
Evidence Rules

Charger Challenge · TOC Bid Tournament

All debate events run under the NSDA evidence rules (Unified Manual, Ch. 7) — the rules in force at TOC bid tournaments nationwide. **This page is the summary; the manual controls where the two differ.** Appendices A–G carry the full detail.

Cite it — aloud and in writing

Minimum spoken citation is the **primary author's last name and the year**; on later cards from the same source, the name alone. The full written citation — author and qualifications, date, source, title, pages, and for digital evidence the URL and date accessed — must be produced on request.

Mark it, twice

Aloud: a clear pause or spoken cue (“quote/unquote,” “mark the card”) at start and stop. **In the document:** highlight, underline, or minimize so the portions read are visible. Internal ellipses are not permitted unless they are in the original, and skipped text must still be present.

Produce it on request

Any card, case, or citation you present goes to an opponent or judge on request, with the **original source** or a copy of the page plus the pages before and after; the live web page counts. This holds whether you cut the card or pulled it from a camp file or open-evidence project — **you are responsible for the accuracy of everything you read.**

Paraphrase, AI, and correspondence

Paraphrase is held to the same standard as a card read in full — you must be able to point to the specific lines. Generative AI is not a citable source; the underlying original must be available. Private correspondence with an author is not admissible.

Violations and penalties

Violation	What it means	Penalty
Distortion	Words added or cut so the author's conclusion changes; added words left unbracketed	Loss + disqualification
Non-existent evidence	Can't produce the source, source doesn't contain the card, unverifiable paraphrase, or refusing to hand over a source you have	Loss + disqualification (avoidable if produced in time)
Clipping	Claiming to have read the full highlighted text while skipping part of it	Loss + zero speaker points
Straw argument	Passing off an argument the author raised only to refute it as the author's own position	Loss + zero speaker points
Improper ellipses	Internal ellipses that are not in the original document	Loss + zero speaker points
Citation problems	Incomplete oral or written citation, unclear marking, private correspondence	Judge's discretion — discount it, weigh it, or do nothing

Challenging evidence

Arguing about evidence is not a challenge. Credibility attacks are ordinary arguments; the round continues. **A formal challenge** (distortion, non-existent evidence, or clipping only): declare it plainly, name the violation, identify the card. The round stops; the judge rules. **Upheld, the offending side loses; failed, the challenging side loses. After the round:** a coach or school-affiliated adult notifies tab within **20 minutes**; written allegation **10 minutes** later.

Appendix A — Citation Requirements

Oral source citation

In every debate event, the minimum delivered aloud when introducing evidence is the primary author's last name and the year of publication. Anything further — publication, credentials, title — is welcome but not required.

When two or more cards come from the same source, author and year are required aloud only the first time; after that the author's name alone suffices. An oral citation never substitutes for the written one: if an opponent or judge asks for the full written citation, it must be provided.

Written source citation

To the extent the original source supplies them, a written citation must carry:

Full name of the primary author and/or editor

Author qualifications

Publication date

The source

Title of the article

Page number(s)

Date accessed, for digital evidence

Full URL, where applicable

Paraphrase versus general summary

A paraphrase is held to exactly the same standard of citation and accuracy as a card read in full. Paraphrase shortens or clarifies one specific portion of a source; it is not a general summary of an entire book, chapter, or study, which is appropriate only for material widely treated as common knowledge. Paraphrase tracks a single idea, summary a general concept.

Practically: referring to social contract theory in the abstract invokes no particular author and needs no citation. Referring to Locke's social contract points at a specific text, and the evidence must be available — the original source **and** the specific text being paraphrased.

Generative AI

Generative AI is not a citable source. It may be used to find articles, ideas, and sources, but the original source behind anything quoted or paraphrased must be available on request. Text from an AI system may not be presented as evidence.

Private communication

Private or personal correspondence between an author and a debater is inadmissible as evidence.

Appendix B — Marking Evidence and Producing Sources

Marking what was read

Debaters must distinguish read from unread text in two separate ways.

Orally. Each piece of evidence is identified by a clear oral pause, or by a spoken phrase such as “quote/unquote” or “mark the card.” A spoken phrase is definitive and is the safer choice; whether a pause was clear enough rests entirely with the judge.

