

# Congressional Debate

# Guide

NATIONAL  
FORENSIC  
LEAGUE  
SPEECH & DEBATE HONOR SOCIETY



"Where there  
are no laws, or  
individuals  
have their own  
rules and laws,  
there is the  
least of real  
democracy."

- Gen. Henry  
Martyn Robert

*(Robert's Rules of Order)*

Prepared by Adam J. Jacobi  
[congressionaldebate.org](http://congressionaldebate.org)  
Portions ©2013 Adam Jacobi  
& National Forensic League  
[nationalforensicleague.org](http://nationalforensicleague.org)

Congressional Debate is a mock legislative assembly competition where **students draft bills** (proposed laws) and **resolutions** (position statements), which they and their peers later **debate** and **vote** to pass into law. While coaches aren't always required to submit legislation to meets, it gives their students the right to an **authorship** speech, introducing the bill or resolution to the chamber. In advance of the meet, a **docket** of submitted titles or full legislative text are distributed to participating schools, so students may research and prepare themselves for the debate. Many meets allow students to caucus in committee(s) to determine the **agenda**, wherein they strive to select topics that will yield even and engaging debate, as well as balancing authorship privileges among the schools participating in the chamber.

The National Forensic League is committed to educational development of the individual through the vehicle of Congressional Debate, which promotes leadership and communication skills through rigorous interaction and debate on issues confronting our democracy. These skills will prepare them for learning and leadership throughout our lives.



# Congressional Debate Terminology

- **Legislation** - specific, written proposal (“bill” or “resolution”) made by a member or committee for assembly to debate.
- **Bill** - type of legislation that describes the details of how a policy would be enacted, if voted into law by the assembly.
- **Resolution** - expression of conviction, or value belief of an assembly, which may urge, request or suggest further action by another decision-making authority.
- **Docket** - complete packet of legislation distributed by a tournament.
- **Agenda** - order of legislation as suggested by a committee or member, and voted on by the assembly (sometimes called the *calendar*).
- **Presiding Officer (PO)** - leader who runs meetings by *recognizing* members to speak or *move*. Also called the **chair**. Modeled after the *Speaker* of the House of Representatives, or the Vice President or President pro tempore of the Senate.
- **Floor** - when a member has the full attention of the assembly to speak (also refers to the area where the assembly meets, where its members speak, and where it conducts its business).
- **Committee** - a small group of members who meet and bring recommendations to the full assembly.
- **Amendment** - a specific change to an item of legislation, explaining exactly which words it modifies, and not changing the **intent** of the legislation itself (*germane*). An amendment not pertinent is ruled **dilatory**.
- **Authorship Speech** - a *constructive* speech of up to three (3) minutes given by a member, which introduces an item of legislation for debate by the chamber. It is called a sponsorship speech if given by a student who is not affiliated with the school the legislation originated from. All author/sponsorship speeches are followed by a two-minute questioning period. The first negative speech also may have two minutes of questioning.
- **Questioning** - period where the members of the assembly ask individual questions of the speaker. *Multiple-part* (or two-part) questions are not allowed (unless the rules are suspended for that instance, or specific *open/direct questioning* rules are used), because they take time from other members who may wish to question the speaker. For all speeches that follow an authorship – except the first negative speech under National Forensic League rules – the speaker may speak for a maximum of three (3) minutes, followed by one minute of questions. All affirmative and negative speeches that follow an authorship speech should introduce new ideas (arguments) and respond to previous arguments (refute or rebut).
- **Precedence** - standard rule in most leagues (including the National Forensic League), which requires the presiding officer to choose speakers who have spoken least (or not at all). The only exception to precedence is when a speaker has *authorship* privileges to legislation when it is introduced for debate. In those cases, the presiding officer must recognize the author first. If no author is present, selecting a sponsor is based on precedence.
- **Recency** - standard rule in the National Forensic League, where the presiding officer not only employs precedence, but also selects speakers based on who has spoken *least recently* (or *earliest*).

*Before precedence is established (applies to students who have not spoken), the following method is often used:*

- **Geography** - this method is employed to balance recognition of speakers among various spatial zones in the chamber, so students seated in any given area aren’t disadvantaged. The chair should ensure that an equal number of affirmative and negative speeches are called from the same zone. Geography is just one approach to recognizing speakers.

*The following methods of speaker recognition priority are flawed and now disallowed under National Forensic League rules:*

- **Activity** - PO selects speakers based whom they have already recognized for questions and motions. The *problem* with this is that the PO could still be biased in recognizing legislators for questions and motions in the first place, and it encourages impertinent questions, just for the sake of being recognized.
- **Longest Standing (Standing Time)** - PO tracks how many times speakers stand to be recognized. The *problem* with this is that speakers may or may not actually have substantive speeches prepared, but simply stand earlier to *play the game*.

## Oath of Office

“I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter, so help me God.”

# Competition Chronological Order

**Legislation** - Participating schools may submit legislation when they register entries for competition. If the purpose of legislation is to effect change in the status quo, then ideas should stem from a desire to solve problems or meet needs. The best legislation is *debatable*, meaning there is some degree of controversy in either the topic or how the legislation intends to address the issue(s). Before students draft legislation, they should research the scope of jurisdictional power Congress has for lawmaking on the given topic, and what agency (or agencies) of the federal government would be responsible for enforcement and implementation of that legislation. See the **Writing Legislation** section of this guide.

