

# **Seven Lakes Speech & Debate Handbook**

Director of Speech and Debate, Calen Cabler

Assistant Director of Speech and Debate, Tuyen Le

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# Welcome

## **Welcome to the Seven Lakes Speech & Debate Team!**

Coach Cabler and Coach Le are pleased to welcome you back for another season of SLHS Speech and Debate. This Handbook serves several functions: outlining your role on the SLHS Speech and Debate Team, laying out rules and guidelines for all team members, and as a helpful resource for you to consult if you have a question about logistical information. Our mission is to use research, writing, argumentation, critical thinking, and public speaking skills to help students find their voice within a supportive team environment.

Seven Lakes is renowned on the local, state, and national level as a highly successful Speech & Debate program, and our expectation is to improve consistently every year to maintain that same standard of excellence. Over the past 4 years, we have placed 2nd twice and 1st once at the TFA State tournament, won the UIL and TFA Congressional Debate state titles, won UIL State in Prose, and have twice been recognized as a top 10 School of Outstanding Distinction at the National Speech and Debate Tournament. We are deeply committed to success at all levels of competition, from novices going to their first tournament to experienced team members attending tournaments across the country.

Speech & Debate is an activity that has **no equal** across any other extracurricular in high school. Over the course of the season, no matter the event, you will be expected to construct well-informed advocacies, performances, and arguments, and present that hard work in a clear and compelling manner. Many past students describe the importance that speech and debate played in helping them find their voice – and in increasingly polarizing times, learning how to speak up and advocate for something that you believe will serve you very well after high school. This takes **commitment** during the entire year from every student. There is no faking success in speech & debate: you will get out of this activity what you put into it. Through practice and competition, you will form lifelong bonds with your friends on the team, your coaches, and with competitors you frequently compete against from other schools. These bonds run deep. The time you spend preparing for and attending tournaments will go a long way in shaping your high school experience – for the better!

**Please thoroughly read the handbook, even if you have been on the team before, as some team policies have been updated from past competition seasons.** It is important that all members of the team begin on the same page. Most importantly, we expect you to always show respect to everyone: your coaches, your teammates, the class, your opponents, and to yourself. We are so excited to work with each of you this year.

Sincerely,

Ms. Calen Cabler

Director of Speech and Debate

Ms. Tuyen Le

Assistant Director of Speech and Debate

## Contact Information

### **Calen Cabler**

School Phone: 281-237-9018  
School Email: CalenMCabler@katyisd.org  
Mobile Phone: 512-558-1178 (only to be used in emergencies)

### **Tuyen Le**

School Phone: 2812379134  
School Email: ngoctuyenle@katyisd.org  
Mobile Phone: 409-549-3435 (only to be used in emergencies)

Parents should use school email as the primary method of contacting the coaches. **Please do not text us unless it is an emergency.** If, during a tournament, you need to contact us, please contact your student at the tournament and ask them to message us. We will respond as promptly as possible. Keep in mind that we may be judging or competing in a round when you contact us and may be unavailable to take your call.

Students should use the team's Slack communication service as the primary mechanism to contact coaches. More details on Slack will be provided later in this handbook. If changes to departure times happen during school hours, announcements will be sent through Canvas. **Students should not call or text coaches for any reason other than emergencies.**

Be advised that coaches may take longer to respond to Canvas messages than emails or Slack messages.

## **Why Speech & Debate?**

### **1. Research Skills**

Very few high school courses teach in-depth academic research skills that are required at a collegiate level. The work done over the course of a single season of varsity debate or extemporaneous speaking can exceed the research required of a college-level senior thesis. Students frequently engage with scholarly articles and the most up-to-date news sources about a wide range of issues of the day. Students competing in platform speaking and interpretation events investigate literature deeply and explore complex performance theory well before any of their peers.

### **2. Analytic Ability**

Speech and debate, at its core, facilitates the investigation of complex problems and the proposition of an advocacy statement to address that problem. This requires students to think about all sides of a current issue: not just what they might personally agree with. The ability to get out of one's "echo chamber" and see all sides of a debate is vital in today's political and professional climate.

### **3. Public Speaking**

As popularized by the comedian Jerry Seinfeld: the greatest fear of the average person is public speaking. The second greatest fear is death. This statement is far from hyperbole! A 2012 article published in Communication Research Reports confirmed that public speaking was selected more often as a common fear than any other fear. Speech & debate competition allows competitors to face that common fear head on and develop the invaluable skill sets of self-advocacy and thinking on one's feet which translates across all academic disciplines and professional environments. After all – it doesn't matter how smart your ideas are if you can't effectively communicate them!

### **4. College Admissions**

Prestigious colleges and universities require students to demonstrate commitment to the broader school environment, including extracurricular activities. Admissions officers and college administrators cite speech and debate as one of the best activities to demonstrate success in and separate one's self from a crowded field of applicants. Success in speech and debate opens thousands of dollars in scholarships to students through the TILF scholarship program in Texas, and others beyond.

### **5. Writing Skills**

All speech & debate events require assessing a wide array of information about a topic and consolidating that scholarly work into concise advocacy statements. Experienced forensics competitors frequently enjoy writing skills leaps and bounds beyond those of their contemporaries as a result of preparing eloquent, concise, and rigorously tested presentations for competition.

### **6. It's FUN!**

Speech & debate is incredibly fun and rewarding. It gives students the opportunity to travel across the state and country to represent their school, and meet like-minded, intelligent peers from across the nation in the process to build lifelong relationships. Students experience unmatched growth in confidence, maturity, and community engagement.

## **Competition Circuits**

The Seven Lakes Speech & Debate Team participates in several different organizational bodies governing speech and debate at the state and national level.

