Advice to Keep in Mind as You Review Your Ballots
(or: Why What These People Say Contradicts Itself and How That Can Still Have Value)

1. Judges are People

Judges, like you, your coaches, and your peers, are human beings who believe that competitive speech and debate is a worthy activity. They have voluntarily given up a weekend of their time to come to competition to watch and critique your performance. People come with bias and baggage that you cannot begin to unwrap, unravel, or understand solely based on their comments on your ballot, and different people see and connect differently to your performance.

2. Objectivity is Impossible

Because judges come with personal bias and baggage, and because of the wide variety of competition pieces at any given tournament, the rank and score you receive from one judge may vary wildly from the rank and score you receive from another. It is not uncommon that comments and critique given by one judge will directly contrast that given by another, so work to identify valuable commentary, and don't obsess over inconsistencies between two ballots.

3. Feedback is Valuable

Despite that judges may disagree about certain details of your performance, do not discount the value of any single ballot. In future tournaments, your rounds will be judged by more people with more different opinions, and trying the suggested changes in practice will help hone the core of the overall performance, making it more solid for the next adjudicators. Even when ballots have conflicting critique, trying both suggestions will help solidify your piece.

4. Success Requires Work

Because Speech and Debate is a competitive event, practice is of the utmost importance. Even if you were lucky enough to break out of prelims in your first tournament, taking feedback from a variety of differently-minded judges and applying it to your presentation in practice shows maturity, helps you define your personal style, and separates good performances from great performances over the course of the year. Waiting until the next tournament to try to apply feedback often makes speakers – debaters AND interpers – look sloppy and disorganized. Using feedback in a helpful manner requires testing it out before taking it out. Practice is key.