



Judging Guide

Judging Debate at a BDL Scrimmage? [Click here to view topics](#)

Judging Extemp at a BDL Scrimmage? [Click here to see what questions the extempers were assigned to make sure they're answering the correct questions.](#)

Click on the event below to view the rules

- [SPAR Debate](#)
- [Student Congress](#)
- [Public Forum Debate](#)
- Lincoln Douglas Debate (coming soon)
- Parliamentary Debate (coming soon)
- Extemporaneous Speaking (coming soon)
- Original Oratory (coming soon)
- Oral Interpretation (coming soon)
- Declamation (coming soon)

Prepare your Paradigm

What is a paradigm? How does it help kids?

- Speakers and debaters know that they need to adjust to their audience, but how do they know who the audience is?
- A paradigm is a short introduction of yourself and your debate experience, with any expectations you have for the round.
- When students know who you are (especially if you're a new judge), they can adjust their use of jargon, speed, and arguments to suit you. This helps students know how they can succeed in that particular round, and also reinforces the real-life skill of making these audience adjustments.
- Any information you provide is helpful and adds context to the ballots! Having a paradigm makes writing ballots easier, because you can say things like, "Given that I prefer..." without a student reading that and wondering "How was I supposed to know that?"



How do I write a paradigm?

- Tabroom.com is the website that organizes all debates. Paradigms are publicly posted on the Tabroom website and are associated with your name.
- On [Tabroom.com](https://www.tabroom.com), you can find your paradigm by clicking on your email on the top of the page, then scrolling down to find a box on the right side of your screen that says “Judging” and click on the button that says “Paradigm.”



Things you should include in your Paradigm:

1. **Debate Experience:** Are you a debate coach, a parent, or a community member? Did you do debate in high school?
2. **Judging Experience:** How many years have you judged, and in what category? Are you new to judging? (Most judges are!)
3. **Preferred Rate of Delivery:** Do you prefer competitors to speak slowly, or are you comfortable tracking speed? How will the speed of delivery impact your ballot?
4. **Expectations:** Comfort with debate jargon, performance, and theory; the role of the debate space (is debate about education, or is it a game?) What your standards are if a student says something unacceptable.

None of these questions have a single standard or correct answer. There are no rules that say how a judge must judge. This judging guide is just a guide for how we think a good judge *should* judge. But ultimately, a judge can have many different valid approaches to judging a round, just as long as they make it reasonable for a student reading their paradigm to adapt to that standard.

Finally, your paradigm should change over time! It's challenging to sit down and write your exact preferences without having judged a debate round before. But each time you judge a tournament, you can use that experience to inform and update your paradigm on what you wish those debaters knew about you before the round started.



Here are some examples of good judge paradigms:

PARADIGM 1: Parent/Lay Judge

I am a parent/lay judge with no real experience. I cannot judge fast rounds when I don't understand or comprehend what you are saying. Debate jargon will only confuse me so keep it clear and simple. Make sure to compare your case to your opponents and weigh arguments against one another – again, without using jargon or terms I won't know. Keep the volume up and the speed very low. Do not be rude to your opponent as it will cause me to take off speaker points. Enjoy the occasion and don't be afraid to repeat things to me.

PARADIGM 2: English Teacher

I am a high school English teacher who did theater in college. I know a solid performance when I see one, and will mostly be assessing you on your delivery. Good analysis and argumentation is also important, but I don't know debate jargon and don't read the news that often. Please be clear, loud, and have fun! I am looking for the speaker who controls the room best, has a memorable presence, and is the most persuasive Congressperson.

PARADIGM 3: Parent Judge who is a Lawyer

Debate is a game and I have the technical prowess to determine the winner based on impact weighing, strong argumentation, and effective rebuttals. I'm a parent so I've heard some of the debate jargon, but I don't know what all of it means. As long as you speak loudly and clearly, I can track speed. I like to see you tell me exactly why you win the debate and I want to see you bring up new arguments. The strongest argument with the most effective rebuttal wins the debate.

PARADIGM 4: Debate Coach

Hi! I'm a professional debate coach. I studied philosophy at Columbia and competed on the Houston circuit for 4 years. I currently work with the Brooklyn Debate League (BDL).



tl;dr; Give me a weighing mechanism so you don't leave the round confused by my decision. Impact through everything. Link chains are super important. I will always look for the clearest path to the ballot; make your advocacy clear by telling me what your path to the ballot is. Debate is about education.

Speed is totally fine, but clarity is essential in this activity. Use jargon when it's needed.

I will drop a debater who wields anti-Black/racist/unapologetically insensitive etc. speech or behavior if their opponent asks me to. This is a speaking activity: you are responsible for your words.

Not sure where to start? Use this template:

Hello! My name is [name] and I am a [parent/coach/volunteer/teacher]. I have [this much debate experience] judging [this type of debate].

I tend to value [content/delivery] over [delivery/content]. Being prepared with a well-written case or speech is important - I value this [more than/as much as/less than] your ability to respond to the debate effectively through rebuttal and extemporaneous analysis.

I [am/am not] comfortable with debate jargon.

I [can/cannot] keep up with speed.

The most important thing I look for is [anything!].

Good luck and have fun!