1. Texas Forensic Association (TFA): This is the state governing body for speech and debate competition and makes up the bulk of our tournament schedule. Students will attend TFA IQTs (Individual Qualifying Tournaments) from August through February to earn qualification to the TFA State Tournament, held every March. Students will earn qualifying points at these TFA tournaments by advancing to elimination rounds. Students earning 12 or more points in an event over the course of the year secure qualification to the TFA State Tournament.
2. University Interscholastic League (UIL): This is the state governing body for athletics and academic competition. UIL offers district, regional, and state competition in several events throughout the year. These events are slightly different from those offered at TFA tournaments, and include Congress, CX Debate, LD Debate, Persuasive and Informative Extemporaneous Speaking, and Prose and Poetry Interpretation. We will compete at all levels of UIL contests throughout the year.
3. National Speech & Debate Association (NSDA): This is the national governing body for speech and debate and hosts the NSDA National Tournament in mid-June. Students qualify for this tournament by attending the NSDA District Tournament. The Congress District tournament is generally held during late February. The IE/Debate District tournament is generally held during early April. Events are very similar or identical to those offered at TFA tournaments.
4. Tournament of Champions/National Circuit (TOC): The Tournament of Champions is hosted by the University of Kentucky during the end of April. Qualification to this tournament requires excellent results at travel tournaments throughout the year, requires a substantial amount of work and effort, and is a high accomplishment.
5. Round Robins: Some invitational tournaments throughout the country hold special, exclusive, invitation-only tournaments for the highest performing students in the country. Often, these tournaments will accompany other larger tournaments. Invitations to round robins are extremely prestigious and represent an excellent opportunity to compete against the best students in the country.

## **Competition Events**

Seven Lakes competes in most NSDA Competition Events at tournaments throughout the year, including at TFA tournaments, the NSDA District and National Tournament, TOC, NIETOC, and Round Robins. Below is a list of events we offer:

### **Speech:**

- Extemporaneous Speaking (Domestic and International at TFA tournaments, Persuasive and Informative at UIL tournaments)
- Informative Speaking
- Original Oratory

### **Debate:**

- Congressional Debate
- Lincoln-Douglas Debate
- Public Forum Debate
- Policy Debate
- World Schools Debate

### **Oral Interpretation (Interp):**

- Dramatic Interpretation
- Duo Interpretation
- Duet Acting (TFA Only)
- Humorous Interpretation
- Program Oral Interpretation
- Prose Interpretation
- Poetry Interpretation

For more information related to any of these events, please refer to the NSDA's Competition Events Guide, found here:

<https://www.speechanddebate.org/wp-content/uploads/Combined-Competition-Events-At-A-Glance.pdf>

We also compete in all UIL competition events. These include:

- Prose Interpretation
- Poetry Interpretation
- Informative Speaking
- Persuasive Speaking
- Lincoln-Douglas Debate
- Cross-Examination (Policy) Debate
- Congress

An overview to UIL competition events can be found here:

<https://www.uil texas.org/speech/new-coach-info/uil-speech-debate-event-overview>

# Team Expectations – Students

## Discipline and Behavior Expectations

1. **All disciplinary action will be handled on a case-by-case basis by the coaches.** We cannot possibly anticipate every way in which a student may violate team, school, district, or basic human behavioral expectations. This handbook contains several general guidelines and expectations, but should not be considered a comprehensive list of expected behaviors.
2. The most common behaviors that get on the coaches' nerves are: being late for bus departure/pickup, being late for departure at travel tournaments, unacceptable or disruptive behavior during class, practice, or tournaments (including the use of inappropriate language), failure to complete or prepare for assignments given by coaches or captains, skipping practice without arranging make-up work with a coach or member of leadership, and failing to check Slack for team announcements and information.
3. Seven Lakes and Katy ISD policies on student conduct and discipline are always in full force and effect for all students at a tournament. Students violating any team, school, or district conduct policy will be subject to removal from the tournament and disciplinary action. Conduct which requires a referral to Seven Lakes High School administrative staff will be handled by Katy ISD.
4. Speech & Debate is a co-curricular academic activity. Students on the Speech & Debate team are expected to always maintain good academic standing. Debate preparation or competition is **never** to be used as an excuse for poor academic performance. Students who are not academically eligible will not be permitted to compete. Students who are *barely* passing classes may be required to stay home from tournaments to improve their grades.
5. Speech & Debate students are expected to represent the team in the highest ethical manner possible. Poor behavior by one student reflects poorly on the rest of the team. At all times, conduct yourself in a professional and mature manner, whether at a tournament, at practice, or at school. All members of the team are expected to always treat all others with respect. Students should refrain from speaking negatively about teammates, opponents, judges, or other competitors at tournaments.
6. The Speech & Debate Team will be a safe space for all students. There is a ZERO tolerance policy for hateful, discriminatory, and aggressive behavior or language. This includes behavior and language directed towards participants from other schools/teams and student behavior in competition rounds. Members of the team who create a hostile learning environment will be promptly disciplined.
7. Speech & Debate is hard work. You should treat it as such. Everyone on the team has **chosen to be here** and should **act like it**. Competing on a team of our caliber is a privilege that not every high school student has. To that end, students should refrain from complaints related to the amount of preparation required, tournament attendance, or any other team conduct. This sort

of thinking becomes a self-fulfilling cycle that depletes team morale.