In writing. The document must show which portions were read or paraphrased. Underlining what is read, highlighting what is read, and minimizing what is unread are all definitive; the clarity of any other marking method is left to the judge.

Ellipses

Internal ellipses are prohibited unless they reproduce ellipses in the original document. Words may be skipped in delivery, but the skipped text must remain present in the written card so opponents and judges can inspect it, and the start and end of what was read must be clearly marked.

Availability of evidence

Any material presented during the round — cards, cases, written citations — must be made available to an opponent or judge on request. When asked, the original source, or a copy of the relevant pages of what was read, must reach the opponent in a timely fashion during the round, and the judge by the round’s end.

What counts as an original source

Pulling up the live web page, or displaying a saved copy of it (competitors may access the internet to do this)

A copy of the page the evidence appears on plus the pages immediately before and after, or the actual printed book, periodical, or pamphlet

Copies or electronic versions of published handbooks

Electronic or printed versions of debate institute files, the NDCA-sponsored Open Evidence Project, or similar repositories

Provenance is not a defense. A debater who obtained evidence from somewhere other than their own research is still fully responsible for the content and accuracy of everything they present or read.

Appendix C — Violations Defined

Distortion

Distortion exists where the text of the evidence itself has words added or deleted in a way that significantly alters the author's conclusion — deleting a “not,” for instance, or inserting one. Failing to bracket added words is also distortion.

Non-existent evidence

Four distinct situations:

The debater cannot produce the original source or a copy of the relevant pages when an opponent, judge, or tournament official asks

The source produced does not actually contain the cited evidence

The evidence is paraphrased but there is no original source against which to check it — the specific lines paraphrased must be highlighted or otherwise marked for identification in the round

The debater has the original source but declines to hand it over in a timely fashion when asked

Clipping

Clipping occurs when a debater represents that they read the complete highlighted or underlined text but in fact skipped or omitted part of it.

Straw argument

A straw argument is a claim an author introduces specifically in order to refute, discredit, or characterize it. The violation is asserting that the author holds that position as their own.

Acknowledgment cures it. A debater who identifies the straw argument as such when first reading it aloud has not misrepresented the evidence. The violation arises where the debater fails to acknowledge it and the opponent then questions the use.

Appendix D — Challenges and Appeals

What the judge resolves in the room

Judges resolve disputes over oral citations, written source citations, and the marking of what was and was not read. Where such a dispute arises, the judge must note it on the ballot or inform tab — particularly if it affects the decision. **These rulings cannot be appealed.**

Informal argument versus formal allegation

Competitors may question the credibility or efficacy of evidence without a formal allegation. Such arguments do not end the round and the judge weighs them like any other argument. A formal allegation is a different instrument, available only for distortion, non-existent evidence, and clipping.

Formal allegation during the round

Make a definitive indication that you are formally alleging an evidence violation
Articulate which specific violation — distortion, non-existent evidence, or clipping
The judge stops the round, examines both sides' evidence, and rules
If the allegation is legitimate, the offending side takes the loss and further sanctions may follow. **If it is not legitimate, the side that brought it takes the loss.**

Post-round allegations and appeals

Tab hears: appeals that a judge ignored, misinterpreted, or misapplied a rule; appeals from a judge's ruling on an in-round allegation of distortion or non-existent evidence; and first-time post-round allegations of distortion or non-existent evidence. An appeal generally requires that the issue was raised in the round. **Judge decisions on clipping cannot be appealed.** The clock:

20 minutes — a coach, school-affiliated adult, or the round's judge notifies tab of intent. The clock starts when the last ballot from all rounds, both flights if flighted, has been collected

10 minutes after that — the coach submits the allegation in writing, naming the specific violation. The challenged competitor and coach are then notified

20 minutes — if tab finds the protest has merit, the challenged side gets this long to produce evidence to the contrary. Failing that, they take the loss and may face further penalty

Tab may extend these limits where circumstances prevent an adult from being available in time. If tab finds the allegation illegitimate, the challenging side takes the loss.

Panels

On a panel, judges decide as independently as usual and are instructed not to confer about the allegation. Judges may split. If the majority finds no violation, no sanction applies; if the majority finds a violation, the penalty is administered.

