

Report of the 2006 National Policy Debate Review and Recommendation Committee

Mission Statement

This committee has been constituted by the National Forensic League in order to examine rules and procedures in the area of policy debate. The goal of our committee is to produce recommendations for consideration by the NFL District Chairs and Executive Council.

In undertaking this task, our deliberations have been influenced by many factors. First, we have attempted to operate from the basic principle of attempting to empower and best serve the students who participate in policy debate. In doing so, we have sought to do the following:

- Attempt to bring conflicting rules into alignment
- Find ways to maintain and strengthen debate in various regions of the country
- Seek ways to empower coaches of various backgrounds and experience levels
- Strive toward creating a level playing field in the highly diverse world of policy debate.

We are offering suggestions in five areas: Computers, Evidence Standards, Topic Selection, Judging and Tabulation Procedure. As much of this work was finalized in subcommittees, there are some minor differences in formatting between the sections. We hope that these differences will not serve as a distraction for the District Chairs and Executive Council members as they consider our conclusions.

In presenting our findings, we would like it to be noted that our committee has a highly diverse background in terms of regional representation and philosophical approach to coaching debate. We have only presented findings which found unanimity within our committee. It is our hope that by speaking with one clear voice, our findings will be of greater use to the forensics community.

Respectfully submitted,

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Pamela McComas, Topeka, HS, KS (Executive Council Representative)
Cindy Burgett, Washburn Rural HS, KS
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Computers

The Policy Debate Review Committee considered the issue of electronic retrieval devices as an initial agenda item. We discussed at great length the concerns we have heard articulated in our various parts of the country for many years, and listened to some of those who currently allow and use such devices in debate rounds. The Committee was comprised of a greatly diverse group of urban and rural schools with enrollments from 300 to 3300, schools with national circuit focus and those with only regional competition, schools with active coaches from two to fifteen, and schools with current strengths of 195 to 850 degrees. Some of the concerns articulated included: Disability accommodation, socioeconomic equity, inappropriate communication, and contemporary literacy.

After much discussion, we agreed that our responsibilities as educators to provide accommodation for disability and especially our responsibility to embrace contemporary literacy outweighed the possibility of new ways to violate ethics and the conception that allowing computers in debate rounds would significantly disadvantage some students

The Committee unanimously agreed that it was time to begin the discussion of the use of computers in rounds of debate at the District and National tournaments. We propose the following rules changes to the National Tournament Manual, with commensurate changes to the District Tournament Manual:

National Tournament Manual page TN-2

STRIKE THE EXISTING RULE [16. Retrieval. The use by contestants of any electronic retrieval system (recording or information retrieval system) now known or to be invented is prohibited during any rounds at NFL District and National Tournaments. Electric or electronic devices may be used for the sole purpose of keeping time. Judges may use a computer to take notes while judging during competition at the District and/or National Tournaments. Materials printed from "on line" services are permitted in debates and the extemp prep room. Electronically retrieved evidence used in any NFL contest must conform to the citation standard of the Modern language Association [See Appendix V, Page TA-5].]

SUBSTITUTE THIS LANGUAGE 16. The use of laptop computers and similar devices for the purposes of data entry or retrieval is allowed in rounds of Policy Debate, Lincoln-Douglas Debate, and Public Forum Debate. Using any device to establish a telecommunication connection with any person other than the competitors in the round constitutes a violation of this rule. Such violation will result in disqualification from all tournament competition.

The making this recommendation, the Committee observes that:

Telecommunication is an evolving technology, and given the nature of competition, methods of enforcement will probably keep pace with attempts at transgression. Such has been the case with every other competitive societies. Also, no debater will want to be known as the first to be disqualified.

If the use of laptop computers is restricted to data entry and retrieval, the cost of such devices is minimized, as is the disparity between more and less affluent students. Current cost of such devices is below \$500, with some below \$200.

