

# Connecticut Debate Association Parliamentary Debate Style Guide<sup>1</sup>

Our format generally follows the American Parliamentary Debate Association (APDA) and the New York Parliamentary Debate League (NYPDL).<sup>2</sup> CDA differs primarily in having a single motion, a motion packet and a single, one-hour preparation period, rather than a separate motion for each round.

This is a “guide” not a rule book. It should be interpreted and applied accordingly. It should not be read to limit the range of arguments or speaking styles. Given limited space, it cannot cover every contingency or serve as a complete manual. Please contact the CDA if you have any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> This version as of June, 2022. The Guide was originally based on the Osterweis Style Guide, developed for the Rollin G. Osterweis Debate Tournament held each April by the Yale Debate Association ( [www.yaledebate.org](http://www.yaledebate.org) ). It has evolved significantly for use at the Yale, Vassar and Columbia tournaments and benefited from comments from debaters from those schools.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Resources* section for links to their web sites.

## Basic Format

### Tournament Schedule

CDA tournaments are held on one Saturday each month and occupy most of the day.

Time	Activity	Comment
8-9AM	Arrival and registration	Register, buy lunch tickets, gather in the cafeteria
9-10AM	Case Preparation	Packet distributed; teams prepare for debate
10-11:15AM	Round 1	Classrooms or online
11:15AM-12:30PM	Round 2	Classrooms or online
12:30-1:15PM	Lunch	Cafeteria
1:15-2:30PM	Round 3	Classrooms or online
2:30-3:45PM	Round 4	Classrooms or online
4-5PM	Final Round	Auditorium
5-5:30PM	Awards	Trophies, ballots and departure

### The Motion and Packet

The motion is a short statement that serves as the topic of debate. The motions will concern issues that should be familiar to the average high school student. Some sample motions:

*This house believes that assisted suicide should be legal in the United States.*

*This house would allow foreign-born citizens to be President of the United States.*

*This house would use force to spread democracy internationally.*

Several common abbreviations may be used at the start of the motion:

- TH: This House
- THBT: This House believes that
- THW: This House would
- THR: This House regrets
- THP: This House prefers
- THS: This House supports

The motion will be accompanied by an information packet consisting of recent news articles providing background information explaining the issues involved.

### Case Preparation

At a CDA tournament, the debaters receive the motion packet at 9AM and have one hour to read the packet and prepare their cases. Each team will debate 4 times—twice on the Government supporting the motion and twice in Opposition to the motion—and must be ready for either. Sides are assigned each round by the Tab Director.

The Government has the right to set the terms of the debate and should provide a brief interpretation of the motion and/or a definition of key terms and possibly a weighing mechanism or framework. Government may interpret the motion more narrowly than given (e.g., “Court penalties should be determined by Judges, not juries” may be applied only to civil cases, rather than criminal cases) provided this allows a fair and reasonable debate. The Government interpretation may be novel but should respect common usage and must leave the Opposition sufficient grounds to argue against it. The

Government interpretation should not rely on specific facts or information that the Opposition or the Judge are not likely to know.

The Opposition should prepare a case to contest what they expect the Government to present. However, Opposition will likely have to adapt their case to the specifics of the Government's interpretation and the Government's actual case. If the Government interpretation is reasonable but unexpected, the Opposition may have to revise their case entirely.

Opposition may contest the Government interpretation if it is not consistent with the wording of the motion or if it does not allow any grounds for the Opposition to argue against it. If the Opposition intends to challenge the Government's interpretation, it should do so at the start of the Leader of the Opposition constructive speech.

### Research Material

Debaters may not use any research materials—the internet, electronic media, printed material, prepared briefs, etc.—other than the motion packet and what they know about the topic. CDA allows for “team prep” in that all debaters from a school may work together during the one-hour preparation period. Debaters may not receive help from outside parties during case preparation. Debaters may not receive help from anyone other than their partner during the debate.

Parliamentary debate is intended to be extemporaneous rather than research driven. Debaters must rely on their own knowledge of the topic. Statistics, expert quotes, and remote facts are discouraged because they cannot be readily verified and may be incomplete if presented briefly and without their full context. However, debaters are encouraged to use information that one would expect to be familiar to a well-read person, or that they explain in detail. The resolution packet is intended to supplement the debaters' knowledge, but should not be taken as “truth”, only as additional facts and opinions on the issue under discussion.

