



Massachusetts Forensic League

Policy Debate Judge Manual

On behalf of the Massachusetts Forensic League and all member schools, we would like to thank you for judging for us today. Without you, this tournament could not function. We hope that you enjoy the results of the hard work that these competitors have put into preparing their cases and arguments.

This booklet has been written to help you with the practicalities of judging high school debates. While it has many guidelines, there are very few “rules” in debate. There may be times when this booklet does not apply to the debate you are judging. Feel free to use your common sense and judgment. If you have any type of question during the day, please ask a tournament official. Remember that you are doing all the debaters a favor, and that all will end well if you rely on your judgments.

The Tournament

Your school’s head coach should tell you where and when you should arrive at the tournament site. When you do arrive at the tournament site, find the coach to find out which pool you are in. You will often be assigned to judge only one of the debate events, and sometimes even just a segment of a single event, for the day. If you can’t find him/her, check in at the registration table, usually in the main lobby, and the tournament staff will help you find someone from your school.

The control center of the tournament is the tabulation room, which everyone will refer to as the “tab” room. From this room emerge all schedules, instructions, and results — which requires that into this room go all ballots, problems, and complaints. Work is feverish here, and it is important that mistakes be avoided. The MFL keeps a “closed tab”, meaning that the room is off-limits to all who are not assigned to work there. However, there will be a table set up in front of the tab room, referred to as the Ballot Table – the people there will be able to answer questions and direct requests into Tab. Some tournaments will also supply runners — students or helpers from the host school — who are posted around the tournament to answer questions.

The rest of the tournament is comprised of the classrooms of the school. It is in these rooms that the debates will take place. It is important that these rooms be used and not abused. Please direct students away from school equipment if you think their activities suspicious. Usually, these rooms will be set up so that the judge may sit in the center, facing front, with the debaters at the front, to either side. Thus the speaker may face the judge from his position at the front of the room. The debaters will usually mark their names on the blackboard to help you identify them. When you leave the room, please be sure you leave nothing behind, as judges will be switching rooms throughout the day.

The Schematic: Before the beginning of each debate round, the tab room will issue a schedule listing the room, debaters, and judges involved in each debate. We call this the “schematic.” These are passed out to all judges and debaters, though you occasionally may have to seek one out. Your job is to find your name in the judge column, see what room you are directed to, and go there. Pick up “ballots”, or comment sheets, from the tournament staff on the way – either at the ballot table or from runners who will supply them when the schematic is released. There are different types of ballots for each debate event – be sure you have picked up the right ballot for the debate event you are judging.

Conducting the Round

After you have read the schematic, picked up your ballots, and found your assigned room, you will find yourself in a debate “round.” There will be several rounds during the day, in which one or two-person teams meet similar teams from other schools. Teams or individuals will typically debate both sides of the topic during the day, going back and forth from round to round. From the decisions in their rounds, debaters build a win-loss record which will be used to determine the winners. You are present to determine the winner and create those win-loss records.

When you enter the room, the debaters usually will have written their names or codes on the blackboard. If they haven’t, ask them for this information. Copy it onto the ballot, being careful to note which debater or team is speaking on the affirmative and which is speaking on the negative. Also, write your name or judge’s code in the space provided, and your school. If you have students in your round whom you know personally, contact the tab room before starting the round. They will make any necessary adjustments

The debaters will then get up and deliver timed speeches that comprise the debate. The times and pattern for these speeches will be indicated on the ballot, and depend on the event. You should listen to these speeches, and time them to ensure the debaters do not go over time. If asked, please provide time signals to debaters – however, some debaters will time

themselves, or sometimes their teammate or audience member will keep time for them. This is permitted, but maintain an “official” time as well on your own. A 15-20 second grace period is permitted for debaters to finish their sentences or thoughts at the time limit.

Remind all people in the room to turn off cell phones and beepers before the round begins. It is common courtesy to listen with interest to all students. No eating or drinking should take place during a round of competition. Do not stop a student during a presentation unless there is an emergency (e.g. fire alarm) or a significant disruption to the performance that clearly impacts the contestant’s ability to proceed. In that case, please allow the contestant to start again (from the beginning) once the disruption ceases.

After the round is done, decide who has won the debate using the guidelines listed below. It is important to judge based only on what the debaters tell you. You are judging not who is “right”, but who is most skilled at debating. You may feel quite strongly that one side or the other is correct, and you may also be able to think of strong arguments yourself. Please do not let these arguments affect your decision; instead decide based on what happens inside the round. Debaters should only be responsible for arguments that their opponents present, not ones in the minds of the judges, since these are not spoken in the round.

Write comments for each debater, and also the Reason For Decision, which describes your reasons for deciding the round as you did. Clearly mark the school and the code/name of the winner on your ballot, and hand it into the ballot staff as instructed by the tournament staff.