If computers are allowed to replace printed evidence, the cost of copying and transporting that evidence would more than pay for a laptop computer. Such a practice would also encourage the practice of effective public speaking, which, we hope, is still the fundamental reason for the existence of the NFL, because evidence would have to be read clearly the first time, rather than depending on the rereading of the printed copy.

With increased use, searchable database applications would replace the physical organization techniques currently employed. Just as they have begun to supply handbook subscriptions in the digital rather than print medium, handbook companies would begin to supply evidence in database format rather than print format.

Even as those with recognized disabilities will sue for use of technological accommodations in the realm of competitive debate, there are many students, not members of identified disability groups, who would benefit greatly from the use of laptops in debate rounds. For instance, those with severe handwriting deficiencies would be able to read what they have written by using a keyboard, rather than a pen. Many of us require printed essays so we can read what our students write, yet deny them that advantage in their debate rounds.

From a vocational perspective, we observe that, as educators, we would be remiss in denying to our students mastery of the technology that they will need to use in their future lives. During the National Tournament, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish NFL debaters from business people in meetings at the hotel. The attire was virtually identical. Except for students sometimes sitting on the floor, their mannerisms were quite similar. Both groups were using laptop computers and cell phones. The distinguishing difference was a plethora of plastic containers containing printed documents that were shared among students, while the business people shared information via laptop computers. No one in the business world still carries around in physical form what can be conveyed in digital form.

This is a call for a change in the data entry and retrieval mediums allowed in competitive debate, not in the process, or the substance, or the goals of competitive debate.

For these reasons, we ask that the District Chairs and the National Council of the National Forensics League adopt our recommendations concerning electronic data entry and retrieval devices in debate competition.

Evidence Standards

The Policy Debate Review Committee found that considerable confusion existed in the community regarding what specific citation standards must be met when presenting evidence in a debate round. It is the belief of the Committee that much of this confusion exists because of the perceived tethering of MLA standards to the world of debate. MLA citation standards are intended primarily to provide a consistent format for printed scholarly work. Oral presentation requires a different format to provide clarity in a different medium.

The specification for citation content in TN-3, 7.A.2 for author, qualification, title and date would seem to be sufficient to establish credibility of evidence and provide information necessary to validate and access the source. The format, beyond adaptation to oral delivery style, is inconsequential. Many people confuse the inclusion of every possible bit of information available about a source in the MLA style sheet (or any style sheet) with a requirement to include all of that information. Hence, the Committee suggests removing MLA references from the manual. This would entail deleting sections TA-4 and TA-5 of the manual.

The Policy Debate Review Committee further finds that the recently established evidence rules lack clarity with respect to what is required to be spoken and the consequences for not speaking what is required.

The possibility of disqualification that some have assumed as a penalty does not seem to apply to source citation, either in the format in which it is presented or the reasonableness of such an application. Protests and due process and possible disqualification aptly apply to falsification of evidence, but should not apply to the failure of one student to correctly cite a complicated source of evidence.

The Committee, feeling that rules without consequences are not effective rules, proposes the following changes to the National Tournament Manual and commensurate changes to the District Tournament Manual: modify TN-3, 7.A.5 by deleting the language “Electronically retrieved evidence used in any NFL contest event must conform to the citation standard of the Modern Language Association [MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Fourth Edition].” and adding the language “Evidence lacking specified citation and challenged by the opposition shall be disregarded by the judge unless said citation is proffered in the immediately subsequent speech.”

This would have the effect of clarifying the controlling standard for evidence citation as TN-3, 7.A.2 and would create a reasonable and measured process for resolving citation issues during debate rounds.

Topic Selection

The Policy Debate Review Committee unanimously recommends the following for the National Forensic League in order to facilitate participation in the annual policy topic selection process:

A) The National Forensic League should urge the National Federation of High Schools to make information about topic selection more readily available on its website by creating a more user-friendly link on the NFHS homepage.

Rationale: After our informative session with Kent Summers, it was a general agreement that many policy coaches are uninformed about the topic selection process. A precursor to increased participation by coaches would be to inform them.

