



2020-2021

Updated May 10, 2021

Middle School Unified Manual Tournament Procedures, Rules, and Judging Instructions

The **National Speech & Debate Association** is the largest interscholastic speech and debate organization serving middle school and high school students in the United States. The Association provides competitive speech and debate activities, high-quality resources, comprehensive training, scholarship opportunities, and advanced recognition to more than 150,000 students and coaches every year. For more than 90 years, the National Speech & Debate Association has empowered more than 1.5 million members to become engaged citizens, skilled professionals, and honorable leaders in our society.

OUR MISSION: We believe communication skills are essential for empowering youth to become engaged citizens, skilled professionals, and honorable leaders in our global society. We connect, support, and inspire a diverse community of honor society members committed to fostering excellence in young people through competitive speech and debate activities.

OUR VISION: We envision a world in which every student has access to competitive speech and debate activities. We are the leading voice in the development of resources, competitive and ethical standards, curricular and co-curricular opportunities, and recognition systems for our vast network of student, coach, and alumni members.

***Editor's Note:** For quick reference throughout this document, new changes for the current year are highlighted in **yellow**. Other recent changes made within the past one or two years remain highlighted in **gray**.*

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SECTION 1: Middle School Speech Challenge Procedures

Overview

This manual offers an overview of competition procedures at the **Middle School National Speech & Debate Tournament**. Coaches must be familiar with the tournament information posted at www.speechanddebate.org/nationals. The following document serves as a guide to help you understand the tournament's structure; however, the deadlines and requirements found on the National Tournament website (not included here) are expectations that must be followed by all participants.

Please refer to the *Middle School Competition Event Rules* section for specific rules of the various events offered at the tournament. Also see *Middle School Judging Instructions* as additional guidance for judges.

2021 Release and Updates

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Harassment and Discrimination Policy

The National Speech & Debate Association is committed to providing its participants, judges, coaches, and staff the opportunity to pursue excellence in their endeavors. This opportunity can exist only when each member of our community is assured an atmosphere of mutual respect. The NSDA prohibits all forms of harassment and discrimination. Accordingly, all forms of harassment and discrimination, whether written or oral, based on race, color, religion, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, citizenship, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, or any other characteristic protected by any applicable federal, state, or local law are prohibited, whether committed by participants, judges, coaches, or observers. Individuals who are found to have violated this policy will be subject to the full range of sanctions, up to and including removal from the tournament premises. Any individual or group of individuals who believes they have been a victim of harassment and/or discrimination should report it to the ombudsperson immediately.

(Updated February 3, 2019)

I. Tournament Entry

A. **Eligibility:** Students must have been in the fifth, sixth, seventh, or eighth grade during this academic school year. There is no qualification process; this is an open tournament.

1. Students involved with non-school clubs must instead be registered with the school at which they are enrolled. Contestants found to be violating this rule will be disqualified.
2. **Membership Notice:** The Board of Directors affirms the creation, support, and development of speech and debate programs at the middle and secondary levels through accredited public and private schools. All members of the Association must be school-based. For any club or organization that does not currently have a school-based membership, the NSDA is eager to work with you to create school-based speech and debate teams. Students who are currently members through their area non-school-based clubs and organizations may request to have their memberships transferred to their accredited public and private schools. Homeschools and virtual schools that are recognized by the state in which those schools compete may join the National Speech & Debate Association. Please contact info@speechanddebate.org for more information.

B. **Entry Limits:**

1. Entries, judges, and payment are due May 15.
2. Coaches must acquire a signed Entry Release Form for each competitor before June 7, retain these signed forms through December 31, and be ready to produce them at any point during or following the Middle School Speech Challenge. **Forms do not need to be turned in to the national office during registration.**
3. Video recordings are due June 1.
4. No live events will be offered at the 2021 Middle School Speech Challenge. All events will be held asynchronously. All events offered are speech events in which pre-recorded performances will be ranked against each other. Students will not be present during judging.
5. There are no entry limits. Students may be entered in as many events as they wish.
6. Entries who do not submit their video recording by June 1 may be dropped from the tournament, and entry fees will not be refunded.

