



How Congress Judges Score: **What Moves a Speaker Up.**

For students and parents who want to understand results. Learn how scorers rate speeches, what the sheet looks like in general, and the habits that earn higher ranks.

The scorer's job

In Congress, judges are usually called **scorers**. They sit through one or more sessions and give each speech a score, often with comments. At the end of a session they rank the strongest students, and the PO is also scored. Scales differ: the NSDA national tournament instructions score each speech from 3 to 9, while a Texas UIL rubric and Wikipedia's overview describe 1 to 6. Scorers then rank their top eight students. **The scale, the number of ranks and the tie rules vary by league**, so read the tournament instructions. NSDA instructions say rankings weigh overall impact (speaking, presiding, meaningful questions, useful motions, engaging with others' arguments), that quality matters more than quantity, and that a student must have spoken or presided to be ranked.

Because scorers are different people, rankings can look uneven from room to room. Judges score what they see: your speeches, your questions, your answers and your conduct.

What scorers watch for

CATEGORY	STRONG EXAMPLE	WEAK EXAMPLE
Content	Clear thesis, credible evidence, real reasoning	General claims with no source
Refutation	Answers a specific earlier speaker	Ignores the debate
Delivery	Eye contact, steady pace, confident voice	Reading with head down, rushing
Questioning	Short, pointed questions and calm, short answers	Speeches in the form of questions, dodging
Conduct	Respectful, follows rules, helps the chamber	Interrupts, stalls, uses motions to delay

What moves a speaker up the ranks

- ◆ **Quality over quantity.** One excellent speech beats three average ones.
- ◆ **Add something new** to the debate each time you speak.
- ◆ **Mention other speakers** so scorers can see you were listening.
- ◆ **Stay active in questioning.** Ask a good question every time you can.
- ◆ **Be a leader, not a showoff.** Help the chamber move, do not hog the floor.
- ◆ **Be clear about the vote.** End with a direct ask.

Speeches and questions both count

A strong speaker who never asks questions may be ranked below a slightly weaker speaker who engages constantly. Active, polite participation is rewarded.

Reading your results

- 1

Look at the comments first. They tell you what to change.
- 2

Find patterns. If three scorers wrote "slow down," that is the next goal.
- 3

Compare scores across sessions. A low score in a session where you spoke once tells you something different from a low score after three speeches.
- 4

Set one goal. Pick a single target for the next tournament.

MY GOAL FOR NEXT TOURNAMENT

Parent questions answered

Is a low rank a bad sign?
Not necessarily. Congress is crowded and rankings are relative. Look for improvement in comments.

Should we push more speeches?
Push better speeches. Two strong ones usually beat four rushed ones.

What if the scorer was unfair?
Scoring is subjective. Ask the coach, not the tab room, and focus on what you can control.

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 · UIL Texas Congressional Debate rubric · 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 →