



We are excited to begin a great season of Speech and Debate.

Before the season can begin it is important that all competitors understand that moving to an on-line only platform is not just a physical change of no longer having to drive to a school site to compete. There are many procedural changes that must take place to ensure that a community of judges, coaches and student-competitors are connected and in sync with each other across the over 250 square-miles that is the CVFL area. Please review the following considerations and procedural changes that we have anticipated to ensure fair, equitable and an enjoyable experience.

SECTION 1: Over All Rules in Debate

Round Procedure

This was the published round procedure for the National Tournament. Tournament officials were also checking to be sure everyone was present during this 30-minute window.

“Thirty minutes prior to each round, students and judges will report to their room on the schematic from Tabroom.com. Judges will do a roll call to make sure each student is present, everyone will test their audio and video, judges will ensure the naming convention has been followed, and an email chain will be created if that is how students agree to do evidence exchange. Any tech issues should be resolved in this 30-minute period. The first speaker must begin speaking promptly at the round start time. Judges will submit their decision via Tabroom.com immediately after each debate. To keep rounds on time and ensure students and judges finish each day at a reasonable hour, judges should not disclose or explain their decisions. Instead, judges will be encouraged to write a reason for decision and comments on the online ballot after their decision has been submitted.”

Video Policy

The general expectation was for speakers and judges to have their video turned on to maximize visual and audio cues for listeners and viewers. However, should bandwidth or other technical issues occur, judges were encouraged to accommodate to maximize participation of all involved. We did find that

participants in the round turning off their video if audio quality was bad helped. We also found that most judges did not turn on their video unless prompted, so you should emphasize it in your messaging if it is important to you that videos remain on.

Internet Rules

The pilot rules for debate, Congress, and Extemp were used at the 2020 National Tournament. These rules allowed debaters to access the internet during the round to pull up evidence, actively research, communicate with their partner, etc. These rules were well received and will remain in place for future National Tournaments.

Coin Flip Policy

Tabroom.com will automatically flip a coin for the two teams where applicable. Thirty minutes prior to the round when teams are to report to their competition room for check-in, teams in both flights will be notified via text and email from Tabroom.com which team won the coin flip. In BQ and WS elimination rounds, the winner of the coin flip will choose their side in Tabroom.com. The students or any adult added as a coach on their school in Tabroom.com may make this selection. In PF, the winner of the coin flip will choose either their side or speaker position in Tabroom.com. Once chosen, the other team will make the remaining selection in Tabroom.com. If the winner of the coin flip does not make a selection after 5 minutes, the choice will revert to the other team. If no one makes a decision after 5 minutes, Tabroom.com will randomly assign sides and speaking position. These choices will be locked on the judges' ballots; judges will no longer need to tell Tabroom.com which debaters are on which sides in what order. All participants will be able to practice in round zero. The purpose of automating this coin flip is to avoid confusing procedures about who conducts the coin flip on video and guarantee that the judges' ballots are always correct based on student decisions.

Evidence

There was a new procedure regarding evidence exchange and preparation time introduced at the National Tournament. The purpose was to ensure that the tournament stuck to the schedule and avoided keeping students and judges in

competition longer than their commitment. It seemed that this change got lost in communication, and many debaters and judges were unaware of the change, though many believed it was a good change in theory.

NSDA evidence rules require that all students have evidence immediately ready to go when requested. If evidence is paraphrased, it is required that the competitor has the specific text from the original source which is being paraphrased clearly indicated and immediately available. If it takes teams more than one minute to find and send evidence that is requested, the team looking for the evidence must take preparation time to find it. Any reading of evidence produced at a team's request must be done within the requesting team's preparation time. These requirements are to ensure that we stick to the schedule and avoid keeping students and judges in competition longer than their commitment.

Debaters must send original sources via PDF or Word document; no links directly to online articles may be shared due to paywalls, subscription restrictions, and the inability to highlight the sections read or paraphrased. Evidence must be shared as a PDF or Word document through a link in the virtual room chat box or through an email chain. Students who plan to use the email option are recommended not to use their personal email address, and instead, to create a Nationals-only account to use. The email chain must be created in the 30 minutes prior to the debate in order to be used. Judges should be added to the email chain if they so request

Partner to Partner Communication

In partner events, partners were permitted to either compete together in the same room or from two different locations. Partners were permitted to share a device or use two separate devices. We did not find that partners being together during competition created any significant competitive advantage, and we believe that students should be encouraged to use their school equipment and internet if that is their best option. We recommend that all competitors follow local guidelines for social distancing at the time of the tournament.

