



NYPDL Judging Guide

Thank you so much for judging at a New York Parliamentary Debate League (NYPDL) tournament! In this guide, you will find information about the basics of judging in the NYPDL as well as some useful links, such as our Rules: Frequently Asked Questions document and our Code of Conduct.

Parliamentary Debate is intended to be a friendly competition. We expect debaters and judges to be cordial and have good sportsmanship, such as congratulating the opposing team and thanking the judge at the end of a round. If the judge or a debater feels as if an opposing debater is attacking their identity or character, they should contact an equity officer at a tournament. More information about equity can be found in the [NYPDL Code of Conduct](#).

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Before the Round:

Accessing MIT Tab

For online tournaments, judges will receive a judge code through which they log into MIT Tab.

All links and further guidance will be provided before or during a tournament.

Topics

There are three topics for each round, generally based on a certain theme. One team will be the Government (Gov) side, or in favor of the resolution, and the other will be the Opposition (Opp) side, or against the resolution.

There are several types of topics, including:

- THW: This House Would
- THR: This House Regrets
- THS: This House Supports
- THP: This House Prefers
- THBT: This House Believes That

Prep Time

Prep time lasts 15 minutes and is the period during which debaters prepare and discuss their cases. **Debaters cannot consult the internet or discuss the round with anyone other than their teammate during prep time. If debaters violate this rule, the judge should consult an equity officer or tournament director.**

During The Round

How to Flow

It is critical that judges keep track of all of the arguments presented during a round. The League strongly recommends that judges learn how to “flow,” a popular method of organizing the content of a debate round. Please find a quick tutorial on flowing [here](#).

Speeches

Gov first speaker (also known as the Prime Minister), 7 minutes

Opp first speaker (Leader of Opposition), 8 minutes

Gov second speaker (Member of Government), 8 minutes

Opp second speaker (Member of Opposition), 8 minutes

Opp first speaker (Leader of Opposition), 4 minutes

Gov first speaker (Prime Minister), 5 minutes

Each speech has an additional 30 second grace period at the end so that debaters can conclude their thoughts. Debaters can choose to end their speech at any time.

Points

POI: Debaters may raise a point of information (POI) to question an opponent’s arguments. In order to ask a POI, a debater can send a chat or say “POI,” at which point the speaker can choose to accept or decline the POI. POIs can only be asked during the first four speeches, and cannot be asked during the first or last minute of a speech, because that is considered “protected time.”

POC: Debaters may raise points of clarification (POCs) when they cannot understand what their opponent has said or are in search of a clarification regarding their opponents' definitions. POCs should be very rare. In order to call a POC, a debater can send a chat or say "POC", in which case time stops and the debater can say their question. An example of a POC may be when the speaker has a poor internet connection and cuts out.

POO: Debaters can call points of order (POOs) when they believe that the rules of debate have been broken in some way. This can include equity violations, exceeding the time of one's speech past the grace period, or the introduction of a new claim, warrant, or impact in either of the final speeches. In order to call one, a debater can type or say "POO." The speech time stops when a POO is called. In any of these circumstances, the debater who calls the point of order has a chance to explain what they believe the issue is and their opponents have the ability to briefly respond. Judges generally have the ability to settle points of order in manners of their choosing, including saying that they have "taken it into consideration" and reaching a decision after the round. If the judge agrees with a POO call, they should disregard the new arguments called into question.

Definitions

Definitions exist to “frame,” or provide context to, a round. In a typical motion, the Government defines “This House” as well as some other significant words or phrases in the resolution. “This House” can be anything, but is usually an individual (such as “a reasonable individual”), group (such as a community), or institution (such as The United Nations). For example, in the resolution “THW randomly assign students to schools,” a reasonable definition for the House could be the United States Federal Government (USFG) or the New York State Department of Education. In the case of this resolution, it also makes sense for the government side to briefly explain their mechanism for randomly assigning students to schools. Although a brief plan helps avoid confusions, the point of the debate is **not** to argue about the Government's implementation plan. If, **and only if**, the Government did **not** set definitions or define any specific terms, the Opposition can set definitions at the beginning of their speech.

The Government may intentionally or accidentally make definitions that can be construed as unfair or “abusive.” **If the Opposition believes that the Government's definitions are abusive, they must mention it at the beginning of their first speech. If, at the end of the round, the judge agrees with the Opposition’s abusive call, the Opposition automatically wins the round.** There are five main types of abusive definitions, which can be found in our [Rules: Frequently Asked Questions document](#).