Guidelines on Policy Debate

Policy, team, or CX (cross-ex) debate involves two teams of two students each debating a proposition of policy. Policy debaters across the nation debate the same policy proposition, referred to as the resolution, for an entire year. However, the resolution is typically very broad, and only one specific aspect of it will be debated in the round.

The debate consists of four constructive speeches of 8 minutes apiece, each followed by a three-minute cross examination period. After the constructives and cross-examination, each debater then will speak for five minutes in rebuttal. Each of these speeches has a specific purpose in mind, as follows:

1. **The Constructive:** Constructives are where the debaters establish their case and evidence in support of their side. The affirmative will narrow the resolution down to a specific policy change, and often present a plan and compelling evidence to follow their plan during their constructives. The negative will sometimes counter with a plan of their own, or present evidence that the affirmative’s policy change and/or plan will be worse than the status quo,

not better. The debaters will probably refer to their pieces of evidence as “cards”, and give each a “tag” to help identify it – such as “The Jane Smith card” to refer to a piece of evidence drawn from a study by Jane Smith. However they choose to present their arguments and defend their positions, the main body of their case and their evidence is presented in constructives.

2. **Cross-examination:** Cross-ex periods are chances for the opponents to clarify each others’ cases in the round, in order to better respond to their opponent’s points. These are not intended to be prosecutorial sessions where the questioner backs the questioned into a corner through inference. The purpose of cross-examination is clarification, not argument; the questioner should always question and avoid statements of any kind.

3. **Rebuttals:** Rebuttals occur after the constructives and cross examinations. They are a chance for each side to clarify what they presented, and show how they best answered the points of the other side. Rebuttals are not a chance to make sudden, surprise introductions of new analysis or evidence, however. Debaters should refrain from bringing in new material, and judges, in making their decisions, should disregard any material that their opponents correctly identify as being completely new and not a response to the others’ case.

Adjudicating Policy Debate: Your job as a judge is to determine whether or not the affirmative debaters have presented a compelling need for the change they propose to policy, or whether the negative has managed to either prove that the need for any change at all is not compelling, or that their own proposed change is more convincing than the one the affirmative proposed. The debaters’ evidence and reasoning should play a part in this decision. Furthermore, the debaters themselves will clarify the round and present arguments to you on which issues are the most important. Listen to the debaters and judge which of them presents the strongest case based on their own criteria.

To do so, it may help to look at these areas, which are often the focus of policy debate:

a. **Significance** arguments involve deciding whether the problem that the affirmative side is attempting to solve is truly significant, or whether their plan can make a significant change.

b. **Harms** are damage somehow caused to society by either side’s plans or positions. Harms that the affirmative claims to solved are labeled “advantages” or “ads” for short, while negative’s claimed harms of the affirmative plan are “disadvantages” or “disads”. The debaters will ask you to weigh the harms of each side against each other.

c. **Solvency** refers to whether or not the plan put forward by the affirmative or any counter-plan put forward by the negative will in fact produced the desired effect, or will instead lead to an irrelevant or even harmful result.

d. **Topicality** refers to whether the affirmative case and plan are truly within the bounds of the resolution.

Policy debaters may make their cases in a variety of other ways; these are only examples. Do not restrict your decision to only these areas; consider the merit of every argument presented.

Speaker points and ranks: You will also need to award speaker points to each debater, and rank them within the round. Speaker points are for individual recognition of who argued most persuasively. The top speakers at each tournament will be recognized based on this point scale. Speaker points are given with 30 being the maximum, and 20 being the ordinary bare minimum for most debaters. Then fill in a rank (1 for the best debater, 4 for the least skilled, no ties please) for each debater within the round.

Flowing

To **flow** a round is to use a note-taking technique which the debaters themselves employ to track arguments in both forms of debate. No matter what the debaters themselves say, flowing a round is not *required* of a judge. However, it is often an invaluable aid for the judges themselves to track arguments and see how the debate has taken shape. You are encouraged to try it, especially if you find it difficult to remember who said what at the end of the round. Virtually all experienced judges flow debates.

Flowing policy is usually done with a few sheets of paper, one each for each “type” of argument listed above (one for harms, one for solvency, etc) divided into columns for each speech. Sometimes debaters and judges will flow in two colors of pen, each for things said by each side of the debate, to help keep track. The idea is to write shorthand notes about the arguments presented by one side of the debate down a column, and then write the responses that the other side presents to those arguments in the next column, with lines connecting the arguments to the responses. The next speech will be in the third column, and so on until you have constructed a picture of the entire debate. After the debate, you will best be able to see how each debater answered the points of the other side, and will be able to confirm the claims made by each side during their rebuttals and crystallization. Because they consist of shorthand notes, a flow is often hard to understand for anyone except the person who wrote it, but ask an experienced judge to see an example of a flow if you want a better picture.

Drops: The debaters may refer to the other having “dropped” an argument in rebuttals. A drop is when one debater presents an argument, and the other debater fails to answer it. It is commonly accepted in debate that when this occurs, the argument is conceded by the side that dropped it. The flow will help you track this.