

Appendix D: Judge Training

The following is a general guide for judge training. Some of the rules and conventions may differ between various states, regions and the NFL itself. Judges should always be mindful of the particular contest they're adjudicating, and what unique policies/procedures apply. Even more dubious is how judges' standards for excellence tend to be highly personal, based on background and taste. The best judges are aware of their own biases, and consciously keep these in check to maintain objectivity.

The Judge's Role

A speech or debate judge not only provides sound, educational feedback for students' presentations, but s/he serves as supervisor of every round, ensuring that it proceeds in a smooth manner, with equal respect given to all contestants. Judges should not apologize for "lack of expertise" – the point of communication in forensic activities is for students to be able to share a message with any audience. Judges also set a positive tone as adults by dressing professionally (i.e., business casual), and putting students at ease with their body language.

- ❖ At many contests, students are aware they may not enter rooms unless a judge is present, and that if they move furniture, they must return it.
- ❖ Students should move from round to round quietly, as other rounds will still be in session. Judges should remind students of this when the round concludes.
- ❖ Judges must maintain objectivity and should not say anything to any student other than an overall greeting or observation; do not give special, individual praise or criticism, or ask what school a student attends.
- ❖ Students and judges are often given codes to mask school affiliation. Judges should, however, write their own school affiliation on the ballot and/or evaluation sheet, so if a coach has questions after the tournament, they may contact you via the coach who hired you.

Supplies

- ❖ A few good pens (please write evaluative feedback in black or blue, please; red is handy for personal notes when *flowing* a debate)
- ❖ Paper – for flowing debates, taking overall notes on a round of speech, etc.
- ❖ A *digital* stopwatch, timer or other timing device for keeping track of time



Tournament Timeline: Keeping the Pace

A coach should instruct the judges s/he hired to arrive early to a tournament (before the end of the registration period). Coaches are responsible for distributing the judging assignments given to their school, and if ballots/critique sheets can be completed with personal information ahead of time, it gives the judge time to prepare for the day ahead. Judges may or may not be assigned to each preliminary round (depending on how many total judges are present). Following are some general tips for judges:

- ❖ Take time to read and follow the specific and unique instructions of each tournament (which saves a great deal of time in the grand scheme of the tournament and helps prevent errors).
- ❖ Make sure to reacquaint yourself with the rules for a given event before each round.
- ❖ **Please be punctual** and start rounds on time so that each round can take place expeditiously for the good of all participants. Please silence your cell phone, and *don't eat in front of students – it's rude!*
- ❖ Make sure contestants assigned to your room on the schematic are there. **For speech, follow the speaking order**, unless a tournament allows cross-entries, and/or a student is late to the round. Allow such contestants to catch their breath, wait through another presentation, and *then* present.
- ❖ Write legibly on critiques/ballots, so students can actually read and benefit from your suggestions!
- ❖ Be objective. Don't let your own preconceptions predetermine your impressions.

- ❖ Be efficient. Don't spend too much time on each ballot, especially between students' presentations. Lulls make students nervous, and hold up meets. Start writing evaluation sheets/ballots during presentations
- ❖ After *each round*, return ballots/critiques to the nearest tabulation collection person/table.
- ❖ Remain at the tournament until you're dismissed (unless special arrangements have been made). Don't smoke on school premises, because this is against most state laws, and sets a terrible example for kids.
- ❖ A judge must NOT confer with other judges regarding their decisions/evaluations in competition. Panel judges are not to confer. All communication regarding results must be exclusively with tabulation staff.
- ❖ Make positive suggestions on how the speaker can improve. Do not simply write "good" or "weak." Instead explain how or why a student is doing well or poorly. You should justify the score you give a student by the comments you write.
- ❖ Judges almost never disqualify contestants. This is up to tournament officials. If judges suspect a rules infraction, rank/rate the student as he/she performed in the round. Then, bring all information to the tournament staff.