Note that this prohibition does not prevent debaters from using a laptop or tablet to write their case or take notes during the round. It also does not prohibit debaters from communicating with their partner electronically if debates are held online and debaters are not in the same room.

### Use of Evidence

The ban on research materials is not a ban on the use of evidence or facts during the debate. The evidentiary standard is “what a well-read person should know” or “The New York Times standard,” that is, what someone who regularly reads a national newspaper should know. (Note, simply because a fact or opinion appears in a national news source does not make it authoritative.)

Debaters may introduce more obscure facts provided they explain them thoroughly, *including any aspects that may weaken their usefulness and benefit their opponents*. As this is difficult to enforce, use of obscure information is discouraged.

As an example, consider a debate about adopting a single-payer health care system. Quoting an expert on the future costs of such a system is not helpful, because that expert's opinion is likely based on extensive study. Unless the full details of that study are included in the round—and there is limited speech time—the other side has no way to contest the underlying supporting assumptions, methodology, and data and the Judge has no way to evaluate them. However, both sides may reasonably discuss how a single-payer system might impact administrative costs, patient coverage, care

providers, health insurers, competitiveness, and innovation in ways that are understandable, persuasive and which could be contested by their opponents and evaluated by the Judge.

In the absence of detailed research debaters may also present “facts” that their opponents will claim are false, or that the Judge does not believe are true. We all innocently rely on what we think we know every day. A Judge may use their discretion in these cases whether and how to consider these facts in awarding the ballot.

Our suggestion is that debates are won by arguments that are clearly explained, illustrated, and weighed in terms of importance against those presented by the other side. In our experience, debates rarely come down to the truth or falsehood of specific data presented by either side, and certainly should not depend on the word of some “expert”. Our preference is that decisions do not come down to a quotation or obscure fact not well-examined.

### The Positions and Speeches

On each team, one debater is the lead speaker and the other is the member. The leader delivers the opening and closing speeches for their team. The member presents the middle speech. For the Government, the leader is known as the Prime Minister (PM) and the member is called the Member of Government (MG). On the Opposition team, the debaters are the Leader of Opposition (LO) and the Member of Opposition (MO).

The six speeches proceed as follows:

Prime Minister Constructive (PMC)	7 minutes	Provides an interpretation of the resolution and lays out the Government’s case
Leader of Opposition Constructive (LOC)	8 minutes	Lays out the Opposition case and replies to the Government case.
Member of Government Constructive (MGC)	8 minutes	Responds to previous arguments, and may introduce new points while doing so
Member of Opposition Constructive (MOC)	8 minutes	
Leader of Opposition Rebuttal (LOR)	4 minutes	Summarizes the debate from the Opposition perspective, while responding to previous arguments.
Prime Minister Rebuttal (PMR)	5 minutes	Summarizes the debate from the Government perspective, while responding to previous arguments.

Each speaker has a 30 second grace period at the end of their allotted time to finish their speech, after which they are out of order. This is not intended as an extra 30 seconds of speaking time beyond the limits given above, but to let speaker to finish a sentence or thought rather than having to stop mid-word.

There is no preparation time or pause between speeches other than a reasonable allowance for the current speaker to be seated and the next speaker to rise.

In the constructive speeches, each team presents its case and responds to their opponent’s case. New arguments may be introduced into the debate, either as independent points or responses to a previous argument.

In the rebuttal speeches, each side should summarize the debate, emphasizing the team's strongest points and explaining why they should win the debate. *New arguments cannot be raised in the rebuttals unless it is the PM's first opportunity to respond to a new point made in the MOC.* New examples to illustrate previous arguments and connecting and contrasting points already made are allowed and encouraged.

## Questions

There is no cross-examination. The non-speaking team may attempt to interrupt the speaker with three types of questions:

**Point of Clarification (POC):** At the beginning of the PMC right after the speaker has presented the Government interpretation of the motion, the Prime Minister may pause briefly and ask the Opposition if the interpretation is clear and acceptable, essentially asking if the Opposition wishes to raise a POC. Alternately, the Opposition may rise and ask for clarification. The Prime Minister must accept these questions.

*The clock stops during a POC* while the opposing team briefly asks the speaker for further details about their case and the Prime Minister answers them.

The intent of POC questions should be clarify the terms of the debate. The Opposition may not introduce arguments or contest the Government interpretation using a POC. The Prime Minister may explain the details of their interpretation of the motion but may not make arguments in favor of the Government's position.

