



Orange County Debate League

Official Tournament Rules and Format

Prepared and Maintained by the
OCDL Board of Directors

This document outlines the official rules, procedures, and expectations that govern all tournament activities, including the responsibilities of debaters, judges, coaches, and observers. All participants are expected to be familiar with and abide by the policies contained within.

Last Updated: August 2025

Effective Beginning: 2025-2026 OCDL Season

To ensure fairness, consistency, and a high-quality educational experience for all participants, these rules apply at all OCDL tournaments and events.

For questions or clarifications, please contact the OCDL Board through your school's coach.

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Preamble

Document Language

The Orange County Debate League may be referred to as “OCDL” or “League.”

Additional debate-related language is found in the glossary (see [Glossary](#)).

Our Philosophy

The OCDL promotes academic and personal growth in local youth through the sport of debate. While competitive success is valued, education, communication, and critical thinking are our foremost priorities. This handbook outlines the league’s format and codifies rules to ensure fairness, clarity, and a positive learning experience.

Rule Interpretation and Exceptions

The League reserves the right to interpret, clarify, or amend rules to preserve the integrity and educational goals of the League. Tournament officials and the Board of Directors may exercise discretion when addressing unique or unforeseen circumstances. All such decisions are final.

Americans with Disability Act (ADA) Compliance

The OCDL adheres to requirements and guidelines of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

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.

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I. Modified Parliamentary Debate Format

1. Teams and Debaters

- 1.1. Each debate has two teams: proposition and opposition.
- 1.2. Coaches will create teams with three debaters. A squad cannot participate in a tournament with more than two two-person teams.
- 1.3. Each team delivers three speeches: two constructive speeches and one rebuttal.
 1. New constructive arguments may not be introduced in the rebuttal.
 2. Judges must disregard any new constructive arguments presented in the rebuttal speech.
- 1.4. A debater may not participate in the novice division for more than one year.

2. Speaking Order

- 2.1. The order of speeches is:
 1. First Speaker Proposition
 2. First Speaker Opposition
 3. Second Speaker Proposition
 4. Second Speaker Opposition
 5. Third Speaker Opposition
 6. Third Speaker Proposition
- 2.2. Each debater delivers one of the three speeches for their side. In a two-person team, one debater must speak first and third; their two speeches will be scored and averaged.

3. Time

- 3.1. Prep time is 20 minutes from topic announcement to debate start.
 1. May be adjusted by tournament officials.
 2. Teams may be disqualified for tardiness.
 3. Running prep time is not allowed.
 4. Judges will start the next speaker when the judge is ready.
- 3.2. Speech length:
 1. Middle school: 5 minutes
 2. High school: 6 minutes (except rebuttals, which are 5 minutes)
- 3.3. Timing rules:
 1. Time starts with the speaker's first word.
 2. No grace period after time expires; judges must disregard overage content.
 3. Judges may stop a speaker exceeding time by 15 seconds.
 4. Devices may only be used to time speeches and must be in airplane mode.
 5. The judge is the official timekeeper but may appoint an assistant.

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4. Preparation and Materials

- 4.1. In the debate chamber, debaters will use the designated and provided colored paper, the flow chart, a blank rubric, and writing instruments. Prior to each debate round, debaters will transcribe cases to the designated colored paper.
- 4.2. Debaters may discuss the resolution with teammates, coaches, and volunteers, but no new research or case work should be done at this time (except for impromptu rounds).

5. Points of Information (POIs)

- 5.1. A debater may request a POI from the opposing team's current speaker.
- 5.2. POIs may be requested only during unprotected time (middle portion of constructive speeches).
 1. The debater should rise and may verbally call "point of information" or "POI" to attempt a POI.
 2. Judges will call "out of order" for POIs attempted during protected time (first/last minute of constructive speeches and all rebuttals).
- 5.3. If accepted, the POI must be completed in 15 seconds.
 1. The current speaker may stop the POI at any time.
 2. Speaking time continues during the POI.
- 5.4. Judges must consider POIs as valid components of the debate and may assign them weight in their decision.

