

{Work In Progress}

Congressional Debate (last update December 2020):

Quick Paradigm: If you want the 1, you should do some or all of the following (ordered by importance):

1. Give at least 1 rebuttal/crystallization speech.
2. While giving that speech, refute evidence/args in the round with logic or new ev or do comparative weighing.
3. Engage in questioning of the opposite side you support in ways that advance your arguments or trap them.
4. Give a constructive speech that lays out the more important arguments for the legislation and proves specific solvency of the main impacts of the problem it intends to fix.

Section 1: Debating

A few statements about debating:

Congress is a debate event.

All debate events feature competing speeches that narrow from constructive speeches to rebuttal speeches to crystallizing speeches.

Congress does not have NSDA rules that lay out this structure. But because Congress is a debate event the speeches in a Congressional Debate round need to follow the structure laid out above.

Longer Paradigm:

Congress is a debate activity, not a speech activity. You need to demonstrate your ability in order to score well in front of me. You also don't need to sound that pretty to score well in front of me (but it will help).

Speech Cycle thoughts (i.e. where and how you should speak to do well):

The first 1 (sometimes 2) cycles are constructive speeches which means these speeches are not required to rebut/refute previous arguments (that said, they totally can, preempts exist and will help you). Three items to note about constructive speeches:

1. They need to cover the more important arguments re: the legislation. If you are giving a Pro constructive on, say, A Bill to Do Gun Control, and you talk about why it's "good for the economy" and why "it's not that much of a violation of the 2nd amendment", you're missing the boat and also my 1.
2. My bar for polish/delivery is much higher for a constructive than a responsive speech. The 1st aff should be very practiced (this is all y'all do anyway, so I don't feel bad for having a high bar).
3. You cannot only give constructive speeches and get a 1. If you aren't a debater, giving at least 1 constructive is probably good for you (play to your strengths). But you cannot only give constructives, because then you aren't debating.

The next 1-??? cycles of debate are rebuttal speeches. These speeches need to respond to arguments on the flow. They can bring up new arguments (here is where you read your obscure, tangential argument that shouldn't be in a constructive), but those new arguments need to be contextualized in the debate. What I basically evaluate is what

you chose to debate (either one argument or the entire flow) and see if you have tipped the scales back to your side once your speech is over. As an example, if you are Pro and give the 3rd cycle aff and choose to just focus on the Economy impact of the neg (which has 2 links), I would rank you up in you 2-3 point each link and also explain why to prefer aff links, and I would rank you down if you respond to only 1 link with the same warrant the 1st aff used.

The last cycle of debate should be reserved for crystallization. These speeches are probably the hardest but also a good one is the quickest path to a 1 from me. A good crystal does the following

a) Identifies the most important part of the debate [MIP] (usually the best impacts for each side, but sometimes it's solvency or the internal link debate for 1 impact). That's it. Just identify what the most important args are. This is harder for y'all than you think it is.

b) Compares (weighs) the aff's arguments on the MIP to the neg's arguments on the MIP. Again, this usually means comparing impacts, but could be claims/warrants on the solvency debate. Truth/ev reputability is also important.

c) Concludes with why your side is winning. A really good crystal doesn't need/use new ev (it's basically a 2NR/2AR), but instead does all the judging/evaluation work of the debate for me. That said, if you need to read ev to seal the deal, that's fine.

Ranking thoughts (i.e. roughly the rubric I use to rank you at the end of the round):

I evaluate each speech in 3 broad categories (speaking/style, debate, argument quality) and also evaluate question answering. Additionally I evaluate basically everything else you do in the round in a rough +/- manner.

Speaking/Style: This covers how polished your speech is, how well you control the speaking space, how well you project, how quickly/slowly you talk/how you carry yourself as a pretend Congressional representative. The bar is highest for a 1st aff and decreases throughout the cycles (that is, a 1st aff needs to be basically rehearsed/memorized and move me in some way to get top marks, while a crystal could have several delivery issues (small pauses, lose place) and still get top marks). This category roughly counts for 30% of your rank.

Debate: This covers how well you lay out your arguments, how well you respond to arguments, how you contextualize your arguments, your coverage of the flow and your identification of the important arguments. This category roughly counts for 40% of your rank.

Argument Quality: A category I do not like that I need to evaluate, but one that has become necessary as argument quality has decreased. This covers how well thought out your arguments are/how true your arguments are. It also covers argument importance. For example, if you read "weed is bad for climate change" on a Marijuana

legalization bill, you are making a bad argument. Or if you go neg on a free college bill with the argument "The bill raises too much money", you are making a bad argument. If you didn't read those arguments, but identify them as "the most important impact in the round" in a crystal, you've missed the boat and are also making a bad argument. This category roughly counts for 20% of your rank.

Question answering: This is mostly straightforward. I will say that I give bumps to deft handling of tricky questions and confusing questioners (not by being obtuse but by giving answers they clearly weren't expecting). I downgrade for many things, but the biggest is not realizing you are being lofted a softball. This category roughly counts for the final 10% of your rank.

