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Judging Rubric

Students develop their skills as a public speaker and debater during their years in the MSPDP. They learn different methods of composing and presenting arguments through direct instruction from their coaches, collaborating with teammates, and through interactions with students from other schools. Accomplished debaters are able to show mastery of many skills at once. Intermediate debaters may show mastery of one or two skills or may show moments of mastery with many more. Beginning debaters are the brave students willing to try something new. Over the course of a debater's career, one of their goals is to improve as an individual debater. This is in addition to learning how to do research and be an effective and supportive teammate.

The purpose of this judging rubric is to help debaters chart their individual progress. Students are looking to grow in four skill sets: **argumentation**, **refutation**, **structure**, and **presentation**.

- **Argumentation** is the explanation why an **assertion** is valid using **reasoning** and **evidence** while demonstrating its **significance**.
- **Refutation** is how debaters respond to the other side's arguments and show how ideas **clash**.
- **Structure** is the way debaters organize information using devices like **numbering**, an **introduction** and **conclusion**, and **transitions** to create an easily understood speech.
- **Presentation** is how debaters engage their audience with meta-verbal elements like **eye-contact**, **volume**, **tone**, **hand-motions**, and **rhetorical devices**.

Only what students do in a debate – their speeches, their heckles, and their POIs – goes into determining their speaker scores. The score does not necessarily dictate which side wins the debate; “low-point wins” happen. The student’s speaking score is rated on a scale of 60 to 90 points. (These numbers are not in any way reflective of the grading scale where 90 is equivalent to an A, 80 B, and so on.) The score is determined by the judge alone and their decision is final.

This packet serves as an expanded version of the judging rubric found on the final page. Here there are descriptions of the different skill sets along with examples of how those attributes manifest themselves in debates.

Skill: Argumentation

There are many ways to structure arguments; the method commonly used in the MSPDP is called “**ARESR**” which stands for the sequence of **Assertion**, **Reasoning**, **Evidence**, **Significance**, and **Result**. For each debate topic, a team will create a number of arguments on that topic and each argument will receive its own ARESR. After each debater develops individual arguments, they should show how their team’s arguments work together to form a cohesive message. When debaters “weigh the debate,” they take the overarching theme for each team and show why their side’s arguments outweigh the other team’s and explain why the judge should vote for their side.

For example, on the topic of “Ban Boxing,” one such proposition argument could be as follows:

*“Our first point is that (**Topic**) we should ban boxing because (**Assertion**) the purpose of boxing is to harm people. (**Reasoning**) In other sports, players wear protective gear, but in boxing the ultimate goal is a “knock-out” where one player is unconscious due to brain trauma. This harm is permanent and serious. (**Evidence**) For example, Muhammad Ali had Parkinson’s Disease, which was a direct result of his time in the ring, according to Dr. Jean-Francois Chermann, a neurologist who studied boxing. (**Significance**) Muhammad Ali boxed to roaring crowds and then lived with a serious disease for 30 years. (**Result**) Does this mean that society is OK with people living with debilitating conditions just for entertainment? If we allow that, judge, what other torture will we allow for our enjoyment?”*

DESCRIPTORS	85 POINTS	75 POINTS	65 POINTS
The debater...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">provides a narrative that includes ARESR and flows naturally.provides complex reasoning for all of their arguments.uses different types of evidence (e.g., qualitative, quantitative) and analyzes their quality, citing the source.explains the significance and result of individual arguments and how their team’s arguments work together.includes discussion of team’s arguments as a whole.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">uses the ARESR format consistently or nearly-consistently in a formulaic way.provides sound reasoning for all or a majority of their arguments.uses evidence and sometimes explains how the evidence supports the argument, usually providing a source.explains the significance or result of each individual argument, but does not show how arguments work together.refers to teammates’ arguments and may provide a new explanation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">uses the ARESR format not at all or only once or twice.mostly does not provide reasoning or provides ineffective reasons.uses anecdotal evidence, doesn’t connect evidence to arguments, doesn’t supply enough evidence, usually omits source.does not explain the significance or result of their own or their team’s arguments.refers to teammates’ arguments briefly or not at all.
EXAMPLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">“The most important argument is”“Our overarching idea is that...”“This is our most important point because...”“Let me reiterate what this debate is about...”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">“My team’s arguments are (numbered points)...and I will be elaborating (a subset of the numbered points)...”“Take this quote from...”“This shows that...”“I will now rebuild our team’s points...”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">“My arguments are...”“It’s just obvious.”