C. **Judging:**

1. Each school must bring at least one-full time judge as a condition for entry. The fee for not providing the first judge owed is \$600.
2. There is one speech judge pool. All judges are eligible to judge all events.
3. A school will owe one judge for every 5 entries or fraction thereof. Any additional judges owed past the first judge (required to be provided) may be bought out for the price of \$160 per judge.
4. If a school brings high school students to judge, they must have been juniors or seniors with at least 250 Honor Society points in the 2020-2021 academic year. No underclassmen or upper classmen without 250 Honor Society points will be permitted to judge. A rising junior does not meet these criteria.
5. Every judge must be available to judge up to six rounds between June 7 – June 10. Judges may complete their judging at any time before the end of the day on June 10.
6. If a judge does not complete their judging assignments by the deadline, the school will lose their judge bond and be charged a \$400 fine. An additional \$400 fine will be assessed for additional judges that do not complete their assignments.
7. Judges will judge asynchronous recordings linked on Tabroom.com ballots. All judges must have a Tabroom.com account before they can be registered for the tournament.

D. **Fees:**

1. **School Membership Fee: \$75.** Every school registered in the Middle School National Tournament must first be registered as a paid NSDA member school. School membership costs \$75, and the school will remain a member until the end of the current school year. Sign up for membership at www.speechanddebate.org/join.
 2. **Student Membership Fee: \$10.** Every student registered in the Middle School National Tournament must first be registered as a paid NSDA member student. Each student membership costs \$10, and students will remain members until they enter high school. Sign up for membership at www.speechanddebate.org/join.
 3. **Entry Fee:** For each speech event a student enters, the fee is **\$25 per event**. For example, if entered in four events, it would be \$100 total for the student.
 4. Each school must post a judge bond of \$200. This bond is in addition to entry fees and judge fees. If all judges from a school complete all judging assignments, the \$200 will be returned after the tournament using the method selected during registration (on the general tab of your Tournament registration): refund check by mail or credit to your NSDA account. Judge bond refunds will be processed by July 31. A school will not be permitted to gain membership or compete the following year unless all outstanding fees have been paid.
 5. Overpayments will be processed by July 31 and refunded via the same method selected for judge bond refund.
 6. Schools must pay a **\$160 fee** for each uncovered judge as per requirements above.
 7. All fees are non-refundable after registration closes on **May 15**.
- E. **Entry Requirements and Deadlines:**
1. Coaches can register online at **MSNats.tabroom.com**. Entries are due **May 15**.
 2. Title, author, and ISBN information for Interpretation events, title and topic for Original Oratory and Informative Speaking, and title for Declamation, must be posted on the registration website by **May 15**.
 3. Judge names and judge conflicts are due **May 15**.
 4. Media release forms, signed by each student's parent/guardian, **must be procured by June 7 and retained by coaches until December 31**.
 5. Entry agreement forms, signed by each school's principal and coach, must be submitted by **May 15**.
 6. All fees, including judge bond, must be postmarked or received by the national office by **May 15**.