Pearls of Wisdom for Specific Events/Situations

- ❖ In Debate, judges award one team the win, and the other team a loss. They may also assign speaker points to each team, or individual debater. Finally, they may rank the debaters from best to last.
- ❖ In Speech, judges rank students against their peers, and sometimes *rate* students with speaker point values. For ranking, 1 is the best in round, 2 is second best, etc., as far down as the number of speakers (in a section of eight speakers, your ranks should look like this: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8). Many judges keep a running order of placement by making marks on the master ballot, or arranging the physical order of the critique sheets. Contestants should never be able to see or figure out your system for ranking (even if they're sitting right next to you in a cramped room). Judges should always give honest, positive, constructive – but **tactful** – criticism with *suggestions for improvement*. Remember the ABCs of judging: be Accurate, Brief, and Clear!
- ❖ Know the rules regarding "grace periods" and how to modify your ranking if a student extends beyond the allowed timeframe.
- ❖ Students may request time signals, particularly in Extemp. Speaking. Please be sure to communicate a mutually agreed upon system with speakers prior to their presentations.
- ❖ Some states/events allow a limited amount of vocal singing and visual aids. Always know the rules!
- ❖ In Congress, judges will hear several short speeches in immediate succession. Congress contests are tabulated in a myriad of ways, but judges will do one or several of these evaluative measures:
 - *Rate* each speaker and presiding officer on a point scale (a general rubric for qualities to look for can be found in the "Coach Resources" section of the NFL website).
 - *Rank up to a certain number of, or all* participants in a round/session. Either arranging individual critiques as suggested for speech ranking, or tracking each speech of the session will allow a judge to make a summative evaluation of the session in this case.
 - *Nominate* one or a few contestants to advance (which may go to a vote by the students).

Some states assign two judges to a session for the express purpose of allowing them to alternately evaluate students. This method is problematic insofar as it creates inconsistency among evaluating the same group of students within the same timeframe of debate, therefore forsaking competitive equity.

Each school’s coach is the arbiter of excellence for his/her own judging corps, and should make sure judges are adequately trained and prepared to provide this vital educational service to young people. Before a new judge actually adjudicates a tournament, have him/her “shadow” an experienced judge, who can debrief his/her process. At an early tournament, ask the Tab room if they can provide a copy of a new judge’s critiques/ballots, so you can review the quality of their evaluations.

Descriptive Word Bank for Judges

| QUALITY | PRESENTATION | “OOMPH” | “NEEDS” |
|----------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
| amazing | articulate | animation | absent of |
| breathtaking | believable | energy | could use |
| beautiful | characterization | enthusiasm | deficient in |
| brilliant | coherent | gusto | incomplete |
| decent | cohesive | life | lacks |
| delightful | credible | liveliness | missing |
| dynamic | dramatic | passion | requires |
| enjoyable | emotional | pizzazz | short on... |
| excellent | enthusiastic | sparkle | potential |
| extraordinary | expression | spirit | |
| fabulous | honesty | vivaciousness | THE PIECE |
| fine | genuine | vigor | assortment |
| first-class | innovative | | combination |
| first-rate | understated | “POOR” | compilation |
| grand | whimsical | artificial | execution |
| great | rhetorical | awkward | plethora |
| impressive | | broad | unified |
| incredible | TALENT | faulty | unsuitable |
| lovely | accomplished | flawed | wealth |
| marvelous | capable | hinder | |
| perfect | clever | incoherent | DEBATE |
| pleasant | convincing | incorrect | fallacious |
| remarkable | creative | mellow | logically linked |
| satisfactory | effortless | monotonous | illogical |
| spectacular | expert | poor | credibility |
| splendid | proficient | repetitive | warrant |
| stunning | natural | scarce | clash |
| superb | skilled | weak | impact |
| terrific | talented | wrong | refute |
| wonderful | well developed | | rebut |
| | mastered | | flow |