League Guide

NHSDLC

National High School Debate League of China (NHSDLC) League Guide

Academic Committee of the NHSDLC

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1 Introduction

A NHSDLC Public Forum (PF) debate round has heavy similarities with its US counterpart. There are only one major difference. Each team has four minutes of preparation time instead of two. This change was made to decrease the difficulty of debating in a second language.

2 Round Structure

Speaker Position	Time	Name
Team A, Speaker 1	4 min	Constructive Speech
Team B, Speaker 1	4 min	Constructive Speech
Speaker 1	3 min	Crossfire
Team A, Speaker 2	4 min	Rebuttal Speech
Team B, Speaker 2	4 min	Rebuttal Speech
Speaker 2	3 min	Crossfire
Team A, Speaker 1	3 min	Summary
Team B, Speaker 1	3 min	Summary
All Speakers	3 min	Grand Crossfire
Team A, Speaker 2	2 min	Final Focus
Team B, Speaker 2	2 min	Final Focus
Each Team	4 min	Preparation Time

3 Starting a Round

3.1 The Coin Flip

Every Public Forum debate begins with a coin flip. A volunteer or judge will flip a coin. One team will predict the result of the coin flip. The winning team gets to choose their side or their speaking order. The other team will choose the remaining option.

Choosing the side decides which team is **Pro** and which team is **Con**. The pro team will agree with the resolution while the con team will oppose it. Choosing the speaking order decides which team speaks first and which team speaks second. The team that speaks first is **Team A**. The team that speaks second is **Team B**. Team A gets to ask the first question in each crossfire.

Since every team can debate on either side, it is imperative to bring cases for both the pro and the con to the tournament.

4 Speaking Roles

Each debater gives two speeches in a Public Forum debate round. There are two speaking roles. Speaker one gives the constructive speech and the summary speech. Speaker two gives the rebuttal speech and the final focus speech.

Each partnership should decide which debater is speaker one and which one is speaker two. Generally, debaters choose one speaker role and keep it the same throughout the tournament. However, some teams decide to switch speaker roles depending on their side. It is entirely up to the team.

4.1 The Constructive Speech

The constructive speeches are the first speeches in the debate. They are four minutes long. The constructive speech is written out before the debate and then read during the debate. These written out speeches are referred to as "**cases**."

The constructive speech lays out the foundational arguments for why one's side of the debate is true. There are three main parts to a constructive speech.

The first part is the **definition**. The definition section defines key words and/or phrases in the resolution. The definition usually comes from a dictionary but may also come from experts on the subject such as professors, policy experts, and philosophers. These are not necessary unless certain words and/or phrases are confusing or ambiguous.

The second part is the **framework**. The framework provides a way for the judge to evaluate what is most important and why. A debater's arguments should connect to their framework so the judge understands why they are important. The framework operates as a standard or criterion that arguments must "meet" or be encompassed by in order to weigh under that framework.

Frameworks often offer a broad value statement about subjects like morality, the role and obligations of a government, the importance of some impacts over others or something similar. Frameworks that are made well do not just list a team's contentions and say they are important. Instead, a framework should explain the overall reason that explains why those contentions are important.

While frameworks are sometimes helpful, they are not required. In most debates, the framework is unnecessary because both teams will agree about the importance of certain impacts.

The third part is the **contention(s)**. The contentions are the arguments that support one's side of the resolution. Generally, contentions are the only required part of a constructive speech. Contentions often are structured in three parts – the claim, warrant and impact.

The **claim** is the statement that is being defended. It is the thing that will be shown to be true if it is properly supported. For example, "dogs are better than cats" and "global trade greatly reduces the risk of large wars" are both claims.

The **warrant** is the justification or reason for why the claim is true. The warrant can be logical analysis, a piece of evidence from a qualified source, or a combination of the two. Contentions can have multiple warrants for the same claim. Warrants themselves can also require their own warrants.

The **impact** explains why the argument matters. Impacts may explain how many people it affects, how likely it is, and/or how soon it happens. Overall, the impact explains how severe the consequences of the argument are.

A typical constructive will usually have two to three contentions and each contention can contain multiple warrants and/or impacts.

