

General Judging Guidelines

How do I get a ballot?

Judges need to report to the judges' room at least 20 minutes prior to each scheduled round, unless informed otherwise by the judge coordinator. It is there where ballots are assigned. Ballots are assigned using several factors, including, but not limited to, events previously judged during the tournament; contestants in the event; schools of other judges (when multiple judges in a round). Please remain in the judges' room when at all possible. Bring with you something to do if you are not assigned to judge a round.

Each team is obligated to provide a certain number of judges based on its number of entries. It is imperative that each team has the appropriate number of judges throughout the entire tournament. If you have volunteered to be a judge for your school, they are relying on you to meet their judging commitment for the tournament.

What do I do when I get a ballot?

Unless otherwise told, proceed to your assigned room IMMEDIATELY. It is important that the rounds start on time. Some students may not be present at the beginning of the round – start the round anyway. Students may be entered in more than one event and may arrive later to the round you are judging, after they've finished their first event. When they arrive, let them speak as closely to their place in the speaking order as possible. On the flip side, you may have a student entered in more than one event who asks to speak earlier than their speaking order and move on to their next event – allow this to happen, but make sure to confirm each speaker's number/code so scores are recorded correctly. Please wait at least 15 minutes after the last speaker for those who haven't yet arrived. After that time, return to the judges' room and let the judge coordinator know you have a "no show" – they will confirm the status of that speaker for you. If they are a no-show, simply mark "no show" on the ballot and rank the remaining speakers.

What do I do during the round?

Determine which of the speakers are present – you may call out the codes, or you may have the speakers write their codes (and piece titles, if you wish) on the board. Call the first speaker to the front. Listen to each speech. Take notes as the speakers are speaking. They are used to people taking notes during their presentations and will not consider you rude.

Can I talk to the competitors?

Please do not talk with the competitors, unless it is to answer a specific question about the round; for example, if they ask what their time was after they complete their speech or if they ask how you will be

giving time signals (if applicable). Students should not provide information about themselves such as what school they are from. Please do not ask them.

What happens when the round is over?

Excuse the speakers and observers. Do not provide verbal critiques of ANY kind to the speakers.

After you have heard each of the speakers, rank them. In preliminary rounds, rank the speakers 1, 2, 3, then tie the remaining speakers with 4. THERE CAN BE NO TIES for 1-3. In semifinals and finals rounds, rank 1 through 7 (or as many places as there are speakers). There are no ties in semifinals and finals. A ranking of “1” is the best, “2” second best, etc.

You will also provide a “rating” – these are listed on the individual (small) ballots as Superior, Excellent, Good, Fair, Needs Improvement. Put the first letter of the applicable rating in the column marked “Rate”.

It is very important to return to the judges’ room immediately after the end of the round and return your ballot. A missing ballot can bring a tournament to a halt. If you would like to provide extensive comments to the speakers on their individual ballots, please do so, but return the main ballot (8.5x11) as quickly as possible to keep the tournament moving.

THE BALLOTS

You will be provided with one 8.5 x 11 sheet and several ¼ page sheets. The large sheet is your communication with the tournament officials (“Master ballot”). The small sheets are your communication with the speakers (“Individual ballot”).

Master Ballot:

Before turning in a ballot, QUICKLY double-check the following:

1. Did you sign the ballot?
2. Did you remember to give the best speaker a rank of “1” and the not-so-best speaker a rank of “4” (or lower in semifinal and final rounds).
3. Did you make sure to give only one “1”, one “2”, one “3” and the remainder “4”s? (in semifinal/final rounds, only one of each ranking out to 7)
4. Did you indicate the speakers’ topics?
5. Are you sure you have the right code number with the right speech, and the right rank/rate for the right speaker?
6. Did you remember to mark the speaker ratings? (Superior, Excellent, Good, Fair, Needs Improvement. The first letter of the word is sufficient on the master ballot)

Individual Ballot:

- Write the student's speaker code in the appropriate box.
- Circle the number that corresponds with the round you are judging (can be found on the master ballot)
- Write in the section number (can be found on the master ballot)
- Following the round, circle the ranking and rating for the speaker.
- Include as many detailed comments as possible on the back of the ballot.

Comments/Critiques:

Since forensics is an educational activity, it is important that the students understand what they are doing well, and what they need to do to improve. Please provide detailed constructive comments for each speaker. The students truly want your feedback, particularly if you ranked them 4 (or lower in semi/final rounds). A ballot that says "great speech, loved it. You did a great job," especially with a rank of "4", does little to help the student improve and can lead to a great deal of frustration for a student wishing to continue competing.

Sample "Helpful Comments"

- I had a hard time differentiating between your father character and your son character
- The way you portrayed the narrator was hilarious, but be careful of the characters blending together when you get excited
- You give away too much in your introduction. Save a little suspense for later
- I was confused in the part where you explained....
- Try adding some research to support.....
- You are going to be great at this. Your speech would have been better if you had...

Sample "Not So Helpful Comments"

- Good job. Perfect.
- I was confused.
- You were the best speaker in the round, but I marked you last because your topic deals with things that are against my personal beliefs.
- Great. Good topic. Good information. Nice voice. Well-written. (especially frustrating when paired with a rank of "4" or lower)
- (BLANK BALLOT)

What do I do if I believe a student has violated a rule?

Please mark on your ballot, in the margin next to the speaker's rank/rate/time, the letter of the violation you believe occurred. When you turn in the ballot, please let the judge coordinator know of the violation. DO NOT PENALIZE SPEAKERS IN YOUR RANKINGS FOR RULES VIOLATIONS, including time violations. Penalties will be assessed by the tournament officials.

Can't I go home? There are plenty of judges in the judges' room - you'll be fine without me.

First, please be assured – we understand these tournaments take a long time and that sitting in a room for 2 hours doing nothing can be EXTREMELY frustrating. We also greatly appreciate you taking the time to support high school speech and don't wish to take advantage of your generosity. That said, there may

be plenty of people sitting in the judges' room, but we always need the largest pool of judges possible for each round. It is entirely possible that even if there are 20 judges sitting in a room, and we have only one ballot to go out, we still could not have enough judges, if none of those 20 judges meet the criteria necessary to judge that event. For example, with very few exceptions, judges cannot judge students from the school they represent. Also, once a judge has judged an event, they cannot judge that event again at that tournament. As the day goes on, each judge becomes more limited as to what they are eligible to judge. Think of assigning judges as a big puzzle and each judge as a puzzle piece. Each round, the puzzle changes and the pieces needed are different. If you aren't used one or even two rounds, you may be the one person who completes the "puzzle" in the next round or two and be the reason the tournament stays on track!

If this is your first time judging, remember next time, bring something to do because there may be long stretches of inactivity.