6. Points of Order (POOs) and Points of Personal Privilege (PPPs) - HIGH SCHOOL ONLY

- 6.1. Debaters may raise a Point of Order (POO) if they believe a tournament rule has been violated or a Point of Personal Privilege (PPP) if they believe an opponent made an offensive remark or a serious misrepresentation of a person or position.
 1. POOs and PPPs may be raised at any time during the round
 2. Time is paused while the judge allows the debater to briefly state their reason for the POO or PPP
 3. The judge may allow a short response from the opponent
 4. No argument or discussion is allowed. The debater simply states what rule was violated (POO) or what was said that was offensive or misrepresented (PPP).
 5. The judge rules immediately, but is not required to announce their ruling.
- 6.2. POOs or PPPs are serious actions, and should not be used for minor issues. Misuse may result in penalties.

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7. Heckling

- 7.1. Argumentative heckling is permitted and may be presented at any time.
 1. Debaters may only heckle during their opponents' speeches.
 - a. Exception: Knocking or saying "hear, hear" for a teammate is allowed.
- 7.2. Heckles must be brief (three words or fewer).
- 7.3. Judges will evaluate heckles based on relevance, clarity, and impact.
- 7.4. Judges must intervene if heckling becomes disruptive.

8. Orphan Teams

- 8.1. The League may form orphan teams from unaffiliated students from up to three schools.
- 8.2. Orphan teams compete independently and are eligible for team and speaker awards, but not squad awards.

II. General Code of Conduct

1. Roles and Jurisdiction

- 1.1. **Judges** are the only individuals authorized to interpret and apply round-based rules, evaluate arguments, manage conduct during rounds, and issue rulings on behavior, timing, POIs, and heckles.
- 1.2. **Coaches** are responsible for preparing their debaters, addressing tournament concerns through official channels, and ensuring their school's participants understand and follow league policies.
- 1.3. **Observers**, including parents, coaches, and guardians, are welcome as supporters but may not interact with judges about debate content, enforce rules, or intervene in tournament proceedings.
- 1.4. **Debaters** are expected to follow all rules and accept rulings from certified judges and tournament officials.

2. Behavioral Expectations

- 2.1. Aggression, shaming, bullying, gossip, favoritism, or other behavior that undermines the League's educational goals is prohibited.
- 2.2. Insults or disparagement based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, identity, or physical appearance may result in immediate removal and forfeiture of the round. A second offense may result in permanent suspension.
- 2.3. Respect for host school property is required. Tampering with or taking personal belongings from classrooms, lockers, or elsewhere on campus is prohibited.
- 2.4. Only water is permitted in debate chambers—no food or other beverages.

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- 2.5. No one may enter or exit a debate chamber while a speech is in progress. Entry or exit is allowed only between speeches.
- 2.6. Post-round critique or influence attempts directed at judges are strictly prohibited. If a judge offers additional feedback, it may not be extended by others.
- 2.7. A judge must always be present in a debate chamber. No person may be alone in a chamber (other than a judge during adjudication), and judges may not be alone with a single debater.
- 2.8. All debaters and observers must leave during judge deliberations.
- 2.9. Audio or video recording is prohibited unless performed by official OCDL photographers.
- 2.10. Concerns should be reported to a coach, who may escalate them to tournament officials.

Violations may result in suspension from the League.

III. Rules for Debaters

1. General Rules

- 1.1. Debaters must follow all directions from tournament officials and judges.
- 1.2. Debaters must arrive before the close of registration and remain until the final round ends. Attendance at the awards ceremony is strongly encouraged.
- 1.3. Debaters must commit to the full day. No substitutions are allowed after Round 1 begins.
- 1.4. If a teammate becomes ill, debaters may continue as a two-person team. A debater without a teammate must be pre-approved for an orphan team by their coach.
- 1.5. Debaters may not confront judges regarding decisions. Only coaches may communicate concerns through League channels. Judges may only be thanked for their service.