Debaters were creative about how they communicated with their partners if they were not in the same physical location (using instant messaging, a phone call, a Google doc, etc.), and we did not believe it was prudent to over legislate how they may do so. Debaters should not plan to use a separate communication

platform that requires computer video or computer audio as that will disrupt the online debate round.

Outside Assistance

Participants in the National Tournament were reminded of their commitment to the NSDA Code of Honor and that during the course of a round, receiving outside assistance from any non-participant in the round, including coaches, teammates, and family members, was strictly prohibited. Any allegations of a rule violation could be submitted through the online protest form and were handled through the adjudication panel process. Students found to have violated tournament policy could have faced loss of round, disqualification from the tournament, and/or removal from the Honor Society and notification to school administration. We have found that while this was a major concern of many coaches when tournaments began moving online, it is not a major concern in practice. Tournament hosts should have a published procedure for addressing rule violations.

SECTION 2: Extemporaneous Speaking

Tournament Policy

USX and IX were the only speech events performed live. Cross examination was not used in Extemp to minimize logistical and technological challenges, and that change did minimize the number of things that students needed to worry about in round. Competitors were instructed that they could determine how close or distant the camera was as they were speaking in order to maximize both verbal and nonverbal communication. Judges were instructed to judge a student's performance, not whether they were sitting, standing, or walking. We found that most students stood in place while delivering their speech.

Internet Rules

The pilot rules for debate, Congress, and Extemp were used at the 2020 National Tournament. These rules allowed Extemp students to access the internet during prep to pull up evidence, actively research, etc. Students still could not use pre-prepared notes or outlines. These rules were well received and will remain in place for future National Tournaments.

Extemp Draw Procedure

Prep rooms were split by speaker order. All of the first speakers reported to USX or IX Speaker 1 Prep, all of the second speakers reported to USX or IX Speaker 2 Prep, etc. There were very few instances of speakers reporting to the wrong room, as their speaker position was listed on the public schematic in Tabroom.com.

All students report to their prep room 30 minutes prior to draw start time for speaker 1. If the round started at 10:00 a.m., students were to report to their prep room at 9:00 a.m., regardless of their speaker position. Students used an automatic draw system built into Classrooms.Cloud. A countdown timer will show students how much time there was until draw time. Once it was time to draw, students will see three questions on the screen and chose the one they wanted. Students will be given two minutes to make a selection. Once they choose a question, they began prepping with a running 30-minute timer on the screen. Students will be instructed to mute themselves, leave their videos on, and keep their speakers on in case the proctor needed to speak to them. If a student is late to draw, they can still choose their question, but time would have begun to count down. Students will be permitted to use different devices to prep and speak. After prep was over, the proctor will release everyone in the prep room to their competition room to speak.

Prep is expected to be staggered by 10 minutes for each speaker position. Judges will be instructed to give time signals as usual, though competitors are warned to time themselves because issues with time signals were not grounds for protest. In general CVFL will ask speakers to leave the room after they spoke to minimize the number of people in the virtual room, which could cause audio/video quality issues.

What Students can expect:

Staggering prep by 10 minutes for each speaker position was a great amount of time to ensure judges heard each speaker, the next speakers weren't entering the room as the previous competitor was speaking, and short delays to fix audio were easy to make up.

SECTION 3: Asynchronous Speech Judged Live

Main event speech rounds, excluding Extemp, consisted of students pre-recording their performances and judges adjudicating those performances live. Competitors submitted one recording of their performance through Speeches.Cloud prior to the competition. This one recording was judged throughout preliminary rounds, elimination rounds, and finals, if applicable.

