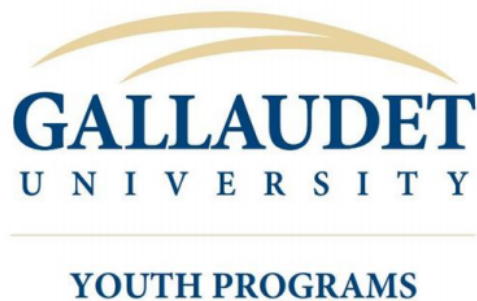




Center for Democracy in Deaf America



# **Debate Bowl**

**for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students**

## **Rules and Guidelines**

### **2026-2027**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Youth Debate Bowl is an annual hybrid competition sponsored by Gallaudet University through its Youth Programs office and the Center for Democracy for Deaf America (CDDA). The number of events in this competition will ultimately depend on how many students participate in the qualifying. This *Rules and Guidelines* booklet governs the Youth Debate Bowl for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students (hereafter Youth Debate Bowl). This is the sixth year of the Youth Debate Bowl competition.

This *Rules and Guidelines* governs the newly formed Debate Bowl for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students (hereafter Debate Bowl).

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of the Debate Bowl is to foster critical thinking and public speaking skills; healthy democratic skills and habits; promote a spirit of academic competition and good sportsmanship; and encourage social opportunities and collegiality among students.

## **3. ELIGIBILITY**

### **3A. GENERAL ELIGIBILITY**

The Debate Bowl is open to all deaf and hard-of-hearing students in both middle school and high school. Individuals may come from residential schools, day schools, mainstream programs, homeschooling programs, or any other type of educational program.

### **3B. INDIVIDUAL ELIGIBILITY**

All Debate Bowl participants must be deaf or hard of hearing. The Youth Programs office and CDDA reserves the right to request verification from a school official or an audiologist of a participant's hearing status.

High school participants must take all their courses at the ninth-grade level or above. Middle school participants must take all their courses at the sixth, seventh, or eighth grade levels.

High school participants may take college courses, but these courses must not constitute more than 50 percent of the student's total course load. Students taking more than 50 percent of their courses in college or in high school-based concurrent enrollment programs are not eligible for the Debate Bowl competition. Middle school participants may take high school courses, but these courses must not constitute more than 50 percent of the student's total course load.

A student's eligibility for the Debate Bowl is limited to a total of four years in high school and three years in middle school. If a student attends high school for five years, that student may participate in the Debate Bowl for only four of the five years. Years of participation need not be

consecutive. If a student attends middle school for four years, that student may participate in the Debate Bowl for only three of the four years. Again, years of participation need not be consecutive.

#### 4. DEBATE BOWL SCHEDULE

For the 2026-2027 Debate Bowl, the schedule of the events is as follows:

We will accept *qualifying submissions* via <https://apply.gallaudet.edu/register/DebateBowl> no later than midnight EST on Friday, October 30th, 2026.

The Youth Debate Bowl *semifinals* will be held the week of November 30th. Students will be notified by mid-November if they have advanced, and those who qualify for this stage will be invited to participate in an additional orientation session.

The Youth Debate Bowl *finals* for middle and high school students will be held between February 24th and 26th, 2027, in person at Gallaudet University.

#### 5. REGISTRATION OF INDIVIDUALS

Every fall, the Youth Programs office will provide information about registration to schools, programs, and individuals. Registration takes place online through the Youth Programs website. We are accepting an **unlimited** number of participants for the qualifying portion of the Debate Bowl. **There is no registration fee for the Debate Bowl.**

The Youth Programs and CDDA offices will send each registered individual an email message acknowledging registration. All follow-up communication will be done via email.

#### 6. COMPETITION FORMAT

The **qualifying** stage will consist of a 3 to 5-minute video of the student doing a persuasive speech on the following questions:

**For middle school students:** K-12 schools should eliminate sports teams.

**For high school students:** Deafness should be cured.

The **qualifying stage** will consist of all participating students submitting their 3 to 5-minute

videos. Judges will select the top 4 students from both high school and middle school age groups based on the rubric on pages 6-8.

The **semifinals** stage will consist of the top 4 players in the high school group and the top 4 players in the middle school group. The **Finals** stage, held in person at Gallaudet University, will consist of a head-to-head matchup between the final two high school debaters and the final two middle school debaters. We will show this event live on Facebook.