4.2   The Crossfire

Every crossfire is three minutes long. The first crossfire happens after both constructive speeches. The first speakers from each team will participate in this crossfire. Team A gets to ask the first question in each crossfire.

Crossfire is the question and answer part of a debate. Both teams ask and answer questions during crossfire. The primary purposes of crossfire are to get information, provide information to the judge and to dismantle an opponent's arguments. Crossfire is not speech time, so it is important to provide concise questions and answers.

Crossfire is most productive when both teams prepare precise questions and have a strategy for what they want to accomplish. There are very few rules in crossfire. The only rules are which debaters are participating, the time limit, and that Team A gets the first question. In the first crossfire only the first speakers from each team participate. The debaters that are not participating should use this time as preparation time for their rebuttal speeches.

Partners may help each other during crossfire, but only the words of the assigned speaker will be evaluated by the judge. Helping a partner often may result in worse speaker points.

Since there are not many rules governing crossfire almost all behavior is allowed

even if it not encouraged. Interrupting an opponent, talking over an opponent, talking for long periods of time, answering a question in a misleading way and other behavior is allowed. However, if a judge thinks the behavior is rude they may penalize speaker points. It is ultimately the responsibility of the debaters to effectively navigate crossfire by asserting themselves. A judge will not intervene except in rare and extreme circumstances or to notify debaters that time is up.

4.3   The Rebuttal

The rebuttal speeches happen after the first crossfire. They are four minutes long. The rebuttal focuses on attacking the opposing team's case. A strong rebuttal will effectively answer the opposing team's framework (if applicable) and every contention. If the definition is also important for the debate, it should be answered.

A strong rebuttal will include both contextual and comparative responses. Contextual responses answer the specific argument being made instead of a more general version of that argument. Comparative arguments compare arguments against each other and explain why one is more accurate or important. The second crossfire occurs after the rebuttal. The second speakers from each team participate.

The primary goal of the second crossfire is to set up the summary speech. Partners should discuss strategy to decide which arguments they want to focus on during the summary speech. The second crossfire should focus on building up these arguments.

4.4   The Summary

The summary speeches happen after the second crossfire. They are three minutes long.

The summary is a balancing act. It must cover both cases effectively. Summary speeches should focus on **argument selection**, or only discussing the important arguments and issues in the debate. A debater should focus on the most important arguments to accomplish this during a two minute speech. Generally, this requires focusing on one or two contentions from one's own case and then adequately answering the opponent's arguments.

A strong summary speech will also include **weighing** between arguments. Weighing compares the importance of arguments. Both teams are often winning arguments at the end of a debate. Weighing is the tie-breaker that determines which arguments are more important.

The grand crossfire occurs after the summary speech. Both speakers from each team participate.

4.5   The Final Focus

The final focus speeches are the last two speeches in the debate. They are two minutes long.

The final focus should **crystallize** the debate. Crystallizing clearly explains the debate for the judge. A strong final focus will conclude major arguments, weigh arguments, and highlight voting issues. **Voting issues**, or voters, tell a judge that they should vote for a team because of these arguments. They are usually at the end of a speech and are part of a numbered list. There are usually three or less voting issues per team.

The final focus is too late to make new arguments. New arguments are distinct claims or responses that are not restatements of ideas already mentioned in the debate. Examples of new arguments include, but are not limited to, new contentions and refuting an argument that was not already refuted. Judges are instructed to not evaluate new arguments in the final focus.

The prohibition of new arguments does not mean that debaters are required to only repeat what was said before in the previous speeches. Debaters are encouraged to provide new analysis by telling the judge things like who is winning on each issue and why based on analyzing arguments made previously in the debate, which issues are the most important, etc. Good final focus speeches will tell a story that clearly explains why the judge should award their team the win.

5   Tournament Structure

5.1   Preliminary & Elimination Rounds

A public forum tournament is structured as follows. There are a certain number of preliminary debates followed by elimination debates (also known as **elims** or **out-rounds**) depending on how many teams have entered the tournament (also known as the **pool**).

A preliminary debate, abbreviated **prelim**, is like the regular season in a sport before the playoffs. Every team in the tournament debates every preliminary debate unless they receive a bye, which will be explained in the next section. Preliminary debates will have one judge. At a typical NHSDLC tournament there are four preliminary rounds, which means every team will debate four times.