Counterplans

Debaters on the opposition might argue a **counterplan** to the resolution. A counterplan is an alternative to the proposed motion. For example, if the resolution is THW abolish private schools, the opposition could argue that we should instead create a very high minimum wage for public school teachers. **Counterplans can also be abusive, if they are not mutually exclusive to what the Government is proposing.** For example, consider the motion THW raise the minimum wage to 15 dollars an hour. It would be abusive for the opposition to argue that we should instead raise the minimum wage to 14 dollars an hour, because the proposal is too similar to the Government's.

Framework

Debaters use a framework, or a weighing mechanism, to declare what they must prove to win the round, and to provide the judge with an easier way of adjudicating the round. The most common framework is **Utilitarianism**, which is the “most good for the most people.” Under this framework, a team wins the round if they can show that their side does the most good for the most people.

How do you define “most good?” It is complicated, but important impacts to consider can be lives saved, lives improved, money saved, and happiness in both the short and long term, among others. If the Opposition chooses to provide a different framework, then both sides must argue for why their framework is better, but also how they win under both frameworks.

Weighing

No new logic is allowed in the final two speeches of the round. While introducing additional examples is allowed, the final speeches should primarily consist of final rebuttals and weighing. In these speeches, debaters are allowed to respond to points that have been introduced in the last speaking block by their opponents. Weighing is the process of comparing the arguments and impacts on both sides of the debate and explaining why one side wins under the framework(s) given, and therefore deserves to win the round.

There are two common ways for debaters to weigh. The first is to compare the “worlds” of each side and ultimately argue why their world is better, safer, more prosperous, more happy, or on a variety of other factors. The second is to summarize the topics of the round that had the most back-and-forth argumentation into a few “clashes” — such as freedom, safety, or quality of life — and then explaining how they won the clashes.

After the Round

Adjudicating the Round

After the conclusion of the round, the judge should look at their flow and determine which arguments they believe still stand or have not been sufficiently rebutted. The judge should consider the impacts that were most convincing and well-argued, weigh them, and determine which side wins under the framework. If the two sides of the debate did not agree on a framework, the judge needs to decide which framework the debate should be judged under.

In the final two speeches, debaters will attempt to communicate why the impacts in their contentions are more important than the impacts introduced by their opponents. In the case that debaters fail to weigh in their final speeches, or if the judge does not “buy,” or agree with, any of the reasons provided by either side, they are still encouraged to determine which arguments are more important under the framework and award the win to that side. It is important to note that **the government has the burden of proof in debates**, meaning that they need to prove that the benefits of their plan are greater than the costs.

Speaker Scores

Speaker points are a measure of a debater’s rhetoric and their contributions to a round. Speaker scores range from 20 to 30 in half-point increments, and the vast majority fall in the 23-28 range.

In the unusual case that a judge believes a speaker deserves above a 28 or below a 23, they must give justification. For instance, a judge may give a rude debater a 22 or the best debater

they have ever seen a 29. **Normally, the best debaters tend to average between 26.5 and 27.5, and an average debater averages around 25.** Because speaker points are based on rhetoric and a debater's contribution to a round, low-point wins – where the winning team has lower speaker point totals than the losing team – are discouraged and require justification from the judge.

Reasons for Decision (RFD)

Following the conclusion of the round, the judge should take around five minutes to decide who wins the round. When the judge has reached a decision, they need to announce the winner and the reasons for decision (RFD) to the debaters. The judge has the ability to organize the RFD in any format of their choosing, but they must articulate their reasoning for choosing the winning team. Judges are also encouraged to point out specific arguments or speeches that swayed their decision and provide constructive feedback as to how rhetoric, arguments, or impacts could have been improved.

Judge Panels

Many elimination rounds will have a panel of three or more judges. In this case, one judge will be appointed as the “head judge.” This judge will often announce start and end times for speeches, accept POOs, and resolve other logistical issues in the round. **Judges should adjudicate the round individually.** The panel will then confer and share their decisions with one another. The panel does not need to come to a unanimous decision. After the judges have discussed, the panel will present their decisions to the debaters, and the team with the most judges voting for their side wins.