B) The National Forensic League should encourage grassroots participation by policy coaches to become more involved in the topic selection process. The National Forensic League should undertake the following to facilitate this:

1. Create a page on the NFL website that has basic information about the topic selection process (including, but not limited to, dates and locations of the topic meetings, an informative explanation of the voting process, contact information for topic paper submission, a listing of names and contact information for the state delegates, and a link to the NFHS site).

Rationale: Information to the coaches is key. Many policy coaches would use the NFL website as its first point of access to try to get information about the topic selection process. After the discussion with Kent Summers, there are a variety of ways that coaches can participate in the topic selection process. A page on the NFL website dedicated to this would increase traffic on the NFL website generally and provide important avenues of information for policy coaches.

2. The National Forensic League office should encourage NFL districts to send their district chair or a policy coach as a representative to the annual topic meeting. If possible, the NFL districts should try to provide some funding for that attendance.

Rationale: Although resources are tight in many NFL districts, there are some districts that could financially assist in sending policy coaches to the annual topic meeting. Even if funds were not available through the district, the National Forensic League could still encourage NFL districts to select representatives to attend. The committee feels that the primary problem with the current topic selection is the lack of participation by policy debate coaches. This can provide a platform for policy coaches to have more of a voice in the topic selection process.

C) The National Forensic League should formally submit in writing to the NFHS Speech Advisory Committee (held in October) a position statement on behalf of the organization the following recommendations for changes in the topic selection procedures:

1. No state should receive a vote in the policy topic selection process if that state does not host a policy state debate tournament.

Rationale: One of the greatest frustrations that the committee felt during the Topic Selection discussion was the high number of individuals and states that submitted votes to the topic selection process that did not have policy debate. States without policy debate should not have a voice in the policy topic.

2. The NFHS should strongly encourage state delegates to include a voting procedure within their state that includes policy coaches before the vote for that state is submitted.

Rationale: Many states rely on athletic, activities, or principal's associations to cast their state's vote for the policy discussion. These associations often do not consult the debate coaches within the state on the topic selection process.

3. Delegates who do submit a vote to the NFHS for its state must also send the results of the internal straw vote that the delegate used in his or her state to cast his or her vote to the NFHS for publication on the website

Rationale: More transparency and accountability are needed. Many state delegates do not include the policy coaches within the state in its decision to cast their vote. This transparency will increase the likelihood that state delegates will get input from their policy debate coaches.

Judging

In the area of judging, the Policy Debate Review Committee would like to offer suggestions in two areas: Judge Paradigm Forms and Oral Critiques.

Judge Paradigm Forms

The Policy Debate Review Committee unanimously recommends the following for consideration by the National Forensic League Executive Council:

A. We recommend that the NFL establish a system for entering judge information for the national tournament electronically and place paradigm sheets online at the NFL web site. There are several benefits for this course of action including: 1) information can be placed online in advance of the tournament and provide teams with opportunities to prepare before arriving at the tournament site; 2) teams would be able to either print or save the information electronically to bring to the tournament, saving the NFL in time and printing costs; and 3) an archive of judge paradigm sheets could be maintained on the web site allowing for access to judge information throughout the year. *Note: several state organizations and collegiate national tournaments offer such judge paradigm information gathering and access.*

B. We recommend that the NFL allow a space for additional comments for each of the items on the judge paradigm form from number three onward. This would allow judges to provide – on an optional basis – further information to clarify the paradigms and the numerical scales on the form. Additionally, this can be readily facilitated with the online entry, and it can be limited to a reasonable length (three to four sentences in length for each entry – and this can be limited electronically). The numerical portion of the preference form would be required, but additional comments would remain optional and welcomed should the judge wish to provide them.

Oral Critiques

The Policy Debate Review Committee is not in agreement about whether or not oral critiques should be “allowed” or considered “acceptable” or “unacceptable” in the preliminary rounds and tabled a motion to disallow oral critiques in preliminary rounds.