In addition to the 3 main categories and question answering, I evaluate the following loosely:

a) Question asking. You can get yourself a + by stumping someone or by trapping someone. You get yourself a - for lobbing softballs to the side you either already spoke on or are clearly planning to speak on. Easiest way to avoid minuses is to NOT QUESTION THE SIDE YOU PLAN TO SPEAK ON. Questions that start with "don't you agree" almost always suck (unless you're laying a trap).

b) Rudeness. Don't be rude. For the love of god don't be rude. I saw someone make faces at people as they answered questions and it broke something in me. Don't be rude. Being rude gets you a -. HOWEVER, being extra nice to me or whatever DOESN'T get you a +.

c) Abstaining. DO NOT ABSTAIN unless you have a very good reason for doing so. If you spoke on a bill, VOTE ON THE BILL. You get a -- for abstaining on a bill you spoke on.

d) Broken cycles. This is buried but is actually really important (rewarding those that read paradigms I guess). If you given the first broken cycle speech (i.e. either the 2nd aff or neg to go in a row because there wasn't anyone on the other side) results in me judging that speech against a higher bar than I ordinarily would, but still flowing and ranking the speech. Giving a second broken cycle speech (i.e. either the 3rd aff or neg to go in a row because there wasn't anyone on the other side TWICE) results in me not flowing your speech and ranking you exactly average for that speech. Please do not waste my time with this nonsense. If you are giving the second broken cycle speech you are not debating, and therefore there is nothing for me to evaluate.

With all that said, you need to also demonstrate range as a debater to get ranked highly. So giving 2 high scoring constructives and asking a couple questions WILL NOT get you the 1, even if you ranked out higher than everyone else on my rough rubric.

Assorted Thoughts:

Move previous quicker. Y'all came here to debate, you will not do well given broken cycle speeches (see above) and you're playing a competitive game! If the other debaters in the round can't figure out how to get their speeches in that's not your problem. Obviously this doesn't always apply (early season local tournaments with novices = everyone speaks), but in a bid tournament semis or higher, do what's best for the debate.

Recesses after legislation is voted is good (only time judges can go to the bathroom/fill water/etc). Recesses to "write speeches" are dumb and you should stop doing them. Instead, you should flow and respond to arguments on the flow. That's your speech.

Make more jokes/have more fun. You're giving up your weekends for this, it doesn't need to be so serious all the time. Also, if you make jokes and I laugh, I probably like you more. That can only be good for you.

I'm a pretty expressive judge, you can probably read me in round. Judge adaptation/judge reading is an important skill. If I'm nodding, you're probably doing something right. If I'm shaking my head, the opposite.

Judging Data:

I took a look at 3 of the bigger tournaments I judged at in 2019 (MinneApple Semis, Blake Semis and MN Section Tournament). I specifically looked at how off I was from the final rankings for that round or tournament. Calculation is sum of the absolute value of (Final Rank - My Rank) for all speakers, then divide by number of participants. For example, if I rank Jane Doe 1 and she finished 2 and I rank John Doe 2 and he finishes 1 (and they are the only two participants), my score would be $(1 + 1) / 2 = 1$, which means I was off by 1 rank on average. Results for tournaments this year below:

MinneApple Semis:

4 judges. Mean = 1.38, Median = 1.17, Total = 5.5. I was 1.00.

Blake Semis:

5 judges. Mean = 1.75, Median = 1.71, Total = 7.0. I was 0.43.

MSHSL Sections:

10 judges (4 sections, 2 days, 5 judges/day).

Based on 1 day results: Mean = 1.35, Median = 1.33, Total = 20.24. I was 0.88.

Based on final standings (both days): Mean = 1.43, Median = 1.31, Total = 21.44. I was 0.83.

Public Forum:

High level background: did CX for 4 years from 08-12. Have coached for 2 years. Have judged 1 tournament this year (mostly focused on growing the Congressional team) and it was not on the current topic. So PF jargon = bad, CX jargon = good, speed = you probably can't go "too fast".

Assorted Thoughts:

1. Rebuttals needs to extend the offense they want to go for. 1st Summary has some leeway for reading new defense to new offense in the 2nd rebuttal. I was a 2A when I debated (which probably translates to going first in PF), so I will probably give the 1st Summary/Final Focus more when it comes to extending blippy defense vs. 2nd rebuttal offense.
2. In the same vein of CX 2A laziness, I am sympathetic to risk of solvency/risk of a link args. Winning 100% defense is pretty hard. That said, I also love a good link or impact turn debate.
3. If your Summary and Final Focus "write my ballot" for me, chances are better that you'll win. That means doing comparative impact weighing and explaining to me where to vote and why that's the most important place to vote.
4. Framework debates in PF are usually stupid but I won't ignore them.
5. I'm probably pretty good for you if you want to read a K in PF (I'll at least evaluate it). You don't get an alt (because they don't get a plan), but if the Rez is good/bad for non "policy/real world" reasons I'll evaluate those. Tell me why your impacts come first/turn theirs and you're good. Performance/narrative Ks were bad in CX, probably not the judge for you if that's your strat.
6. Going for more than 2 (and really probably more than 1) impact by final focus is probably a bad idea, but that's just an observation from my limited experience.
7. If the tournament doesn't prohibit it, I will give an oral RFD with decision. If I can't disclose I would still prefer to give feedback in person post round vs. on a ballot. Please take the time to ask questions if something doesn't make sense/you don't understand why I evaluated the debate the way I did. I'm always trying to be the best judge I can be so I welcome discussions about my evaluation in order to be better.
8. Read cards. I may call cards post round, usually it's not going to decide a round (I think I've called cards 8 times across ~8 tournaments, maybe 1 time it flipped my decision).