The **formats** for **semifinals** in the middle school and high school brackets, respectively, are on pages 6 and 7.

More information about the **finals format** will be shared with the finalists.

## PERSUASIVE SPEECH EVALUATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

+ = excellent, √+ = good, √ = adequate, √- = flawed, - = poor/missing Note: The percentages here are guidelines. All these categories are mutually dependent.

Arrangement (20%) \_\_\_\_ The speaker clearly and effectively introduced the topic and explained its importance and relevance \_\_\_\_ The speaker clearly and effectively previewed the argument and main points in the introduction and reviewed them in the conclusion \_\_\_\_ The speaker highlighted the structure of the speech and made it easy to follow with artful transitions \_\_\_\_ The main points and the subpoints adhered to the principles of coordination, subordination, and discreteness \_\_\_\_ The speaker arranged the main points appropriately to persuade an oppositional audience

Delivery (20%) \_\_\_\_ The speaker used notes minimally and engaged the audience \_\_\_\_ The speaker spoke at a pace that contributed to the meaning and rhythm of the speech \_\_\_\_ The speaker moved and gestured in a natural way that contributed to speech \_\_\_\_ The speaker spoke confidently and with appropriate projection for the space \_\_\_\_ In general, the delivery contributed to the speaker's ethos and persuasiveness

Invention and style (50%) \_\_\_\_ The speaker identified and responded to the most relevant and pressing concerns of the opposition \_\_\_\_ The speaker appealed effectively to those areas where the audience could be moved \_\_\_\_ The speaker effectively used a variety of proofs designed to persuade an oppositional audience \_\_\_\_ The speaker effectively used a variety of supporting materials that would be judged as credible by an oppositional audience \_\_\_\_ The speaker cited supporting material effectively and appropriately \_\_\_\_ The speaker used language that increased the persuasiveness of the argument \_\_\_\_ The speaker used language that highlighted shared values and did not alienate or offend the oppositional audience

Overall (10%) \_\_\_\_ The speaker addressed a controversial public issue \_\_\_\_ The speaker's argument was appropriate for the time constraints and the constraints of the assignment

Additional Comments:

Time: \_\_\_\_\_ 3-5 min      Time Penalty (if any): \_\_\_\_\_      Grade for Speech: \_\_\_\_\_



# GREAT COMMUNICATOR

## DEBATE SERIES

### Middle School Format

#### Making a Decision in the Great Communicator Debate

The Great Communicator Debate is an individual event that advocates or rejects a position posed by the resolution. A central tenet of the debate is that the clash of ideas must be communicated in a manner persuasive to the non-specialist or “citizen judge,” i.e. a member of the American Jury.

A Great Communicator Debate should:

- ☒ Display solid logic, reasoning, and analysis
- ☒ Utilize evidence but not be driven by it
- ☒ Present a clash of ideas
- ☒ Counter the arguments of the opponents (rebuttal)
- ☒ Communicate ideas with clarity, organization, eloquence and civility

In making a decision, a judge should be as objective as possible. Judges should adjudicate the round as it is debated, not as they personally feel. Judges should not disclose their preferences.

#### 1. Procedure and Order/Time Limits of Speeches:

- a. The Affirmative will always speak first. During the Crossfire, the Affirmative will ask the first question.
- b. Each side receives 2 minutes of prep time which can be used at any point during the debate. When one side asks to use their prep time, the opposing side may also use the time.

|                                |            |                              |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|
| <b>AFFIRMATIVE</b>             | 4 minutes  | Opening Statement            |
| <b>NEGATIVE</b>                | 4 minutes  | Opening Statement            |
| <b>AFFIRMATIVE</b>             | 4 minutes  | Rebuttal                     |
| <b>NEGATIVE</b>                | 4 minutes  | Rebuttal                     |
| <b>CROSSFIRE</b>               | 3 minutes  |                              |
| <b>MODERATOR</b>               | 3 minutes  | Pose questions to each side* |
| <b>AFFIRMATIVE</b>             | 4 minutes  | Closing                      |
| <b>NEGATIVE</b>                | 4 minutes  | Closing                      |
| <b>TOTAL DEBATE TIME</b>       | 36 minutes |                              |
| <b>FEEDBACK &amp; COMMENTS</b> | 4 minutes  |                              |
| <b>PREP TIME</b>               | 2 minutes  |                              |