8. Speech & Debate students must be easily available via Slack and promptly respond to electronic communications from other team members and coaches during the school week and weekends where they are competing in tournaments. Students are expected to check Slack daily and be up to date on all team announcements sent via that platform.
9. Any student participation in online speech & debate forums is expected to be constructive and appropriate. The Speech & Debate team believes that online connection can be helpful to foster relationships between competitors from diverse backgrounds, if conducted thoughtfully.
10. During tournaments, the following is a list of bare minimum expectations for all team members:
  - a. Be punctual to your rounds. Be prepared to begin your round 5 minutes before the round start time. Arrive at extemp draw in time for the first speaker to draw before going to other events, using the restroom, etc.
  - b. Respect property that is not yours. If you rearrange a classroom, put it back the way you found it. **Clean up after yourself.** Secure your valuables at a tournament.
  - c. Do not argue with judges after the round. Polite questions are encouraged for the purposes of improvement. Serious concerns about judges should be brought to the coaching staff. Avoid making enemies – the speech and debate circuit is small, and you will have repeat opponents and judges.
  - d. After you are eliminated from a tournament, you are expected to continue watching rounds at that tournament. Tournaments are always learning experiences – whether you drop every round or win the whole thing.
  - e. Never enter a competition room without a judge.
  - f. Between competition rounds, you should be actively working to facilitate your success at the tournament – speech re-dos, going over strategic decisions in the round, taking a short break to relax, whatever is best for you. You should refrain from unconstructive behavior between rounds.



## **Dress Code**

1. We do not want to police what you wear. However, if we receive comments from your judges about your attire, or your clothing impacts you negatively while competing, we will speak with you to correct the issue. Regardless of whether you agree with certain judges' opinions regarding your dress, they are the ones ranking you, and you should generally try to adapt to them.
2. Here are our recommendations regarding what you should wear. **In short: business formal.** Consider what an attorney would wear into a courtroom. The primary focus of any speech and debate outfit should be professionalism. Dress conservatively and appropriately. Your appearance reflects on yourself and your team members. Many judges prefer dark colors, such as navy blue or black, and want you to wear a dress suit. Wear formal footwear during competition. Jeans or other denim materials are not appropriate attire for many judges.
3. Students must be in tournament dress while competing at a tournament. You should probably bring a more comfortable pair of shoes to switch in and out of. Once eliminated, you are welcome to change into more comfortable clothes to watch rounds, if you so choose. These comfortable clothes should be school appropriate: avoid loungewear, like pajamas, or excessively revealing attire.
4. Katy ISD's dress code, as with all other Katy ISD policy, is always in full force and effect.

## Team Communication

All student-coach and relevant team communication will take place on the team Slack. Students should make sure at the beginning of the year that they have downloaded the Slack app on both their laptops and phones, and that they check notifications for Slack throughout the day. Students are expected to respond to any communication via Slack promptly.

Students must use their **actual** first and last name and include a picture of themselves as their profile picture on Slack. Students should not have multiple Slack accounts. This is to make sure that everyone is easily identifiable to facilitate effective communication across multiple individuals and channels.

During the school week, students should check Slack at least daily for announcements across multiple channels, including #announcements, #tournamentregistration, their squad's channel, and DMs from teammates or coaches. Students are expected to respond to Slack messages within at least 24 hours during the week. We expect that students check Slack **during their class period and** immediately after school, every day, at minimum.

During tournament weekends, students should turn Slack notifications on, and treat Slack as the team's instant messaging/text messaging service throughout the week. Students should be responsive to Slack messages very promptly, as this will be the primary mechanism by which coaches are in contact with students during tournaments.

Students who do not use Slack in a constructive manner will be removed from it at the discretion of Coach Cabler and Coach Le and will be disciplined. Failure to use Slack in a constructive manner may result in suspension from tournaments.

Students failing to regularly check Slack notifications, or who do not promptly reply to Slack messages at tournaments, will face disciplinary action based on the severity of the offense.

If you are a student and need to be added to the team Slack, please let one of the coaches know, and they will provide you with an invitation.

## **Team Expectations – Parents**

### **Summary of expectations for parents:**

- Send team contribution check in full by September 4, 2025 - \$475 Varsity, \$275 Novice
- Complete transportation form to permit student participation in all extracurricular tournaments
- Drop off and pick up students at Seven Lakes High School promptly on tournament weekends
  - If your student is not picked up within 15 minutes of drop off at school, Katy ISD police will be notified to relieve coaches of supervision.
- Judge for 3 days at local tournaments during August - February or, if you are unwilling to judge, include an additional \$250 to contribute to the team to cover your student's hired judging fees during the year (example: \$475 + \$250 = \$725 for Varsity, \$275 + \$250 = \$525 for Novice). Fees associated with hiring judges will be due by the end of the first semester - the last day to pay without a hold on your student's account will be Wednesday, November 19, 2025.
- Provide 1 judge per household for the duration of the home tournament, or volunteer for the equivalent amount
- Encourage and support student fundraising efforts, i.e. spirit nights
- Participate in the team's Booster Club, including donating meals, water, and snacks to tournaments, and assisting with hospitality and concessions during tournaments hosted at SLHS
- Assist with team fundraising activities
- Support your student's membership on the team!

## **Contribution Expectations**

At the beginning of the school year, each Varsity student (anyone returning to the team from last year) will be expected to contribute \$475 to the 7LHS Speech and Debate Booster Club. Each Novice student (anyone in their first year of competition, including all Debate 1 and Oral Interpretation 1 students) will be expected to contribute \$275 to the 7LHS Speech and Debate Booster Club. This contribution funds direct activities and expenses associated with the team's programming, including meals for the students when attending local tournaments on Fridays and Saturdays, TFA tournament participation in the immediate Houston area, transportation, hiring consultants and judges to prepare for tournaments, and buying supplies for the program. This contribution is due on September 4, 2025.

All tournaments designated as "Travel Tournaments" on the team calendar must be sponsored by parents, and students electing to attend those tournaments may incur additional fees associated with travel, lodging, and tournament entry, depending on that tournament's cost. Those fees will be communicated with team members as they arise. Estimates of costs for travel tournaments are posted in the year's tournament schedule.