Skill: Refutation

Refutation, also called rebuttal, is the art of showing why an argument is invalid. Debaters may do this with counter evidence, showing logical fallacies, or devaluing the significance of the other side's points. Good refutation requires good listening skills. In the MSPDP, debaters can use their own speaking time, **Points of Information (POIs)**, or **heckles** to refute any aspect of the other side's arguments. Debaters do not need to refute all of the other side's points, but good debaters will at least acknowledge each point and explain why they are or are not rebutting it. Speakers can also show why a refutation does not work by refuting the refutation, meaning that their original point still stands. One way to structure a rebuttal is in a four-step refutation. This direct refutation is called **clash**. Debates need clash because that's how one side shows their arguments are more valid than the other side's. When debaters clash, it shows that they are listening to one another.

For example, on the topic “Ban Boxing”, one such refutation may be as follows:

(Step 1: Restate) They say that the purpose of boxing is to harm people, (Step 2: Counterpoint) but there is much more to boxing than physical harm, which is actually quite common in many sports and therefore is not enough to single out boxing. (Step 3: Reasoning/Evidence) Boxing should not be banned because in football, wrestling, fencing, and countless other sports, the art of the sport comes from physically overpowering your opponent. We would never dream of banning football, eliminating wrestling from the Olympics, or jailing fencers for “trying to stab each other.” (Step 4: Conclusion) Therefore, judge, as a society we’ve said that the harm that may occur due to boxing is not enough to merit a ban of the sport, so the other side has not proven its case.”

DESCRIPTORS	85 POINTS	75 POINTS	65 POINTS
The debater...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">evaluates importance of other side's major points with complex rebuttals and specific evidence and reasoning.creates clash by quoting opponents and teammates to show conflict, adding specific and complex explanations.heckles and uses POIs effectively, referencing the current debate and showing logical fallacies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">identifies some of the other side's major points and rebuts them briefly.consistently provides some clash showing how the other side's arguments conflict with their side's.heckles or gives POIs an inappropriate amount, but provides effective rebuttals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">identifies few or none of the other side's major points.provides little or no clash and does not discuss the other side's arguments.does not heckle or use POIs at all or uses them inappropriately in a way that does not add to the debate.
EXAMPLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">“I’d like to refute the finer details of their points...”“There are inconsistencies in their arguments, such as...”“This eliminates the doubt they have tried to cast on our argument because...”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">“I’d like to refute my opponent’s points.”“They said (quote)...but it’s wrong because...”“Our point that...proves that they are incorrect because...”“At the end of the day, judge, our team’s big idea is...and their big idea is...”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Heckling with “Shame” when there is not a moral argument (e.g., in response to “15% of people don’t like watching boxing”).Standing up for a POI repeatedly after being told “no, thank you.”

Skill: Structure

The structure of a speech directly affects the clarity of the debater's arguments. While all speakers should promote their team's arguments and refute the other side's points, the responsibility to do these two things falls differently for each speaker during their speech. The descriptions below are common but *not* a formula required for success. The notes in italics provide a general idea for how the speaker should allocate time.

