

Judge Guidebook

Orange County Debate League

©2025 All Rights Reserved



Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Levels of Judge Certification	2
Requirements/Process to become a Certified Judge	2
Judge Duties in Brief	3
Responsibilities of Judges	4
Keep Time During Debates.....	4
Intervene Only When Necessary.....	4
Flow as a Judge.....	5
Be a Blank Slate (A Tabula Rasa).....	5
Provide Feedback.....	6
Speaker Points.....	6
Written Ballot.....	7
Mitigate Any Intentional or Unintentional Bias.....	8
Make All Decisions Independent Decisions.....	9
Act as a Professional.....	9
Don't delay the Tournament (Importance of Speed).....	9
Report Conflicts of Interest.....	10
Thank You	10

Statement of Purpose

This guidebook is intended to supplement the official Orange County Debate League (OCDL) Judge Training. It provides additional reference, clarification, and examples to support your learning. It is **not** a substitute for completing the formal judge training and certification process, which is required before judging in any OCDL tournament.

Introduction

Your role during your service in the Orange County Debate League (“OCDL” or “League”) is to serve as a judge for middle and high school level, modified-parliamentary debates. The purpose of OCDL is educational: to teach, promote, administer and develop the art of student debate in the classroom and through competition. As a judge and volunteer for your school or the league, you should place this purpose above all others. In doing this, your work is important in promoting the development of essential skills in our community’s young people.

In order to accomplish its purpose, the OCDL established a judging certification program. To maintain fair and consistent judging, all OCDL judges must participate in either the online or in-person training program before being permitted to judge in any OCDL tournament. OCDL rules require judge certification, comprehensive oral and written feedback, productive criticism to assist debater skill development, and accountability for decisions to the tournament tabulation staff.

Consistent judging can be a challenge, primarily because judges are human with different backgrounds and experiences. The League balances its policies with the need for a well-trained set of consistent-scoring judges and the understanding that league judges are volunteers comprised of teachers, coaches, parents, and students. Detailed in this guide are the responsibilities of judges and policies of the OCDL.

Levels of Judge Certification

Certified Judge: A certified judge has completed training and is approved to judge at all OCDL- and MSPDP-related tournaments.

Judge Trainer: A judge authorized to have training judges shadow them and sign off on sample ballots. They are also authorized to lead judge training at tournaments and workshops.

Head Judge/Director of Judging: The Head Judge/Director of Judging oversees and is responsible for all issues of judging, including resolving conflicts. They are members of the Board of Directors and responsible for reporting to the Board.

Requirements/Process to Become a Certified Judge

To become a certified judge in the OCDL, one must meet the following criteria:

1. Be the proper age:
 - a. 9th grade or above for middle school tournaments
 - b. 12th grade or above for high school tournaments
2. Pass the OCDL judge certification process outlined below.

To become a certified judge, one must complete 2 steps:

Online or In-Person training followed by Online or In-Person shadowing

	Step 1: Training	Step 2: Shadowing
Online	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• View online Judge Training Videos• Pass online Judge Training Test	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit online ballot for sample debate• Judging committee will review ballot and approve certification or recommend in-person shadowing• Receive certification from Head Judge/Director of Judging
In-Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attend in-person Judge Training• Pass online Judge Training Test	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shadow Judge Trainer in live round and complete Sample Judge Ballot• Judge Trainer will review ballot and approve certification or recommend further shadowing• Receive certification from Head Judge/Director of Judging

Judge Duties in Brief

The following list of judge's responsibilities is not exhaustive, but it highlights many of the most common responsibilities of a judge when serving in the OCDL. An OCDL judge must:

- Be familiar with all rules and meet with the Head Judge to review/refresh/update the rules of conduct/scoring in an OCDL tournament before the start of each tournament.
- Wear OCDL identification at all times during the round.
- Pick up their ballots at the start of each round.
- Inform the Tabulations Table of any conflicts of interest with debaters.
- Assume authority in the room throughout the debate.
- Flow/keep notes of the debate proceedings.
- Write detailed and helpful information on ballots.
- Ensure proper timekeeping during the round.
- Maintain impartiality.
- Give the debaters the "benefit of the doubt" for acting in good faith.
- Determine scores and victories independently with students and parents outside of the room.
- Disclose their reasons for decisions
- Fill out the ballots completely including score breakdowns
- Check disrespectful behavior box on ballots when applicable ([Promoting Respectful Behavior in the OCDL](#))
- Be responsible for their own administrative paperwork.
- Represent the Orange County Debate League well!