*\*Like a presidential debate, the moderator will at this point have an opportunity to pose a question to each debater. In general, this should be to clarify or help the competitor expand on a point from earlier.*

2. **Timing:** Timekeepers will be provided. Debaters may time for themselves and for their opponent.
3. **Plans/Counterplans:** Similar to Public Forum Debate, a plan or counterplan is a formalized, comprehensive proposal for implementation. Neither the pro nor the con side is permitted to offer a plan or counterplan.
4. **Closing:** No new arguments may be introduced in the Closing; however, debaters may include new evidence to support prior arguments.



# GREAT COMMUNICATOR

## DEBATE SERIES

### High School Format

#### Making a Decision in the Great Communicator Debate

The Great Communicator Debate is an individual event that advocates or rejects a position posed by the resolution. A central tenet of the debate is that the clash of ideas must be communicated in a manner persuasive to the non-specialist or “citizen judge,” i.e. a member of the American Jury.

A Great Communicator Debate should:

- ☒ Display solid logic, reasoning, and analysis
- ☒ Utilize evidence but not be driven by it
- ☒ Present a clash of ideas
- ☒ Counter the arguments of the opponents (rebuttal)
- ☒ Communicate ideas with clarity, organization, eloquence and civility

In making a decision, a judge should be as objective as possible. Judges should adjudicate the round as it is debated, not as they personally feel. Judges should not disclose their preferences.

#### 1. Procedure and Order/Time Limits of Speeches:

- a. The Affirmative will always speak first. During the Crossfire, the Affirmative will ask the first question.
- b. Each side receives 2 minutes of prep time which can be used at any point during the debate. When one side asks to use their prep time, the opposing side may also use the time.

|                                |            |                              |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|
| <b>AFFIRMATIVE</b>             | 6 minutes  | Opening Statement            |
| <b>NEGATIVE</b>                | 6 minutes  | Opening Statement            |
| <b>AFFIRMATIVE</b>             | 6 minutes  | Rebuttal                     |
| <b>NEGATIVE</b>                | 6 minutes  | Rebuttal                     |
| <b>CROSSFIRE</b>               | 3 minutes  |                              |
| <b>MODERATOR</b>               | 3 minutes  | Pose questions to each side* |
| <b>AFFIRMATIVE</b>             | 6 minutes  | Closing                      |
| <b>NEGATIVE</b>                | 6 minutes  | Closing                      |
| <b>TOTAL DEBATE TIME</b>       | 48 minutes |                              |
| <b>FEEDBACK &amp; COMMENTS</b> | 4 minutes  |                              |
| <b>PREP TIME</b>               | 2 minutes  |                              |

*\*Like a presidential debate, the moderator will at this point have an opportunity to pose a question to each debater. In general, this should be to clarify or help the competitor expand on a point from earlier.*

2. **Timing:** Timekeepers will be provided. Debaters may time for themselves and for their opponent.
3. **Plans/Counterplans:** Similar to Public Forum Debate, a plan or counterplan is a formalized, comprehensive proposal for implementation. Neither the pro nor the con side is permitted to offer a plan or counterplan.
4. **Closing:** No new arguments may be introduced in the Closing; however, debaters may include new evidence to support prior arguments.



## 7. COACHES

**Although we encourage students to have coaches, it is NOT a requirement.**

The Coach's role is to:

- Help them register for the individual competitions
- Prepare, support, and advise them before and after the competitions

Coaches will be allowed to be a part of the Zoom practice sessions and observe the semifinals privately via Zoom.

## 8. PLAYERS' ATTIRE AND BACKGROUND

All individual participants who participate in the Debate Bowl shall keep in mind that they represent their school and/or themselves at all times, and be conscious of how they present themselves to other Debate Bowl participants and the general public, since the events will be live-streamed. As such, all Finals participants shall wear appropriate apparel during the final event. At a minimum, their shirts shall include the school/program name OR be a solid color without any distracting prints or information on the shirt.

Each individual's background should be a solid colored (any color) wall with the camera directed towards the person and the solid color wall in the background.