- The **first proposition** speaker defines the topic, introduces their own side's arguments, and may try to predict and rebut their opponent's points.
(Mostly argumentation)
- The **second proposition** speaker refutes the previous speaker's points, rebuilds and extends their own side's arguments, and may weigh the debate.
(Argumentation and refutation in nearly equal proportions)
- The **proposition rebuttalist** explains why, given all of the arguments in the debate, the proposition has won the debate.
(Mostly refutation)
- The **first opposition** speaker may respond to how the previous speaker defined the topic, rebuts their arguments, and introduces their own side's arguments.
(Mostly argumentation, some refutation)
- The **second opposition** speaker refutes the previous speaker's points, rebuilds and extends their own side's arguments, and may weigh the debate.
(Argumentation and refutation in nearly equal proportions)
- The **opposition rebuttalist** explains why, given all of the arguments in the debate, the proposition has lost the debate.
(Mostly refutation)

DESCRIPTORS

EXAMPLES	85 POINTS	75 POINTS	65 POINTS
	<p>The debater...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• identifies their points consistently in a way that may be non-linear without compromising clarity.• has a clear introduction and conclusion.• has flowing transitions between points.• allocates time to each argument and refutation appropriately, using all or nearly all of the five minutes allotted. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “The proposition/opposition believes that (topic) and will defend this position with the following arguments: first...second...third...”• “Today, our side will conclusively show that (topic) is valid/invalid because (big idea).”	<p>The debater...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• numbers their points in a formulaic way but may stray occasionally and may be slightly unclear at times.• may have introduction or conclusion.• sometimes uses transitions, but may move between arguments suddenly.• may spend a little too much or too little time on refutation or a single point, compromising other parts of the speech.	<p>The debater...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• does not number their points or does not use the numbering scheme effectively.• has no effective intro or conclusion.• does not clearly transition between arguments.• does not spend enough time overall on elaboration or ineffectively allocates time compromising the speech as a whole. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the middle of one argument, starts discussing another argument without notice.

Skill: Presentation

Presentation is how the debater engages their audience with meta-verbal elements like **eye-contact**, **volume**, **tone**, **hand-motions**, and **rhetorical devices** like **humor** and **tricola crescentes**. Debaters who excel in the presentation category deliver their speech in a highly entertaining and informative manner. They may remind you of famous orators, such as Winston Churchill, Barbara Jordan, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Denzel Washington, or Ann Richards.

BEWARE! Appealing presentation may distract from a faulty argument, incomplete ARESR, or shoddy refutation. Also, a debater's accent, a mispronounced word, or even a debater's clothes may make you miss that their argumentation and refutation are highly effective.

Eye-contact is one way to engage and make a connection with the audience. It's also a measure of how much the debater is reading their speech directly from their notes, which may reflect confidence, how well they know the material, or something else. **Hand-motions** and body language may express confidence or be used to highlight important points, which can be strategic. **Volume** and **tone** are other tools for debaters to intentionally manipulate their voice to convey meaning and importance. **Filler words** and **gaps in speech** interrupt a debater's flow and may distract, while **strategic pauses** can be used to add emphasis.

Debaters who have found control of many aspects of presentation may begin to experiment with **rhetorical devices**. They may use **humor** to establish a connection with the audience or minimize their opponents' arguments. A **tricolon crescens** (pl. **tricola crescentes**) is a series of three phrases where the final phrase holds the greatest effect on the audience. Here are three examples:

1. “*I came, I saw, I conquered.*” (Julius Caesar, 47 BCE)
2. “*I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?*” (Sojourner Truth, 1851)
3. “*My mother, my hero, and our next president...*” (Chelsea Clinton, 2016)

Did you have a reaction to the third in that series of quotes? Overall, presentation is the combination of verbal and non-verbal forms of communication which affect the audience's reception of the speech.

DESCRIPTIONS	85 POINTS	75 POINTS	65 POINTS
	<p>The debater...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• makes eye contact to engage audience members for their entire speech.• masterfully controls their volume and tone to effectively convey importance.• uses strategic pauses without distracting fillers.• uses rhetorical devices like humor to directly connect to the audience, always finishing each sentence and idea.	<p>The debater...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• sometimes makes eye contact but may rely on their notes occasionally.• sometimes uses varied volume or tone to add to their speech.• uses filler words or gaps rarely enough that it does not distract.• almost always finishes their sentences and ideas but does not add rhetorical devices.	<p>The debater...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• relies on their notes and rarely makes eye contact.• does not use volume or tone at all.• uses filler words or gaps to an extent that it distracts from their speech.• does not consistently finish their sentences and ideas and does not use any rhetorical devices.

