



Rules of OCDL Tournaments

The OCDL is an “education first, competition second” organization: it exists to educate and promote communication and critical thinking. The league is not intended simply to provide a forum for competition.

There are few rules to debate, and creativity is encouraged as to create an intellectually dynamic activity; however, there are some expected norms and protocols. To provide for a good tournament experience, all participants, coaches, and audience members (family/friends) must adhere to the following rules. If a particular host school’s rules differ from those listed here, the OCDL rules will be the ones used.

Teams and Speakers

The debate has two teams: proposition and opposition. Both teams have 3 speakers unless approved to have two speakers. A squad cannot participate in a tournament with more than two two-person teams.

There are three speeches for each team. The first two speeches are constructive speeches: new arguments can be presented in these speeches. The third speaker delivers a rebuttal, and new arguments are not allowed during this speech. Judge’s are to ignore new arguments that are initiated in the rebuttal section.

Speaking Order

The speaking time is the maximum time allotted for each speech. Middle school speeches are all 5 minutes long, while for high school, constructive speeches are 6 minutes and the rebuttal speech is 5 minutes.

Speakers make their presentations in the following order:

- First Speaker Proposition
- First Speaker Opposition
- Second Speaker Proposition
- Second Speaker Opposition
- Third Speaker Opposition
- Third Speaker Proposition

For a two member team, the two-time speaker must speak first and third and the scores for the two-time speaker will be averaged.

Time (Preparation and Debate)

Debaters have a total of 20 minutes of preparation time from the announcement of the topic to the start of the debate. For impromptu resolutions, the preparation time may be increased to 30 minutes. Additional preparation time (or “running prep”) is not given during or prior to the start of the debate. Once the speech is complete and the judge is ready, the judge will recognize the next speaker. A fast flow of events during tournaments is crucial; therefore, debaters must begin their speech as soon as the judge is ready. For each speaker, time will begin at the sound of their voice and all speaking is included in the debaters speaking time.

In addition, there is no “grace period” at the conclusion of a speech. Once the speaker's time has elapsed, the judge should ignore or disregard information stated after the time has elapsed. A debater may gracefully end a speech, and this might take a few extra seconds beyond the official end time; however, the judge will not consider any information that has been stated after the speaker's time has elapsed. If a student hasn't quickly ended their speech after the time has ended, the judge may ask the student to stop (immediately).

If a team does not arrive on time for a debate round, the judge will report it to the tournament administration, and that team may be disqualified. Given the prep period has expired and the judge has arrived at the debating chamber, debaters must be present and prepared to debate.

Debaters may use phone timers to self-time during their speech provided that 1) the phone is in “airplane mode” and 2) the phone is not used at any other time, but the judge is always the official timekeeper.

Getting Assistance During Preparation Time

Debaters may speak with other debaters, coaches, and volunteers during the preparation time. No one (debaters or anyone assisting a debater) may access the Internet during preparation time. An electronic device may not be used to access an argument database or find material on the Internet. Violations of this preparation time rule will cause the team to lose the debate by forfeit which will be decided by the head judge after the round has completed.

Transcribing Notes and Electronic Information

A variety of colored paper is provided to debaters at the beginning of the tournament. Debaters must transcribe any notes and other prepared materials that they would like to use during their debate onto this colored paper during preparation time. Students may not write on the colored paper prior to the start of the actual prep time. No material (written or typed in advance of the preparation time) may be used or reviewed during the actual debate. In other words, debaters may only have access to the colored paper and blank flow chart. Students using unauthorized paper resources during the debate round will cause their team to be disqualified for the given round.

Points of Information and Argumentative Heckling

Points of Information

If approved by the speaker, an opponent must deliver their point of information (POI) within 15 seconds; however, the speaker is in charge of their own time and may cut the POI short. Because the speaker yields time for a POI, the speaker's time continues to run during a POI; in addition, a point of information can only be directed to a member of the opposing team and never to one's own team member.

A point of information cannot be accepted in the third speech for either team. In the event a POI is attempted during “protected time,” (the first and last minute of the constructive speeches and the entirety of the rebuttal section) the judge should call “out of order” and end it. A point of information can be accepted after the first minute and before the last minute of constructive speeches. The opening and closing minutes of each constructive speech are “protected time” for the speaker.

Debaters may make a nonverbal or verbal request for a point of information. A point of information can be a statement or a question.

POIs can be rejected verbally (e.g. “no thank you”) or with a simple wave down of the hand.

Heckling

Argumentative heckling, an interruption of a speaker by one or more members of the opposing team, may be presented at any time in the debate. Heckles are limited to three words. Argumentative heckling is for the benefit of the judge and adds value to the debate. As with points of information, any argument made as a heckle may have the same consideration as any argument entered in the debate.

Disruptive heckling is not permitted. If heckling becomes overly disruptive, the judge will ask the speaker to stop being disruptive.

Some heckling is positive (e.g. applause for speakers at the beginning and conclusion of each speech). Only positive heckling can be used in response to one’s own teammate’s arguments. Team members may applaud their teammate’s speech by tapping on a tabletop or desk with their knuckles (conventional form of debate applause). Team members may also call out “hear hear” in support of a particularly effective argument.

Any argument made as a point of information/heckle has the same consideration as any argument entered in the debate.