Before the live stream of each debate starts, the Youth Programs office and/or CDDA reserves the right to request that an individual change to appropriate attire.

## 9. ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMMODATIONS/INTERPRETERS

**Advance notification of all accessibility accommodations is required at the time of registration to allow appropriate accommodations to be made. We cannot accommodate last-minute requests and will only accept requests that are made at least two weeks prior to the competition that the participant plans to participate in.**

**Interpreters:** Students may request interpreters. Although we encourage students to debate in American Sign Language (ASL), it is **NOT** required.

**Vision and Perception:** A player may request accommodations for a vision or perceptual impairment; for example, the need for a font style, size, or color change, or a background color or intensity change. If samples of our questions or PowerPoints are needed to determine if a vision-related accommodation request is needed, please contact us at [youthdebateowl@gallaudet.edu](mailto:youthdebateowl@gallaudet.edu).

All other situations requiring special accommodations should be brought to the attention of the Youth Programs office at least one week prior to the competition in which the participant plans to enter. We cannot guarantee that last-minute requests will be accommodated.

## 10. RULES DURING COMPETITION

For the **qualifyings**:

- a. We ask that each player use one (1) electronic device to record themselves. We will also allow one other additional device (smartphone, tablet, or another tablet) in order to have notes. We reserve the right to verify that all other devices have been removed.
- b. There should be no other person present in the room at the time of the video recording.
- d. The time limit for the qualifying video is three to five minutes.
- e. All entries must be submitted through video format via a *YouTube link* and will be included when submitting a registration form.
- f. If filming using a *phone*, videos must be in landscape mode, not in portrait mode. **See Appendix B for a visual.**
- h. Judges must be able to see the signer from the torso (hip level) up to a few inches above the head.
- i. Special effects and any kinds of editing are not allowed. The video must be non-stop from start to finish.

All entries must be submitted through video format via a YouTube link. **See Appendix A on how to create a YouTube link.**

For the **semifinals** and **finals** stages:

- a. We ask that each player use one (1) computer or laptop to connect with Zoom. For this stage, there is no need for an additional device. We reserve the right to verify that all other devices have been removed.
- b. There should be no other person present in the room at the time of the **semifinals** stage.
- c. All parts of the debate will be presented through ASL or verbally in English. There will be varying time limits for each stage of the debate as shown earlier.

- d. Players must finish before the timer runs out.

## 11. DEBATE BOWL EVENTS AND QUESTIONS

The following are the topics for the qualifying presentation and Semifinals debate for the Debate Bowl competition. *If needed*, the topic for the Championship rounds will be announced at a later date.

**For middle school students:** Resolved: K-12 schools should eliminate sports teams.

**For high school students:** Resolved: Deafness should be cured.

## 12. COMPETITION STANDINGS

After each round, we will announce who advances. The winner of the championship match will be the first-place winner, and the loser of the championship match will be the second-place finisher.

## 13. SPORTSMANSHIP AND CONDUCT

Appropriate sportsmanship, decorum, and professional behavior is expected from all individuals participating in the Debate Bowl. Suspected cases of plagiarism will be investigated, and if it is determined that plagiarism has occurred, consequences may include expulsion from the competition and/or disqualification from participation in future years, depending on the discretion of Youth Programs administration.

## 14. COMMUNICATION DEVICES

Communication devices may not be used in the Zoom call at any time by the players. This includes smartphones, smartwatches, tablets, notebook computers, or any other device. Their use may jeopardize the fairness and integrity of the Debate Bowl competition. Players should leave any additional devices in a different room before the start of each event. Earbuds or headphones connecting a player to a computer in order to hear the ASL to voice interpreter (if applicable) will be allowed.

## 15. FUNDING AND TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

The Youth Programs office will cover an all-expense paid trip to Gallaudet University for the Youth Debate Bowl Championships for two middle school and two high school finalists. This includes one coach or chaperone from each school. Coverage includes transportation, lodging, and all meals during the designated competition period.

If two players come from the same school, only one coach and chaperone will be covered unless otherwise agreed. Schools that wish to send a second chaperone with their players may do so at

their own expense. In this case, the school is responsible for purchasing the additional coach/chaperone's airfare. Youth Programs will still arrange all lodging, meals, and transportation during the competition for the additional chaperone, and the school will be billed for those costs after the competition concludes.