### **Please contribute using one of the following methods:**

1. **Cash**, in an envelope with your student's name and ID number in it, brought to a Coach
2. **Write a check to the "7LHS Speech and Debate Booster Club."** Include the student's name in the memo line, and have your student bring it with them to school.
3. **Via Zelle to [7LHSSDBoosterClub@gmail.com](mailto:7LHSSDBoosterClub@gmail.com).** Include your student's name in the message, along with what is being paid for. Example: "Tuyen Le Team Dues 2025" or "Calen Cabler Grapevine Tournament 2025".
4. If none of these methods work for you, please contact the Booster Club to coordinate an alternative method of payment.

All students are expected to contribute to the team. If contribution to the team is an issue for you or your family, please email Coach Cabler, Coach Le, and the Booster Club President, Jenny Kumar, to discuss an alternative solution.

The 7LHS Speech and Debate Booster Club is a non-profit public corporation and will be able to give you a donation receipt if requested by the parent. We are always looking for additional contributions – if you can provide additional donations, please let the leaders of the Booster Club know.

Students who register for a tournament and then drop from that tournament will pay drop and nuisance fees. More details under "Tournament Registration."

## **Volunteering Expectations**

Because of the size of our team, low availability of hired judging, and high hired judge fees, we need parent volunteers to assist us with judging rounds at tournaments. This helps us keep entry fees reasonable for all members of the team. We will provide you with training before the beginning of the tournament. **Each household on the team is responsible for providing at least one of the following:**

- Additional financial contribution of \$250 to cover your student's extra hired judging costs
- Three tournament days of judging – a tournament day being defined as full availability on Friday evening or Saturday.

Signups for parent judges will be emailed out approximately 2 weeks before each tournament. Parents should email Coach Le with questions about judging at tournaments.

**Additionally, during the year, we will host our own tournament.** This date is September 19-20, 2025, for this school year. During that tournament, all students will be expected to provide the equivalent of one judge for the duration of the tournament. Volunteering with the Booster Club counts as judging during the tournament, should they need the assistance.

We always welcome additional volunteering efforts or financial contributions to facilitate more competition for students. If you are able to judge more often, we may be able to lower your student's expected contribution to the team on a case by case basis.

Throughout the year, coaches and the year's officer team will announce various fundraisers. All students are expected to participate in these fundraising efforts.

**[Debate Judge Resources](#) – Please use this link to access debate judge training and resources on Google Drive.**

## **Booster Club**

Competing in speech and debate is an incredibly rewarding experience for students, and we strongly encourage parents to get involved and help with the team's Booster Club to experience Speech and Debate for themselves. Your involvement with the Booster Club will assist the team secure additional sources of funding to promote educational opportunities for all team members, enhance instructional efforts from the coaches, facilitate additional team practices, provide transportation services, provide meals for students at tournaments, and much more.

Involvement with the Booster Club includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Donating or delivering a meal at a tournament on a Friday night or Saturday mid-day
- Donating snacks or water to the school before a tournament
- Volunteering to judge at additional tournaments
- Assisting with hospitality and concessions during tournaments hosted at SLHS
- Assisting with fundraising efforts

Parents should contact the Booster Club if they are interested in attending meetings.

The members of the 7LHS Speech and Debate Booster Club are:

President: Jenny Kumar

Vice President: Deepthi Pendyala

Treasurer: Rebecca Lun

Secretary: TBD

Communications Chair: Audrey Lin

To contact the Booster Club, please email [7LHSSDBoosterClub@gmail.com](mailto:7LHSSDBoosterClub@gmail.com).

# Event-Specific Policies

## PF, LD, Policy

1. Regarding preparation, including prep sharing and prep groups:
  - a. The set of materials compiled by the PF, LD, and Policy teams at SLHS creates an advantage over other schools which allows us to succeed. It is the expectation of the team that those materials stay within the boundaries of our team.
  - b. ALL prep unless explicitly stated otherwise should be uploaded in a designated shared drive/file in a manner consistent with the organizational structure laid out by Coach Le.
  - c. Students on the Seven Lakes PF and LD squads may not trade or give another school any preparation material, including evidence, cases, speeches, or lecture notes, without the full knowledge and consent of Coach Le and all other members of the team.
  - d. Students shall not participate in “prep groups” comprised of individuals outside of the SLHS Speech and Debate team without the full knowledge and consent of Coach Le and all other members of the team.
  - e. Students shall not withhold research or argumentation from other members of the SLHS Speech and Debate team. All research shall always remain publicly available to all members of the team. Exclusive “prep groups” limited to only certain students on **our** team are expressly forbidden. This includes any prep acquired by way of cooperation approved by Coach Le with other schools – schools are not working with one or two debaters – they are working with our team.
  - f. None of the rules above prevent students from disclosing arguments on the wiki.
2. Regarding evidence:
  - a. Students are expected to adhere to the highest academic evidentiary standard during tournaments as discussed in class, including, but not limited to –
    - i. Sharing evidence willingly in and out of round, including disclosing on the wiki,
    - ii. Formatting evidence appropriately (i.e., a cut card), and
    - iii. Generally being as transparent as possible as to the original source of a piece of evidence used during a debate.
  - b. Any students found to be in violation of NSDA’s in-round evidentiary guidelines, **whether such an infraction is raised in a round or not, or whether such an infraction results in a loss or not**, may face disciplinary action at the discretion of coaches. This includes clipping cards, evidence distortion, evidence fabrication, failure to produce a piece of evidence, or not sharing evidence in the format of a cut card.
3. Regarding partnerships: While student input is important for determining partnerships, final partnership decisions in Public Forum Debate are **at the discretion of Coach Le and Coach Cabler, and non-negotiable once final**.
4. Miscellaneous:
  - a. Debaters should flow every speech in the round, even if they are done speaking, to facilitate speech re-dos after tournaments in class.
  - b. All PF, LD, and CX debaters are expected to additionally compete in a TFA qualifying speech/interp event. UIL LD, CX, or Academics participation may count as the second event.

