Who Are You To Judge?
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Who are you to judge? You are the ideal person to judge! You are intelligent, open-minded and most of all, available. Parents, friends and members of the community play an incredibly valuable role in judging speech and debate events. The whole point of our activity is to teach students to persuade other intelligent members of the community. So it’s not just that you don’t have to be a coach or ex-competitor, it’s that we affirmatively seek out people who are not coaches or ex-competitors to give students a better cross section of the people they will communicate with in the real world.

The following are some simple tips for judging debate and individual events. Above all, don’t be nervous. You are fully qualified and will do an excellent job!

**General Information:**

**The Judges' Lounge:** When you arrive at the tournament, you should report to the judges' lounge. Usually, this will be a library or some other area with plenty of tables and chairs. New rounds will be announced in the lounge by tournament officials. Your name will be called and you will be handed your ballot. When you finish judging, you should return to the judges' lounge to wait for your next assignment. When judges stray from the lounge, the tournament schedule typically gets thrown off and we end up getting back at 1 a.m.

Bring something to do. You will be in the judge's lounge for most of the day. So bring something to read or work on. iPads have become very popular in recent years. But plan to have a fair amount of down time.

Food is provided. The lounge will provide free meals and snacks. The quality varies, but generally is pretty decent. Make a point to eat lunch when it is delivered, as there may or may not be more food later.

**When your name is called:** Each round, the tournament administrators will come to the tab room and call judges. Listen carefully for your name. When you are called, you will pick up your ballot (or ballots, in individual events) and a schematic of the rooms. At some tournaments, you may just be handed the schematic and asked to head to the “ballot table” to pick up your ballot(s). Find your assigned room and go there promptly with your ballot(s), pen and pad, and something to keep time with. You may not need a timer, as the tournament may assign a person to time, but it’s best to err on the side of caution.
**Debate Events:**

You’ll do just fine. If you judge debate, you almost certainly will judge Public Forum (2-on-2) or Lincoln Douglas (1-on-1) debate. In both events, debaters are trained to tailor their arguments to many different types of judges, including those with little or no experience. This is part of the game for these students, so don’t worry about your level of experience. It’s their job to make the arguments accessible to you.

**Take notes:** You don’t have to learn the more elaborate method of note taking the debaters use (called “flowing”), but you should take notes on the round. The simplest method is to bring a notepad, draw a line down the middle, and keep arguments for the two debaters/teams on separate sides.

**Keep an open mind:** You should decide the round based on who did the better job arguing, not what you personally believe, or what you would have said. Resist the temptation to argue the points in your head. If a debater makes Argument A, which you think is easily refuted, but his opponent doesn’t address Argument A, you should treat that argument as being established, unless it’s just absolutely ridiculous on its face.

**Give feedback, but not too much:** Don’t reveal your decision to the debaters in the round. Thank them for a good debate and let them leave. Explain your reason for decision on the ballot, but don’t write a lengthy treatise. There are two reasons to limit the length of your comments. First, if you write too much, the debaters may have difficulty figuring out which points were the real deciding factors. Second, when judges spend a long time writing ballots after the round, the tournament inevitably goes off schedule and we end up getting back at 1 am. So write 3-5 clear sentences explaining your decision, sign the ballot, and return it to the ballot table.

**Individual Events:**

Again, you’ll do fine. Individual events just require you to watch a series of performances (usually about 6) and rank them from best to worst. There is no objectively “right” or “wrong” way to do this. Here again, the idea is to expose competitors to a variety of different judge preferences, so don’t be nervous.

**The basics:** You assign each speaker a rank (1-6, with 1 being best) and speaker points (35-50, with 50 being best). Speaker points are used to break ties between ranks by the tournament officials. There should be no ties in ranks on your ballot. There may be ties on speaker points, but a lower ranked competitor may never have higher speaker points than a higher ranked competitor. Unless a performer is totally unprepared, try not to award points below 40.
**Use the stack method:** To make things quicker and easier, rank each competitor in relation to those who performed before him. For example, when the second speaker finishes, decide whether she was better or worse than the first speaker. You can use tally marks on a sheet, or just place the ballot of the better competitor on top. Then, when the third competitor finishes, decide where he ranks in relation to the two who preceded him, and so on. This way, when the last competitor finishes, you will have your ranks done, and won't have to try to recall all six performers at once.

**Cross-entry and late competitors:** On Saturday, competitors may be entered in more than one event during a flight. Some may write “cross-entered” or “x-entered” on the board. This means you should wait for them to complete their other event, at which point they will return and perform for you. Generally, you should not leave the room before all competitors are finished. If a competitor is unaccounted-for more than 1 hour and 15 minutes after the round starts, you may need to go quickly to the ballot table to check on the delay.

**Handing in ballots:** When you hand in ballots, double check to be sure each one has (1) a rank (with no ties); (2) speaker points; (3) the competitor’s name and code; (4) a brief explanation of your reason for decision along with helpful comments; and (5) your signature. Please wait at the ballot table for the officials to check your ballots. If you leave something off, it’s better to have it caught then, rather than having officials have to track you down.