If a player or coach is no longer able to participate, the individual or the school/program is responsible for reimbursing the Youth Programs for the travel arrangements that have been made. The school or the participant is responsible for meals while in transit and before or after the competition period. Baggage costs will also be the participant's responsibility.

All costs for any people traveling, in addition to the players and coach allowed from each school participating in the competition, will be the responsibility of those individuals or the school.

## **16. AWARDS**

We will recognize the top four finishers in both age groups.

For high school students, the Amazon gift card prizes for each event will be:

1st place- \$150

2nd place- \$100

Top 4 finisher- \$50

For middle school students, the Amazon gift card prizes for each event will be:

1st place- \$150

2nd place- \$100

Top 4 finisher- \$50

## **17. INFRACTIONS AND CONSEQUENCES**

Infractions and Consequences are detailed in the Participation Contract and are considered part of these Rules and Guidelines. The Participation Contracts will be distributed to members of each registered team and electronically signed by each player, parent/guardian, and coach.

If the Youth Programs and CDDA offices find out after the competition that a player has violated the Participation Contract during the competition period, it reserves the right to suspend the player from the following year's competition if the violation is deemed serious enough.

The Youth Programs and the CDDA teams reserve the right to determine appropriate consequences for any violations committed by a team member. The Youth Programs and

CDDA will work with the coach(es) and/or administrative members of the player(s) school to determine the appropriate consequences.

## **CHANGES TO THE RULES AND GUIDELINES**

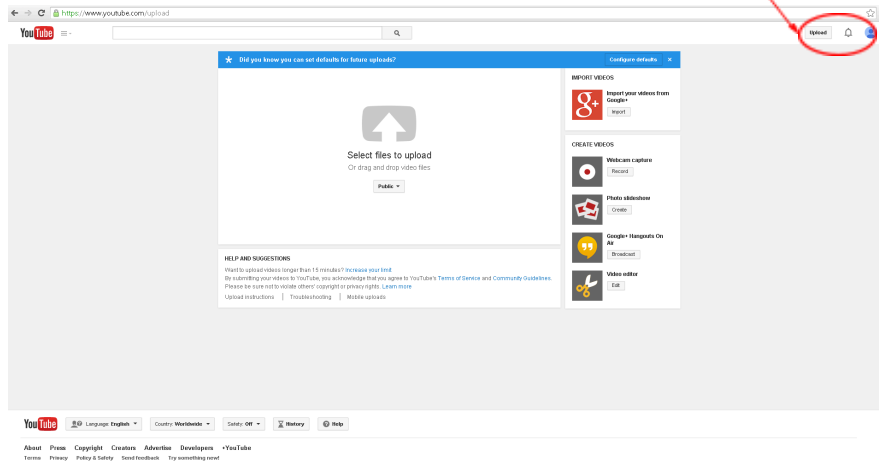
**These Rules and Guidelines are subject to change by Youth Programs and Center for Democracy in Deaf America staff as necessary to maintain a fair and enjoyable competition. In-season changes will be kept to an absolute minimum.**

## Appendix A:

### Steps to create YouTube link for your ASL submission(s):

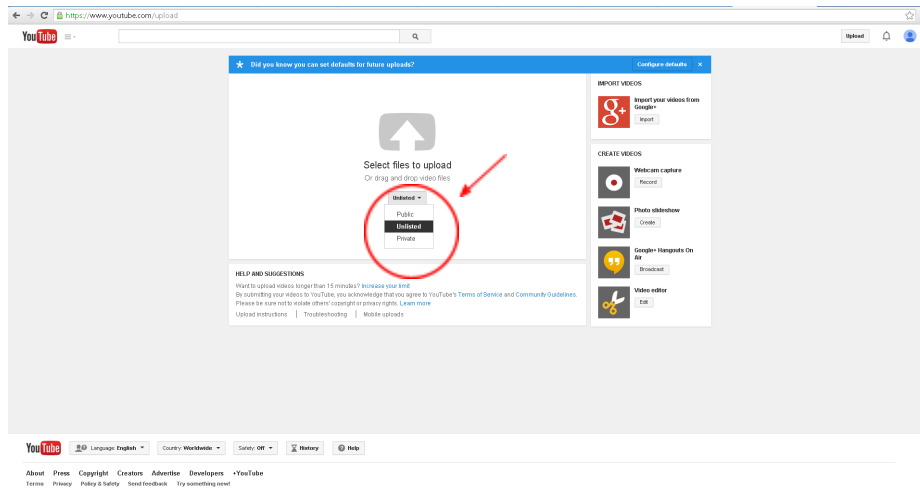
#### Step One:

Go to [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and click on “Upload” button to upload your video.



