



The Presiding Officer Guide: **Script, Scoring and Tips.**

For students thinking about running for PO, and for parents who want to understand the role. Learn the duties, the common scripts, how POs are judged, and the mistakes to avoid.

What a PO does

The **presiding officer** runs the chamber. The PO is elected by the chamber at the start of each session, usually after short candidacy speeches and a secret ballot where a majority wins. During the session the PO recognizes speakers and questioners, keeps time, runs votes, rules on motions and keeps order.

A good PO moves the room smoothly, treats everyone fairly and knows the rules well enough to stay calm. POs are scored by the judges, and strong POs can rank very well. Do not run for PO only because it feels safer than speaking: the role requires skill.

How POs are evaluated

Judge criteria vary by league. The NSDA national scorer instructions list parliamentary procedure, speaker recognition, control, demeanor and communication, and the areas below are in line with those:

AREA	WHAT JUDGES LOOK FOR
Fair recognition	Correct use of precedence and recency, consistent and visible tracking
Parliamentary procedure	Right rulings, clear explanation of motions and votes
Efficiency	Little dead time, correct timing, brisk pace
Presence	Confident voice, neutral tone, respect for all students
Control	Handles disputes, off-topic talk and mistakes without losing the room

At NSDA national tournaments the PO earns 3 to 9 points per hour of presiding and is ranked against the speakers. Some tournaments handle POs differently, so ask before your first tournament.

Opening script

"The chamber will come to order. I am [name] from [school], and I will be your presiding officer. I will recognize speakers by precedence and recency. If we reach a tie, I will pick fairly and explain my choice. Speeches are three minutes, followed by [two] minutes of questioning for the first two speeches and [one] minute afterward. Please rise and state your name when you want to speak. We will now take up legislation number [one]."

Fill the brackets with your league's actual times.

Everyday phrases

SITUATION	SAY
Recognizing a speaker	"The chair recognizes the senator from [school]."
Starting questions	"We will now enter a [two]-minute questioning period."
Motion made	"Is there a second?" then "All in favor, say aye. Opposed, nay."
Ruling on a point	"The point is well taken" or "The point is not well taken, and the speaker may continue."
Result of vote	"The ayes have it" or "The nays have it. The motion fails."

Keeping fair records

- 1 Make a clean chart before the session with every student's name
- 2 **Log each speech.** Mark the speech number the moment it ends.
- 3 **Log each question.** Track questioners too, in whatever way your tournament sets.
- 4 Explain your recognition method at the start of the session and apply it the same way every time
- 5 Never choose someone because they made a motion or because you like them

Common PO mistakes

Rushing and skipping a student, forgetting to give the full questioning time, talking too much, letting a student speak out of turn, and reacting emotionally to a dispute.

Before you run

- ☐ Read your league's rules and the motion table twice
- ☐ Practice a short candidacy speech (check your tournament's time limit)
- ☐ Run a mock session with family or teammates
- ☐ Bring a watch or timer, a pen and a blank chart
- ☐ Know when to ask the parliamentarian for help

Want a plan built around your debater? Book a free consultation with Scholar Coach at the link below.

Built from public guidance: NSDA Nationals Congressional Debate scorer instructions · Wikipedia: Congressional Debate. Rules change by league and tournament, so always confirm against your tournament invitation and current league rules.

NOTES

Want a plan built around **your** debater?

Book a free consultation. The short intake takes about a minute and opens right away.

BOOK NOW →