2. Rules for Materials and Preparation

- 2.1. Debaters may use only designated colored paper, flow chart, blank rubric, and writing tools. All other materials must be out of reach to avoid disqualification.
- 2.2. Materials used in round must be transcribed during official prep time. No prewritten, printed, or typed notes are allowed.
- 2.3. During prep time, debaters may receive verbal assistance from coaches, teammates or volunteers, but must write independently.
- 2.4. During the round, use of unauthorized resources including internet access, AI tools, or argument databases, is strictly prohibited.
- 2.5. No one may use an internet-connected device, access argument databases, or conduct research of any kind during prep time.

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Violations may result in forfeiture of the round.

IV. Rules for Judges

1. General Rules

- 1.1. Judges must be OCDL-certified and complete all required training.
- 1.2. Upon receiving their ballot, any conflicts of interest (e.g., prior coaching, affiliation) must be disclosed to a tournament official.
- 1.3. Judges may not judge teams from their own school unless it is a designated scramble tournament.

2. Judge Duties in the Debate Chamber

- 2.1. Judges must not modify League rules or apply personal standards of debate evaluation conflicting with applicable OCDL documents
- 2.2. Judges must take clear, complete notes on a flow chart.
- 2.3. Judges enforce speaking order and time limits. They are official timekeepers and may appoint an assistant if needed.
- 2.4. Judges must call “out of order” for POIs requested during protected time.
- 2.5. Judges must intervene when heckling becomes disruptive.
- 2.6. Judges must maintain order and may remove disruptive observers.

3. Adjudication

- 3.1. Judges must make their decisions independently based solely on in-round arguments.
- 3.2. Judges must consider POIs and heckles as valid components of the debate and may weigh them in their decision, based on relevance, clarity, and impact.
- 3.3. Individual speaker scores must be assigned using the OCDL rubric.
- 3.4. Judges must provide specific written comments and educational feedback.
- 3.5. Judges must disclose the winning team and speaker scores unless a debater opts out of public scoring.
- 3.6. New constructive arguments in rebuttals must be disregarded.
- 3.7. Ballots must be submitted promptly. Judges may text a photo of the ballot but must also submit the physical copy.
- 3.8. Judges should report any issues, especially but not limited to POOs and PPPs, on the ballot. Such issues should also be verbally reported to the tournament officials.

V. Rules for Coaches

1. Conduct and Responsibilities

- 1.1. Coaches must uphold the League's mission to promote academic and personal growth through debate.
- 1.2. Coaches must model respectful, professional behavior, and constructive conduct at all times.
- 1.3. Coaches may not engage in aggression, gossip, favoritism, or behavior that undermines the educational goals of the League.
- 1.4. Coaches must not confront judges about their debate decisions. Concerns must be submitted through the Grievance Process via a tournament official.
- 1.5. Coaches must intervene promptly if debaters are harassed, bullied, or made to feel unsafe and escalate such events to tournament officials.
- 1.6. Coaches must ensure that all members of their organization, including debaters and observers, are familiar with the League's rules.

2. Team Formation and Registration

- 2.1. Coaches must create teams with three debaters.
 1. A squad cannot enter more than two two-person teams in an event at a tournament.
 2. A squad cannot register more than 6 teams per tournament.
- 2.2. Coaches must ensure their teams and judges are registered in Tabroom by 10:00 PM the night before the tournament. Changes after the deadline require approval from the Director of Tabulations.
- 2.3. Coaches may rearrange teams up until 10:00 PM on the night before a tournament. After that time, changes are only permitted with approval from the Director of Tabulations.
- 2.4. If a debater does not have teammates, coaches may notify League officials in advance of the tournament for a debater to be considered for an orphan team.
- 2.5. Coaches must register judges for each squad and provide at least one volunteer for each tournament. Each squad requires a number of judges equal to the number of teams divided by 2, rounded up.
 1. Should sufficient judges be available, a coach may hire judges for a fee.
 2. The school will be fined if a squad does not meet its judge or volunteer obligation.

3. Tournament Day

- 3.1. Coaches must ensure debaters and judges arrive before the start of the tournament (typically 8:00 AM) and remain until after the final round concludes.