The elimination debates occur after every preliminary debate has finished. If a team advances to the elimination debates this is referred to informally as **breaking**, **clearing**, or **advancing**. Elimination debates are single-elimination. This means that once a team loses an elimination debate, they are eliminated from the tournament.

The amount of elimination debates also depends on how many teams have entered the tournament. Usually, the first elimination debate will include the top 32, top 16, or top 8 teams. More detailed information about elimination debates can be found below.

The appropriate names for different sizes of elimination debates are as follows:

- Top 64 Teams – Triple Octofinals
- Top 32 Teams – Double Octofinals
- Top 16 Teams – Octofinals
- Top 8 Teams – Quarterfinals
- Top 4 Teams – Semifinals
- Top 2 Teams – Finals

Unlike in preliminary debates, some elimination debates may have more than one judge. These are referred to as **panels.** Panels are guaranteed starting in the octofinals debate. Panels are usually composed of 3 judges. Panels always have an odd number of judges to ensure there cannot be ties. They do not collaborate on their decisions.

5.2   Flights

The amount of available rooms and judges is often limited. Therefore, many tournaments break down debate rounds into **flights**. Flights break down a debate round into two groups, Flight A and Flight B. Each team is randomly assigned to either flight each round. Flight A debates occur immediately. Flight B debates occur after Flight A debates are over.

For example, if a tournament has 60 teams there would be 30 debates during each round. Without flights this would require 30 different rooms and judges. With flights, 15 of those debates would happen in Flight A and 15 would happen in Flight B. Therefore, flights lower the requirements for rooms and judges and also provides students a break time between debates, which they can use to prepare for their next debates.

At a typical NHSDLC tournament all four preliminary rounds are flighted, which means each round has two flights. This means eight debates occur within the span of four rounds. Each team is assigned either Flight A or Flight B during each round, and overall participates in four preliminary debates. Some elimination rounds will also be flighted.

5.3   The Basics of Pairing

This section will cover the basic rules and guidelines of pairing.

Pairing is the decision making process that determines who faces who in a debate tournament. The tournament staff that tabulate these pairings are called the **tab** or **tabbing staff**. They will be in the **tab room** for the majority of the tournament. The tabbing staff use various tabbing software to assist them in pairing the tournament because making the decisions requires a lot of data and there is a large amount of possible decisions.

Here are some of the basic guidelines that explain how pairing works. In the first two preliminary debates pairings are **randomized**. This means any team has an equal chance of facing any of the other team in the tournament. For example, if there are 100 teams in a tournament a team has about a 1% chance to face any of the other teams. They are equally as likely to face the 84th team, the 32nd team, the 55th team, etc.

There are two constraints on the randomization.

First, teams cannot face teams that they have already debated. *Second,* teams cannot face teams from the same school. However, in the NHSDLC, if a school composes more than 1/3 of the competition then teams from the same school can face each other. This is to prevent a large amount of pull ups in the powered rounds. Both of these concepts will be explained next.

Every debate after the first two debates are **powered**. A powered round is one where teams with similar win-loss records face each other. For example, for the third debate in a tournament teams that have won two debates would face other teams that won two debates, teams that have won one debate would face other teams that have won one debate, and teams that have won no debates would face other teams that have not won yet. For the fourth debate, teams that have won three debaters would face other teams that have also won three debates, and so on. The purpose of powered rounds is to match teams with similar skill levels against each other. This leads to more even and higher quality debates.

Sometimes there will not be an even amount of teams that have the same win-loss record. For example, there may be an uneven amount of teams that have won two debates. In that case, a team that has won one debate will face a team that has won two debates. This is called a **pull up.** Pull ups will only affect a small amount of teams in a tournament and are necessary to make the tournament possible.

Similarly, if there is an uneven amount of teams in the entire tournament one team will receive a **bye** each round. If a team receives a bye they do not have an opponent for the round and receive a win. For example, if there are 101 teams at a tournament 50 debates would happen each round. This leaves one team leftover who does not have an available opponent. They would receive the bye. Byes are awarded randomly during the preset rounds and given to lower seeded teams in powered rounds.