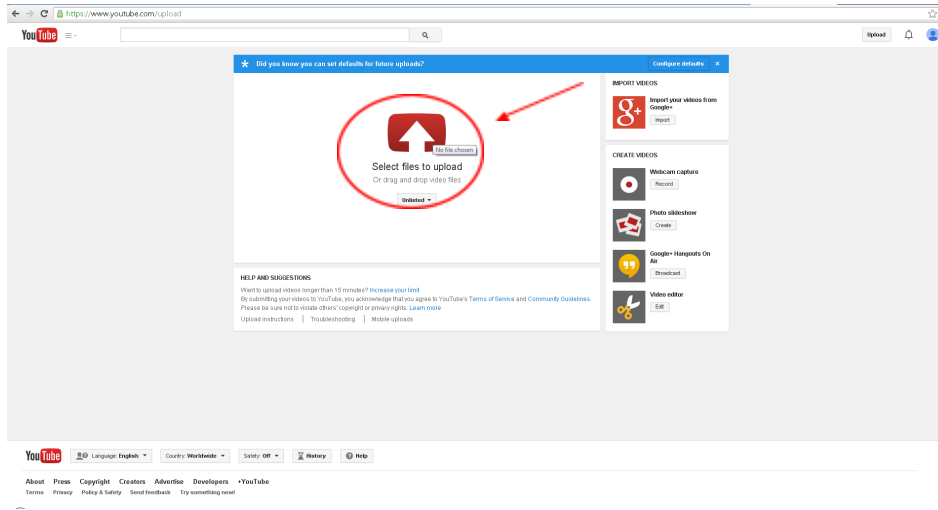
#### Step Two:

Change the listing from “Public” to “Unlisted”.



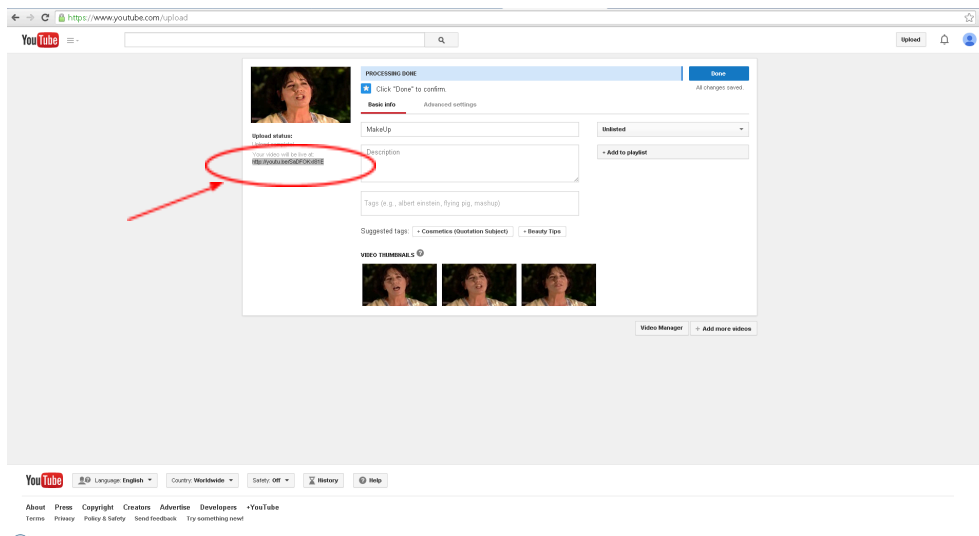
### Step Three:

Click on the arrow icon to upload your video, then wait until youtube.com notify you that your video has been successfully uploaded.



### Step Four:

Copy the link as shown while the video is processing, and send the link to us.



**Appendix B:**

Portrait



Landscape

