

Appendix B

Judging Criteria

The set of criteria used to evaluate debaters depends on the region, level, and style of debate. Even if the criteria are similar, the total number of points, the weight placed on each area, and the scoring guidelines may vary significantly. In general, a judge has two responsibilities: assign scores to each speaker and decide which team won the debate. This section explores some of the questions judges usually ask themselves when evaluating a debate.

These criteria also serve as a useful summary and reminder of many of the book's most important concepts. When you prepare to debate and as you continually evaluate your performance, think about how you're measuring up on these dimensions. You want your judges to be able to put a 'check mark' beside each of the questions.

INDIVIDUAL SCORE

When evaluating you individually, judges are thinking about how well you contributed to the overall dynamic of the debate. Did the *matter* you presented—arguments and refutation—add value to the debate? And did the *manner* in which you presented it—organization and delivery—make you an effective, compelling speaker? There are usually five categories that a judge considers: *Content*, *Refutation*, *Organization*, *Delivery*, and *Procedure*.

Content (5 points)

- **Themes.** Did the debater's arguments center around a single theme or a closely related set of themes? Were the themes selected appropriate and clearly presented? The wise use of central themes provides a sense of coherency to the case. It allows the debate to come down to a core group of key ideas.

- **Arguments.** How strong were the arguments used to support the overall themes? Was it easy for you to understand each argument and to describe it with a short phrase? Carefully selected arguments instantly provide a sense of strength to the debater's case.

- **Explanations.** Did the speaker use sound explanations and logic to expand on the arguments? How well did the explanations cover the key dimensions of each point? The debater should go beyond stating an argument and expecting you to agree with it. His or her explanation should strengthen the point against any possible attacks.

- **Evidence.** Was sufficient evidence and example employed to support the explanations? Was the backup presented effective and relevant to the argument it was intended to enhance? If any of the debater's claims are questionable or unclear, you should expect them to be supported. It should also be made very clear to you how the evidence proves the argument in question.

Refutation (5 points)

- **Completeness.** Was the clash complete, covering every relevant point of the opposing team's case? The debater shouldn't leave any of the opposing team's key points untouched. As you track the debate on your flow sheet, check off each argument that the debater has refuted.

- **Prioritization.** Did the clash focus on the most important areas of the other team's case? There's no requirement that a debater spend equal time refuting each argument. The debater should be able to distinguish between the other team's central and less important points, adjusting his or her emphasis accordingly.

- **Effectiveness.** Was the clash successful at exposing flaws in the opponent's arguments? The refutation of each point should be thorough enough to raise serious doubts. It should hit on the key weaknesses and explain persuasively why each argument is wrong.

Organization (5 points)

- **Introduction.** Did the introduction effectively lay out the core themes and direction of the team's case? The way a debater begins should pre-

pare you for what's to come. He or she should compel you to listen to the forthcoming material.

- **Conclusion.** Did the conclusion bring the case together and wrap it up in a way that made it understandable? A conclusion, while short, should hit on the key issues and outcomes of the debater's speech.
- **Structure.** Was there a clear structure that broke the case down into clear and logical parts? Did the order in which the points were presented make sense? The way a debater structures a case should make it easy for you to follow and take notes.
- **Flow.** Within each point, did the speaker have a clear and logical flow? This doesn't mean that the debater is required to provide obvious 'signposts' within each point. However, as the debater moves through the point, the flow should seem smooth and effective.
- **Transitions.** When moving between points, were there smooth transitions? Did they make it clear what the speaker had just accomplished and where he or she was going next? Excellent transitions guide you through the speech, helping tie together the distinct points.

Delivery (5 points)

- **Eye Contact.** Did the speaker maintain strong eye contact with the entire audience? The debater's eye contact should convey confidence and engagement. You shouldn't see the debater spending most of his or her speaking time reading text from a page.
- **Pace.** Was the speaking speed appropriate for the audience? Did it allow everyone to understand clearly the points being made? This doesn't mean that the debater has to talk at the same rate throughout the entire speech, as variety can add character and liveliness.
- **Posture.** Did the speaker maintain strong posture and presence? Like solid eye contact, good posture and body movement make a debater appear more confident and engaging.
- **Clarity.** How clearly did the speaker articulate the content? Was it easy to understand what he or she was saying? While it certainly isn't

necessary to articulate every single syllable robotically, the words and phrases shouldn't seem mumbled or slurred.

