

# Welcome to Paly Speech & Debate

We're so glad to have you join us! **If you haven't already, please sign up for our Novice Development Program ([here](#)) – our first cohort starts Monday, August 25.**

This guide contains items you need to complete to become an official member of the program ([here](#)). It also contains our practice schedule ([here](#)), along with a description of the major debate events ([here](#)) and the major speech events ([here](#)). Finally, we've included some jargon that might help you in your first couple weeks on the team ([here](#)).

## WHO WE ARE

### About Us

The Palo Alto "Paly" Speech & Debate Program (PASD) is one of the most successful programs in California, ranked #3 out of 240 high school programs in the state and #24 out of 3,000+ in the country by the National Speech & Debate Association. Our no-cuts, no-tryouts program includes 175+ student members competing in 10+ speech & debate events, and a long line of accomplished, beloved coaches from top schools such as Stanford, Berkeley, Harvard, and Yale. We compete in 40+ tournaments from September–June, ranging from local novice scrimmages to out-of-state, international championships. Our program is highly respected for its inclusive, supportive, and welcoming culture, and has been consistently recognized for excellence in citizenship, winning three District Awards in 2022 and two in 2024, including Coach of the Year. Guided by values such as student leadership, volunteer service, and social impact, our students collectively contribute over 3,000 community service hours annually. Our students also organize the Palo Alto Speech & Debate Camp, a 20+ year-old summer program which teaches public speaking skills to elementary and middle school students, reaching 400+ kids in 2025.

### Teams/Squads

#### Congressional Debate

Coached by Isaac Kan, Benjamin Grimes

Captained by Elsa Lagerblad

**What it is:** A simulation of the U.S. House and Senate where students debate student-written legislation in a chamber format.

**Skills it builds:** Public speaking, persuasion, critical thinking, collaboration, leadership, and knowledge of government procedure.

**Format & flow:** A “chamber” of 10–25 students acts as a legislative body debating a series of proposed bills and resolutions. Students take turns giving **3-minute speeches** either in support or opposition to each piece of legislation. Following each speech, other students ask questions. After enough speeches have been given, the chamber votes to pass or fail the legislation. Sessions last **2–3 hours**, and students typically give multiple speeches. One student serves as **Presiding Officer** and leads the session—an opportunity to develop leadership and time management skills.

**Good fit for students who:** Enjoy politics, public policy, group discussion, and speaking multiple times in a round.

**Example legislation topics:** Universal basic income, banning TikTok, mandatory voting, immigration reform.

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#### Lincoln-Douglas (LD) Debate

Coached by Adrian Youngquist, Kyle Hietala

Captained by Joseph Sun, Tiffany Chou

**What it is:** A one-on-one debate format focused on big-picture ethical, philosophical, and moral questions.

**Skills it builds:** Solo argumentation, philosophical analysis, value-based reasoning, logical structure, and cross-examination.

**Format & flow:** LD rounds are structured around a **single resolution** that changes every two months. Students write **prepared cases**, give structured speeches, and engage in cross-examination. Rounds last about **40–45 minutes**. LD debates often center on **normative questions** such as “Should the United States prioritize environmental protection over economic growth?” Students often draw from philosophy, history, political theory, and ethics.

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**Good fit for students who:** Enjoy reading, writing, working independently, and thinking deeply about “what ought to be.”

**Example topics:** Civil disobedience, consequentialism vs. deontology, compulsory voting, just war theory.

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### Public Forum (PF) Debate

Coached by Claire Beamer, Sophia Kim

Captained by Diana Senderzon, Mihika Sridhar

**What it is:** A 2-on-2 debate format designed for broad public appeal, centered on current events and policy questions.

**Skills it builds:** Partner collaboration, real-world issue analysis, evidence-based argumentation, and persuasive communication to lay audiences.

**Format & flow:** Teams of two debate a **monthly resolution** on domestic or international current events. PF emphasizes clarity and persuasiveness to “**citizen judges**” (parents, teachers, community volunteers), rather than technical jargon. Rounds last about **35–40 minutes** and include crossfire questioning between teams. Students must prepare for both sides of the resolution.

**Good fit for students who:** Enjoy current events, want to build teamwork and communication skills, and like debating for non-specialist audiences.