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- 3.2. If the regular coach is unavailable, they must designate a parent or another responsible adult in their place for the tournament.
- 3.3. Coaches must help monitor debater behavior at the tournament and ensure compliance with League rules and expectations.
- 3.4. Coaches may assist debaters during preparation time, but may not write for debaters, and must prohibit debaters, parents, or observers from using internet-connected devices or accessing argument databases during preparation time.

VI. Rules for Observers

- 1.1. Observers may not speak, coach, or prompt debaters during a round.
- 1.2. Observers may not discuss outcomes with judges and may only thank them.
- 1.3. Parents and visitors must not override the authority of coaches, judges, or officials.
- 1.4. Observers may express support only by non-verbal gestures (e.g., desk tapping).

VII. Enforcement and Grievance Process

1. Enforcement and Consequences

- 1.1. The OCDL Board has the sole authority to interpret or amend rules in real time.
- 1.2. Tournament officials have final authority on all rulings and may take immediate action if necessary to maintain integrity or safety.
- 1.3. Violations of tournament rules or conduct expectations may result in warnings, round forfeitures, or suspensions from future League events.
- 1.4. Repeated or severe infractions may result in permanent suspension, at the discretion of the OCDL Board.

2. Grievance Process

All participants in the league, including debaters, coaches, and judges, have the right to express concerns or file formal grievances regarding conduct, rules violations, or other procedural issues that occur during a tournament.

Grievances must follow the appropriate chain of communication:

1. Debater or observer concerns should be reported to their coach. Debaters and observers must not directly confront judges or tournament officials with their grievances.
2. If the coach believes the concern is valid and merits further action, the coach may submit the grievance to a tournament official.

Coaches filing a grievance should do so promptly, ideally on the same day as the incident, and should provide a clear and concise summary of the concern, including names of individuals involved, the round and room number (if applicable), a factual description, and any supporting evidence (flows, notes, etc.).

Important notes:

- Submitting a grievance does not guarantee that a definite resolution will be made.
- Grievances may not be used to reverse round outcomes or override judge decisions.
- League officials reserve the right to interview involved parties and determine whether further action is necessary.
- The League's decision on all grievances is final.

The goal of the grievance process is to promote fairness, accountability, and continual improvement of the League, not to create an adversarial environment. All concerns should be communicated respectfully and in good faith.

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Glossary

adjudication	the time after a debate round during which the judge delivers feedback and RFD to the debate teams (and observers, if any)
argument	a claim supported by reasoning and evidence presented to persuade the judge during a debate round.
argumentative heckling	heckling that is brief (three words or fewer), relevant, and used to challenge ideas rather than to mock, distract, or intimidate.
ballot	the sheet of paper or online location where judges write the results and feedback for an individual round of competition, which they submit to the tournament officials after the round.
break time	the period between the end of one round's adjudication and the official announcement of the next round's preparation; debaters may rest, eat, or review feedback, but must remain on campus and be ready when called.
case	the structured set of arguments prepared by a team used to support or oppose the resolution, which may include constructive arguments, which narrows and definitions, and anticipated refutations.
clash	the exchange of arguments and refutations that contest the opposing team's case, responses to an opponent's arguments, including POIs and heckles.
coach	an individual responsible for preparing debaters, organizing teams, communicating with the tournament officials, and supervising the debaters during a tournament; each of these roles may be performed by a different individual, each referred to as a coach by the League.
constructive speech	the first two speeches of each team (first 4 speeches of the debate); new constructive arguments, definitions, and narrows are permitted during constructive speeches, unlike rebuttal speeches.
constructive argument	a new argument introduced during a constructive speech, supported by reasoning and evidence.
debater	a student registered to compete in the OCDL tournament.
debate chamber	the classroom or designated space where the debate occurs.
definition	the explanation of a word or phrase in the resolution offered with justification by a debater to clarify the round's focus.
designated timekeeper	an observer chosen by the judge to assist with timing and signals if needed.
disruptive heckling	heckling that violates League norms and may result in warnings or removal; which may include excessive, unclear, or off-topic interruptions; personal

