continue your comments on to the reverse side of the ballot. There is nothing there so there is plenty of room to write. We have found that most schools have double-sided copiers, so if you need additional space, please write on the back of the ballot.

Don’t be too self conscious. Every judge approaches a debate a bit differently. Debaters need to understand this, and to understand that the different types of things that different judges see are all important. There is no one correct way to judge a debate. Your feedback is important because you were the one who saw them debate.

Finally, remember that while we do give copies of the ballots to each team, we don't distribute them until the end of the tournament. Usually the debaters will review them on the ride home and at their team meeting after the tournament. So while they may complain about your decision, they will do so after we have all gone home for the day. If a debater comes up to you during the tournament and asks you about the debate, you should not discuss anything that would give away your decision. As I said, we want the decisions kept confidential until after the tournament has ended.

Step Ten: Get your ballot back to the tab room on time

Okay. You've listened to the round, taken notes, made a decision, scored the round and filled out the ballot. You should try to spend no more than five to ten minutes filling out the ballot. I realize this isn't a lot of time—especially since I've just said you can write comments on the back of the ballot—but it's important that we keep the tournament moving so that we stay on schedule. We all want to get out at a reasonable time. Try not to agonize over your decision. I find that the quality of my decision and comments don't improve much after more than 15 minutes, and I try to be finished in 10.

There is only one more thing to do before you get to move on to the next round and do it all over again: get the ballot back to the tab room. Please bring the ballot back in person. Don't give it to a student or anyone else. There will be volunteers, usually sitting at a table outside the room, who will check to see that your ballot is filled out correctly. If you bring the ballot to tab personally, we can clear up any questions immediately while the debate and your score is still fresh in your mind. Once you've been told the ballot is correct, you can go on to the next round. And remember, we want to keep your decision confidential until the end of the day.

Additional Thoughts on Judging a Debate

There will be three rounds, two before and one after lunch. Then a final round between the two best varsity teams to decide the winner of the tournament. It's a long day, but I hope you will find it interesting and enjoyable.

I also hope that these ten steps will help guide you through your first round and subsequent rounds. I've concentrated more on procedure than how to evaluate the debate in order to be sure you were prepared for your first round.

In the time that remains I'd like to talk about more about the criteria we would like you to use to judge the debate. While each judge will approach a round differently, there are a number of things that we emphasize to the debaters that you should be aware of and understand. Some of these are listed on the handouts we've given you, and some are indicated by the scoring categories on the back of the ballot.

Judge Primarily on What the Debaters Say

The fundamental task of each team is to persuade the judge of the correctness of its position, the Affirmative in favor of the resolution, and the Negative against the resolution. The decision should be based on the arguments presented by each team during the debate, and not on the knowledge, preference or reasoning of the judge. The

topics that we debate are usually of current interest and are sometimes highly controversial. You may have strong personal opinions in favor of one side of the argument or another. We ask you to leave those opinions outside the room and listen to the debaters with an open mind. You should judge based on what you hear, not on what you believe. If you find that you feel so strongly about the issue we are discussing today that you can't judge with an open mind, please let us know and we will excuse you.

You should also be careful not to inject too much of what you know about the subject into judging the debate. While it is reasonable to ask you to put aside your beliefs, it's harder and less useful to ask you to put aside what you know, because if you didn't know anything you wouldn't be very useful as a judge. However, you shouldn't let your knowledge overwhelm what is presented by the debaters.

The debaters only received the resolution just before we began this workshop. The only materials they have are four to ten pages of articles in a packet put together to give them some background on the resolution and to be used to help develop and support their arguments. They are permitted to bring a dictionary, an almanac and a copy of the US Constitution with them for use during the preparation period and the debates. Beyond that, all they have are their wits and what they have learned, both formally and informally. But in one hour they have to be ready to argue both for and against the resolution with equal skill.

You may know quite a bit more about the topic than they do, but you cannot hold them to that standard. I've often found debaters to be surprisingly knowledgeable. On the other hand, I've also heard debaters cite rather amazing facts that I've known to be absolutely incorrect. Generally this is done quite innocently—I've never seen debaters knowingly present false evidence. We've all said things on occasion that we've later found out were false. It's also rare that the debate will turn on the truth or falsity of one fact. You should generally credit what the debaters tell you, but if you believe some fact they have presented is incorrect, then you may want to credit it a bit less.

Finally, you've probably already noticed a wide variety of fashion choices among the debaters. The CDA does not have dress code, and you should try not to let students' appearances affect your judgment.