**Researching the Docket** - Tournaments send to participating schools or post online a docket of legislation. Each squad then brainstorms affirmative and negative arguments and finds supporting evidence through research. Students should have a firm working knowledge of issues in the docket, but should not write word-for-word speeches ahead of time; rather, they should be prepared to dynamically respond to arguments given by peers at the tournament.



**Role Playing** - Contestants act in the manner of a senator or representative, weighing needs of theoretical constituents whom they represent, and in a larger sense, all American citizens. This includes speaking as a legislator would talk, and acting genuinely nice to other delegates. If students think of the purpose of Congress as serving a higher need of solving problems in our society (rather than as a debate competition), they will take it more seriously. Humor is acceptable in the right context, but shouldn't be the emphasis of speaking or conduct. Contestants should dress the part: professional legislators wear business attire. Dress shoes are highly recommended with restraint toward tasteful accessories that would not distract an audience.



**Chamber Opening Business** - Upon arrival at a Congress, students are assigned to chambers, sometimes labeled as a "Senate" or "House (of Representatives)," where they would be assigned the appropriate courtesy title (Senator or Representative). When tournaments prepare placards (name cards) with students' names (or make cardstock paper and markers available) or have name tags, it enhances the dignity of the event, and makes identification of speakers by judges more efficient. The first task a chamber assumes is to determine seating arrangement. Either the tournament will provide a seating chart with assigned placements, or students will fill in a blank seating chart. This facilitates easier identification by student presiding officers and judges.

**Setting the Agenda** - With the legislative docket provided to schools, students in each chamber will:

- Offer proposed agendas, which are presented in the order they wish to debate it. The chamber will conduct a single-ballot election until one agenda receives a majority vote; or
- Convene an "Agenda," "Calendar" or "Rules" Committee, comprised of one representative from each school, who will collaboratively determine an agenda for the duration of the session. By virtue of procedure, whatever order this committee settles upon becomes binding unless rules are suspended; or
- Convene several committees based on issues (whereby all members of a chamber serve on a committee).

Once the agenda is set, it is considered part of the standing rules of the chamber; changing it (beyond laying an individual bill or resolution on the table) requires a motion to suspend the rules. This is considered ill-advised, because it has the potential to be manipulative and consumes time better spent facilitating speeches.

**Presiding Officer Election** - Using a single ballot election, presiding officers are elected for each session (or fragment thereof as established by each individual tournament's procedural rules).

Instructions (with visual aids) for conducting elections may be downloaded from [www.congressionaldebate.org](http://www.congressionaldebate.org).

**Competition Structure** - There are many methods of determining who earns a trophy or gavel as the "Best Legislator/Speaker," or "Best Presiding Officer." These methods vary in their degree by tournament. The recommended method by the National Forensic League is for judges to rank the top students in the chamber, and for a cumulative rank total to determine who advances and placement. At some competitions, the top-rated students by judges may be considered a slate of nominees for the chamber to cast a preferential ballot ranking their peers, in order of favor.

# Understanding Civics



A grasp of civics forms the foundation for substantive legislation on issues, since ultimately, Congress passes laws the federal government must implement. Understanding politics and government begins with acknowledging the relationship between those who govern and the constituents (citizens) they represent. One bedrock principle, the **social contract** finds its roots with the Enlightenment philosophers who inspired the founding of the United States, and holds that citizens give up certain rights for protections by their government. A prime example of this is airport security, where passengers sacrifice a certain amount of privacy with government officials, who inspect their luggage. Further investigation into how the social contract, different **moral codes** and understanding of **fundamental rights** will help a Congressional debater understand theories upon which debate relies. The U.S. *Bill of Rights* as well as the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* illustrate an imperative to recognize certain rights. Of course, the Bill of Rights, as part of the *Constitution*, underlies all laws made in the U.S., whereas the UN's rights are recommended, but not required.

The **Constitution** is the supreme law of the land, so understanding its articles – particularly those that relate to the three branches of government – is important. We start by investigating the central **powers of Congress**, which dictate the lawmaking jurisdiction of U.S. Congress, something Congressional Debaters must bear in mind before writing legislation. Some examples include, but are not limited to:

- ❖ Empowers House of Representatives to originate taxation and impeachment, and Senate for trying impeachment (2/3 vote = conviction), concurring or amending taxation.
- ❖ Regulate Commerce and Banking
- ❖ “Necessary and Proper” clause: “elastic” - implied powers, U.S. Code

Understanding checks and balances between the branches is important, too. For instance, while the executive branch (the President and agencies directed by cabinet-level *secretaries*) is responsible for operating functions of the national government, Congress has the authority to tax and provide oversight of executive branch activities, as well as appointing their chief officials.

Additionally, while the Department of State is responsible for international relations, and while the President has the responsibility for negotiating treaties, these must be presented to the Senate for approval. Foreign aid is supervised by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), whose budget is appropriated by the House of Representatives, and co-approved by the Senate.

## Federalism

One of the most important concepts of governing is that of **federalism**, the concept that authority is shared between the national or *central* government, and the governments of states and territories, which further grant authority to municipalities (cities, towns, counties). The Constitution holds that where authority is not specified, it is up to states to govern, but that states are subordinate to the national government, particularly in management of international affairs and regulation of interstate commerce and disputes.

Over time, cooperation has increased between the state and national governments, and the national government has become more powerful in its regulatory oversight of such items as education, interstate highway construction, environmental protection and health, labor issues, and social security. Often, funding grants issued by the national government to states dictates that certain policies are followed. The Supreme Court becomes the arbiter for any conflicts in the federal system.