Responsibilities of Judges

Keep Time During Debates

Timing the debate is the responsibility of the judge, and therefore, they need to ensure that each student receives the allotted amount of time (and no more) to speak. It is recommended the judge employ another person (audience member) in the room to keep time as a designated timekeeper. It is also recommended that the judge ask the designated timekeeper to sit close to the judge. Students are allowed to keep their own time only by using kitchen (simple) timers or phones in airplane mode. Ultimately however, judges must ensure proper time keeping procedures using the designated hand signals.

Intervene Only When Necessary

In most cases, judges should allow the debate to proceed without interference. As mentioned before, the OCDL prides itself in allowing the debaters to be the ones in much control of the flow and words in a debate. Only in very rare circumstances such as parent interference OR excessive and disruptive heckling can a judge immediately admonish a given group or individual in the debate room. In these cases, the judge should simply say “order” and explain their concerns with the issue at hand. Any further action on the judge’s part should be brought to the attention of the Tabulation Administrator, Head Judge and/or League President.

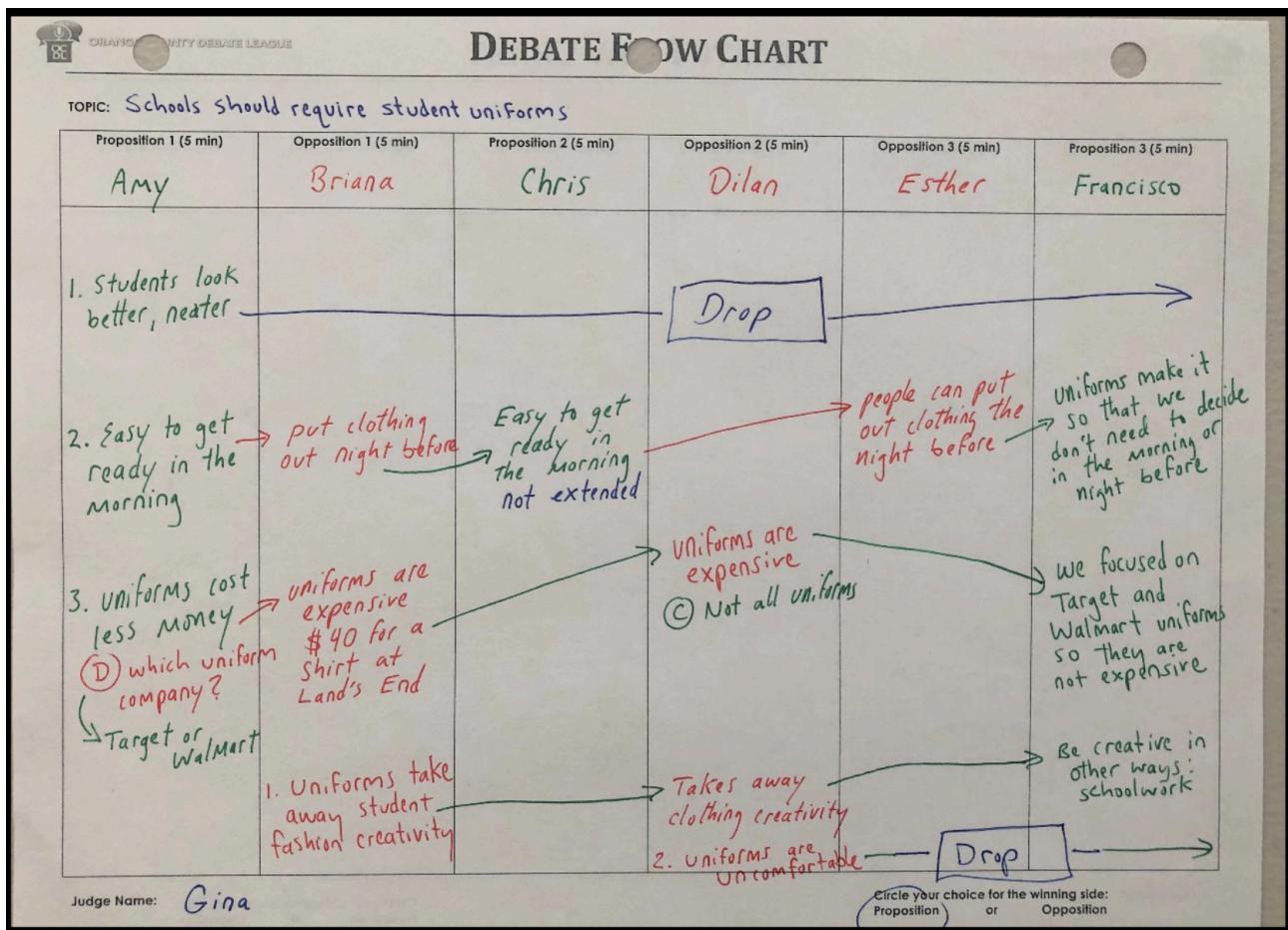
Flow as a Judge

Judges are required to keep notes of the debate, but the format of those notes are up to the discretion of the judge. Judges are encouraged to keep an Orange County Debate League-style flow chart as seen below. Color-coded flow charts are recommended but not required.

Judge flow charts differ from debater flow charts in their depth. While debaters tend to keep track of arguments based on their assertions and other information the debater deems relevant, judges should try to take notes with as much detail as possible, as such detail helps them when deciding victors and speaker points.

Flowing helps judges not only keep track of debaters' speeches, but also provide valuable feedback during the deliberation period. Just like debaters must present evidence for their arguments, judges are asked to defend their feedback with specific examples that occurred throughout the debate.

SAMPLE FLOW CHART



Be a Blank Slate (A Tabula Rasa)

The judge is responsible for deciding who wins and loses a debate. In the OCDL, judges are a "blank slate"; i.e. it is up to the debaters to "catch" errors in logic or evidence and challenge them. If an assertion goes unchallenged, the team that made that assertion "wins" that point. Judges must apply reciprocal standards for evaluating arguments to the best of