**Example topics:** NATO expansion, universal basic income, AI in the workforce, government surveillance.

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### Parliamentary (Parli) Debate

Coached by Max Renteria, JJ Telebrico

Captained by Beinan Ren, Motoko Iwata

**What it is:** A 2-on-2 **extemporaneous** debate format where topics are announced just 20 minutes before the round.

**Skills it builds:** Quick thinking, creativity, argument structure, teamwork, and rhetorical improvisation.

**Format & flow:** Teams are given a resolution in one of three categories—**FACT** (what is true), **VALUE** (what is right), or **POLICY** (what should be done). With no outside prep

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allowed, students brainstorm, research, write a case, and develop rebuttals in just **20 minutes**. One student gives the opening and closing speeches; their partner gives the middle constructive speech. Parli rounds often feature **clever argumentation, witty rhetoric**, and a mix of logic and flair.

**Good fit for students who:** Are fast thinkers, enjoy spontaneity, and want a challenge that rewards mental agility over deep preparation.

**Example topics:** This House supports a four-day work week, Reality TV does more harm than good, The United Nations should intervene in failed states.

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### Interpretative Speech

Coached by Erin Ritchie, Kai Wildberger

Captained by Aaron Shone

**What it is:** A collection of speech events where students bring existing published works to life through performance.

**Skills it builds:** Acting, voice control, movement, timing, emotional nuance, and character development.

**Format & flow:** Students select excerpts from novels, plays, speeches, films, or poetry, and perform them as **10-minute memorized pieces**. No props, costumes, or set pieces are allowed—students rely on voice, gesture, and facial expression to distinguish characters and convey mood. Performances can be dramatic, humorous, or somewhere in between.

**Good fit for students who:** Love theater, storytelling, literature, and performing for an audience.

**Events include:**

- **Dramatic Interpretation (DI):** Emotional, serious content
  - **Humorous Interpretation (HI):** Comedic or absurd material
  - **Duo Interpretation:** Two-person performances (no eye contact or physical touch)
  - **Program Oral Interpretation (POI):** A mix of genres and sources
  - **Oratorical Interpretation (OI):** Interpreting historical speeches
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### Original/Platform Speech

Coached by Kyle Hietala, Kai Wildberger

Captained by Bethany Liu

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**What it is:** Events where students research, write, and deliver original speeches on topics of their choice.

**Skills it builds:** Rhetorical strategy, speechwriting, research, memorization, and persuasive delivery.

**Format & flow:** Students deliver **8–10 minute memorized speeches** written entirely in their own words. Topics range from personal experiences to global issues. Original events blend logical argument with emotional appeal and strong storytelling. Students often cite credible sources, use humor or anecdote, and end with a strong call to action or takeaway message.

**Good fit for students who:** Want to write and perform their own material, advocate for social change, or share personal stories.

### Events include:

- **Original Oratory (OO):** Persuasive speech on any issue
  - **Original Advocacy (OA):** Persuasive speech focused on policy reform
  - **Informative/Expository:** Informative speech using visuals (optional)
  - **Original Prose & Poetry (OPP):** Artistic, creative writing performed aloud
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## Spontaneous Events

Coached by Ethem Gulcu, Avanti Ramraj

Captained by Kiara Yoon, Tessa Berney

**What it is:** Speaking events that challenge students to create speeches in real time with little to no advance preparation.

**Skills it builds:** Mental agility, humor, structure, confidence under pressure, and creative framing.

### Events Include:

- **Extemporaneous Speaking (Extemp):** Students are given a question about a current political, economic, or social issue. With **30 minutes of prep**, they research, organize, and deliver a **7-minute speech** with **evidence-based analysis** and source citations. Topics are often drawn from the news and require staying up-to-date with global affairs.
- **Impromptu:** Students receive a random prompt (word, quote, question, or current event), have **2 minutes to prep**, and deliver a **5-minute speech** without notes. Strong impromptu speeches use clear structure, vivid examples, and often personal

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anecdotes or humor.

### Good fit for students who:

- **Extemp:** Are analytical, enjoy research, and want to sharpen their ability to synthesize evidence quickly.
- **Impromptu:** Enjoy spontaneity, storytelling, and connecting with an audience in a relaxed, fun way.