### CORE VALUES

As members of the National Forensic League community, we share a commitment to:

- Promote ethics in research and competition.
- Promote respect for diversity of ideas and of community.
- Promote seriousness of purpose and demeanor.
- Promote empowerment gained through knowledge.
- Promote tools of effective and ethical leadership.
- Promote active participation in democratic processes.
- Provide an opportunity for developing higher level thinking skills and critical analysis of issues.
- Develop interaction skills and cooperative decision making skills used in an assembly or in a committee.
- Learn the basic principles of parliamentary procedure and its use in a democratic society.

# Research Sources

These sources are a great place to start when writing legislation, or investigating issues surrounding legislation sponsored by other schools, which you are preparing to debate. All evidence used is subject to verification. Honesty and integrity are of utmost importance. Falsification or deliberate misuse of evidence may result in suspension of legislators by tournament officials.

## News/Current Affairs *(some require subscription/paid access)*

BBC .....	bbc.co.uk	Google News .....	news.google.com
Business Week .....	businessweek.com	National Public Radio (NPR) .....	npr.org
Financial Times .....	ft.com	New York Times .....	nytimes.com
Foreign Policy .....	foreignpolicy.com	The Economist .....	economist.com
Foreign Affairs .....	foreignaffairs.com	Washington Post .....	washingtonpost.com

## Policymaking Think Tanks, also known as Policy Institutes

Think Tank Directory (Columbia University) .....	bit.ly/Pl8ev
Think Tank Directory (Harvard Kennedy School) .....	bit.ly/5xj5hR
Think Tank Bank .....	think-bank.org
Pew Research Center .....	pewresearch.org and people-press.org
Brookings Institution .....	brookings.edu
Hoover Institution at Stanford University .....	hoover.org
Center for Strategic and International Studies .....	csis.org
American Civil Liberties Union ( <i>Libertarian</i> ) .....	aclu.org
American Enterprise Institute ( <i>Conservative</i> ) .....	aei.org
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace .....	carnegieendowment.org
Cato Institute ( <i>Conservative/Libertarian</i> ) .....	cato.org
Council on Foreign Relations .....	cfr.org
Heritage Foundation ( <i>Conservative</i> ) .....	heritage.org
National Center for Policy Analysis ( <i>Leans Conservative</i> ) .....	ncpa.org
Progressive Policy Institute ( <i>Liberal/Progressive</i> ) .....	ppionline.org
Rand Corporation ( <i>reports, research briefs</i> ) .....	rand.org



## Government Agencies/Information

Federal Government Portal .....	usa.gov
Congressional Budget Office .....	cbo.gov
Congressional Legislation (Lib. of Congress) .....	thomas.loc.gov/home/bills_res.html
Independent Legislation Tracking .....	govtrack.us/congress/legislation.xpd
Open Congress: Issues .....	opencongress.org/issues
Congressional Research Service .....	zfacts.com/p/576.html
Air University's CRS Report Collection .....	l.usa.gov/QfsH5y
Univ. North Texas Library's CRS Report Collection .....	http://bit.ly/eXw7KS
Department of State – Country Pages .....	state.gov/misc/list
Library of Congress Country Studies .....	l.usa.gov/8GdxS
Executive Branch Agencies .....	l.usa.gov/Erff
Federal Reserve System .....	federalreserve.gov
Government Accountability Office .....	gao.gov
Social Security Administration .....	ssa.gov
U.S. Courts .....	uscourts.gov
Constitutional Law (Law Library of Congress) .....	l.usa.gov/OBsd9f



## General Reference

Bartleby Language Reference .....	bartleby.com	Virtual Library .....	vlib.org
FindLaw.com .....	findlaw.com	United Nations News Service .....	un.org/News
Internet Public Library .....	ipl.org	Journalist's Resource (see "Policy Studies," "Reference") .....	journalistsresource.org
RefDesk .....	refdesk.com		

# Writing Legislation



Inspiration for legislation comes from a desire to solve current problems facing our country, and should have a **national** focus.

A **bill** must have national *jurisdiction* (i.e., when passed into law, the federal government would have the authority to implement it). Bills enumerate details of how a particular law must work, including when it takes effect, how much tax levy would be appropriated (if applicable), how infractions/violations will be dealt with, etc. A bill may answer the who, what, when, where – and most specifically how – but it will never answer “why.” Legislators explain rationale behind bills in speeches, and a solution is implemented can spark deeper, more meaningful debate.

Students should be mindful of how controversial an issue is; for example, is it likely that students would argue against a bill to assist starving infants? Of course not! There needs to be two sides. Frequently, arguments over bills stem from the amount of funding. Since there are countless problems needing solutions, funding projects often comes down to whether one item should be prioritized over another.

Since the Executive Branch runs most agencies that enforce federal laws, understanding those helps. While foreign affairs often fall under the jurisdiction of the Executive Branch, funding efforts such as USAID can have an impact on the success or failure of United States involvement in other countries, and therefore, can be framed as a bill. See the research links page for good starting points.

Writing an effective bill involves more time and research than researching one written by someone else. A student must ask her/himself what the legislation does, who is involved (government agencies), where it happens, when it is feasible to take place, pay for and how much time is needed for implementation, and how it should be carried out (a plan of action). All of these questions must be answered in writing the sections of the bill, with thoughtful consideration as to how thoroughly each section explains its plank of implementing the overall bill’s plan of action.