II. Competition Event Procedures

- A. **Judges:** At least one judge evaluates each preliminary round.
- B. **Judging Conflicts:** Contestants scheduled to be judged by someone who has, at any point in time, coached or taught them or with whom they have a close personal relationship are responsible for reporting that conflict on Tabroom.com prior to May 15. If they are scheduled to judge a student that is a conflict, they must report that fact to the ombudsperson immediately. Failure to comply may result in disqualification from the tournament.
- C. **Rounds:** Each competitor will be guaranteed five preliminary rounds. There will be no elimination rounds.
- D. **Results:** The top students in each event will be recognized as Middle School Speech Challenge Showcase Finalists and have their recordings showcased on the NSDA website.
- E. **Speech Events:** This tournament will offer competition in the following speech events: Informative Speaking (INF), Program Oral Interpretation (POI), Congressional Debate Authorship Challenge (CON), Pro Con Challenge (P/C), Declamation (DEC), Dramatic Interpretation (DI), Prepared Mixed Extemp (EXT), Humorous Interpretation (HI), Prepared Prompt Speaking (IMP), Original Oratory (OO), Poetry (POE), Prose (PRO), Original Spoken Word Poetry (OSWP), and Storytelling (ST).
 1. Preliminary Round Sectioning
 - a. Each contestant is guaranteed five randomly sectioned preliminary rounds.
 - b. When possible, no student should be placed in a section with another student from their school.
 - c. Each student should meet a variety of opposition in each round.
 - d. Each student should be assigned a variety of speaker positions in preliminary rounds, with adjustments made to accommodate cross-entry.
 - e. Scheduling judges for preliminary rounds
 - i. Preliminary rounds of speech events will be evaluated and ranked by at least one judge.
 - ii. No school-affiliated judge shall be scheduled to judge a student from their school.
 - iii. No judge shall judge the same student in the same event more than once during prelims.
 2. Advancement to Showcase Finals
 - a. The number of entries in each speech event will determine the number of individuals that can advance to the Showcase Finals in that event.
 - b. The Showcase Finals will not be judged; the purpose is to showcase the talents of the top middle school competitors in each event.
 - c. Showcase Finalists will be recognized during the Opening Ceremony of the High School National Tournament. Their videos will be made available as a resource on the NSDA website after the tournament.

III. Protests and Disqualification

- A. **Protest Process:**
 1. Any judge who believes a rule has been violated should reach out to the national office. An ombudsperson will investigate and adjudicate protests of alleged violations of tournament rules and standards.
 2. Ombudsperson decisions are final and may only be appealed by the coach of the accused (not the coach initiating the protest). Another protest may be filed if a perceived violation occurs in a subsequent

round.

3. In case of a disqualification of a contestant, all previous ranks and decisions of other contestants stand and no revision of past round ranks will occur.



SECTION 2: Middle School Competition Event Rules

Overview

This manual provides official rules for events offered at the **Middle School National Speech & Debate Tournament**. Rules are mostly modeled after high school events, rules, and standards, but have been modified in some cases to more appropriately suit middle school students.

Please refer to the *Middle School Tournament Procedures* section for information on how the competition is operated. Also see *Middle School Judging Instructions* as additional guidance for judges. For other tournament logistics, visit www.speechanddebate.org/nationals.

2020 Release and Updates

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Policy Debate case limits can be found at www.speechanddebate.org/topics.

Time Limits

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Declamation | 10 min + 30-sec grace | Congress: Sponsor Speech | 3 min + 2-min questioning |
| Dramatic Interpretation | 10 min + 30-sec grace | Congress: First Negative | 3 min + 2-min questioning |
| Duo Interpretation | 10 min + 30-sec grace | Congress: Other Speeches | 3 min + 1-min questioning |
| Prepared Mixed Extemp | 7 min + 30-sec grace | | |
| Humorous Interpretation | 10 min + 30-sec grace | Lincoln-Douglas Debate | Varies – see LD page |
| Prepared Prompt Speaking | 5 min + 30-sec grace | Policy Debate | Varies – see Policy page |
| Original Oratory | 10 min + 30-sec grace | Public Forum | Varies – see PF page |
| Poetry Interpretation | 7 min + 30-sec grace | World Schools Debate | Varies – see WSD page |
| Prose Interpretation | 7 min + 30-sec grace | Pro Con Challenge | 10 min + 30-sec grace |
| Storytelling | 5 min + 30-sec grace | Congressional Debate Authorship Challenge | 10 min + 30-sec grace |
| Informative Speaking | 10 min + 30-sec grace | | |
| Program Oral Interpretation | 10 min + 30-sec grace | | |

Topics

See www.speechanddebate.org/topics for National Tournament topics, available by May 1.