**Example Extemp prompts:** How should the U.S. respond to rising tensions in the South China Sea, Is universal basic income economically sustainable?

**Example Impromptu prompts:** The road less traveled, A quote from Taylor Swift, Teacups

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## ONBOARDING TASKLIST

### Immediately

- Fill out our **new team member form** ([link here](#)). This will help us stay in touch with you.
- Register for a **Novice Development Cohort** ([link here](#)). This is our comprehensive Novice program that all new students go through in the fall.
- Join our team **Slack** workspace when you receive an invite from Kyle Hietala, Program Director. This is our primary means of communication. Once you've joined, be sure to turn on notifications.

### Within First Week

- Download **Slack** for your phone and your computer. This will ensure that you're not missing important information (make sure to turn notifications ON).

### Within First Month

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- Consider **signing up for a tournament**. If you're unsure, talk to your coach about what tournament might be best! Our list of upcoming tournaments, along with the links to register, can always be found on our [website](#). We recommend bookmarking it!
- Create a National Speech & Debate Association (**NSDA**) account ([link here](#)) in order to compete in tournaments. Once you've done this, email Kyle Hietala (khietala@pausd.org) with the email address that you used to create the account. This will help us link your account to our school.
- Create an account with **Tabroom**, which is the website that runs nearly all tournaments. Use your NSDA account login to create your Tabroom account. ([link here](#))

## PRACTICES

All of our novices (new members of the team) go through our Novice Development Program, which is a series of novice-only practices taught by our most experienced coaches. ([link here](#))

If you're eager to dive into varsity-level competition, you can attend varsity squad practices! We practice in the 800s building at Paly High School. On the day of your first practice, come to the Fishbowl (Room 800) and we will point you in the direction of the specific room.

## DEBATE on MONDAY

- **Lincoln Douglas (LD) Debate:** Mondays 6:30-9:00 PM in 810/812
- **Public Forum (PF) Debate:** Mondays 5:30-7:30 PM in 804/805
- **Congressional Debate:** Mondays 6:00-8:00 PM in 813/811
- **Parliamentary Debate:** Mondays 6:00-8:30 PM in 801/803

## SPEECH on TUESDAY

- **Speech:** Tuesdays 6:00-8:00 PM in 803/805
- **Extemp:** Tuesdays 6:30-8:30 PM in 801

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## GLOSSARY

**Breaking:** To advance to the next round after preliminary rounds.

**CFL:** Coast Forensic League, which is our local league for competition

**Judge:** An adult who evaluates a round of competition. Judges are drawn from educators, former competitors, & parents. Parents are considered “lay” for their lack of technical debate knowledge.

**NSDA:** National Speech and Debate Association

**Resolution:** The proposition or subject offered to debate.

**Round:** An individual heat of competition, where students are matched to *(an)* opposing contestant(s) in a particular room with a particular judge or panel of judges.

**Tabroom.com:** An online tournament software hosts can use for registration, creating rounds, and results calculation.

## FAQ

### Do I have to do the [Novice Development Program](#)?

Yes, even if you have prior experience, we want you to attend the Novice Development Program! It's not just about teaching you foundational skills, it's also about introducing you to our community, culture, and helping you make an informed choice about which team to call your own.

### Do I have to try out for the team? Do I need to have prior experience?

Nope, we're a public school program – and by definition, a public school program should be open to everyone. There are no try outs and you don't need any prior experience. Our only absolute requirement is that you act with kindness and respect at all times.

### What if I try Speech & Debate but I don't want to stick with it? Can I drop out?

Yes, of course! There's no penalty or punishment for not sticking with PASD – our goal is to help you figure out if our program is a good fit for you, not to “sell” you on the program or pressure you into being part of it.

### How do tournaments work? Am I required to attend tournaments?

You're not required to attend any tournaments in your first semester with the program, but most



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students attend at least 2, because they're a lot of fun and a great opportunity to showcase your skills. In your second semester, we'll expect you to attend at least 2 tournaments, and by then you'll be part of a squad led by varsity captains and coaches – so you'll have a lot of support.