Rules for Judging

Only certified judges are eligible to judge at OCDL tournaments, and these judges may not change any of the rules for competition. Except during a “scramble tournament,” judges may not judge teams from their own school, and judges are responsible to notify tournament officials of any conflicts of interest they may have with a particular team or debater. A judge must take careful notes (paper or electronic) on a flow sheet during a debate. A judge must act as the highest authority in the debate chamber. Among other duties, judge’s are responsible for proper conduct during the debate (from both debaters and observers) and treatment of the debate chamber.

It is the judge's responsibility to make two decisions for each debate: 1) determine which team has won the debate and 2) score individual speech performances based on the speaker performance rubric. The victory and speaker scores are independent of one another: winning teams can actually have lower speaker points than their opponents. For the speech performance decision, the judge scores argumentation, refutation, organization, and presentation individually for each speaker/speech.

After private, independent deliberation, the judge will complete a ballot: the written record of the winning team and individual speaker scores. During official training, judge trainers and those in training may remain in the debate room during a judge’s deliberation. Judges are required to write comments to explain the outcome of the debate and help debaters improve. Judges are also required to verbally announce the winner of the round and speaker scores to the debaters, but a debater may opt out of the public announcement of their own speaker scores.

Topicality and Definitions

Any debater can define terms within their speech, and the other team may argue against their opponents’ definitions, but such challenges made to previous definitions/narrows should be solidly justified by the challenger. The judge will decide issues of fairness for topicality/definitions based on the arguments presented to them by both teams.

What arguments count for victory?

Judges must not include personal biases in making the decision for debate. Judges must be a “blank slate,” meaning when making a decision they only consider material (arguments/evidence) brought up during the debate round. In order to be considered in the RFD (reason for decision) an argument needs to be raised in at least one of the constructive speeches in addition to the rebuttal speech. Arguments not carried into the rebuttal speech are considered to be dropped.

Teams are not permitted to start new arguments in their rebuttal speech. Debaters may continue an argument or respond to an argument from the constructive speeches to the third speeches and add more reasoning, evidence, or impact (significance and/or results). The judge will not penalize debaters for presenting new arguments; instead, a judge will simply disregard new arguments when evaluating the outcome of a debate.

Proposition wins the round if they prove their case to be more likely true than false or more beneficial than harmful.

Code of Conduct

The league does not accept aggression, shame, bullying, unprofessional favoritism, or gossip. All attendees will be reminded at the beginning of each event that it is appropriate to communicate respectfully and professionally with other parties.

Observers may not verbally heckle debaters or disrupt a debate. Observers may politely applaud a debate team by tapping on a tabletop slash desk with their knuckles. The audience too may occasionally applaud the same way during a speech, but no other disruption or heckling is allowed. If heckling by observers becomes disruptive, the judge will ask the observers to leave the room until the debate is concluded.

Observers may not speak to judges or have any other contact with the judges about their debate decisions except to express appreciation for the judge’s time and service.

While debaters may ask questions to the judge for the purpose of learning, and improving, statements in critique of the judge’s decision/scoring (putting the judge on the spot) aka “post-rounding” are not permitted.

No filming, photography, and/or audio recording of the debates is permitted except by an official photographer appointed by the OCDL administration and/or board of directors.

Neither debaters nor observers may enter the debate chamber (host school classroom) without both a judge and another student present.

Everyone at the debate must respect the property held within each classroom and around the school. Tampering with or taking personal belongings of students and/or teachers found in and on desks and in and around lockers is not permitted.

No one may enter or exit a debate chamber in the middle of a given debate or speech. If a debater or observer must leave the debate chamber for any reason, they must do so in between given speeches.

Food/drink (except water) is not permitted in the pairings/announcements area or the individual debate chambers.

While the league seeks to build a strong community, an individual's identity is equally important. If a participant insults another participant's race, ethnicity, religious belief, gender, or physical appearance, they may be asked to leave the event location, and it may cause their team to lose their debate by forfeit. A second offense may result in the offender no longer being allowed to participate at any OCDL event.

If debaters or observers have a concern about a judge or another team/school, or a rules violation, the party making the complaint should relay this information to their coach. If the coach feels the complaint is valid, he/she may then petition the head judge, tabulations administrator or league president.

Participants who consistently ignore or break the rules of the tournament may be prohibited from future participation.

Punctuality and Commitment

Students and coaches must arrive at the tournament site before the conclusion of the registration period (8:00 AM), and they are not allowed to leave until the last round of debate has concluded.

The OCDL requires students make a commitment for the entire day, so it is not possible to have a substitution or alternate student swap places with another student during a tournament: the same three people must debate together the entire day. In instances where a student becomes ill and can no longer compete, the two remaining students can continue debating as a two-person team.

The substitution rule only applies after the first round of the tournament has begun. A school may rearrange teams before the first round begins. After this point there may be no further alterations to teams.

Scramble Team Arrangement

If more than one coach has a student without teammates at a tournament, the league has the authority to create a scramble team, or a mixed team of students from up to three different squads. The scramble team competes independently of any of its members' schools. This team would be created only if the need arises, but it would allow any students whose partner(s) did not appear at the event the chance to still compete. This scramble team could take home squad, team and individual awards.

Americans with Disability Act Compliance

The OCDL adheres to requirements and guidelines of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. When and where OCDL rules conflict with the terms of the statute, the ADA rules will take effect. Tournament officials must be informed about ADA-related issues prior to the start of the tournament and/or first round.