Appendix E — Penalties and Tournament Adjustments

Penalties by violation

Citation and marking problems, and private correspondence — judge's discretion: disregard the evidence, reduce its credibility, weigh it in deciding the round, or take no action

Clipping, straw arguments, improper ellipses — loss for the offending side, zero speaker points where applicable, and the reason recorded on the ballot

Distortion or non-existent evidence — loss and disqualification from the tournament. A side that loses on an in-round non-existent-evidence allegation but produces the source to tab within 20 minutes may avoid disqualification; the recorded loss stands. Evidence infractions violate the NSDA Code of Honor. Depending on severity, consequences can extend to notification of the competitor's school administration and chapter advisor, loss of merit points, and revocation of membership. Those decisions rest with the national office.

Tournament adjustments

No tournament or portion of one is re-run over an evidence violation. Where a competitor is disqualified, results from rounds completed before the protested round stand. If a round is held while a protest is pending: a disqualification gives the opponent a forfeit win; if the protest is overruled and the protesting side won the protested round, nothing changes; if they lost with no previous loss, nothing changes; if they lost and had a previous loss, the opponent receives a forfeit win regardless of the ballot.

Appendix F — Our Obligations as a TOC Bid Tournament

Separate from the in-round evidence rules, the TOC sets requirements the **host tournament** must satisfy for its bids to count. Missing these is the likeliest way for a first-year bid host to get it wrong. From the TOC's published bid-tournament criteria:

Register with the TOC as a bid tournament and receive confirmation before bids can be awarded (speech bids require the TOC's registration form)

Run in person or synchronously online — asynchronous events are not bid-eligible

Publicize all tiebreakers clearly, in advance

Identify the tournament as a TOC bid qualifier in the invitation and/or on the Tabroom front page, and maintain a Tabroom landing page even if tabbing runs elsewhere

Register the tournament for the TOC-UK circuit on Tabroom

Certify and submit the UKTOC bid report via Tabroom after competition ends (Settings → Rules & Results → Points & Bids, then Results → Web Publish → Result Sheets → TOC Bids report → Send Bid Report to UK)

Meet the bid reporting deadline — for 2025–26 this was March 1 for debate events and March 9 for speech; confirm the current season's dates on the TOC bid-tournaments page before the invite goes out

Bid levels also carry minimum entry counts and school counts per event (for speech: e.g. a champion bid requires at least 8 entries from 3 schools with 3 prelims and a final). Verify the tier your entries actually support before announcing bid levels, and confirm everything against the current criteria at ci.uky.edu/debate/toc before publishing the invitation.

Coach's Tip

Assign one named person to own the bid report. The certification steps happen after awards, when everyone is exhausted and loading buses — that is exactly when a first-year bid tournament misses its filing.

Appendix G — Judge Quick Reference

Tournament guidance, not NSDA rule text. This page condenses the rules above into what a judge needs in the room. Post it in judge materials or read it at the judge meeting.

When someone objects to evidence

First establish whether this is an **argument** or a **formal allegation**. Ask directly. Most objections are arguments and the round simply continues

A formal allegation is only available for distortion, non-existent evidence, or clipping.

Anything else is an argument or a matter for your discretion

On a formal allegation: stop the round, examine both sides' evidence, and rule.

Someone loses the round on your ruling — the offending side if the allegation holds, the challenging side if it does not

Yours to decide

Whether an oral pause was clear enough to mark where reading started and stopped
Whether a marking method other than highlighting, underlining, or minimizing is clear enough

How much a citation defect costs — disregard the evidence, discount it, factor it into the decision, or do nothing

Note any evidence dispute on the ballot or tell tab, especially where it affected the decision. Rulings on citation and marking are final.

Not yours to decide

Disqualification — record the loss; tab and the national office handle sanctions beyond the round

Post-round allegations — send the coach to tab and keep to the 20-minute clock

Whether the tournament re-runs anything — it does not

Provenance: Pages 1 and Appendices A–E summarize Chapter 7 of the NSDA High School Unified Manual (text verified against 2025–26 reproductions of the rules; confirm against the current manual version at speechanddebate.org). Appendix F summarizes the TOC's published bid-tournament criteria at ci.uky.edu/debate/toc. Appendix G is tournament guidance.