Main Events at the 2021 Middle School Speech Challenge

Recording Rules for All Middle School Speech Challenge Events

- Recording links must be added to Tabroom.com by June 1.
- Students may record their performance using any video recording site or software available to them (Zoom, Quicktime, camera or video app on a computer, etc.). Then, they will upload their recording to a site that creates a link to the video (YouTube, Google Drive, Vimeo, etc.).
- Coaches will collect links to the students' video recordings and copy/paste them into the student's entry in their Nationals Tabroom.com registration.
- Coaches and students should be mindful of privacy. These links will be accessible to judges and other students in the tournament. We recommend that coaches create a private team account to submit videos without students' identifying information. For example, an "XYZ Speech Team" YouTube channel with unlisted videos or a Google drive account under the school's name.
- Coaches should double check that permissions on the video are appropriately set to allow anyone with the link to view it. After coaches paste the link in Tabroom, they should click the blue and white button to confirm that the link works.
- Professional equipment enhancements may not be used. Professional equipment includes professional lighting kits, professional grade camera recording and audio devices, and softboxes. Students are welcome to film their recording on their school's auditorium stage, but the use of stage lighting is not permitted. Lavalier microphones and ring lights are permitted.
- Recordings may not be edited using any software; all submissions must be non-stop footage of the entire performance.
- Students recording split-screen Duos may not record their performances separately and edit them together.
- Students may not trim a recording, even to remove the seconds that they walk to and from the recording device to push start/stop.
- The length of the recording must not exceed the time limit with the grace period.
- Competitors may not use green screens, virtual backgrounds, or on-screen text.
- The camera being used must remain stationary throughout the entire performance, and no zooming or panning is permitted.
- The camera must remain on throughout the duration of the performance; a student may not turn off their video at any point during their recording.
- The use of lighting tricks like shadow puppets are not permitted.
- Students may move closer to and further from the camera to simulate zooming, though the camera must remain stationary.
- Students may cover the camera with their hands or body.
- Students may move out of frame during the recording.
- 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.

Events Held at High School National Tournament

The following events offered at the Middle School Speech Challenge that are also being held at the High School National Tournament will follow the event rules outlined in the [High School Unified Manual](#): Dramatic Interpretation, Humorous Interpretation, Informative Speaking (no visual aids allowed in middle school division), Original Oratory, Poetry, Prose, Storytelling, and Program Oral Interpretation.

Prepared Mixed Extemporaneous Speaking

1. **Divisions:** One division of Extemp will be held at the Middle School Level. Students will be entered into a Mixed Extemporaneous Speaking division.
2. **Topics:** The tournament will have a set of 10 topics announced in advance by May 1 at speechanddebate.org/topics. The topic areas will cover questions of both domestic (United States) and international issues.
3. **Procedure:** Students will select one prompt from the official list, prepare a speech, and record it using the Middle School Speech Challenge Recording Rules. Preparation time should not be recorded; only the speech should be filmed and submitted. Recordings must be no longer than 7 minutes and 30 seconds. No notes are allowed during presentation. Judges will be instructed to judge Prepared Mixed Extemp the same way they would Extemporaneous Speaking.
4. **Internet:** Students may use the internet while preparing their speech as per the Internet Guidelines in Extemp in the [High School Unified Manual](#).
4. **Time:** The time limit in both Extemporaneous Speaking events is seven minutes with a 30-second “grace period.” Should a student’s recording go beyond the grace period, the student may not be ranked 1st. There is no other prescribed penalty for going over the grace period. The ranking is up to each individual judge’s discretion. No minimum time is mandated.

Prepared Prompt Speaking

1. **Topics:** The tournament will have a set of 10 topics announced in advance by May 1 at speechanddebate.org/topics. The topic areas will cover questions of both domestic (United States) and international issues.
2. **Procedure:** Students will select one prompt from the official list, prepare a speech, and record it using the Middle School Speech Challenge Recording Rules. Preparation time should not be recorded; only the speech should be filmed and submitted. Recordings must be no longer than 5 minutes and 30 seconds. No notes are allowed during presentation. Judges will be instructed to judge Prepared Prompt Speaking the same way they would Impromptu.
3. **Time:** The maximum time limit is 5 minutes with a 30-second “grace period”. Should a student go beyond the grace period, the student may not be ranked 1st. There is no other prescribed penalty for going over the grace period. The ranking is up to each individual judge’s discretion. No minimum time is mandated.

Declamation

1. **Length:** Declamation is a 10-minute event with a 30-second “grace period.” Should a student go beyond the grace period, the student may not be ranked 1st. There is no other prescribed penalty for going over the grace period. No minimum time is mandated.
2. **Source:** The speech must have been delivered in public and available in print (copies from a publicly available website will also be sufficient).
3. The speaker should present an introduction that states the title, author, and date of the speech they are reciting.