In summary, the fundamentals of pairing a debate tournament are as follows: **The first two preliminary rounds are randomized, meaning any team**

has an equal chance to face any other team in the field. Every round after the first two are powered, meaning teams with equal win-loss records will face each other.

5.4 Speaker Points

At the end of a debate judges don't only decide the winner and loser. Judges also decide speaker points. Speaker points are the points awarded to a debater based off of a combination of their argument quality, persuasion and overall presentation. So in contrast to wins, which are given to debaters solely based off of their arguments, speaker points evaluate a debater's performance more holistically.

In theory, the speaker point scale goes from 1 to 30. However, in practice speaker points are assigned within the range of about 22 to 30, with 30 being the best. Half-point intervals are commonly utilized, such as 27.5, 28.5 and so on. Ties are permitted.

Quantifying persuasion and style is not a precise science. It is informed by loose guidelines that can change depending on each debate region's community norms and by each individual judge's preference. NHSDLC tournaments use the scale below as a loose guideline when assigning speaker points.

Speaker points are assigned in a relative way. A debater that is an average speaker at one tournament may be below average at a more competitive tournament, but then be an above average speaker at an easier tournament. This means that if a debater goes to a highly competitive tournament and receives lower speaker points it isn't necessarily because they debated worse than they regularly do. More likely it is because the competition they are being compared to is stronger.

Since speaker points are rewarded holistically instead of solely based off of argument quality, low point wins are possible. Low point wins occur when a team that receives higher speaker points loses the debate. Even if a team is overall stronger at speaking, persuasion, organization and other important debate skills, they may still lose the debate versus an opposing team because of strategic errors. Low point wins provide judges the flexibility of rewarding a team for being better speakers even if they lose the debate.

5.4.1 NHSDLC Speaker Score Scale

The following are broad, general descriptions. Speeches need not have every feature described to fit a particular score. The judges may make decisions that do not exactly align with this scale.

- **30 - One of the best speeches at the tournament**. All arguments are complete, extremely well supported with convincing evidence and logic, and demand very strong responses. Rebuttal exposes significant flaws in the opponent's arguments, and rebutted all points thoroughly. An

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incredible speaker, with both outstanding style and delivery. This team should likely win the tournament.

- **29 - An excellent speech**. No significant gaps in logic or evidence, and all arguments are relevant and address the major issues in the debate. Provided effective rebuttal of all of opponent's points. Very clear and persuasive in speaking style and delivery. This team should likely be competing in late elimination rounds.

- **28 - A very good speech**. Most arguments are complete and supported with evidence, but occasionally lack warrants or impacts. Responded to most of the opponent's arguments effectively. A good speaker, who shows style and a clear delivery. This team should likely advance to elimination rounds.

- **27 - A good speech**. Most arguments are generally strong, used logic and evidence, but may be easy to respond to or have some noticeable flaws. Rebuttal addressed opponent's main points, but may be strong in some areas and weak in others, but is generally effective. Delivery and style is adequate, and without any major mistakes. This team might advance to elimination rounds.

- **26 - An average speech**. Arguments are usually complete, with evidence and logic, but could be stronger, and probably need more evidence or support. Rebuttals do a good job of addressing some, but not all of the opponent's points, but may not effectively negate key ideas or evidence. Shows some speaking ability, but lacks clarity and style of stronger speakers at the competition. This team should likely break even in competitive record.

- **25 - A slightly below average speech**. Arguments are mostly clear, but may present flaws in logic, gaps in evidence, or problems with relevance to the topic, but are strong in some areas as well. Rebuttals are present, but may fail to address all of the opponent's case effectively. Speaker probably lacks strong persuasive ability, style, delivery, or may be difficult to follow. This team should likely break even or below even in competitive record.

- **24 - A poor speech**. Arguments are somewhat unclear, or severely lacking in evidence or logic. Rebuttals are attempted but are not complete, or don't address any of the important points. Speaker's delivery is poor and difficult to follow. This team should likely break below even in competitive record.

- **23 to 20 - The judges do not give these scores except in extraordinary circumstances**. Student either did not give a speech, or extremely severe misconduct took place. A score of 20 may also be given when a student debates without a partner (or maverick), to show that there was no student present.