Judge Primarily on How Well the Teams Support Their Side

There are very few rules of debate, but there are a few things that are generally accepted. First, the Affirmative team has the "burden of proof" which means simply that they must start the debate by presenting a reasonable argument that supports the resolution. The Negative team need only show that the Affirmative has not met this burden, and has not given sufficient reason to adopt the resolution. Note that in compensation for having to carry the resolution, the Affirmative gets three advantages: the Affirmative speaks first and last, and the Affirmative has the right to a reasonable definition of terms.

Almost any reasonable argument the Affirmative makes in favor of the resolution meets the burden of proof if it stands unopposed, no matter how weak it may seem. If all you

have is what the Affirmative tells you, then they will win the debate by default. This is reflected in the convention that both teams have what is called the “burden of rejoinder.” What that means, simply, is that if one side advances a reasonable argument, it should be accepted as such unless it is challenged by the other team. So if the Affirmative presents a case that is ignored by the Negative, then the Affirmative has met its burden of proof and should win the debate. If the Negative presents reasonable arguments against the Affirmative case, and the Affirmative ignores them, then the Negative has met the burden of rejoinder, it has responded to the Affirmative’s arguments, and the Negative should win the debate, and so on.

The debates that you judge will be much messier than this simple description. The Affirmative will present arguments in favor of the resolution. The Negative will respond to those arguments: to some with strong counterarguments, to some with weaker replies, and to some with no argument at all. The Negative may also give you separate arguments against the resolution, a Negative case, independent of what the Affirmative has said. The Affirmative will then not only have to respond to any Negative counterarguments against the Affirmative case but also propose Affirmative counterarguments to the Negative case. Like the Negative, some of those Affirmative counterarguments will be strong, some weak, and the Affirmative will fail to respond at all to some arguments.

This is where the real work and art of judging comes to play. You will have to compare the arguments presented by both sides—strong and weak, present and missing—and weigh them to decide which side has done the best job of convincing you to adopt or reject the resolution. In some debates one argument may be critical, but in most of them it each side will carry one or more arguments, and you must decide which ones are the most important. We ask you to judge the debate based on the information presented by the debaters, but in the end you will have to exercise your own judgment as to the relative value of that information.

Remember that the standard in debate does not require one side or the other to win every single argument. The team that wins should carry the preponderance of the arguments, which means you should consider the relative importance of arguments as well as their number. In short, you must judge.

Judge Primarily on Clash

The idea of clash is explicit in the way I’ve just described a debate: each side is responsible for presenting arguments and responding to the arguments made by their opponents. That is the essence of good debate, two teams each listening closely to what the other is saying and responding appropriately.

Not every debate will work that way. Especially with the novice and less experienced debaters, each side may come in with their own arguments and repeat them throughout the debate. Some debates will seem at times as if the two teams could be in separate rooms for all the attention they pay to each others’ arguments. This lack of clash is the exact opposite of good debate. It’s less interesting to listen to, and it’s hard to judge

because you have to make all the decisions as to which arguments are important. If you judge a debate like this, you should be certain you note the lack of clash in your comments on the ballot. This way the debaters will realize what's missing and do better the next time.

The best debaters in the best debates clash early and often, starting when the Negative cross examines the First Affirmative speaker. Clash is continuous thereafter. Each team makes arguments that refer directly to arguments, comments or answers given by their opponents. They compare and contrast their own position with that of their opponents, telling you precisely why their own arguments are superior. These debates are interesting and entertaining. They may be just as difficult to judge if they are hard fought, but you won't have to construct the arguments yourself, only select the line of reasoning that you ultimately found most convincing.

How do you know when the debaters are clashing effectively? It should be obvious that the debaters have listened carefully to what their opponents have said, citing their opponents' arguments fairly and correctly. They should reply to those arguments in detail, not with vague assertions. They should exploit weaknesses in what their opponents have said, not simply mistakes, but also weak reasoning, inconsistencies and omissions. They should contrast their own position with those of their opponents, making clear comparisons between the two. Finally, and especially at the end of the debate, they should summarize what has been said, reducing the debate to the critical differences between the two sides, and why the arguments should lead you, the judge, to decide in their favor.

Ironically, the essence of clash is utmost respect for your opponents: "I've listened to you, I've understood what you've said, and I've replied to it in a serious fashion." That's what makes a good debate!

This is about all the time we have for now. Please check the schedule and get to your first debate promptly. If you are not scheduled for the first round, feel free to observe a debate. Simply ask the two teams and the judge if they mind your presence. It can be useful to observe a team from your own school in order to give them additional feedback on their performance. In any event please do not leave, because we will almost certainly need you for the second and later round.

I and other member of the CDA will be around all day. Please feel free to stop us and ask questions as you have them. We will be happy to help. And once again, thank you for volunteering your time to make this tournament possible. We hope that you will enjoy it enough to come back to other CDA tournaments in the future.

ejr
10-3-08