When watching/observing a speech, Judges are asked to consider our value of equity and not take video quality into account while judging. This is part of the language found on top of ballots:

“Please remember that the video quality of a student’s performance or speech may be impacted by lighting, internet, access to equipment, and other family members’ presence in the home. To ensure a more equitable experience for our participants, please be sure your decision-making process and comments are related only to the content and quality of the presentation or speech itself”

It is important that judges not to take video quality into account. We know it may be impossible to fully remove implicit bias from their decision-making process. As an additional attempt to level the playing field, we created standards for video recording to prevent students with access to professional-level technology or resources to purchase professional-level technology from receiving a competitive advantage with their videos. We found that these rules were well-received, and while it was impossible to create a comprehensive list of what was permitted/not permitted, we encouraged members to reach out and ask questions if they felt that any of their recording technology may not be within the rules. These were the standards created:

- Competitors may not use green screens, virtual backdrops, on-screen text, or professional equipment enhancements such as professional lighting kits or professional grade camera recording and audio devices (including things like softboxes or using an auditorium’s lighting system) during their performance in any event.

- Students must use the official Speeches.Cloud, to film and submit their performances; performances cannot be submitted as a separate video file.
- Submissions or recordings may not be edited using any software; all submissions must be non-stop footage of the entire performance done through the permitted submission platform.
- The camera being used must remain stationary throughout the entire performance, and no zooming or panning is permitted. Other individuals may be present while filming, but audience interaction (laughing, applause, etc.) must not be included in the performance. Competitors may determine how close or distant the camera is set up in order to maximize both verbal and nonverbal communication. If possible, it is recommended that students and judges remove items that may be distracting in the background.
- Backdrops of a solid color with no special markings may be used by competitors and judges. No rule changes will be made to accommodate virtual visual aids.

*Lavalier microphones and ring lights are typically under \$50 and many are readily available to students from their school's newspaper or journalism department. At CVFL it is allowed to use this technology. Students are also allowed to record their performance in their school's auditorium as long as they did not use stage lighting and it is within their school and school district's safety policies during COVID-19 closures. One of the biggest change in making a video look "professional" was the use of a professional lighting kit, most of which cost several thousands of dollars. Disallowing the use of professional lights, such as those found in a school auditorium, helped to level the playing field for students without access to professional lighting kits.

Overall, the most important thing was that we created a list of all questions asked, all equipment that we allowed and disallowed, and remained consistent and transparent in our rulings.

Section 4: Asynchronous Recording Process

How to upload videos:

[Here is a short video](#) showing the Speeches.Cloud site with instructions for students to submit recordings. Students had a two and a half week recording window to submit their performance through our secure portal called Speeches.Cloud. Students were required to use Speeches.Cloud to film and submit their performances. Students logged into Speeches.Cloud using their Tabroom.com login information. Competitors logged into Speeches.Cloud, recorded their performance, watched the recording, and could re-record their performance as many times as they liked.

However, once the performance was submitted, that recording was considered the official tournament entry for the contestant and could not be re-recorded and submitted. The recording system was set to stop all recordings at a preset time limit of 10 minutes and 30 seconds. However, some smartphone operating systems (iphones and Apple tablets, in particular) prevented recording beyond the set time limit of 10 minutes. We put a big note about this limitation on the top of the recording site. Competitors were instructed to test and use the systems that best fit the length of their performance and audio and visual quality. Submitted performances were saved by code in a database within our competition site. Students received a confirmation email that their recording has been submitted, and that confirmation email also included a link to view the recording that was submitted. We did ask competitors to share that link with no one but their coach.

What Worked

1. **Security.** As all competitors at the CVFL tournaments required to have a linked Tabroom.com account prior to submitting a recording, Speeches.Cloud is able to pull their exact information (name, school, event, code) from Tabroom.com rather than relying on everyone correctly remembering and typing out their information. This means that there were will not videos submitted from students that were not entered in the tournament.
2. **Organization.** The way the recordings were stored in Speeches.Cloud after submission made it very easy to troubleshoot, audit, edit mistakes, and eventually upload into Tabroom.com and the competition site. We

could search Speeches.Cloud by any field (code, name, school, email, etc.), and the process for getting the submissions into the competition rooms after they had been collected was a breeze. Collection of the video submissions was by far the most difficult part of this process.