**Resolutions** are simply position statements on issues Congress does not have jurisdiction over (such as a foreign issue, although a bill can suggest foreign aid), a recommendation to another party (such as the President, Supreme Court, or United Nations) or further action (such as **amending the Constitution**). Resolutions lack the force of law, and never establish enforcement.

## Topics & Format

Appropriate topics exhibit seriousness of purpose. The action proposed should be feasible, and such that the actual United States Congress might debate it. Topics should be debatable, meaning substantive argumentation exists on both sides. Legislation should be typed and double-spaced with line numbers, **not exceeding one page**. Capitalizing the words “WHEREAS” and “RESOLVED” in resolutions, and “SECTION” in bills, as well as inverse-indenting each clause or section helps to distinguish between ideas and concepts. The title should be descriptive, specific, and brief. The samples above show proper formatting. In the resolution, note the semicolon, and how it precedes the word “and” at the end of each “whereas” clause, and the phrase “now, therefore, be it” at the end of the last “whereas” clause. Templates for drafting legislation, and sample legislation may be downloaded from [www.congressionaldebate.org](http://www.congressionaldebate.org).

### A Bill to Establish a Specific Policy

BE IT ENACTED BY THIS CONGRESS THAT:

1. **SECTION 1.** State the new policy in a brief
2. declarative sentence, or in as few
3. sentences as possible.
4. **SECTION 2.** Define any ambiguous terms inherent
5. in the first section.
6. **SECTION 3.** Name the government agency that will
7. oversee the enforcement of the bill
8. along with the specific enforcement
9. mechanism.
10. **SECTION 4.** Indicate the implementation
11. date/timeframe.
12. **SECTION 5.** State that all other laws that are in
13. conflict with this new policy shall
14. hereby be declared null and void.

*Introduced by Name of School*

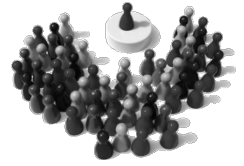
### A Resolution to Urge Further Action on a Specific Issue

1. **WHEREAS,** State the current problem (this needs to
2. be accomplished in one brief
3. sentence); and
4. **WHEREAS,** Describe the scope of the problem
5. cited in the first whereas clause (this
6. clause needs to flow logically from the
7. first); and
8. **WHEREAS,** Explain the impact and harms allowed
9. by the current problem (once again, the
10. clause needs to flow in a logical
11. sequence); now, therefore, be it
12. **RESOLVED,** By this Congress that: state your
13. recommendation for dealing with the
14. problem (the resolution should be a
15. clear call for action); and, be it
16. **FURTHER RESOLVED,** That (an *optional* additional
17. recommendation; if not used, end the
18. previous clause with a period).

*Introduced by Name of School*



# Speaking



Debate on each legislation starts with a speech *introducing* it to the chamber, called an **authorship** if it's delivered by the student or school who wrote it, or **sponsorship** if delivered by a student from a different school (students present from the authoring school *may* decline the privilege of authorship). This first speech on each legislation is always followed by a two-minute questioning period. Questions and answers are timed continuously (the clock does not stop) once the first questioner is recognized. Also, the National Forensic League requires a two-minute questioning period for the **first negative** speaker on each legislation.

After the introductory speech for each legislation, students deliver **alternating negative and affirmative speeches**. Each of these speeches allows a maximum of three minutes, with a one-minute questioning period (National Forensic League rules) or balance of unused speaking time (NCFL rules and some states). If a speech is particularly controversial, a member may move to suspend the rules to extend questioning *for an individual speaker*, but this should be done with restraint.

While a speaker technically has the option to not yield to questions, this is extremely inadvisable, since under National Forensic League rules, scorers are instructed to take answering questions into account when evaluating speeches.

Speeches should be delivered **extemporaneously**, which means spoken spontaneously based on an outline of notes, rather than recited word-for-word from a manuscript. To do this, a speaker must be well researched and prepared with ideas before arriving at the contest. S/he will develop specific arguments that **refute** (argue against) the opposition and introduce new ideas and perspectives rebuilding his/her own side of debate, rather than simply repeating ideas shared by speakers on the same side, or ignoring points raised by the opposing side. The only exception to this expectation is the speaker who introduces legislation (authorship or sponsorship) who may have a manuscript, since s/he begins debate on legislation.

In refuting, speakers should refer to specific arguments made by peers and **never** attack the individual (*ad hominem* fallacy). Be kind, generous and gracious with remarks, for example: "While Sen. Smith's argument to close the military base is well-intentioned..." It is also effective to refer to general themes/threads made in arguments on a particular side, synthesizing and weighing the overall "big picture" impact. After debate gets one-sided, a speech of summation is a welcome relief.

Effective speeches that respond to other arguments made on legislation come as a result of critical **listening** and **taking notes** – called flowing. Keeping track of arguments made on both the affirmative and negative sides – and any proof or evidence that may be questionable is the only way to keep debate dynamic or interactive.

Speakers should use effective word choice, correct sentence structure, and clear transitions to **signpost** ideas (outline that the audience can follow). Connect with the audience through sustained eye contact, and avoid standing behind a podium if possible, since it is a barrier to the audience.