5. UIL: All debaters will be expected to fully participate in UIL events, if selected. Students are to understand that the trade off for traveling to tournaments is a requirement to field competitive UIL squads.

## **Congress**

1. Congressional debaters on the Seven Lakes team are expected to represent evidence ethically, in accordance with NSDA guidelines, and be able to produce a PDF or full-text webpage of the original source of any cited information during a round promptly if a review is necessary.
2. Students are strongly encouraged, but not required, to share speech outlines, evidence, and reference materials with other team members in advance of tournaments. Captains are responsible for organizing prep sharing efforts. Captains shall not withhold specific preparation arbitrarily from other members of the team.
3. Upperclassmen and captains are encouraged to support the research efforts of younger students, when necessary.
4. Congressional debaters are prohibited from regularly sharing speech outlines, evidence, lecture notes, or any other preparation materials with competitors from outside of the Seven Lakes High School Speech and Debate team. In other words, private prep groups outside of our team are unacceptable. Congressional debaters *may* prep in a limited fashion with other members of their chamber during a tournament, if the need arises.
5. Congressional debaters may hire private coaches to facilitate more effective delivery or argument generation, so long as any and all preparation materials are able to be shared in full with the rest of the team upon request by any team member.
6. All Varsity Congressional Debaters are expected to participate fully in UIL events, if selected.
7. All Varsity Congressional Debaters are expected to compete in, and qualify for TFA State in, at least one other public speaking (Extemp, OO, INFO) or interpretation event. Students who have not qualified for TFA State in a second event will not be permitted to attend travel tournaments after the Winter Break if they have not made substantial efforts to qualify, at the discretion of coaches.
8. Varsity Congressional debaters are expected to write at least one piece of legislation for submission to UIL, NSDA Districts, or the TFA dockets.



### **Interp (DI, HI, DUO, DA, PR, POE, POI)**

1. Interpers on the Seven Lakes team are expected to choose appropriate and relevant pieces ***in accordance with NSDA and Katy ISD guidelines***, and upload all documentation information to the specified repository before competition at their first tournament.
2. Students are required to perform their piece for either Coach Le, Coach Cabler, or an officer or captain prior to competing in their first tournament in that event. Students are responsible for scheduling this performance before they go to their first tournament in that event.
3. If a student wants to change their piece, they must get coach approval for the change, approval of the new selection, and approval of the new performance before attending a tournament.
4. All Varsity interpers are expected to compete in at least two TFA qualifying events and either UIL Prose or Poetry Interpretation. All Novice interpers are expected to compete in at least one TFA qualifying event and either UIL Prose or Poetry Interpretation.
5. Upperclassmen and captains should be available to help novices block/prepare their pieces.
6. All Varsity Interpers are expected to participate fully in UIL events, if selected.

### **Public Speaking (OO, INFO)**

1. Topics must be approved by coaches prior to speech-writing beginning. A first draft of at least one speech must be submitted with Varsity team member applications for 2025-26.
2. A coach must watch you perform your piece, all the way through, at least once before competing with that piece at a tournament. If you want to change or overhaul your topic, it requires a coach's approval and a re-watch of your performance before you may attend a tournament.
3. Topics should be school appropriate. Consider: would you be comfortable giving this speech in front of a random teacher from your class schedule? If not, it is probably not an appropriate topic.
4. You must fully complete and have all boards approved by a coach before you sign up for a tournament in INFO.
5. All Varsity Public Speaking students are expected to compete in at least two TFA qualifying events, starting October 1 of the competitive year. UIL Extemp participation does not count for the second qualifying event. UIL Academics may count as a second event on a case-by-case basis.
6. All Varsity Public Speakers are expected to participate fully in UIL events, if selected.

## **Extemporaneous Speaking**

1. Without evidence of preparation for UIL LD, CX or Academics, or a second TFA qualifying event, students will be on the team's Extemporaneous Speaking squad.
2. Students that compete in Extemporaneous Speaking are expected to perform to their best ability and use the preparation time in its entirety. Failure to commit to this event in round or "throwing" will result in disciplinary action.
3. Students are expected to file articles regularly on Prepd. More information about Prepd will be provided during class. Students will be graded based on Prepd's weekly activity report.
4. All Varsity Extemporaneous Speakers are expected to participate fully in UIL events, if selected.

# **Tournament Procedures**

## **Calendar and Registration**

1. [The tournament calendar can be found here](#). Check for updates frequently.
2. All students must be academically eligible in order to compete. Senate Bill 1 mandates that students who participate in extracurricular activities must receive a grade of no less than 70 in each class. Grades will be checked at the end of each 6 week grading period. At that time, any student who fails a class will not be able to participate in any contest for the next three-week period. After three weeks, grades will be checked again. If the student is passing all classes after the three-week period has elapsed, they will become eligible at 2:35 pm seven days after the grades are checked. If the student is not passing all classes after the three-week progress report time, the student will remain ineligible for the remainder of the six weeks. All tournaments follow UIL Eligibility Guidelines, which can be found on the UIL website.
3. Students will register for tournaments via their Tabroom account. Students will be notified in Slack when tournaments are available for sign up by team leadership, and are expected to sign up on their own by the deadline. Students will not be guaranteed late registration for any tournament.
4. Students who attempt to drop after the registration deadline has passed and their registration is accepted will pay the full fee associated with their entry. This includes that student's portion of judging costs and any nuisance fees assessed by the tournament. Students will not be permitted entry to subsequent tournaments until all drop fees have been paid. Do not register for tournaments you will not attend.
5. One of the coaches will create a Slack channel for tournament-related announcements after the sign-up deadline for the tournament has passed and registration has been completed. Students are expected to monitor that channel diligently for any tournament-related announcements both before and during the tournament.
6. It is assumed that students registering for tournaments have obtained parental permission and double checked for potential scheduling conflicts. Double-booking yourself is not a valid excuse to drop from a tournament.
7. Students must obtain coach approval to travel out of Houston for tournaments. Students are automatically approved for travel assuming they have maintained good academic and behavioral standing on the team and have qualified for TFA State in at least one event.
8. Competitive tournaments frequently place limits on the number of students that may be entered into the tournament beyond the control of the coaches. Students will be chosen based on their overall effort, attendance at practices and tournaments, past competitive success, and seniority, in roughly that order of importance. If you have concerns about coach decisions related to tournament attendance, they should be raised privately with Coach Cabler or Coach Le. Coach decisions for travel are final.