- **Expression.** How dynamic was the speaker's delivery? Did the debater vary his or her pitch and volume appropriately? This really comes down to your overall impression. Think about how interested you were as the debater spoke.

- **Gestures.** Were hand gestures used effectively to add meaning to the delivery? Hand gestures should flow naturally according to the debater's style. It's important that they don't seem repetitive, but they shouldn't be flashy to the point of distraction.

Procedure (5 points)

- **Process.** Did the debater follow the correct procedure for the style of debate? Were the time limits observed? Were the other debaters, the judges, and the moderator addressed appropriately? While these factors don't impact the substantive part of the debate, they do speak to the debater's respect for the rules and traditions of competition.

- **Courtesy.** Was the debater respectful and courteous to everyone in the room? Did he or she avoid making personal attacks or derogatory comments? There's nothing wrong with a debater being assertive, even aggressive. But above all, the competitor should be making a positive contribution to the experience of everyone in the room.

- **Questions.** Did the debater ask strong, targeted questions to challenge the opponent's points? Were the questions relevant to the issue at hand? This applies to Points of Information in parliamentary debate, the question period in discussion debate, and after each constructive speech in cross-examination debate.

- **Answers.** How effectively and completely did the debater answer the other team's questions? Did he or she appear confident and fluent when providing the answers? If the answers were in response to a Point of Information in parliamentary debate, did the debater transition back to the speech in a smooth way? The competitor has to strike a good balance between answering the question fully and not appearing to be on the defensive.

Total Score (25 points)

Judges are often asked to follow scoring ranges, which are targets prescribed by tournament directors to ensure consistent evaluations from room to room. A typical guide for a total score out of 25 points is to stick within a range of 15 to 23 points. This would result in an average score of 19 points, plus or minus one point depending on the overall strength of debate in the room. Some judges prefer to use the specific criteria discussed previously to arrive at a score, whereas others use them only as a guidelines to reach a total score. Here are descriptions of the different levels:

<15 points. Rarely should a debater receive a score this low. A score under 15 points indicates that the debater didn't fulfill his or her role in the debate. The speech was incomplete and virtually impossible for any reasonable person to follow.

15 to 17 points. Some debaters, particularly beginners, may fall within this scoring range. There was clearly preparation and thought put into the case. Unfortunately, significant errors and shortcomings hurt the overall effectiveness.

17 to 19 points. A score within this range is considered average. The debater presented arguments reasonably well. He or she clashed with the other team's points, but may not have been thorough enough in many places. The style was adequate and the structure was fairly clear, but neither element was exceptional.

20 to 22 points. This score indicates an excellent performance. The debater presented arguments, clashed with the other team's points, and articulated the case in a confident, organized, and effective manner. He or she clearly stood out in the round.

23 points. A score this high should be reserved for a top-notch performance. There should probably be only a handful in the tournament, the recipients of which would almost certainly be contenders for the top speaker awards. To earn this score, every aspect of debate has to be done exceptionally well.

24 points. You're falling off your chair because you've been dazzled

beyond your wildest expectations. You would pay money to see this person debate again, or even for an autograph.

25 points. The debater is perfect. Superhuman, actually.

TEAM DECISION

Usually, the team with the higher speaking score between the two debaters wins the debate. Doesn't it make sense that the debaters with stronger arguments and more effective refutation should win? In the vast majority of cases, this is true. But there are some debate tournaments that allow 'low point wins'. This means that a team could have been less proficient in its debating skills, such as style and procedure, but still have won the overall argument. There are two questions that a judge should ask in deciding who won the debate, both of them different ways of stating a similar measuring stick:

- **Trial test.** If you were a judge in a trial on this issue and had to decide objectively which team made a stronger case with its arguments and refutation, who would you select? Or, if you were randomly assigned to either side in a courtroom battle on this resolution, which team would you want to be your legal counsel?

- **Burden test.** Which team did a more effective job at meeting its burden in the debate? That is, which one was more successful at fulfilling its obligations according to the definitions presented and your interpretation of each team's responsibilities?