Asking **questions** helps clarify confusing points in debate and shows a genuine interest in what other speakers are saying. *Questions* usually are not scored by judges, but how well **speakers answer** is scored. Answering questions well shows a judge the speaker can defend his/her arguments and has sound knowledge of the topic. When answering, it's best to succinctly answer just the question – no more, no less. Do not avoid answering questions; give your best effort, but if you don't understand the question paraphrase by saying "what I think you're asking is..." and then answer. If you don't know the answer to a question, redirect your answer to what you do know about the topic. It's courteous for speakers to thank the presiding officer when s/he recognizes them to ask a question.

## Speech Organization

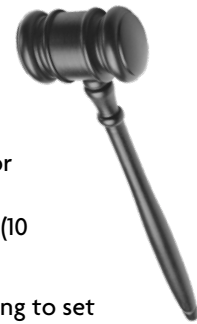
- I. **Introduction** (15 to 30 seconds)
  - A. Relate the speech to ideas that are, or might be, brought to the floor for debate.
    1. Use a quotation; and/or
    2. Use an analogy; and/or
    3. Use statistics to raise awareness of a problem
  - B. State purpose/thesis (about 10 seconds)
- II. **Body** (approximately 2 minutes)

Each claim you make (whether constructive or refuting the opposition) should be *supported* with analytical reasoning and/or evidence with a good combination of quantitative statistics or facts, and qualitative case studies and quotations from experts. Be sure to state the importance, or *impact* that claim has for the overall topic of debate and why it supports or opposes those views. Example structure:

  1. **Claim:** issue of debate; point or points that are in conflict.
  2. **Proof:** evidence and reasoning to support the argument; *explain* how the proof relates to the claim (link).
  3. **Impact:** why the argument is important/significant, especially to the particular side debated. Challenge the opposition to respond to an issue. Give two to three meaningful arguments.
- III. **Conclusion** (about 30 seconds)
  - A. State primary points and issues
  - B. Summarize key arguments



# Procedure for Debate



- **Time** is of the essence, and the ultimate goal of a chamber is to share time equally among legislators for speaking. The more time spent on motions, amending, etc.; the less time is available for speeches. The National Forensic League defines a session of floor debate as three hours for a chamber of 18 students (10 minutes to allow for two speeches per student).
- Setting the agenda at the beginning of the session is important. Invest thoughtful discussion in caucusing to set the agenda to avoid **laying items on the table** during sessions, which often annoys judges/scorers and the parliamentarian. Also, when calling the previous question fails to achieve a 2/3 vote, do not move to “Lay on the Table” by a simple majority. Remember, moving the previous question protects the voice of the minority prior to when the vote will rest on the majority.
- **Legislators stand if they wish to be recognized to move, to speak, or to vote on the main motion** (legislation). The presiding officer will recognize speakers first who have not spoken, next, based on *precedence*, and finally, based on *recency*. Before precedence has been established, the presiding officer should recognize speakers randomly and fairly. During a session, precedence and recency should not reset to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to speak and receive evaluation from scorers. When a new session begins with a new presiding officer and scorer(s), both precedence and recency should reset.
- **Only the presiding officer recognizes legislators who wish to question the speaker.** Neither questioners nor speakers must ask or grant permission to yield; this is implied by the set questioning period. Legislators may only ask one question at a time; two-part questions are not allowed. Some tournaments may use a direct questioning format; this is only allowed if stated in tournament rules. Scorers should take quality of answers into account when evaluating speakers.
- Do not yield remaining speaking time to another legislator. The elected presiding officer may not give a speech while presiding, unless a tournament’s rules specifically allows for it. National Forensic League tournaments do not.
- Be respectful of others in the room. If the presiding officer makes a minor mistake, give him/her the benefit of the doubt unless someone has been wronged. The PO is elected by the chamber to run the meeting and should be allowed to fulfill this duty efficiently and effectively. Move the *previous question* only if debate gets one-sided; do not use it to prevent someone from speaking.
- Votes on motions other than the *main motion* are usually taken by *voice vote*, with a “Division” called by a member when the vote is not clear *and* that member believes someone’s right to speak is being abridged. Voting results for a simple majority decision (except on the main motion, i.e., legislation) are based upon the number voting (ayes plus noes); not the number seated in the chamber at the beginning of the session. When debate has exhausted and no one wishes to speak (or the chamber moves to end debate), the chamber will vote on the legislation. This vote is based on the number seated in the chamber, since Congress members’ voting records are ostensibly tracked by their constituents.
- **Amendments** must be presented to the presiding officer in writing (an official form is available in this manual’s appendix), with specific references to lines and clauses that change. This must be done in advance of moving to amend.
  - The parliamentarian will recommend whether the amendment is “germane” – that is, it upholds the original intent of the legislation – otherwise, it is considered “dilatatory.” The title of the legislation may be changed.
  - Between floor speeches, a legislator may move to amend, and the presiding officer will read the proposed amendment aloud and call for a second by one-third of those members present, unless he/she rules it dilatatory.
  - Should students wish to speak on the proposed amendment, the presiding officer will recognize them as per the standing precedence in the chamber, and the speech will be counted toward their total, accordingly.
  - Simply proposing an amendment does not guarantee an “author/sponsor” speech, and any speeches on amendments are followed by the normal one minute of questioning.
  - Amendments are considered neutral and do not constitute an affirmative or negative speech on the original legislation.
  - If there are no speakers or the previous question is moved, the chamber may vote on a proposed amendment without debating it.