## **Attendance Expectations and Guidelines**

1. Tournament participation is a requirement of the Speech & Debate team. Novice competitors are required to attend each of the first 3 Novice Nights (dates are on the calendar) and 1 tournament outside of SLHS. Novice competitors who plan to return to the team for the next school year must compete at Novice Night #4. The only make-up permissible for missing a Novice Night is attendance at a weekend tournament.
2. Varsity competitors are expected to:
  - a. Make their best effort to qualify for TFA and/or UIL State in all events they compete in.
  - b. Judge and/or volunteer at all novice nights.
  - c. Compete at any capstone tournaments they qualify for.
  - d. Make themselves available for capstone qualifying tournaments (e.g., NSDA Districts, UIL Districts) if selected.
  - e. Varsity competitors are **highly encouraged**, but not explicitly required, to travel outside of the greater Houston area. Students who choose not to travel will find themselves behind other students at capstone tournaments.
3. Students are expected to watch elimination rounds at all travel tournaments they attend. Any round is acceptable.
4. At local tournaments, if you do not break to elimination rounds, you are expected to stay for at least one additional round past your elimination.
5. To leave a tournament early, you must have completed and turned in all necessary forms prior to the team's departure to the tournament and must sign out of the tournament by completing the Tournament Check Out Google Form.
6. Students should not register for a tournament which they cannot attend in its entirety. Swing tournaments count as two separate tournaments for Speech and Congress competitors - students may attend the "Friday side" or the "Saturday side" of a swing tournament. More information on swing tournaments below.
7. Students are responsible for communicating with teachers at least a week in advance of missing school for a tournament. Students are solely responsible for completing all assignments missed due to tournament absence in a timely manner and in advance when possible. Local tournaments may require absences for part of the day on Friday. Travel tournaments require more travel, and therefore more missed school.
8. Students must attend school both the day before and the day after returning from a tournament. This is a Katy ISD and UIL policy, not mine. Those students who are absent for class on the day before/day of the tournament will not be allowed to compete at that tournament and will owe any applicable drop fees.
9. Students may independently enter tournaments hosted online, if they so choose, and if the tournament permits independent entry. They will not be excused from school, and coaches will bear no responsibility for covering judging obligations or serving as a chaperone for these tournaments. Students are expected to follow all Handbook guidelines even if not competing under the SLHS name.

## **Sample Local Tournament Schedule**

This schedule is meant to give parents an idea of what a typical tournament weekend looks like. This is not true of every single tournament, and the exact schedules of each tournament will be provided to students in advance on Tabroom. Tournament schedules are subject to change at any time due to human error, delays, or other necessities. Speech and debate tournaments often run behind.

### **Friday:**

12:00 pm: Depart for host school  
12:30 pm: Arrive at host school  
3:30 pm: Competition rounds begin  
10:30 pm: Competition rounds end  
11:00 pm: Return to Seven Lakes

### **Saturday:**

7:00 am: Depart for host school  
7:30 am: Arrive at host school  
8:00 am: Competition rounds begin  
6:00 pm: Competition rounds end  
8:00 pm: Return to Seven Lakes

**Students should plan on spending their entire Friday afternoon/evening and Saturday at tournaments for which they register.**

Most local tournaments last two days – Friday-Saturday. Competition typically begins after school on Friday afternoon and will last until 10-11 pm that night. On Saturday, competition frequently begins very early in the morning and lasts until the mid-afternoon. Tournament schedules released by hosts are based on smooth operation and minimal disruption – speech and debate tournaments can, and frequently do, run behind due to human error and unanticipated events. Flexibility on tournament days is paramount.

Some tournaments are “swing tournaments”. These tournaments are functionally two tournaments in one weekend for Congress and Speech events, with competition for one side typically concluding on Friday night and the other side beginning on Saturday morning. Students competing in these events may register for only one “side” of a swing tournament. Students taking advantage of swing tournaments should very carefully look at the schedule for the tournament they are attending to verify when they are expected to be at the tournament.

## **Local Tournament Transportation**

1. You must be on time for all tournament departures, if taking the bus. Generally, we will depart for tournaments between 11:00 am and 1:00 pm on Fridays, depending on the necessary distance to travel, the start time of the tournament, and availability of buses/drivers. Students should expect to return to the school until between 10 pm and midnight on Friday night if taking the bus. Students and parents should communicate to ensure prompt pickup upon return from tournaments. We recognize that this can be tricky with shifting schedules – consistent communication about the status of the tournament between student and parent is vital here.
2. For tournaments in Katy ISD or within a 20 minute drive of Seven Lakes High School, SLHS Speech and Debate will *only* provide a bus to the tournament on Friday afternoon. Students must coordinate their own transportation on Friday night and Saturday for these tournaments.
3. When buses are provided on Saturday, we will generally depart at 6:30 am. Returning to school will vary widely depending on the tournament. Students should check that tournament's schedule for a more precise estimate of return time.
4. If using a bus or other district provided transportation, students must be picked up by a parent/guardian, or someone approved by the parent/guardian. This person should arrive within 10 minutes of the bus' arrival at SLHS. Students will not be permitted to walk or ride their bikes home when we return that late in the evening.
5. Students are expected to remain at the tournament through at least one elimination round. Exceptions to this policy will only be granted in special circumstances communicated in writing before the tournament by the student's parents and at the discretion of the coaches. Please have a parent contact Coach Cabler to discuss any potential special circumstances that may arise.