Pro Con Challenge

1. **Topics:** Students will choose one National Tournament topic: the LD, PF, or CX National Tournament topic. These topics will be released May 1 at speechanddebate.org/topics.
2. **Procedure:** Students will write a 3-5 minute affirmative case and a 3-5 minute negative case on their chosen National Tournament topic for LD, PF, or CX. Both cases must be on the same topic. The competitor will read both of those speeches within a recording limit of 10 minutes and 30 seconds. Students may take recorded “prep time” in between speeches to pull up files or take a short break, but their two speeches must be submitted **as one recording** that is no longer than 10 minutes and 30 seconds. Judges will evaluate the structure, arguments, evidence, and speaking

abilities of each competitor and rank them against each other. The event's goal is to demonstrate that students have the ability to see multiple perspectives on an issue.

3. **Length:** The maximum time of presentation is 10 minutes with a 30-second “grace period.” Should a student go beyond the grace period, the student may not be ranked 1st. There is no other prescribed penalty for going over the grace period. No minimum time is mandated.

Congressional Debate Authorship Challenge

1. **Topics:** Students will choose two pieces of legislation from the High School Nationals Congressional Debate Docket. The docket will be released by May 10 at speechanddebate.org/topics.
2. **Procedure:** Students will construct two authorship speeches 3-5 minutes in length. They will give both of those speeches within a recording limit of 10 minutes and 30 seconds, taking prep time between speeches if needed. Their two speeches must be submitted **as one recording** that is no longer than 10 minutes and 30 seconds. Judges will evaluate the structure, arguments, evidence, and speaking abilities of each competitor and rank them against each other.
3. **Length:** The maximum time of presentation is 10 minutes with a 30-second “grace period.” Should a student go beyond the grace period, the student may not be ranked 1st. There is no other prescribed penalty for going over the grace period. No minimum time is mandated.

Original Spoken Word Poetry

1. **Material:** Students will write and perform original poetry. Original Spoken Word Poetry is poetry written for performance to express ideas, experience, or emotion through the creative arrangement of words according to their sound, their rhythm, their meaning.
2. **Quotation:** No more than 150 words of the original poetry may be direct quotation from any other speech or writing, and such quotations must be identified in a printed copy of the speech. An introduction is permitted, but not required.
3. **Delivery:** The delivery must be memorized, and no book or script may be used.
4. **Time:** The maximum time limit is 5 minutes with a 30-second grace period. This is a hard limit, and time spent walking to and from the camera counts toward the recording time. If there are multiple judges in the round, all must agree that the student has gone beyond the grace period. Should a student go beyond the grace period, the student may not be ranked 1st. There is no other prescribed penalty for going over the grace period. The ranking is up to each individual judge’s discretion. Judges who choose to time are to use accurate (stopwatch function) timing devices. No minimum time is mandated.



SECTION 3: Middle School Judging Instructions

Overview

This is a general guide to assist judges in facilitating rounds at the **Middle School Speech Challenge**. Judges are expected to understand event rules. Coaches are not able to levy protests to the ombudsperson based upon judging instructions. Whatever your background or experience, you bring unique perspective to providing *constructive criticism* toward guiding young people in their growth as communicators and performers.

Please refer to the *Middle School Competition Event Rules* section for specific rules of the various events offered at the tournament. Also see *Middle School Tournament Procedures* as an overview of competition. For additional tournament logistics, visit www.speechanddebate.org/nationals.

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Reminder: If a school brings high school students to judge the Middle School Speech Challenge, they must have been juniors or seniors with at least 250 Honor Society points in the last academic year. No underclassmen or upper classmen without 250 Honor Society points will be permitted to judge. A rising junior does not meet these criteria.

A Note About Training: All judges should be adequately trained in evaluating rounds of competition. Additional training videos, handouts, and other materials are available online at www.speechanddebate.org/judge-training.

