

Middle School, Novice, Junior Varsity and Varsity debate divisions

What are they and what do they mean?



Public Forum, Lincoln-Douglas and Policy debate tournaments offer 4 divisions: Middle School (MS), Novice, Junior Varsity (JV) and Varsity. Students in the Middle School division must be in 6th, 7th or 8th grade. The Novice division is intended for middle or high school students participating in their first year of competitive debate. Junior Varsity (JV) is typically for students in their first or second year of debate and Varsity for students in their 3rd or 4th year of competition. However, coach judgment is critical to enter students in the division where they are appropriately challenged. Students in Speech and Student Congress compete together, regardless of experience levels.

When are students required to move to a higher division?

WACFL bylaws have requirements for when a debater must move to a higher division.

Middle School. Students in MS debate can remain in this division until they reach 9th grade. However, when joining a high school debate team, they must start as JV debaters. Middle school coaches are encouraged to “graduate” their successful MS competitors to Novice (or possibly JV) when appropriate, but are not required to do so.

Novice

Any student finishing in the top six in the Novice division at a preliminary tournament must advance to JV or Varsity. Any student who has ever qualified for the MetroFinal tournament in any division is ineligible to compete in the Novice division. Students in Novice must be in their first year of competition experience. If a student has competed in the prior school year, they must register as a JV debater.

Junior Varsity (JV)

Any student finishing in the top six in JV in preliminary competition twice in the competition season must advance to Varsity for future preliminary tournaments. This rule does not affect the student's eligibility to compete in the MetroFinal Junior Varsity Tournament unless the student has also qualified at the Varsity level in the same season. When a JV team has qualified for MetroFinals, coaches are encouraged (but not required) to advance them to Varsity for future tournaments.

Suppose students change styles of debate?

Occasionally students will change debate formats, for example, moving from Public Forum to Lincoln-Douglas. Students are not required to compete in the same division if they change events. For example, if a student is competing in JV in Public Forum and moves to Lincoln-Douglas, they are not required to compete at JV in LD. They could start as a Novice, progressing to JV under the rules above.

Is it possible to qualify for Metrofinals as a Novice debater?

There is no Novice division at Metrofinals, only Middle School, Junior Varsity and Varsity. However, Novice debaters can qualify for Junior Varsity Metrofinals under a few circumstances.

- The first-place finisher in the Novice division at each preliminary tournament automatically qualifies for MetroFinals in the JV division.
- A Novice competitor that earns a 4-0 record at two preliminary tournaments qualifies for JV Metrofinals.
- A Novice competitor earning a second through sixth place finish at two preliminary tournaments qualifies for JV Metrofinals, regardless of their record.

If a student qualifies for JV MetroFinals under one of these rules, they must advance to JV for any subsequent preliminary tournaments.

What is “Power Pairing” at a debate tournament?

WACFL preliminary Public Forum, Lincoln Douglas and Policy tournaments randomly assign pairings, within division, for rounds 1 and 2. Students will always debate once on PRO/Affirmative and once on CON/Negative in the two morning rounds. When pairing rounds 1 and 2, students’ win/loss records from prior tournaments are not included. It’s completely random within each division.

However, WACFL uses power pairing in rounds 3 and 4. In the afternoon, teams with the same morning record will be debating each other. For example, a team that wins the first two debates will be paired against another team that also won the first two debates. A team with a 1-1 record will debate a team that is also 1-1. This ensures that each team has competitive debates in the afternoon rounds.

Power pairing isn’t perfect. Sometimes a 2-0 team will debate a 1-1 team. Similarly, a 1-1 team could debate a 2-0 or 0-2 team. There are several reasons for this. Side constraints must be observed, meaning every team must debate twice on each side of the topic. Students will never debate an opponent from their school and students won’t debate the same opponent twice at the same tournament. There are often an odd number of teams with similar records after the first two rounds. Power pairing needs to account for all these constraints, which may require teams with disparate morning records to debate in rounds 3 and 4.

As a student competitor, power pairing means a few things:

1. In your afternoon rounds, if you are debating some very good teams, it likely means you did well in the morning rounds. Be proud and do your best!
2. If you are debating some weaker teams in the afternoon, it likely means you lost one or two morning rounds. Don’t despair, win your afternoon rounds and prove your might!
3. Occasionally, you may not debate the side you expect in round 3. For example, if you debate PRO (Affirmative) in round 2, you may debate PRO/AFF in round 3. But you would then be CON (Negative) in round 4. This is not common, but it can happen, so don’t be surprised.
4. Power pairing means it’s very difficult to go 4-0 at a tournament. Winning all 4 rounds means that in the afternoon you likely defeated two teams that went 2-0 in the morning. Students should celebrate 3-1 records! A winning record shows that you are doing well and succeeding as a competitor.