## **Travel Tournaments**

1. Traveling for debate is a privilege, not a right. Students who violate team behavior guidelines or the Handbook risk being sent home at their own expense and barred from future travel tournaments.
2. You may not enter any hotel room other than the room you have been assigned by Coach Le or Coach Cabler. This includes the hotel rooms of other Seven Lakes Speech & Debate Team members or members of other schools. If you would like to socialize, prep, or otherwise hang out with other team members, please do so in a common area of the hotel, such as the lobby.
3. Students must adhere to the curfew set at the tournament by the coaches, and may not leave their rooms or make excessive noise after that time. Always follow all hotel protocols, especially those regarding noise. In case of an emergency, students should call a coach. You are not the only people staying at the hotel.
4. Students may not travel alone at a tournament for any reason. Students must receive permission from a coach to travel away from the primary tournament site for any reason. Students should be easily reachable by phone and Slack.
5. Students will be held responsible for any fees incurred at hotels. This includes any property damage, unauthorized room service purchases, phone fees, or any other charges the team must pay. Students charging fees to their room may be subject to additional disciplinary action.
6. Seven Lakes and Katy ISD policies on student conduct and discipline are always in full force and effect as to all student participants in speech and debate. Students violating any team, school, or district conduct policy will be subject to removal from the tournament and disciplinary action. You are representing Seven Lakes High School and our team at tournaments - you should act like it.



## **Walk-over Policies**

Because of the success of our program, we will frequently be matched against each other in elimination rounds. When students from only one school are matched against each other, students do not debate each other. Instead, coaches will select a team to advance for official tournament results. This decision is final, and is ultimately up to coaches' discretion – though we will do our best to be fair and make a decision that benefits the team as a whole.

In general, Coach Cabler and Coach Le will prioritize facilitating more qualifications to championship-level competitions, such as TFA State, NSDA Nationals, and the Tournament of Champions.

If there is no qualification at stake, Coach Le and Coach Cabler will generally endeavor to advance the higher prelim seed.

At capstone tournaments where the difference in seeding is negligible, coaches reserve the right to break ties based on seniority.

# **Student Wellbeing**

## **Conflict Resolution**

Students should handle team conflict keeping in mind that members of the team are generally good people. Students should give their team members the benefit of the doubt. If students on the team have a conflict with each other, they should bring their concern privately to Coach Le or Coach Cabler so that they can handle the situation. This includes complaints about students not pulling their weight in terms of preparation; the coaches are committed to ensuring that the speech and debate team is a welcoming environment for everyone involved, and will not tolerate behavior which harms team cohesion or fosters division on the team. This includes “vigilante justice” – students should refrain from engaging in public callouts or displays of anger.

Conflicts will be handled on a case-by-case basis. Students are expected to bring concerns about behavior of other students to coaches if they are detrimental to the team.

## **Mental Health**

Speech and Debate is a stressful and demanding extracurricular activity. You will have a significant amount of extra work on top of your schoolwork to adequately prepare for tournaments, and attending tournaments takes a significant amount of free time. If you are struggling with your mental health in any capacity, please come and speak with one of the coaches. We are here for you. Message us on Slack, send us an email, stop by after school - whatever works for you is alright with us. Please take steps to check in with yourself and manage your mental health during the year.

Speech and Debate is supposed to be a fun activity. If you find yourself very regularly not having fun, please shoot one of the coaches a message so that we can talk about what’s going on.

## **Controversial Issues**

By its nature, taking speech and debate courses requires that students engage in controversial issues of the day, and engage in current events and politics across a range of the political spectrum. It is a state-mandated course guideline for students to “acquire life-long skills for intelligently approaching controversial issues” through having students “analyze and evaluate propositions and related issues presented in academic and public settings” (Texas Administrative Code Rule 110.60, linked below). Students taking speech and debate courses will be exposed to, research, and evaluate arguments in favor and against various controversial issues while preparing for competition. Students will be expected to treat all ideas and arguments with their due respect, and to engage in in-class performances and debates with necessary consideration and respect for others’ opinions and beliefs.

The full State guidelines for teaching Debate courses [can be found at this link](#).

# **Tournament Preparation**

## **Practice Procedures**

### **Schedule:**

Monday 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm: Public Speaking, Extemporaneous Speaking, and Oral Interp

Tuesday 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm: Congress, Public Forum, Lincoln-Douglas, Policy, World Schools

Additional dates in the Spring as announced for UIL/NSDA participants.

Other practice dates may be scheduled based on need before large tournaments. Students should check Slack for updates.

- You must be at practices the week you are competing
- Excessive absences from practice will result in disciplinary action at coaches discretion

### **Additional Schedule Note**

- If both coaches are not at school, there is no practice.
- On Novice Nights, there is no regularly scheduled practice.
- There will never be a practice scheduled for a Friday.
- Be advised that coaches may adjust the practice schedule via Slack in special circumstances.

### **Debate/Oral Interp 1 Specifics:**

Students are highly encouraged to attend practice in events that they are interested in. Practice for novice team members is not required for class, but may be required for participation at tournaments. Practice attendance is a major component of returning to the Varsity team.

Debate 1 and Oral Interp 1 students should work with captains if they plan to regularly attend practice sessions to schedule appropriately.

### **Advanced Debate + Oral Interp (2-4) Specifics:**

Students are required to attend practice during the week they are attending a tournament, for a sufficient amount of time as to actually practice (i.e., give a speech, do a practice debate, do drills, refine cases, etc.). **Failure to attend practice during the week of a tournament will result in students being removed from tournaments. There are no refunds for travel tournaments.**

Students are expected to attend practice in order to facilitate their own competitive success. Take care of what you need to take care of. Repeated or habitual absence from practice will result in suspension from tournaments.