## Gavel Signals

- **1 strong tap** = call meeting to order; also used to end questioning time (*presiding officer also may gesture a cue to questioners to be seated as the speaker finishes answering the final question*)
- Speech time signals: **1 tap** = 1 minute remaining • **2 taps** = 30 seconds remaining • **3 taps** = time has lapsed
- **Multiple taps** (until speaker stops talking) = grace period has ended (speech should not exceed 3 minutes, 10 seconds)



## Helpful Phrases

You want to:	You say:
Move a motion	"I move that (or to)..."
Leave the room (restroom, etc.)	Legislator stands: "I rise to a point a personal privilege." Chair says: "State that privilege" Legislator says: "To leave the room."
Make an amendment	See " <b>Amendments</b> " above. "Move to amend."
Close debate on the current issue	"I move the previous question."
Ask about an error	Legislator stands: "Motion... I rise to a point of parliamentary inquiry (or order)." Chair says "State that point." Legislator describes the issue. The chair may confer with the parliamentarian.
Second a motion	"Second!"
Table	"I move to lay the question on the table."
Take from the table	"I move to take from the table..."

## Tracking Speaking Order

Keeping record of who has spoken ensures fairness in speaker recognition, and can be done with a simple table as demonstrated below. When students track recency, documenting the order of speeches also helps with this process. Speaker side is also noted – S (sponsor), N (negative), A (affirmative) – the examples below show where more than one speech on the same side was given.

- **In the example to the left**, speakers' names are snaked from top to bottom, left to right, and crossed out when a speaker is subsequently recognized (the speech numbers are noted in parentheses). This makes it easier to determine who has spoken least and least recently.
- **In the example to the right**, an alphabetized list is kept. In both examples, the presiding officer serves for two hours, which counts as two speeches.

	1	2	3
1	Smith (PO)	Smith (PO)	Wilson (20N)
2	<del>Lincoln</del> (1S)	Jones (7A)	Clinton (22A)
3	<del>Jones</del> (2N)	<del>Clinton</del> (12A)	
4	Washington (3A)	<del>Wilson</del> (14A)	
5	Roosevelt (4N)	Nixon (17N)	
6	Jackson (5A)	Carter (18A)	
7	Reagan (6N)	Lincoln (19N)	
8	<del>Clinton</del> (8N)		
9	Bush (9N)		
10	<del>Wilson</del> (10S)		
11	Harding (11N)		
12	Kennedy (13N)		
13	<del>Carter</del> (15N)		
14	<del>Nixon</del> (16A)		
15	Ford (21N)		

		1	2	3
1	Bush	8 N		
2	Carter	12 A	19 A	
3	Clinton	7 A	16 A	22 N
4	Ford	14 A		
5	Harding	10 S		
6	Jackson	5 A		
7	Jones	2 N	15 N	
8	Kennedy	11 N		
9	Lincoln	1 S	20 N	
10	Nixon	13 N	18 A	
11	Reagan	6 N		
12	Roosevelt	4 N		
13	Smith	PO	PO	
14	Washington	3 A		
15	Wilson	9 N	17 N	21 A

## Conduct, Ethics and Evidence *(from National Forensic League rules)*

- ❖ A congressperson's conduct shall be above reproach and he/she should never be guilty of intentional harassment. Impeaching and censuring other participants is not allowed.
- ❖ Participation in this event demands the seriousness of purpose and maturity possessed by real world policymakers. All adult officials, including scorers, will hold each participant to this standard.
- ❖ Congresspersons should have a cooperative nature and if there is a problem, then the student should take any concerns to an adult official.
- ❖ Participation in the legislative debate is essential. Extended absence from the chamber during a session will affect a contestant's overall impression and performance. The practice of "open chambers" interferes with the parliamentarian's ability to monitor student participation.
- ❖ Visual aids are permitted in Congressional Debate, provided they do not require electronic retrieval devices in the chamber.
- ❖ Please see National Forensic League rules for use of laptops/electronic retrieval devices. Cell phones, music players and games are not to be used in the chamber during a session. Traditional timing devices are permitted.

# Presiding



## Supplies

Table of Parliamentary Motions, legislative docket packet, stopwatch, paper (notebook or otherwise), gavel.

## Order of Procedure

1. If you give a candidacy speech for election, state that you will be fair and work to make sure time is best spent giving speeches.
2. After you are elected, say "this chamber will come to order." State that you will use your best effort to recognize speakers around the chamber in a fair and balanced manner. Describe gavel time signals. Explain procedures clearly: i.e., how you will recognize speakers, etc., that you **will not call for motions at any time** (speakers should seek your attention when they wish to rise to move something), and that when it is clear that debate has exhausted on a bill/resolution, you will ask the chamber if they are ready for the question, rather than waiting for the *previous question* (which should be reserved for forcing end to debate that has become one-sided or repetitive in arguments). Always stand when addressing the chamber (to project authority). Use a calm, controlled and caring voice to show a genuine interest in the chamber's business.
3. When you are ready to begin, say "Who would like to sponsor the first legislation?" When you recognize speakers, use the third person: "The chair recognizes..."
4. When a speaker concludes, say "That speech was \_\_\_ minutes and \_\_\_ seconds; questioners, please rise." *Call on one legislator at a time, until the questioning period is over. You should keep track of questions to allow a fair distribution.*
5. *You may gesture for questioners to sit down when it is apparent time is running out.* Afterwards, say "The questioning period has concluded, and the speaker may be seated."
6. "Those wishing to speak in opposition, please rise." *Call on a speaker, using recency and balancing areas of the room as much as possible.*
7. "That speech was 2 minutes and 15 seconds; questioners, please rise."
8. When you have called on the last person who wishes to speak on a bill/resolution, say "since this is the last senator/representative who wishes to speak on this issue, if no one objects following his/her speech, we will immediately move the question following his/her speech." (That way, a separate vote to call *previous question* is unnecessary).
9. When it is time to debate the next legislation, say "The next item of business is —" (say the legislation's title).