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5.5   Ranks

Along with speaker points judges will also assign speaker ranks. Ranks are assigned to each debater to evaluate how well they spoke relative to each other. Ranks are assigned from 1 to 4, where 1 is the highest and 4 is the lowest. There are no ties for ranks. Ranks must correspond with speaker points, where the highest rank goes to the debater that got the highest speaker points.

For example, if the speaker points assigned in a debate are 24.5, 25, 25 and 26, the debater that received the 24.5 would be ranked a "4" and the debater that received a 26 would be ranked a "1." The judge would decide which debater out of the two that received a 25 was better, and assign one debater a "2" and one of debater a "3." While debaters can receive the same speaker points they cannot receive the same ranks. Therefore, ranks can differentiate debaters who receive the same speaker points.

6   Tabulation

6.1   Speaker Awards

Speaker awards are given to the students who have received the best speaker points during preliminary debates. The number of awards depends on how many teams have competed in the tournament division. Most leagues, including the NHSDLC, will award at least the top 5 speakers in the tournament with awards. If the division is bigger the top 10 may be rewarded. At particularly large tournaments, the top 20 may receive awards. Speakers are ranked by an algorithm using a number of factors from their scores in the preliminary rounds of the competition. Criteria are order from top to bottom, with ties in "H/L" broken by "PTS" and so on.

Speaker rankings are calculated for NHSDLC tournaments by looking at:

1. **High/Low points** – The combined speaker points for the team after removing the highest and lowest results. This is done to ensure that anomalous high or low score doesn't unduly affect the results. The high/low mitigates the effect of outlier speaks when determining awards. This means consistency is rewarded. Having one bad debate does not, by itself, prevent a debater from getting a speaker award, nor does a single excellent debate guarantee a debater will earn a speaker award. Therefore, a single judge cannot affect results too heavily.

2. **Total Speaker Points** – Total combined speaker points from all debates.

3. **Total Ranks** – Total combined ranks from all debates. In each round speakers are ranked 1-4. Unlike with speaker points there cannot be a tie in ranks. Therefore, lower total ranks are better.

4. **Opposition Wins** – The total number of wins that teams they debated against received.

5. **Judge Controlled Variance** – Judge Variance (JVar) is a measure of how many more (or less) speaker points a debater receives from a judge, given the average of that judge's speaker point distribution over the course of a tournament. This is a statistical analysis that adjusts speaker points on the basis of patterns in how the judge gave out speaks. This uses a Z score.

6. **Opposition Points** – The total number of speaker points that teams they debated against received.

7. **Random Number** – In the extremely unlikely event of a perfect tie a random number is generated for each speaker to break the tie. This has never actually been necessary. This is mathematically equivalent to a coin flip. If this were ever to actually happen we would probably give a joint award, but the computer program requires a definite output.

6.2   Team Awards

After all preliminary debates are done every team is ranked in order. Team ranks are calculated for NHSDLC tournaments by looking at:

1. **Wins** – Total number of debates that the team won.

2. **High/Low Points** – The combined speaker points for the team after removing the highest and lowest results. This is done to ensure that anomalous high or low score doesn't unduly affect the results.

3. **Total Speaker Points** – Total combined speaker points from all debates. Just like in speaker ranks, the high/low points come before total speaker points to mitigate the impact of having one bad debate or having a judge that gives really high or really low speaker points.

4. **Total Ranks** – Total combined ranks from all debates. In each round speakers are ranked 1-4. Unlike with speaker points there cannot be a tie in ranks. Therefore the lowest total ranks are better.

5. **Opposition Wins** – The total number of wins that teams they debated against received.

6. **Judge Controlled Variance** – Judge Variance (JVar) is a measure of how many more (or less) speaker points a debater receives from a judge, given the average of that judge's speaker point distribution over the course of a tournament. This is a statistical analysis that adjusts speaker points on the basis of patterns in how the judge gave out speaks. This uses a Z score.

7. **Opposition Points** – The total number of speaker points that teams they debated against received.

8. **Random Number** – In the extremely unlikely event of a perfect tie a random number is generated for each speaker to break the tie. This has

never actually been necessary. This is mathematically equivalent to a coin flip. If this were ever to actually happen we would probably give a joint award, but the computer program requires a definite output.