Captains will facilitate all practices and keep an attendance log of Varsity students. All competitors in a given competitive squad are expected to communicate with captains to facilitate effective practice sessions. Failure to communicate with team leadership may result in disciplinary action.

An excused absence from school excuses the competitor from practice for the day.

Team leadership has discretionary authority to call additional practices or squad meetings if necessary. Decisions to call additional practices at these times have the full force and weight of Coach Le or Coach Cabler calling these meetings themselves and students are expected to behave accordingly.

## **Team Leadership**

### **Officers**

Officers on the Seven Lakes Speech & Debate Team are appointed by the coaches. The officers and their responsibilities are listed below. All officers may be assigned additional duties by the coaches at their discretion throughout the year, when appropriate.

All members of team leadership are expected to maintain a positive team environment, assist with practices, coordinate tabulation and tournament administration for novice nights, and refer any significant disciplinary issues or conflicts to the coaches.

All officers will have logins to relevant social media and be empowered to make posts to facilitate community outreach in a constructive manner. All officers will be expected to attend every practice on Monday and Tuesday to facilitate team success, or to find somebody to fill in for them if they must be absent.

All officers will be expected to assist each other in coordinating two team-wide fundraisers per year.

The coaches reserve the right to make leadership changes at any time, for any reason.

#### **1. President: Ishaan Quazi**

- Must be a junior or senior member of the Varsity team and have been a member of the SLHS Speech and Debate Team for at least 2 years prior to running
- Point of contact for coaches to team and team to coaches
- Responsible for maintaining tournament registration sign ups in conjunction with coaches
- Responsible for answering basic questions about tournament logistics in tournament channel
- Responsible for compiling volunteer judge training resources at the beginning of the year
- Maintains tournament calendars in 2512 and 2514 and trophy cases in school as directed
- Responsible for assisting with all tournament administrative duties during home tournament as assigned, including tournament tabulation and coordinating security leads
- Responsible for coordinating thank-you gifts for teachers after home tournament
- Point of contact for all other officers and captains

#### **2. Vice President: Suad Lawal**

- Must be a junior or senior member of the Varsity team and have been a member of the SLHS Speech and Debate Team for at least 2 years prior to running
- Organizes social events and spirit nights
- Responsible for designing, ordering, and distributing team t-shirts, sweatshirts, and other apparel by Labor Day Weekend
- Writes weekly team news and tournament results, to be uploaded to designated Google Drive by Sunday evening
- Responsible for coordinating student concession and hospitality workers at home tournament

- Responsible for coordinating awards ceremony/trophy pickup at home tournament
- 3. Team Development Council: Mars Khan, Andy Chen, Bella Jackson**
- Must be a junior or senior member of the Varsity team and have been a member of the SLHS Speech and Debate Team for at least 2 years prior to running
- Primary point of contact for basic questions from novice competitors, including Tabroom, tournament schedules, practice, etc.
- Responsible for coordinating student volunteering, judging, and coaching at Seven Lakes Junior High and Beckendorff Junior High practices
- Responsible for coordinating student runners at home tournament

## Captains

Captains are responsible for facilitating their squad's success, both present and future. They are the student leader of their competition event, or group of competition events. All captains have the below listed responsibilities. All captains may be assigned additional duties by coaches at their discretion throughout the year, when appropriate. Captains are appointed by the coaches at the beginning of each school year. Students with questions about an event should contact that event's captain.

The coaches reserve the right to make leadership changes at any time, for any reason.

Responsibilities include:

- Assist coaching all team members in the event of expertise, including providing peer feedback, judging, and revisions during class time and practice
- Facilitate squad practice and organizing practice plans
- Maintain practice attendance log, following up with those squad members not in attendance and reporting repeated practice absences to coaches
- Facilitate topic discussions and analysis, as appropriate, with squad members
- Facilitate tournament preparation for all squad members, both in advance of and during tournaments, including those tournaments the captain is not planning to attend
- Attending middle school/junior high practices as directed by the Team Development Chair
- Coordinate mentorship programs or squad social events, if desired or deemed necessary
- Other duties as assigned by the coaches

2025-26 Captains:

**Congress:** Ishaan Singh and Loena Jani

**PF:** Feliks Lin, Tharoon Eswar, Anika Sud, Anya Kaushik

**LD:** Chris Ou

**Policy:** Rayaana Meghani

**WSD:** Aarushi Thatola

**Interp:** Huda Nadeem

**Speech:** Samantha Luo and Anisha Ruparel

**Extemp:** Advait Nair, Katherine Wu

# Acknowledgment

We, the undersigned, acknowledge and affirm that we have received and reviewed the Seven Lakes Speech and Debate Handbook for the 2025-2026 Academic School Year. We understand that participating in this activity is a privilege that comes with certain responsibilities and expectations. By signing this acknowledgement, we agree to abide by, uphold, and respect all rules and regulations set forth in this handbook, and understand that a failure to comply with this handbook may result in disciplinary action or the revocation of participation on the Seven Lakes Speech and Debate Team.

We additionally understand that, per the Student Wellbeing section of the handbook, the TEKS for Debate require analysis and understanding of controversial social and political issues of the day, and agree to treat these issues with necessary understanding and respect.

We understand that, in the case of Public Speaking and Oral Interp, that all materials being presented are presumed to be deemed appropriate for performance by the legal guardian(s) of the student.

**We understand that any questions or concerns regarding the Handbook should be brought to the parent meeting, which will be hosted on Tuesday, August 19th at 6:00 pm in the LGI (Room 2501) at Seven Lakes HS.**

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_