## General Notes

Legislators should refer to you as: Mr./Madam chair, *Speaker*, or *President*. Legislators may not approach the front table without rising to a point of personal privilege.

## Handling Motions

- At the beginning of the session, remind members to stand and seek recognition when they wish to move. Do not call for motions; rather, pause briefly between speeches.
- **Recognizing Members:** "The chair recognizes..." or "State your point/question." Say their title (Representative or Senator) and last name.
- **Second:** (if the chamber is silent) "Is there a second?"
- **Stating Motions:** "It is moved and seconded that..."

## Taking Votes

- **Negative votes and abstentions** are **only** counted for *recorded* votes (such as the main motion, i.e., legislation); votes taken where a fraction of members are needed are based on those casting a vote each time.
- **Voice Vote** - "On the motion to [read the motion title] those in favor, say aye. (Pause) Those opposed, say no." *If the result is not clear, especially evidenced by particularly loud members, or if a member moves for a Division of the vote, then a standing vote is taken.* Do not call for abstentions, since a voice vote is not recorded.
- **Rising Vote** (*You may substitute "raise hands"*) "Those in favor of the motion to [read the motion title] will rise [or, "stand"]." [Count vote.] "Be seated. Those opposed will rise." [Count vote.] "Be seated." Calling for abstentions is unnecessary, except for the main motion (legislation).
- Voting for individuals (presiding officer, awards) is done by **secret ballot**.

## Announcing the Result: "On the motion to..."

- **Voice Vote** - "The ayes have it and the motion is adopted [or "carried"]." Or, "The noes have it and the motion is lost." *If you are unsure of the prevailing side, announce that you will take a rising vote (before someone asks for a division... to save time).*
- **Counted Rising Vote or Show of Hands Vote** - "With a vote of 51 in the affirmative and 23 in the negative, the affirmative has it [or, "there are two-thirds in the affirmative] and the motion is adopted." Or, "There are 29 in the affirmative and 33 in the negative. The negative has it and the motion is lost."

## Discipline

- **Motion Out of Order or Motion Not in Order** "The chair rules that the motion is out of order [or "not in order"] because . . ."
- **Member Out of Order** (serious offense) "The member is out of order and will be seated."

# Table of Parliamentary Motions

Following is the National Forensic League's motion chart, annotated (non-shaded) to show motions used most often.

Table of Most Frequently Used Parliamentary Motions Adapted for use in National Forensic League Congressional Debate			Second Required?	Debatable?	Amendable?	Required Vote	May Interrupt?
Type	Motion	Purpose					
Privileged	24. Fix time for reassembling	To arrange time of next meeting	Yes	Yes-T	Yes-T	Majority	Yes
	23. Adjourn	To dismiss the meeting	Yes	No	Yes-T	Majority	No
	22. Recess	To dismiss the meeting for a specific length of time	Yes	Yes	Yes-T	Majority	No
	21. Rise to a question of privilege	To make a personal request during debate	No	No	No	Decision of the Chair	Yes
	20. Call for orders of the day	To force consideration of a postponed motion	No	No	No	Decision of the Chair	Yes
Incidental	19. Appeal a decision of the chair	To reverse a decision	Yes	No	No	Majority	Yes
	18. Rise to a point of order or parliamentary procedure	To correct a parliamentary error or ask a question	No	No	No	Decision of the Chair	Yes
	17. Division of the chamber	To verify a voice vote	No	No	No	Decision of the Chair	Yes
	16. Object to the consideration of a question	To suppress action	No	No	No	2/3	Yes
	15. Divide a motion	To consider its parts separately	Yes	No	Yes	Majority	No
	14. Leave to modify or withdraw a motion	To modify or withdraw a motion	No	No	No	Majority	No
	13. Suspend the rules	To take action contrary to standing rules	Yes	No	No	2/3	No
Subsidiary	12. Rescind	To repeal previous action	Yes	Yes	Yes	2/3	No
	11. Reconsider	To consider a defeated motion again	Yes	Yes	No	Majority	No
	10. Take from the table	To consider tabled motion	Yes	No	No	Majority	No
	9. Lay on the table	To defer action	Yes	No	No	Majority	No
	8. Previous question	To force an immediate vote	Yes	No	No	2/3	No
	7. Limit or extend debate	To modify freedom of debate	Yes	Yes	Yes-T	2/3	No
	6. Postpone to a certain time	To defer action	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes
	5. Refer to a committee *	For further study	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes
	4. Amend an amendment °	To modify an amendment	1/3	Yes	No	Majority	No
	3. Amend °	To modify a motion	1/3	Yes	Yes	Majority	No
	2. Postpone indefinitely	To suppress action	Yes	Yes	No	Majority	No
Main	1. Main motion	To introduce a business	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	No

\* No. 5 should include:

1. How appointed?
2. The number
3. Report when or to what standing committee

T = Time

° Nos. 3 and 4 by:

