

LDEP Recommended Tournament Practices

The Lincoln-Douglas Education Project believes that competitive debate tournaments are ultimately a means to student education. Therefore, administering a tournament is a serious educational responsibility. While recognizing that tournament directors may legitimately interpret this responsibility in different ways and that each tournament has its own unique character, we believe the following practices by tournament administrators are conducive to educationally constructive competition. **Even if you reject some of the suggestions below, you can preserve and enhance the educational value of your tournament by bringing your best professional judgment to bear on this subject. Our overarching message is that tournament directors should think carefully about the educational goals of their tournament and should implement policies that will achieve those goals.**

- 1. Publicize your policies in your invitation, tournament packet and opening assembly.** Explanation helps coaches, judges and students know what they should expect, and makes it more likely that all parties will work together on a common educational project. Advance notice also helps coaches make informed decisions about which tournaments suit their own objectives. Authoritatively announcing judging policies (e.g., take the ballot instructions seriously) at the opening assembly indicates that you are serious about your policies, which will promote greater consistency and ultimately more fairness and educational value.
- 2. Publish the resolution to be debated and the LD burden scheme you wish for your tournament to observe if it is not the NFL's.** The NFL states that: "Each debater has the equal burden to prove the validity or invalidity of his/her side of the resolution as a general principle. As an LD resolution is a statement of value, there is no presumption for either side." In the interest of fair competition, students and coaches should know in advance if your tournament will observe a different burden scheme.
- 3. Do not admit unaffiliated entries, and require that each student be accompanied by an adult chaperone.** Even if liability were not a major concern, unsupervised students are literally unaccountable to coaches, administrations, or other adult authority figures. When concerns arise about a student's practices or her influence on other competitors, it is essential that judges and coaches be able to discuss the situation with a responsible, educationally committed adult.
- 4. Encourage educated adults, especially coaches, to fulfill judging obligations, and assign adult critics whenever possible, especially in elimination rounds.** Because they control competitive incentives, judges are the most powerful teachers in debate. Tournament directors ultimately decide who wields this power. Students need to be held accountable to ordinary norms of clear thinking and speaking, and adult critics are more likely, on average, to reinforce these norms than are recent high school graduates. Educated community members will strengthen a judging pool if properly oriented. Some tournaments will find it necessary to include former debaters in their pools, but the LDEP believes younger critics need mentoring and should not dominate a pool or panel.

5. **Do not invite students or their coaches to rank judges.** This practice fosters narrow and exclusive styles and shield students from meaningful criticism. Instead, encourage debaters to present themselves in a manner that is accessible to a wide range of audiences.
6. **Implement and publicize procedures to block conflicts of interest.** Many relationships to students besides those of coach, relative, or teammate may compromise a judge's impartiality. To ensure the fairest competition for all students without even the appearance of impropriety, all judges should be required to recuse themselves from judging any students to whom they have potentially biasing relationships. The LDEP lists such relationships in our "Conflicts of Interest" document, which could be a basis for your policy.
7. **If you allow judge strikes, then allow only a limited number, and ask that coaches (not students) fill out any strike forms.** Limited strikes may be appropriate to eliminate truly exceptional conflicts not screened by a formal conflicts-of-interest policy. But strike decisions should be overseen by adult educators and should not be used as a way to shield students from meaningful criticism.
8. **Distribute judging guidelines (the LDEP's or your own).** Make your expectations about educationally constructive judging practices explicit. This need not involve micromanaging judges or restricting the content of resolutorial arguments; see the LDEP's "Judging Recommendations" for a model.
9. **Encourage judges to develop, discuss and publish judging paradigms.** To help students learn to adapt to the wide range of audiences they may encounter, encourage judges to discuss their expectations with debaters before rounds, and encourage regular judges to post written paradigms online.
10. **Make the purpose, range and interpretation of points clear to all students and judges.** Each tournament should ensure that whatever interpretation it endorses is clearly communicated and consistently implemented. Whatever scale you adopt, strongly discourage point inflation, which compromises the informational (and hence educational) value of this important tool.
11. **Foster a positive educational atmosphere for competition.** This may include considerations for schedule, meals, etc. Debate is more fun and more academically enriching for everyone involved when it does not require the sacrifice of health.
12. **Implement procedures to promote research integrity.** Make sure that all students, judges, and coaches know the requirements for ethical evidence use and how they should handle cases of suspected dishonesty. Intentional fabrication or misrepresentation of evidence warrants the harshest penalties, up to expulsion from the tournament. The LDEP has published guidelines on research ethics that can help define standards in this area.