

INTRODUCTION TO ADJUDICATING

1. Introduction

The adjudicator determines which of the teams has performed better in a debate. This determination is made according to which team was more persuasive within the rules of debating, not according to which side of the argument an adjudicator agrees with. Adjudicating debates is complicated and the nature of debating is such that not every aspect of every debate can be precisely reflected in the scores and feedback. Debates will usually be won by the team that best analyses the key arguments in the debate and has better manner, rather than, for instance, the team that speaks perfectly to time or has the most examples to support their case.

This guide is intended to briefly outline the role of the adjudicator and how adjudicators should view debates. This guide is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to adjudicating or the rules of debating. More information can be found in the *SADA Guide to Adjudicating* and the *Australia-Asia Debating Guide*.

2. Matter: the Substance of the Speech

An adjudicator must objectively assess arguments according to whether they are based on common sense, logic, quoted authority or general knowledge. An adjudicator must position themselves as an average reasonable person, which requires adjudicators to leave any special knowledge or bias they have of a topic out of their deliberations.

Teams' arguments need prove their side of the topic. A model debate requires the affirmative side to propose a particular course of action or policy, explain how it works and justify it. The negative team may wish to provide an alternative model to support their side of the case. An empirical debate requires a debate over the truth of a statement. Both teams should propose a 'test', which is an objective and balanced set of criteria, to determine the truth of the topic and present arguments which satisfy that test.

2.1 *Rebuttal*

All speakers except the first affirmative should begin their speeches with rebuttal. Rebuttal can take many forms, including: undermining the factual basis of a claim, showing that an argument does not make logical sense or demonstrating that a particular argument has negative consequences. Good rebuttal consists of identifying important issues in the debate or the opposition's case, grouping similar arguments according to those themes and then analysing them holistically and delving into detail where appropriate, rather than simply rebutting the opposition's case point-by-point.

3. **Manner: the Presentation of the Speech**

There is no one style of manner which is preferred, what is important is that the reasonable person would consider the speaker persuasive. Speakers should attempt to convey a sense of spontaneity in their manner and employ language and humour in a way that assists their arguments, rather than alienates or confuses the audience. There are some technical aspects of manner which speakers should employ, including: making eye contact with the whole audience, minimal use of notes and a comfortable stance and gestures which engage the audience and are not distracting.

4. **Method: the Structure of the Speech**

Speakers should perform their designated role (e.g. the first affirmative should define the topic) and deliver speeches that are well organised and respond to the dynamics of the debate. Speakers should clearly signpost their main points and ensure that their rebuttal addresses the key issues in the debate at the time of their speech. It is important that speeches do not run substantially over-time, but speakers will usually be allowed some latitude. Method is marked holistically having regard to the all of the above factors, not just whether a speaker speaks to time.

5. **Points of Information**

In some grades speakers will be required to offer points of information (**POIs**). POIs are a brief interjection to the opposition about any issue pertinent to the debate. Speakers have the option to accept or decline the POI. Each speaker should accept two POIs during their speech and should offer at least three POIs to each opposing speaker. POIs should be clear and concern the most important issue in the debate at the time.

6. Scoring

An average speaker for a particular grade will receive a total mark of 75 which comprises scores of 30 for matter and manner and a score of 15 for method. Adjudicators must mark within acceptable ranges: 26 (very poor) to 34 (excellent) for manner and matter and 13 (very poor) to 17 (excellent) for method. Marks at the extremes of these ranges are rare, but adjudicators should use the full range of scores to reflect the disparity between speakers.

For the POIs offered in the debate each speaker receives a mark of between -2 and +2, with 0 being the average score. This mark reflects the quantity and quality of the POIs were offered. Depending on the grade, speakers may lose marks if they do not offer enough POIs or, upon being accepted, they offer POIs which are of a poor standard. Responses to POIs are integrated into matter, manner and method scores.

6.1 Margins

A margin between 1 to 4 points denotes a close debate, 5 to 9 points denotes a clear win and a margin above 10 points recognises an extremely clear win.

7. Oral Feedback

Once the adjudicator has made a decision an adjudicator must provide brief feedback on the debate. This will start with some general comments about the debate, followed by two to three points of feedback to each speaker about his / her speech and conclude with a brief explanation of the factors which determined the result.

8. Adjudicating Finals

Finals debates will usually be adjudicated by a panel of adjudicators. Each adjudicator will score the debate independently, as if they were the only adjudicator. This means that the panel can have unanimous or split decisions. At the conclusion of the debate the adjudicators will leave their completed score sheets in the room and convene outside to discuss their results. A member of the panel will then give an oral adjudication outlining how the panel arrived at its decision based on the main issues in the debate. Individual speaker feedback will not be given.