General Guidelines for All Judges

The tournament will not feature any live performances or live judging. All middle school events will be held with asynchronous recordings and asynchronous judging. The asynchronous model allows the NSDA to honor achievement while avoiding asking young competitors to solve technology and logistical issues on their own.

Judge Training: All judges should complete the Cultural Competency course found at speechanddebate.org/judge-training before adjudicating rounds.

Procedure: Judges will be assigned a series of preliminary rounds to judge at their leisure within a four-day window of time: June 7 - June 10. Judges will go to [Tabroom.com](https://tabroom.com), click “Start Round” on one of their round assignments, and watch the linked videos in order. The online ballot will require that judges rank the competitors in order. The ballot will also give judges the option to write a reason for decision (RFD) explaining their ranks, as well as the option to leave individual feedback for the competitors. Judges must have completed all judging assignments by 11:59 p.m. CT on June 10 to avoid school fines.

Penalty for Missing Assignments: If a judge does not complete their judging assignments by the deadline, the school will lose their judge bond and be charged a \$400 fine. An additional \$400 fine will be assessed for additional judges that do not complete their assignments.

Writing Evaluations: It is important that you write a complete evaluation. Do not wait until the round is completed to begin writing constructive feedback! Writing during students’ presentations is permitted. It is critical for the contestants and their coaches to have the educational feedback that justifies judges’ decisions. Please be objective (don’t let your own opinions on an idea predetermine your impression of a student’s presentation/argument).

Implicit Bias: We are all influenced by implicit bias, or the stereotypes that unconsciously affect our decisions. When judging, our implicit biases negatively impact students who are traditionally marginalized and disenfranchised. Before writing comments or making a decision, please take a moment to reflect on any biases that may impact your decision making process. Many students do not have equal access to the internet and technology. Do not allow video/sound equipment quality, physical location, or other elements not in control of the individual students to affect their decisions.

Feedback: Try to make *constructive* suggestions on how the speaker can improve. Do not simply say “good” or “weak.” Instead, explain HOW or WHY a student is doing well or poorly. If you give a student a poor score, make sure to indicate the problem with the presentation. It is better to focus on one or two specific ways a student could improve, than to give comments that are too general. Where notes/manuscripts are allowed, you may weigh memorization and the effect that the use of notes has on the performance in your rank/scoring.

Demeanor: Absolutely no profane or vulgar comments—orally or in writing—are tolerated. Judges removed from the pool for violating our expectations will result in a forfeiture of the judge bond, plus an additional fee of \$100 for each round the judge was assigned. Please give the contestants your undivided attention and respect. You’re in the round to judge, not read books, play video games, text-message, etc. Please model appropriate, formal conduct. Please alert the ombudsperson with conflicts of interest, i.e., you personally know a student who’s in a room you’re assigned to judge (e.g., past teammate, student you’ve coached, family/relative, personal friend).

Disqualification: Judges will not disqualify a student. Should you believe a student has violated rules, alert tournament officials to the situation by emailing the national office. Evaluate the round as if there were no rules violations; tournament staff will adjust results as needed for disqualification.

Code of Honor

“As a student or coach member of the National Speech & Debate Association, I pledge to uphold the highest standards of humility, equity, integrity, respect, leadership, and service in pursuit of excellence.”

Humility: A member does not regard oneself more highly than others. Regardless of a person’s level of success, an individual always looks beyond oneself to appreciate the inherent value of others.

Equity: A member respects individuals and their individual differences as well as fosters equity, diversity, and inclusion. A member promotes empowerment for people from all backgrounds, including race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and ability.

Integrity: A member is honest, ethical, and adheres to the competition and conduct rules of the organization. A member follows the NSDA discrimination and harassment policy and abides by the rules of their schools, tournaments, and localities.

Respect: A member demonstrates civil discourse in their interactions with others. A member maintains and contributes to a safe space and welcoming environment for all.

Leadership: A member is aware their words and actions influence others. A member commits to thoughtful and meaningful words and actions that reflect NSDA core values.

Service: A member exercises their talents to provide service to peers, community, and the activity. At all times a member is prepared to work constructively to improve the lives of others.

(Adopted September 23, 2007 | Updated February 2021)