## 6.3   Breaking to Elimination Rounds & Bracket Basics

Once team ranks are calculated, the teams that advance to elimination rounds has been determined. If a tournament breaks to double-octofinals, the top 32 teams advance to elimination rounds. If the tournament breaks to octofinals, the top 16 teams advance, and so on. In principle, tournaments will attempt to advance between one-fourth to one-half of all teams and will attempt to advance, at least, all debaters with winning preliminary records, although the actual number of teams that advance will vary based on logistical constraints and the discretion of the individual tournament director.

Team ranks also determine the seed of each team. The **seed** is the team's position in the elimination rounds bracket. The team with the team rank of "1" will be first seed, the team with the team rank of "16" will be sixteenth seed, and so on.

Seeds determine which teams face each other during outrounds. The top seed will face the lowest seed, the second seed will face the second lowest seed, the third seed will face the third lowest seed, and so on. However, if a lower seed defeats a higher seed, they will occupy the higher seed's position in the bracket.

Some tournaments will run partial elimination rounds. If a tournament breaks to partial double-octofinals, some number of teams between the top 32 and top 16 teams advance. If the tournament breaks to part octofinals, some number of teams between the top 8 and top 4 teams advance. Partial elimination rounds are held to allow more debaters to advance without advancing more than half of the teams in the pool. Because partial elimination rounds do not use the entire bracket, the top seeded teams will be awarded byes for that round.

The following image is an example of a bracket for a tournament breaking to double-octofinals.
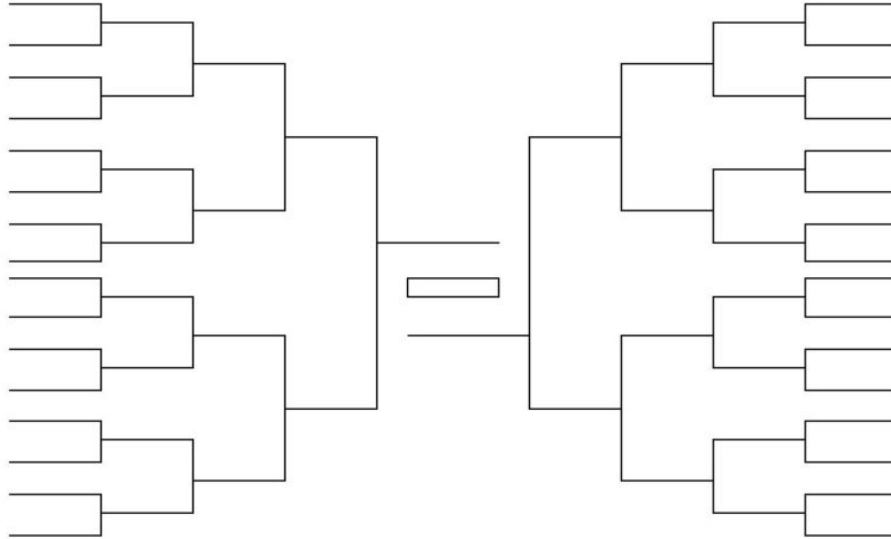
Teams are placed into the bracket based on their seed, with the 32nd seed debating the 1st seed, the 31st seed debating the 2nd seed, and so on until the 16th seed debates the 17th seed. If a lower seeded team defeats a higher seeded team, known as an **upset**, they will occupy the higher seed's position in the bracket. The bracket is designed so that if there are no upsets, the final results will reflect the initial seeding, i.e. the finalists with be the 1st and 2nd seeds, the semifinalists would be the 3rd and 4th seeds, and so on.

7   Final Results

An awards ceremony is hosted at the conclusion of a tournament. The awards ceremony will recognize final placements based on the results of elimination rounds in each event, top speakers in each event, and overall school sweepstakes. Teams are not awarded based on preliminary seeding, so the top seeded preliminary team could lose in the first elimination round where they would receive an award corresponding to the elimination round they were eliminated in. The school sweepstakes award is for the school which performs the best across all of its teams throughout the weekend, in both preliminary and elimination rounds in all events. Each win by any team from the same school counts towards their overall total, and every win counts for one point.

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