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	attacks; sarcasm; or noise meant to interfere with the speaker.
forfeit	the loss of a round due to rules violations, tardiness, or failure to participate as determined by tournament officials.
flow chart	a structured note-taking tool used by debaters and judges to track the progression of arguments, refutations, and rebuttals across speeches.
grace period	an unofficial extension of time after a speaker's allotted time has ended. The OCDL does not permit a grace period; judges must disregard anything said once time expires.
grievance	a formal complaint raised about conduct, procedural violations, or rule infractions during a tournament.
heckle	a brief (three words or fewer) verbal interjection made by a debater during an opponent's speech, intended to challenge or comment on an argument.
host school	the school site where a tournament is physically held.
individual award	recognition given to a debater based upon performance.
judge	an individual, certified by the League, responsible for evaluating debate rounds, enforcing in-round rules, and providing feedback (RFD) to debaters.
narrow	a justified limitation on the scope or specific set of circumstances under which the topic should be considered; a narrow is provided by a speaker and used to clarify the team's focus for the resolution.
opposition	the debate team arguing against the resolution.
orphan team	a temporary debate team constructed of s from multiple schools which are ineligible for squad awards.
out of order	a judge's declaration that a rule has been violated, especially regarding a point of information attempted during protected time.
pairings	the official match-up for each debate round, listing teams, rooms, and judges.
point of information (POI)	a brief question or statement offered by a debater from the opposing team during a constructive speech.
point of order	(high school tournaments only) a formal objection raised when a debater believes an opponent has violated a tournament rule.
points of personal privilege	(high school tournaments only) a formal request made when a debater believes an opponent has made a personal insult, offensive remark, or serious misrepresentation.
preparation time	the time allotted to debaters to write their case onto the designated colored paper before the debate round begins.

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proposition	the debate team arguing in favor of the resolution.
protected time	the first and last minute of the constructive speeches and the entirety of the rebuttal speeches during which POIs may not be requested.
rebuttal	the rebuilding of arguments after attacks and refutations against the arguments.
rebuttal speech	the final speech of each team (last 2 speeches of the debate) used to summarize and weigh arguments; no new constructive arguments may be introduced but existing arguments may be extended.
refutation	attacking the opposing team's arguments.
resolution	the topic of the debate round.
RFD(reason for decision)	the judge's justification for the winner.
round	a single match between two debate teams, including preparation time, speeches, judge deliberation and adjudication (judge's feedback and RFD).
rubric	a scoring guide used by the judge to evaluate speakers' scores.
speaker	an individual debater in a round currently delivering a speech.
speaker score	a numerical evaluation given to a debater based upon the debate skills presented in a speech (on a scale of 0 - 120) evaluated according to the OCDL Speaker Rubric; this score provides feedback to the speaker and is used to determine individual awards.
speech	a formal presentation by a debater, limited in time and governed by content rules based on their speaking position.
squad	a group of up to 18 debaters from an individual school or organization arranged into teams; a squad is often interchanged with the word school, but each school or organization may have up to two squads, each eligible for a squad award.
squad award	recognition given to a specific squad based upon performance.
team	a group of 2 or 3 debaters who debate together at a tournament.
team award	recognition given to a specific team of debaters based upon performance.
technology	any device (e.g. phone, tablet, laptop) used during a tournament that is capable of accessing the internet and/or artificial intelligence resources; such devices are strictly limited to timing in airplane mode during preparation time and debate.
tournament	an organized event where multiple squads debate in several rounds under League rules.

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tournament officials	League staff or administrators responsible for organizing, supervising, and ruling on issues during a tournament.
unauthorized resources	any materials or tools, including printed or digital notes, pre-written speeches, internet-connected devices, AI tools, and argument databases, not permitted during preparation or the debate round.
unprotected time	the middle portion of each constructive speech when POIs are permitted.
weigh	to compare, based upon criteria such as relevance, clarity, logic, impact, or evidence, the strength or importance of arguments in a debate round.