If the Opposition believes the Government interpretation is not consistent with the motion or leaves no room for an opposing case (a "tight case") or relies on specific knowledge unavailable to the Opposition, they should make these arguments at the beginning of the LOC, not during the POC.

Time starts again when the POC has been answered.

**Point of Information (POI):** During the constructive speeches, a member of the opposing team may attempt to interrupt the speaker to ask a question. Traditionally, the questioner stands with one hand on head (to keep their wig in place) and the other arm outstretched. Standing or simply raising a hand (or, on video, saying "POI" or something similar, loud enough to be heard but not so as to interrupt the speaker) is sufficient.

The speaker may accept the interruption, wave it off, take it after finishing a point, or simply ignore it. If accepted, the questioner asks a short question or makes a short statement intended to undermine the argument being made. The speaker responds and then continues with their speech. There is no right to a follow up question, though the opposing team may continue to stand or signal for another POI.

*Time does not stop during a POI.*

POIs are permitted only during the constructive speeches and are not permitted during the first or last minute of a constructive speech ("protected time").

A speaker may refuse or defer a POI, but it is considered poor form not to accept some POIs if offered, and poor form for opponents not to offer any POIs.

**Point of Order:** A Point of Order is raised if a team believes the speaker has violated a rule of debate, for example, exceeding the 30 second grace period at the end of a speech, or presenting a new argument in rebuttal.

The questioner stands, states “Point of Order,” to the Judge, and briefly explains the issue. If the questioner calls out a new argument, the speaker may briefly explain why the argument is not new by explaining where it was raised in a previous speech. The Judge may say “Point well taken” if they agree, “Point not well taken” if they do not agree, or “Point under consideration,” deferring a decision until after the debate has finished. If the Judge declares the point well taken, the speaker should stop presenting it and move on.

*Time stops during a Point of Order* and resumes after the Judge’s decision, when the speaker continues.

### Important Stylistic Differences

Parliamentary debate styles vary. At the high school level in the US the major differences are between “East Coast” (used at the Yale Invitational) and “West Coast”, and between these and World Schools.

Differences between CDA and other East Coast styles:

- CDA has a single motion for the entire tournament, introduced at the start of the day with an information packet, and a one-hour case prep.
- East Coast tournaments introduce motions for each round, sometimes offering two or more motions for the teams to choose from, and a 15 minute case prep period for each round.

Differences East Coast with respect to West Coast Parli:

- A coin toss process is used to determine both motion and side, rather than pre-assigning sides and allowing each team to strike a motion.
- Case prep is 15 minutes rather than 20.
- No internet, research materials, or prepared briefs may be used during case prep; motions are likely to be more broadly based than some at West Coast tournaments, i.e., the “New York Times” standards applies to the one who sets the motions as well as to the arguments presented.
- No exchange of written material during the round, i.e. case outlines may not be given to the Judge or the opposing team.
- Non-speaking debater may not aid their partner during the partner’s speech, for example, by providing written notes or verbal comments.

Differences in World Schools format:

- World Schools tournaments may have pre-announced, “prepared” motions.
- For extemp motions, World Schools usually provides 1 hour case prep.
- World Schools has 3 debaters on each team.
- World Schools has 3 constructive speeches per team..
- World Schools expects the second constructive teacher on each team will introduce a new contention.

Differences compared to British Parliamentary:

- In British Parli 4 teams of two debaters each compete in a round.
- Each speaker has a single constructive speech.

## Judging

The Judge (formally, the Speaker of the House) has three basic duties: see that the debate moves along expeditiously, rule on certain issues that arise during the debate, and decide the round by returning a completed ballot.

Judging debate is inherently subjective. Judges are asked to base their decision primarily on the arguments presented by each side during the debate, and not on the Judge's own knowledge or preferences, or simply on either side's oratorical ability.

## Starting the Round

Once both teams have arrived, the Judge should confirm they match the teams specified on the ballot. The round should start as soon as possible.

## The Ballot

The ballot—paper or electronic—will not necessarily reflect the speaking order. Before the teams begin speaking the Judge should verify which team is on side Government and which on side Opposition, and also verify which debater on each team is speaking first and second. *This information should be entered on the ballot before the debaters begin speaking.*

Electronic ballots generally have a "START" button that signals the round has started. Judges are asked to so indicate once the Judge and all debaters are present.