However, there is consensus on this committee that we are unhappy with how oral critiques are currently practiced. There are some judges who do give critiques in the preliminary rounds and do disclose their decisions, and there are others who do not, and despite that, there are not clear guidelines for our judges. Thus, the Policy Rules Review Committee unanimously propose that the following actions be taken:

Recommendation 1

The Tournament Manual and Appendix should be modified to include the following recommendations:

A) On page TN -2, under the heading of General Rules, number 11 should read as follows:

11. Judges:

- a. Preliminary debaters and contests shall be judged by two judges; elimination rounds by three judges; semi-finals by five and finals by eleven judges. The two high and two low judges’ scores for each contestant in the final rounds shall be eliminated before tabulating the final results.
- b. College age judges must have completed their sophomore year.
- c. A \$100 per round penalty is assessed when a judge misses a judging assignment.
- d. Judges assigned by the tournament committee shall be final unless protested in writing for cause.
- e. No debate ballot should be turned in without a reason for decision. Oral commentary should not be considered a substitute for the written ballot. Blank ballots or ballots with the word “oral” written on them with no other commentary are not considered responsible examples of education or adjudication. Any judge who turns in a ballot that is blank or a ballot without at least some commentary on it concerning the round debated or the judge’s reason for decision will forfeit the judging bond paid by the school represented by that judge.

B) On page TA – 2, under Appendix II Judge Instructions in the section headed Policy, Public Forum and L/D Judges, the following items should be added:

9. Oral commentary/critiques: NFL strongly discourages judges from disclosing decisions in the preliminary rounds. Comments made by a judge (orally or in writing) should be constructive and professional. Ballots with decisions should be turned in before a judge makes any oral comments to any teams, and ALL ballots

for a specific debate must be turned in (or all judges' decisions rendered for that round) before any oral comments should be made to any teams. Oral comments that are made to teams should never affect the overall time schedule of the tournament or delay subsequent rounds. Please end comments by judges in the round early enough so that competitors may get to subsequent rounds on time. Tournament officials may ask you to limit your comments in order to facilitate the tournament schedule.

Recommendation 2

All of the above changes should appear on the judging assignment page that is distributed for each judge at registration, as we believe knowledge of these guidelines is an important part of the judging assignment. A sample of how this might look is offered on the next page:

JUDGE: Smith, Ms. Jennifer A.

Milo Springs HSKS

Your judge code for this tournament will be 85J001

It is the responsibility of each judge to read this judging assignment page in its entirety.

You are scheduled for 4 rounds. You will be paid \$10 for any rounds judged over that.

- Please report directly to rooms. Ballots will be delivered to assigned rooms.
- Failure to be at your assigned places at the assigned times will result in a loss of \$100.00 from your school’s judge bond for EACH round missed. This includes all main event pools, supplemental and consolation pools.
- If you are judging policy debate, please be sure that you write a ballot with a reason for decision on it. Oral commentary should not be considered a substitute for the written ballot. Blank ballots or ballots with the word “oral” written on them with no other commentary are not considered responsible examples of education or adjudication. Any judge who turns in a ballot that is blank or a ballot without at least some commentary on it concerning the round debated or the judge’s reason for decision will forfeit the judging bond paid by the school represented by that judge.
- NFL strongly discourages judges from disclosing decisions in the preliminary rounds of policy debate. Comments made by a judge (orally or in writing) should be constructive and professional. Ballots with decisions should be turned in before a judge makes any oral comments to any teams, and ALL ballots for a specific debate must be turned in (or all judges’ decisions rendered for that round) before any oral comments should be made to any teams. Oral comments that are made to teams should never affect the overall time schedule of the tournament or delay subsequent rounds. Please end comments by judges in the round early enough so that competitors may get to subsequent rounds on time. Tournament officials may ask you to limit your comments in order to facilitate the tournament schedule.