their abilities. Topics should not be pre-interpreted by individual judges, and they should rely upon the students to explain any unclear or undefined terms and ideas.

On a similar note, judges should be tolerant of conventions and practices (not rules, but behavior) that differ from their experience or expectations. For example, to reject a point of information, some students use a subtle gesture to ‘wave down’ opponents as they stand for a point of information. Other students give a verbal reply – “No, thank you.” Either is acceptable. A judge may not be familiar with a practice but that is not a reason to penalize a student for ‘unusual behavior.’

Finally, judges need to come to each tournament without bias from previous tournaments or experiences in education. It is important to remember that the team that wins the debate may not always be the team that is “expected” to win. Judges must be fair and judge each debate on its own merits, rather than on speculation, past performances in debate rounds, or other factors, such as school affiliation. While unlikely, it is possible to have the lower speaker point total awarded to the winning team. This is called a low-point win and can be indicated as such on the ballot.

Provide Feedback

After the debate, judges tell the debaters how they voted and why they voted that way. This includes verbally providing reason for decision (RFD) and individual speaker points. OCDL judges are required to disclose feedback both in verbal and written form to all debaters:

Oral RFD (Reason for Decision)

OCDL judges will provide oral feedback for debaters at the conclusion of the round. This oral feedback should begin within 10 minutes of the conclusion of the last speaker, and the oral feedback itself should be approximately 10 minutes. While the judge makes their decision, all students, audience members and time keepers must leave the debate room. The strict time structure is crucial to ensure timeliness of the tournament.

During the oral RFD, the judge will need to disclose the winning and losing side (Prop/Opp) of the debate and reveal the speaker points awarded to each individual student. During this time, the judge should address the following:

- Which side won?
 - What were the major/most impactful arguments?
 - Which arguments were not impactful or dropped?
 - What could the opposing team have done to win the round?
- What were the student speaker scores (referencing the Speaker Performance Rubric)?

A judge’s decision for team victory is never reversed. In very rare cases of extreme scoring, a student’s individual speaker score can be reviewed by tournament administrators.