3. **Flexibility.** Speeches.Cloud allowed for manual upload of videos. If a student has a video file saved to their computer, they can manually enter their name, code, email, event, etc., and upload the video file to Speeches.Cloud in the same format as other recordings. Although 98% of students are able to get their files uploaded directly to the Speeches.Cloud system, there might be a few students who, despite our extensive troubleshooting, could not get their videos uploaded. Almost always, this was a result of students with poor access to the internet who did not have anywhere else to go to get a better connection. It is important that if a competitor discovers that they are having such an issue that they contact tab of the CVFL coaches through email or the Remind app. Students and their coaches should be able get their recordings manually uploaded into the system.
4. **Standardization.** Requiring students to submit their videos through the same recording site will help provide an additional safeguard against students submitting professional videos. The recording site meant that students had no ability to edit their videos, splice together scenes from different recordings, or remove anything about the performance they did not like. The recording site also meant there was a maximum level of quality that could be submitted through the site. Though the site did accept HD videos, the quality of video captured with an expensive, high-level camera would look of similar quality as most other recordings once submitted.

Challenges

1. **Deadlines.** Students were will be given a time period to submit their videos before each tournament. Our intention within CVFL is to give students as much time as possible to practice on the site and submit their best version of their performance. It is our concern that more than 90% of students' videos were uploaded after 5:00 p.m. on the day the recordings were due.

Please do not wait until the deadline unless you have to. This not only put a strain on the recording site's servers, but also leaves our volunteer staff overwhelmed with requests for technical support all at once.

2. **Audit Process.** We will be asking that coaches and students verify that what they published is a qualifying video and that students were ultimately responsible for the video that they submitted -that there would be no audit or opportunities to fix problems with recordings.

During Asynchronous Recordings Rounds

When a judge entered the room for their speech round, they will see a video player at the top with six to seven tabs, each representing a student's recording. The tabs are listed in order of their speaker position so that judges could click through each tab in order and watch the recorded speeches. Underneath the video player, there will be a Zoom window that judges (and students, if they choose to attend) will enter so that the judges could facilitate the round and all round participants could watch the videos around the same time.

Judges are expect to meet in the competition room 30 minutes prior to round start time to allow us time to replace any missing judges. Judges in recorded speech events needed the most instruction and assistance about how to judge than other events' judges.

After watching all of the students' performances, the judges congratulated the competitors and completed their ballots. The ballot will give the judges an option to write a reason for decision (RFD) explaining their ranks, as well as the option to leave individual feedback for the competitors. Judges will be instructed to submit their ranks before writing any optional comments in order to get decisions in as soon as we could.

SECTION 5: Congressional Debate

Congress Norms

Parliamentarians are asked to be flexible and adapt to students as they created norms for moving to the online format. Many of these norms will be

created organically, and we encourage tournament directors and competitors alike to avoid over-legislating norms in Congress to allow students to lead their chambers. Some presiding officers will use the yes/no or thumbs up/down functions in Zoom to vote; others will find that students raising placards in front of their camera was best. We (within CVFL) have yet to practice these options. Points of privilege and amendment documentation are to be handled through the built-in chat function. Time will be called through hand signals or visual time cards instead of gavel taps. It is recommended that Congressional Debate participants use the Zoom app instead of the built-in Zoom window in the browser because it enabled gallery view, which was essential to viewing all of the members of a chamber at once.

SECTION 6: Tournament Official Procedure

Tournament officials will move from room to room to verify judges were present and answer any questions prior to the round start time. Like other events, Congressional Debate participants will be asked to report to their rooms 30 minutes prior to round start time.

The tournament officials promoted the parliamentarian as a host or co-host so they had the ability to privately chat with members in the room and mute/unmute speakers. Tournament officials will check with the parliamentarian to see if the PO Election record has been completed and the PO Advancement form has been submitted. At the end of a session, they will be reminded scorers are to provide two scores for the PO and consider the PO when ranking.

SECTION 7: Awards and Award Announcements

The plan currently, is to livestream our CVFL Awards Ceremony at the end of the Tournament. There will be a push notification through tabroom.com before awards/ranking are announced. It is our goal that this will allow family and friends to watch and cheer on their team members and contestants.