Following is the schedule you have been assigned to judge for this tournament

-----MAIN EVENTS ASSIGNMENTS-----

8:00 a.m.	Monday Quincy Middles School	Rm 310
10:00 a.m.	Monday Quincy Middle School	Rm 120
1:30 p.m.	Thursday	Report to Grand High School Auditorium – Policy Debate Semifinal
1:00 p.m.	Friday	Report to Ballroom A at the Marriott -- IX final

=====SUPPLEMENTAL EVENT ASSIGNMENTS=====

YOU HAVE NO SUPPLEMENTAL EVENT ROUNDS SCHEDULED AT THIS TIME

=====CONSOLATION EVENT ASSIGNMENTS=====

YOU HAVE NO CONSOLATION EVENT ROUND SCHEDULED AT THIS TIME

You will notice that you are scheduled to judge a semifinal round of policy debate. Actual judges will be determined based upon the states and districts represented by the students in semis. Be aware, however, that you must report 30 minutes prior to this round or you will lose \$100 for failing to report

We will not know how many rounds must be scheduled before the final round in debate. It is, of course, possible that this particular semifinal round will not even be necessary. You MUST, however, wait for the posting of EACH round to find out if you are judging. You MUST wait until you are released by the judge assignment committee.

You have been selected for a final round judge pool in International Extemp. Please report to Ballroom A at the Marriott at 1:00 p.m. on Friday to fulfill your judging commitment.

You, or anyone from you school, may not check out before Friday 3:00 p.m. This time is based on the latest round that someone from your school is scheduled to judge.

Tabulation Procedure

The Policy Debate Review Committee is offering two recommendations regarding tabulation procedures.

Recommendation 1

The Policy Debate Review Committee unanimously proposes that all teams with 8 or more ballots after 6 preliminary rounds shall advance to rounds 7 and 8 and that the run-off round for debate be eliminated.

Rationales:

1. Eight ballots is a fair standard to determine advancement to elimination rounds. This is a difficult tournament – as it should be. In order to clear to elimination rounds under the system used at the 2006 nationals, a team must have a 75% win-loss record, which is extremely difficult at ANY tournament, let alone at the national championship tournament. Compounding the difficulty of competition in general is the (often first-time) challenge of adapting to the broad diversity of judges in the pool for this tournament. A 67% win-loss record (8 ballots) is both very rigorous and more equitable and fair to all teams.
2. It is not inequitable with other events to advance all teams with 8 ballots. There are those who might argue that this would create inequity with the other main events at nationals, since debate may advance more than 60 entries to the elimination rounds if all 8 ballot teams advance. While this seems to be a sound argument, there are a number of solid reasons why it is not true. First, in other events, there are numerous instances of there being an “unbreakable tie” and so more than 60 contestants advance to round 7. Sixty is NOT a “magic” number that is adhered to at all times. If it is true that not more than 60 may advance, then perhaps to create equity with debate, there should be a run-off round in all other events in which contestants with an unbreakable tie have to compete in a run-off round as well should that unbreakable tie require advancing more than 60 entrants. As it was, there was gross inequity for all of the debate events at the 2006 national tournament, since only 49 policy teams, 54 LD entries, and 55 PFD teams advanced to elimination rounds, while all other events advanced 60 or more. Also, debate is fundamentally different in terms of competition than all other main events. In an individual event round, a contestant is competing against at least 4 other competitors. At the end of the six preliminary rounds, a student has competed against roughly 20-25% of ALL of the competitors in that event. To cut to (roughly) 60 entries in an individual event at the end of prelims is based on a larger sampling of how an individual stacks up against the competition in his or her event. In the debate events, a team will have competed against no more than 6 other entrants in that event, roughly 3% or less of the total field. Additionally, in a debate event, the decision a judge makes is yes or no/win or loss. In a speech event, this is not the case. A judge can vote yes (a rank of 1),

probably (2), maybe (3), probably no (4), or no (5 or higher). It may be hard for a speech student to recover from a "no" (5) in speech, but it is very possible for a student to recover from a "maybe" (3). No such opportunity exists in the debate events.