Speaker Points (Use the Speaker Performance Rubric)

The OCDL’s Speaker Performance Rubric is the only standard for debate performance in the League. Specific use of this rubric will direct focus on the skills students need to develop and, indirectly, narrow the scoring variance between

judges. The League's goal is to have between a 5- and 10-point variance between judges. For example, if one student were to be judged by three different judges in the same debate, the OCDL expects that the scores for that student remain within the 5-10-point variance between the three judges. The underlying presumption is that a student's performance is likely to remain relatively consistent throughout the day of a single tournament.

The Speaker Performance Rubric is designed to be read from the top down. This is to create a "skill building" rather than penalizing effect on scoring in the League. Judges should award points when students display great aspects of debate, rather than penalizing (or "docking") students through error of omission or commission.

To aim for consistent scoring, the OCDL trains judges to follow the OCDL Speaker Performance Rubric when allocating speaker points. In any life situation, the audience of a debater will be different depending upon the audience's personal background; therefore, some inconsistencies are bound to occur.

When judging in the OCDL, it is inappropriate for judges to create their own paradigm (standards for judging). While this style of judging may be acceptable in other debate organizations, OCDL judges must adhere to the rubric and rules of OCDL debate when making team victory decisions and allotting speaker points.

Written Ballot

The ballot is the written form of feedback and it is equally important. A judge must fill out the ballot completely with the same (or very similar) information given in the oral RFD including reasons for decisions, helpful comments/critique to the debaters, speaker score breakdown, and marking for any disrespectful behavior. Penmanship should be as neat as possible. Copies of all ballots are provided to coaches after the tournament to assist student learning. Most coaches cannot attend the actual debate with their students, so they rely upon the ballots to help guide their teaching.

It is the responsibility of the judge to pick up their assigned ballot at the beginning of the debate round and subsequently return the completed ballot after the round has been completed. If a judge has not been assigned a ballot for a given round, that judge is required to remain near the tabulation table to be assigned unfilled ballots. When judges fail to appear for a given round or tournament, their school of affiliation will receive a fine of \$25 per round or \$100 per day. If a judge needs more time to write feedback, their ballot may be recorded by tournament tabulation staff (win/loss and speaker points) and then returned to the aforementioned judge to make additional comments.

Orange County Debate League Judge Guidebook

SAMPLE COMPLETED BALLOT

FRONT:

Room: 62	Start: 8:30 AM																								
OCDL 29	Round: R1																								
R1																									
DAVID ANDERSON TOURNAMENT INSTRUCTIONS																									
<p>Please submit this ballot as soon as possible. You may turn it in and write feedback after it has been entered. If you have a conflict of interest with any of the debaters you are judging, please see the administration team. When deliberating scores, please refer to the rubric and write reasons for decision in the feedback section. If you are having any technical issues, please call or text Olivia Thimone (202-255-6868) or Brianna Stodghill (909-344-0646) as soon as possible.</p> <p>Timing Instructions: Speakers must be encouraged to time themselves. Speeches (5 min each): stop loudly at 4 min remaining and 1 min remaining; hold up a "C" at 30 sec remaining; at 10 secs, countdown remaining secs on fingers; call "time" at the end of 5 min.</p> <p>We are all influenced by implicit bias or stereotypes that, when unchecked, influence our judging in ways that may negatively impact the students we are called to judge impartially. Before writing comments or making a decision, please take a moment to reflect on any preconceived notions you may hold that may impact your decision-making process and/or jeopardize the student experience.</p>																									
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>AFF</th> <th>SPKR</th> <th>POINTS (+ 120)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>3</td> <td></td> <td>69</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td></td> <td>55</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td></td> <td>51</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	AFF	SPKR	POINTS (+ 120)	3		69	2		55	1		51	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>NEG</th> <th>SPKR</th> <th>POINTS (- 120)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2</td> <td></td> <td>62</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td></td> <td>57</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td></td> <td>50</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	NEG	SPKR	POINTS (- 120)	2		62	1		57	3		50
AFF	SPKR	POINTS (+ 120)																							
3		69																							
2		55																							
1		51																							
NEG	SPKR	POINTS (- 120)																							
2		62																							
1		57																							
3		50																							
<p>Winner: _____ debating on the <u>aff</u> _____ Side (aff or Neg)</p>																									
<p>Comments & Reason for Decision:</p> <p>Opposition's arguments were refuted well by prop 3 & proposition's arguments remained largely unmentioned^{by opp}. However, all argument assertions throughout this debate did not seem to match the evidence & unpacks, so both teams could work on that. The narrow to the U.S. was a major point of contention, but it had little effect on the debate at large.</p>																									
8093912																									