## Script

The Judge may follow a script, patterned after English Parliamentary practice, though this is not required.

- **To begin the round:** "I call this House to order and call upon the honorable Prime Minister to deliver the first speech of the round not to exceed seven minutes."
- **Before LOC:** "I thank the honorable Prime Minister and call upon the Leader of the Opposition to deliver a speech not to exceed eight minutes."
- **Before MGC:** "I thank the honorable Leader of the Opposition and call upon the Member of Government to deliver a speech not to exceed eight minutes."
- **Before MOC:** "I thank the honorable Member of Government and call upon the Member of Opposition to close out the constructive portion of the round in a speech not to exceed eight minutes."
- **Before LOR:** "I thank the honorable Member of Opposition and call upon the Leader of Opposition to deliver the first rebuttal speech of the round not to exceed four minutes, reminding him/her that while new examples are welcome, new arguments are not."
- **Before PMR:** "I thank the honorable Member of Opposition and call upon the Prime Minister to deliver the final speech of the round not to exceed five minutes, reminding him/her that while new examples are welcome, new arguments are not."

There is no prep time between speeches. Speakers should rise in turn with only a reasonable delay to collect their papers and move to the podium.

## Keeping Time

Debaters will usually time themselves and their opponents, raising a Point of Order if a speaker exceeds the grace period. The Judge should also keep time to monitor the round and note protected time—the first and last minute of each constructive speech—when POIs are not permitted.

Time stops during a Point of Clarification (POC) or a Point of Order, but not during a Point of Information (POI). See the discussion above for more information.

### After the Round

After the final speech, the Judge should decide the round and record it on the ballot. The ballot should always include a clear reason for decision (RFD), and a justification for any points awarded below 23 or above 28. If a low point win is intended, this should also be clearly explained.

**When using electronic ballots:** Judges should submit the decision as soon as possible, *before* giving any oral feedback to the debaters or writing their RFD. Once the ballot is submitted the judge may give brief—no more than 5 minutes—oral feedback to the debaters. Judges may enter, add to or edit comments on the ballot until the tournament close, usually 8PM.

**When using paper ballots:** Judges should enter their decision—win/loss, speaker ranks and scores—first. Once this is done they may give brief—no more than 5 minutes—oral comments to the debaters. Judges should then write their RFD or other comments, and return the ballot to Tab promptly. If a Judge needs extra time to write comments, they should first return the ballot to Tab so the decision can be entered. Tab can then return the ballot to the Judge for additional written comments.

### Making the Decision

Experienced Judges will have their own approach. If you are unsure, we suggest the following.

First decide which side won. Make your decision based on which team carried the more important issues in the round. The teams should tell you which issues they think are most important during rebuttals, why they believe that they won those issues, and why these issues more important than issues they may have lost. If they fail to do so explicitly, then you must use your discretion. In a tie—you believe the teams argued to a standstill—the decision should go to the Opposition.

Second, rank the speakers from best to worst, 1 to 4. A speaker's rank should consider that speaker's contributions to the round. Debaters must be ranked 1, 2, 3 and 4, with no ties.

Third, assign each debater points from 23 (generally weak debater), 25 (average debater, average round) to 28 (excellent debater), with half points permitted. Debaters may tie in speaker points. Points above 28 or below 23 should be justified on the ballot and may be questioned by the tab director. They should be rare. (*Note: 23 is the lowest score that should normally be assigned. A score below 23 indicates a behavioral problem that should be reported to Tab.*)

If you are giving a low-point win, i.e. the winning team has fewer total speaker points than the losing team, you should check the indicator on the ballot and include a brief explanation of your reason. Low-point wins are exceptions and should be rare.

The ballot should always have a clear, written reason for the decision. Additional feedback may be provided at the Judge's discretion.

Again, we emphasize the need for Judges to balance their desire to provide detailed feedback with the need to keep the tournament running on time.

### Speed, Spread, "Technical" Debate, etc.

Debaters may speak at any pace they like and use any and as many arguments that they believe are relevant and which they can present in the time allowed. However, parliamentary debate is persuasion using the spoken word. We ask debaters and Judges to consider the following.



It is the role of the debater to persuade the Judge, not the obligation of the Judge to be persuaded. We expect the Judge to make an honest effort to hear, understand, note, and appreciate what the debaters have to say, and decide the round fairly from that. However, if the Judge cannot hear, follow or understand what a debater is saying, that is primarily the fault of the debater, not the Judge.