Finally, clearing all teams with 8 ballots does not create as large a discrepancy in equity with individual events as exists in the system adopted for the 2006 nationals. The difference between 61 teams clearing in debate (or even 64 under the old system) is still closer to 60 than 49 (the number of policy teams that were advanced to round 7). In a scenario where there were more than 220 entries participating (see LD and PFD numbers), the difference between the number of teams with 8 ballots (61 and 67 respectively) is STILL closer in equity than 60 is to 49, which is the number that cleared to round 7 in policy debate.

3. The run-off round creates a fundamentally unsound "one down and you're out" system in which certain teams actually debate a single-elimination tournament between preliminary rounds and elimination rounds. This puts those teams debating the run-off at a distinct disadvantage from the standpoint of having less down-time/rest.
4. The run-off round has created confusion. The schedule for the 2005 nationals saw a situation in which a team didn't know it was supposed to be debating round 7 and that there was no run-off round and didn't show up to debate round 7. Will there be a run off round? Will there not be a run-off round? No one ever knows, so a solid schedule can never be set for debate. By eliminating the run-off round, a solid and unambiguous schedule can be set.
5. The tournament will still be between 14-16 rounds, even if all teams with 8 ballots advanced to rounds 7 and 8. In the elimination rounds, we would lose roughly the same PERCENTAGE of teams each round (thus a higher number, if we cleared more teams) and be in the situation we are now: we would have anywhere from 14-16 rounds total.

The 2006 statistics for CX, LD and PFD are as follows:

Policy debate began with 189

After 6 rounds--

37 teams have 9 or more ballots

24 teams have 8 ballots

61 teams would have advanced to rounds 7 & 8 with no runoff.

Because of the run-off, 49 teams advanced to rounds 7 & 8

LD debate began with 222 entries

After 6 rounds--

46 LD contestants have 9 or more ballots

15 LD contestants have 8 ballots

61 LD contestants would have advanced to rounds 7 & 8 with no runoff.

Because of the run off 54 LD contestants advanced to rounds. 7 & 8

PFD debate began with 218 teams

After 6 rounds--

42 PFD teams have 9 or more ballots

25 PFD teams have 8 ballots

67 PFD teams would have advanced to rounds 7 & 8 with no run off.

A run off would have occurred under old manual language.

Because of the run off, 55 PFD teams advance to rounds 7 & 8.

Recommendation 2

Pairings for rounds 1 and 2 of debate will be made available at registration. Pairings for rounds 3-6 will be made available at the beginning of the tournament rounds on Monday.

Reasons and Rationale: Currently, if there are an odd number of teams, one bye is assigned in each round of the tournament when the tournament schedule is made. However, there are usually (maybe always) teams that have entered but do not register and are dropped from the tournament, creating even more byes.

In a world where a team must have 8 or 9 ballots to clear to round 7, having 2 “free” ballots from a bye is significant. It is fairest to all teams that the fewest number of bye ballots be given out. It has been the case in the past when as many as 4 teams per round received byes. This is clearly an advantage to those teams and a disadvantage to those teams not receiving byes.

At the same time, it is very important that pairings be available to teams so that they may begin their preparations. Thus, releasing pairings for rounds 1 and 2 at registration would facilitate organization and preparation by coaches and teams but allows the tab room to adjust the schedule for later preliminary rounds so that there is, at most (at least within the control of the tournament management), one team receiving a bye. Pairings for rounds 3 and 4 would be available Monday morning prior to the beginning of round 1. Pairings for rounds 5 and 6 would be available at the end of the Monday rounds. If it was more convenient for the scheduling management, rounds 3-6 could be made available for rounds 3-6 before round one begins on Monday morning.

While we realize that this recommendation may create printing issues for tournament management, the inequities created by numerous byes per round need to be addressed.