BACK:

<p>Please answer the following questions before submitting your ballot:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What arguments were impactful? <p>Proposition's arguments went through the whole debate & had magnitude, so I feel their ^{work} arguments & ^{units} argument were impactful. (their 3rd was muddled.) Opposition had a fairly effective, if oddly explained, efficiency argument, but I wish they had brought it up sooner.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What could the losing team have done differently that might have won them the debate? <p>Opposition could have responded to prop's basic analysis/plan, which provided a foundation for prop's refutes & viewing. Overall, I also did not hear many refutations to the meat of prop's arguments.</p>																																															
<p>Judge _____ Room _____ Round _____</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>P1</th> <th>O1</th> <th>P2</th> <th>O2</th> <th>O3</th> <th>P3</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A</td> <td>17</td> <td>17</td> <td>13</td> <td>15</td> <td>4</td> <td>12</td> </tr> <tr> <td>R</td> <td>5</td> <td>10</td> <td>10</td> <td>11</td> <td>14</td> <td>16</td> </tr> <tr> <td>O</td> <td>17</td> <td>17</td> <td>18</td> <td>20</td> <td>16</td> <td>22</td> </tr> <tr> <td>P</td> <td>12</td> <td>13</td> <td>14</td> <td>16</td> <td>16</td> <td>19</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>51</td> <td>57</td> <td>55</td> <td>62</td> <td>50</td> <td>69</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>							P1	O1	P2	O2	O3	P3	A	17	17	13	15	4	12	R	5	10	10	11	14	16	O	17	17	18	20	16	22	P	12	13	14	16	16	19	Total	51	57	55	62	50	69
	P1	O1	P2	O2	O3	P3																																									
A	17	17	13	15	4	12																																									
R	5	10	10	11	14	16																																									
O	17	17	18	20	16	22																																									
P	12	13	14	16	16	19																																									
Total	51	57	55	62	50	69																																									
<p>Winner (school and team) _____ on the (prop/opp) <u>prop</u> side.</p>																																															
<p>Please place a checkmark in the box if the debater displayed disrespectful behavior as outlined in the Promoting Respectful Behavior in the OSDL outline.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Disrespectful Behavior (check)</th> <th>P1</th> <th>O1</th> <th>P2</th> <th>O2</th> <th>O3</th> <th>P3</th> </tr> </thead> </table>						Disrespectful Behavior (check)	P1	O1	P2	O2	O3	P3																																			
Disrespectful Behavior (check)	P1	O1	P2	O2	O3	P3																																									

Mitigate Any Intentional or Unintentional Bias

Judges often talk to debaters to make them more comfortable or ease their anxiety. Sometimes such questions inadvertently give debaters the sense that a judge is biased toward, or against, one or more debaters, one or more positions on the topic, or one or more arguments. Judges need to be aware of, and sensitive to such a viewpoint, and take precaution to avoid making statements or asking questions that may unintentionally sound biased.

At the beginning of a debate round, judges should limit their interactions with debaters to questions or statements necessary for judging a debate round, such as:

1. Asking the debaters' names, speaking order, school affiliation and/or assigned position (affirmative or negative);
2. Providing guidance on how speakers will be timed and reminding the debaters and audience members of the general rules of conduct; and
3. Answering debater questions regarding judge preferences, i.e. what one may look for in assessing a debate.

After the debate round, judges should limit their interactions with debaters to statements necessary for communicating debate-related feedback to debaters, such as:

1. Explaining what score is being assigned to each speaker and the reason for that score; and
2. Explaining which team won and the reasons for the decision.

Whether before a round or after a round, judges should avoid asking students personal questions regarding:

1. Their (or their family's) city, country, or place of birth;
2. Their parents' professions;
3. Their debate experience;
4. A disability or impairment of some type they might have; or
5. Any other personal questions that delve into the debaters' religion, background, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or political views.

Asking such questions may result in the judge's removal from the judge pool.