If you are judging a debate event such as LD, PF, or Policy, you may want to include your email so that students can share their case with you on an "email chain". It can be helpful to tell the debaters what YOU are looking for; be as clear as possible with phrases like "the debater/team who does ____ will win the round" or "I do not like to vote on arguments about ____".

Be sure to press "Save Paradigm" when you're finished!



SPAR Rules

1. A spar round will have an even number of competitors, which are then paired up to debate against each other. The 1st speaker on the list is the aff and will debate the 2nd speaker who is neg, the 3rd speaker is aff and will debate the 4th speaker who is neg, the 5th speaker is aff and will debate the 6th speaker who is neg, and so on if necessary.
2. Debaters will be shown 3 potential topics. First the Negative debater will strike one topic they don't want to debate, then the Affirmative debater will strike a topic they don't want to debate. The remaining topic is the topic for the debate.
3. Students should not bring up any new arguments past their constructive speeches. Judges will be told to not consider new arguments introduced in the final speech.
4. Judges will rank the competitors in the round overall. In other words, debaters will not “win” or “lose” their debate, rather they will be ranked as the (for example) 2nd best debater in the round overall.
5. Debaters can not use the internet for accessing outside information either during prep or during the round.

SPAR Speech Times

Mandatory Prep Time 2 min

AFF Constructive 2 min

NEG Constructive 2 min

Crossfire 2 min

Mandatory Prep Time 1 min

AFF rebuttal 2 min

NEG rebuttal 2 min

Crossfire 2 min

Mandatory Prep Time 1 min

AFF summary 2 min

NEG summary 2 min

The topics used will be general knowledge topics and research is not expected before the round.



Public Forum Rules

1. The BDL uses the NSDA rules for Public Forum wherever applicable, [which you can find here](#) (Public Forum rules on page 25). Below is a summary of the event and clarifications on any places where we do not follow NSDA rules.
2. The topic debated will match the current NSDA topic, [which can be found here](#). In the rare event that we are asked to make an exception and extend the previous month's topic in order for more students to have debate cases ready, we will first consult all schools entering..
3. Teams will be assigned affirmative or negative. The affirmative team will speak first.
4. A Public Forum round involves 2 teams of 2, debating a predetermined topic and providing evidence to support their arguments. The evidence can be "paraphrased" (rather than the debater reciting a direct quote in round), but teams must be able to quickly provide a link to or a copy of any evidence they want to cite.
5. PF debate begins with first speakers stating their case for their side, then questioning each other. Next, second speakers will refute their opponent's cases, then question each other. Next, First speakers will speak again attempting to summarize and resolve the clash between the sides, after which there's a period of questions where any of the 4 debaters may ask or answer questions. Finally, Second speakers will close out the debate with a 2 minute speech explaining why they should win.
6. Evidence cited in the debate should be introduced in the first two speeches (meaning each team's Constructive and Rebuttal speech). New evidence can not be cited in Summary or Final Focus speeches.
7. During Crossfire, debaters take turns asking each other questions. Whenever possible, the debater who spoke first (or in this case, the Affirmative side) should ask the first question.



Public Forum Speech Times

First Affirmative Speaker (Constructive) – 4 minutes

First Negative Speaker (Constructive) – 4 minutes

Crossfire (Between first speakers) – 3 minutes

Second Affirmative Speaker (Rebuttal) – 4 minutes

Second Negative Speaker (Rebuttal) – 4 minutes

Crossfire (Between second speakers) – 3 minutes

First Affirmative Speaker (Summary) – 3 minutes

First Negative Speaker (Summary) – 3 minutes

Crossfire (Between all debaters) – 3 minutes

Second Affirmative Speaker (Final Focus) – 2 minutes

Second Negative Speaker (Final Focus) – 2 minutes

Each team has a pool of 3 minutes of Prep Time, which they can choose to use any portion of before any of their speeches.



Student Congress Rules

1. The BDL uses the NCFL rules for Congress wherever applicable, [which you can find here](#). Below is a summary of the event and clarifications on any places where we do not follow NCFL rules.
2. In Congress, students assume the role of a member of Congress. They will be presented a set of bills, which they can choose at their own discretion to argue in favor of or against.
3. The bills to be debated will be provided in advance. Students are encouraged to prepare arguments and evidence to bring into the debate.
4. Rather than the “for” or “against” side of the debate winning the round, each speaker is judged (and ranked) by the individual merits of their performance.
5. Each round of competition, or “session” as it’s commonly called in Congress, will be on a different bill that will be assigned to that round in advance. Debaters have until the assigned end time of that round to give a speech on that topic.
6. One student will take on the role of Presiding Officer, or PO. Instead of speaking on the bill itself, the PO organizes the round and calls on debaters to speak, ask questions, or make motions. They are judged and ranked among the other students based on their individual performance in that role. In a case where the pool of students competing in the round lack the necessary experience to be PO, an experienced PO may be provided by the tournament to run the round but not appear on the ballot and should not be ranked.
7. A speech for or against a bill should not be longer than 3 minutes, with a 10 second grace period.
8. Following each speech for or against the bill, the speaker will have a 1 minute questioning period in which they answer from other debaters in the round. Any speaker is welcome to ask a question.

Check out the BDL [Congressional Debate Judging Guide](#) with canned comments and a framework for judging!