1. Adding (inserting)
2. Striking (deleting)
3. Substituting

# Recency Table & Fractions of Voting

1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						
20						
21						
22						
23						
24						
25						
26						
27						
28						
29						
30						

# Votes Cast	Majority	Two-Thirds	One-Third
6	4	4	2
7	4	5	3
8	5	6	3
9	5	6	3
10	6	7	4
11	6	8	4
12	7	8	4
13	7	9	5
14	8	10	5
15	8	10	5

# Votes Cast	Majority	Two-Thirds	One-Third
16	9	11	6
17	9	12	6
18	10	12	6
19	10	13	7
20	11	14	7
21	11	14	7
22	12	15	8
23	12	16	8
24	13	16	8
25	13	17	9

# Congressional Debate Rubric: Speaking

This table of evaluation standards may be used by any judge who would like assistance in determining scores for speeches. Each scorer independently (without collaborating) awards 1 to 6 points for each speech. Each speaker has up to three minutes to present arguments followed by a questioning period (the time length for which will vary, depending on specific league rules).

Points →	3	4	5	6
	Mediocre	Good	Excellent	Superior
Content: Organization, Evidence & Language	The speech lacked a clear thesis and organizational structure. Claims are only asserted with generalizations and no real evidence. Language use is unclear or ineffective.	While the speaker's purpose is present, the speech lacks logical organization and/or developed ideas. Analysis of evidence, if present, fails to connect its relevance to the speaker's claims. Use of language is weak.	While a clear purpose is apparent, organization may be somewhat loose (weak introduction/conclusion; no transitions between points). Diction represents a grasp of language. Much evidence is presented, but not in a persuasive or effective manner; or the speaker relies on <i>one</i> piece of evidence, but does so effectively.	Content is clearly and logically organized, and characterized by depth of thought and development of ideas, supported by a variety of credible quantitative (statistical) and qualitative (testimony) evidence analyzed effectively to draw conclusions. Compelling language, a poignant introduction and conclusion and lucid transitions clearly establish the speaker's purpose and frame the perspective of the issue's significance.
Argument & Refutation	The speaker offers mostly unwarranted assertions, which often simply repeat/rehash previous arguments.	The speaker fails to <i>either</i> introduce new arguments (simply repeating previous arguments) <i>or</i> the speaker fails to refute previous opposing arguments; in other words, no real <i>clash</i> is present.	New ideas and response to previous arguments are offered, but in an unbalanced manner (too much refutation or too many new arguments). Questions are answered adequately.	The speaker contributes to the spontaneity of debate, effectively synthesizing response and refutation of previous ideas with new arguments. If the speaker fields questions, he/she responds with confidence and clarity.
Delivery	Little eye contact, gestures and/or movement are present. Vocal presentation is inarticulate due to soft volume or lack of enunciation.	Presentation is satisfactory, yet unimpressively read (perhaps monotonously) from prepared notes, with errors in pronunciation and/or minimal eye contact. Awkward gestures/movement may be distracting.	The presentation is strong, but contains a few mistakes, including problems with pronunciation and enunciation. The speech may be partially read with satisfactory fluency. Physical presence may be awkward at times.	The speaker's vocal control and physical poise are polished, deliberate, crisp and confident. Delivery should be extemporaneous, with few errors in pronunciation. Eye contact is effective and consistent.

Scores of less than three (3) are rarely encouraged, and should be reserved for such circumstances as abusive language, a degrading personal attack on another legislator, or for a speech that is extremely brief (less than 45 seconds) or delivered without purpose or dignity for the cause exhorted by the legislation. Substantial written comments and description of specific incidents should accompany such scores.

# Congressional Debate Rubric: Presiding

This table of evaluation standards may be used by any judge who would like assistance in determining scores for a presiding officer (PO). Each scorer independently (without collaborating) awards 1 to 6 points for each hour of presiding.

Points →	1-2	3-4	5-6
	Weak – Mediocre	Good	Excellent – Superior
Speaker Recognition	The P.O. needs to improve his/her communication with fellow delegates to gain their trust and respect relating to the rationale for rulings made. Frequent errors are made in speaker recognition, which lacks consistent method or impartiality.	While the P.O. does not adequately explain his/her preferences for running the chamber in advance, he/she does clearly explain rulings, when necessary. Speaker recognition may be somewhat inconsistent or biased.	Presiding preferences are clearly explained at the beginning of the session and executed consistently. The P.O. is universally respected and trusted by his/her peers, and is consistent in recognition ( <i>very few</i> errors) and rulings, distributing speeches throughout the room geographically, equally between schools of the same size, and among individuals.
Parliamentary Procedure	The P.O.'s knowledge of parliamentary procedure is lacking, and he/she shows negligible effort to correct errors and/or consult written rules.	The P.O. demonstrates competency in procedure, but makes mistakes in determining the results of motions and votes, etc.	The P.O. has command of parliamentary procedure (motions) and uses this almost transparently to run a fair and efficient chamber, seldom consulting written rules and ruling immediately on whether motions pass or fail.
Delivery/ Presence	The P.O. needs to improve his/her vocal and physical presence and professional demeanor.	The P.O. displays a satisfactory command of the chamber in his/her vocal and physical presence. Word choice is usually concise.	The P.O. dynamically displays a command and relates well to the chamber through his/her vocal and physical presence. Word choice is economical and eloquent.

Student  
Presiding  
Officer



Debater or  
“Speaker”

Judge or  
“Scorer”

*Congressional Debate  
at Milwaukee City Hall, Wisconsin*