Make All Decisions Independent Decisions

All judge decisions in the OCDL are made independently. Judges cannot consult with one another. This rule is clear for team victory and speaker points. It is not allowed for judges to discuss the decision with other judges or audience members. Only in the case of shadow judging can a "shadow judge" discuss their verdict with the Judge Trainer. Sometimes, such as in the final round of a tournament, a judge may be asked to sit on a panel of three or more judges. In this instance, each judge must come to their decision independently without discussion and/or collaboration with other judges.

Act as a Professional

OCDL judges need to assume authority over all behavior (debaters and observers) in the round. Judges must be polite and confident but firm with the students. They should not allow back talk, but should be open to answering questions related to their decisions. Judges should be patient with student mannerisms and presume that debaters are acting in good faith. As the authority in the debate room, judges need to give debaters the benefit of the doubt in their choices. Judges must ensure that debaters and guests adhere to the rules of the OCDL (e.g. putting away papers, no filming, no audience verbal heckling, etc.).

Judges must use appropriate language, manners and conduct at all times, maintaining respectful and constructive professional relationships with all participants in the OCDL. Judges should be role models to young people.

Judges should wear clothing that demonstrates their high regard for education and presents a professional image. Preferably business casual, the apparel must not be divisive, revealing, offensive or derogatory, nor should it contain references to sex, drugs, or alcohol.

Finally, the OCDL requires judges to wear OCDL lanyards/ID cards throughout the day from start to finish. Some debate-site school campuses are open, so debaters and their families need to know who is an authority within the League. OCDL lanyards will be provided by league administration at the judging table and should be returned at the end of the tournament.

Don't Delay the Tournament (Importance of Speed)

A common saying at debate tournaments is that we are only as fast as our slowest judge. As such, it is essential that the judges help move the event along quickly.

Judges must be in the debate room (chamber) ASAP to start the round, and they also need to ensure the students move quickly during the round. Debate students might delay their own approach to the podium, and judges should encourage these students to begin speaking as soon as their turn comes up. Ballots must be returned to the tournament administrator's table before the time announced by the tabulations team which is typically within twenty minutes of the conclusion of the debate. In order to avoid further delay, judges can text their ballot to the Admin Team (but still need to turn in the paper ballot) or task someone to deliver the ballot to the tabulations team before providing feedback to debaters.

In the interest of time, judges should not be overly concerned with small details (e.g. do the debaters sit or stand, must the speaker say his/her name, which team sits left or right, should names be written on the white board, etc.); rather, judges should move the debate forward.

Report Conflicts of Interest

Judges must remember their duties as OCDL volunteers and always identify potential conflicts of interest. It is in judges' best interests not to judge a round where they may have conflicts. Conflicts of interest may include any number of personal relationships between the judge and their assigned debaters such as former teammate, tutor/pupil, family friend, etc. A conflict of interest can also arise from judging the same team more than once in a tournament.

During the certification process, judge candidates are asked to please list all schools with which they may foresee conflicts. In addition, judges must notify the tabulation administration of potential conflicts of interest as soon as possible on the morning of a debate tournament.

When picking up a ballot, it is the responsibility of the individual judge to notify the Tabulations Administrator and/or the Head Judge when, for any reason, they feel there may be a conflict of interest. In such cases, a judge may not independently exchange ballots with another judge. The judge should present their ballot to the Tabulations Administrator and/or the Head Judge and explain the conflict. Only these board officials may approve ballot switches.

The Tabulation Administrator and/or Head Judge will fairly accommodate a judge when they are affiliated with two or more schools and may strike judges against certain schools where such a conflict may arise. Students and coaches are not allowed to call conflicts of interest, or to request a "strike" against judges. Any conflicts of interest will be handled by the Tabulations team on a case by case basis.

A judge cannot reject a ballot because they do not wish to judge a particular team or school. A judge can judge any team from any school except his/her own school affiliation. It is not appropriate to say that one school's judges can never judge a different school's teams. In other words, there are no "judge preferences".

Thank You

The OCDL is volunteer-run, so on behalf of the Head Judge, all board members, and all participants in the League, THANK YOU to all judges for volunteering with the League! The students benefit greatly from your valuable time, so we greatly appreciate the passion, expertise, and excitement you bring to the organization!