Why no examples? Because much of what makes good presentation is non-verbal.

Argumentation

90

85

75

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- provides a narrative that includes ARESR and flows naturally.
- provides complex **reasoning** for all of their arguments.
- uses different types of **evidence** (e.g., qualitative, quantitative) and analyzes their quality, citing the **source**.
- explains the **significance** and **result** of individual arguments and how their team's arguments work together.
- includes discussion of **team's arguments** as a whole.

- uses the **ARESR** format consistently or nearly-consistently in a formulaic way.
- provides sound **reasoning** for all or a majority of their arguments.
- uses **evidence** and sometimes explains how the evidence supports the argument, usually providing a **source**.
- explains the **significance** or **result** of each individual argument, but does not show how arguments work together.
- refers to **teammates' arguments** and may provide a new explanation.

- uses the **ARESR** format not at all or only once or twice.
- mostly does not provide **reasoning** or provides ineffective reasons.
- uses anecdotal **evidence**, does not connect evidence to arguments, does not supply enough evidence, or usually omits a **source**.
- does not explain the **significance** or **result** of their own or their team's arguments.
- refers to **teammates' arguments** briefly or not at all.

Refutation

- evaluates importance of other side's **major points** with complex rebuttals and specific evidence and reasoning.
- creates **clash** by quoting opponents and teammates to show conflict, adding specific and complex explanations.
- **heckles** and uses **POIs** effectively, referencing the current debate and showing logical fallacies.

- identifies some of the other side's **major points** and rebuts them briefly.
- consistently provides some **clash** showing how the other side's arguments conflict with their side's.
- **heckles** or gives **POIs** an inappropriate amount, but provides effective rebuttals.

- identifies few or none of the other side's **major points**.
- provides little or no **clash** and does not discuss the other side's arguments.
- does not **heckle** or use **POIs** at all or uses them inappropriately, not adding to the debate.

Structure

- **identifies their points** consistently in a way that may be non-linear without compromising clarity.
- has a clear **introduction** and **conclusion**.
- has flowing **transitions** between points.

- **numbers their points** in a formulaic way but may stray occasionally and may be slightly unclear at times.
- may have **introduction** or **conclusion**.
- sometimes uses **transitions**, but may move between arguments suddenly.
- may spend a little too much or too little **time** on refutation or a single point, compromising other parts of the speech.

- does not **number their points** or does not use the numbering scheme effectively.
- has no effective **intro** or **conclusion**.
- does not clearly **transition** between arguments.
- does not spend enough **time** overall on elaboration or ineffectively allocates time compromising the speech as a whole.

Presentation

- makes **eye contact** to engage audience members for their entire speech.
- masterfully controls their **volume** and **tone** to effectively convey importance.
- uses **strategic pauses** without distracting **fillers**.
- uses **rhetorical devices** like humor to directly connect to the audience, always **finishing each sentence and idea**.

- sometimes makes **eye contact** but may rely on their notes occasionally.
- sometimes uses varied **volume** or **tone** to add to their speech.
- uses **filler words** or **gaps** rarely enough that it does not distract.
- almost always **finishes their sentences and ideas** but does not add **rhetorical devices**.

- relies on their notes and rarely makes **eye contact**.
- does not use **volume** or **tone** at all.
- uses **filler words** or **gaps** to an extent that it distracts from their speech.
- does not consistently **finish their sentences and ideas** and does not use any **rhetorical devices**.

59 should be reserved for students who are mean-spirited or otherwise inappropriate during a debate. This requires a conversation with the tournament director.

91 is a MAGNIFICENT performance. Sophisticated argumentation and refutation mark a speech that is delivered in a highly entertaining and informative way.