If a debater is speaking too fast for the Judge to follow, the Judge may—but is not obliged to—ask the debater to slow down. If a debater makes an argument that is unclear, the Judge must use their discretion whether to consider that argument’s impact on the debate. If a debater overwhelms the Judge with more information than the Judge can take note of, the Judge may be unable to apply that when making a decision. Judges should not ask debaters to clarify their arguments or to provide supporting material.

Judges differ in skill and experience, as do debaters, and that this will affect the tenor of a round. Our preference is for debates that could be presented to and appreciated by a broad rather than a narrow audience.

### Online Debate

Recent events have moved debate online, and best practices are only now being developed. Some suggestions:

- Test your equipment at least one day before the tournament. Check not only that it works and the sound and video are adequate, but also consider how you look in picture, and whether you are comfortable speaking for 8 minutes or more. Speaking is more difficult than simply breathing; speaking while sitting is more difficult than speaking while standing; giving a speech while sitting can be less effective than speaking while standing. Consider putting your laptop on a box or use a standup desk so you can speak as you would at a regular tournament.
- Re-boot your laptop or tablet the morning of the tournament. The longer the time since a restart, the more likely your computer is to slow down or have other problems. Do not open any applications you do not need for the debate or to communicate with your partner. Unnecessary applications may slow your device.
- When the debate is about to start, the Judge should conduct a brief sound and visual check with all the participants to make sure all can be heard and seen. *It is preferred that all the debaters and the Judge be visible during the round, with video turned off only if the connection will not support it.*
- Debater and the Judge should agree on a procedure for POIs. While a raised hand (or a “raised hand” icon) may be used, speakers tend not to see them. An alternative is for a debater to say “POI” so all can hear, but not loudly enough to drown out the speaker. Other options are possible so long as debaters and Judge all agree.
- Unless you have a headset with a microphone, your laptop microphone will pick up the sound of typing on your keyboard as well as ambient noise in your environment. If you plan to take notes on your laptop and do not have a headset microphone, you will probably have to mute yourself while the other team is speaking.
- If you wish to communicate with your partner while the other team is speaking, you will need a second means of communication.

### Resources

The following websites are useful references for learning more about debate in general and Parliamentary debate in particular:

- New York Parliamentary Debate League (NYPDL) resources page ( <https://www.nyparli.org/resources> ) is probably the best introduction to this form of debate for high school students. They also have a YouTube channel with recordings of past debates.
- National Parliamentary Debate League (NPDL, <https://www.parliamentarydebate.org/> ) has a database of motions used at parli tournaments across the country ( <https://www.parliamentarydebate.org/resolutions> ) as well as a collection of round recordings which may be found through their Resources entry. Some of these recordings show debates that may not conform to CDA practice regarding speaking or argument style.
- American Parliamentary Association (APDA) Novice Mentor Guides ( <https://apda.online/category/nm-guides/> ) are written for college debaters, but provide advanced insight into many issues.

The following links are debate textbooks in PDF format that can be downloaded:

- *On That Point: An Introduction to Parliamentary Debate*, by John Meany and Kate Shuster. Meany and Shuster are with the Claremont School and sponsor the High School Public Debate Program. This text pre-dates that effort and uses a standard 2-person team parli format. ( [https://debate.uvm.edu/dcpdf/MeanyShuster\\_onthatpoint.pdf](https://debate.uvm.edu/dcpdf/MeanyShuster_onthatpoint.pdf) )
- *Art, Argument and Advocacy: Mastering Parliamentary Debate*, by John Meany and Kate Shuster. Similar to the above, but a bit more advanced. ( [https://debate.uvm.edu/dcpdf/MeanyShuster\\_Art-arg-advoc-webready.pdf](https://debate.uvm.edu/dcpdf/MeanyShuster_Art-arg-advoc-webready.pdf) )
- *Debating in the World Schools Style: A Guide*, by Simon Quinn. Quinn was a leading debater from Australia at the turn of the millenia, and this is one of the best debate texts available. ( [https://projects.unitn.it/nsf/DOCUMENTO\\_2\\_Dibattito\\_universitario.pdf](https://projects.unitn.it/nsf/DOCUMENTO_2_Dibattito_universitario.pdf) ) This text uses the World Schools format, which is 3-on-3 debating, but the material on argumentation, case prep, etc., is universal.