



Starting and Running a Speech and Debate Team.

For coaches, advisors and parent volunteers building a team from scratch or improving an existing one. Includes officer roles, a practice template, recruiting ideas, a travel checklist and budget basics.

Before you begin

- ◆ Get school or organization approval and an adult sponsor.
- ◆ Find out what your state or regional league requires, including membership and fees.
- ◆ Pick a regular meeting time and space.
- ◆ Decide which events you will offer first. Start small.
- ◆ Recruit a few adult helpers: judges, drivers, chaperones.
- ◆ Review your school's policies on travel, permissions and background checks.

Start small

Five committed students and two adults beat twenty uncommitted ones. Build habits first.

Officer roles

ROLE	JOB
President	Runs meetings and represents the team
Vice president	Coordinates event captains and mentors
Secretary	Takes notes and sends reminders
Treasurer	Tracks money with adult oversight
Social or welcome chair	Plans team events and greets new members
Event captains	Lead practice drills for each event

Rotate roles each year and let younger students shadow officers. Adults handle money and legal responsibilities.

A practice schedule template

For a 90 minute weekly meeting:

MINUTES	ACTIVITY
0 to 10	Welcome, announcements, quick warm-up
10 to 25	Skill lesson (one topic, one drill)
25 to 70	Event time in small groups with practice rounds or run-throughs
70 to 85	Feedback circle: one praise, one next step

MINUTES	ACTIVITY
85 to 90	Plan for next week

Add a lighter second meeting for catch-up and a monthly mock tournament so new students see the full format.

Recruiting and retention

- ♦ Run a demo night where students try a short speech or debate.
- ♦ Invite students from drama, English, history and student government.
- ♦ Ask teachers to nominate students who ask good questions.
- ♦ Pair every new member with a mentor.
- ♦ Celebrate progress, not only wins.
- ♦ Send short regular updates to families.

Travel checklist and budget basics

- ☐ Permission and medical forms collected
- ☐ Emergency contacts on file
- ☐ Transportation and chaperones confirmed
- ☐ Registration and entries submitted before the deadline
- ☐ Judges obligations met (check what your tournament requires)
- ☐ Food plan and any allergies noted
- ☐ Team gear: tubs, timers, extension cords, supplies, as needed

BUDGET ITEM	NOTES
League dues or membership	Varies by league
Tournament entry fees	Varies by tournament and number of entries
Transportation	Bus, vans or carpool costs
Lodging and meals	For overnight trips
Supplies	Folders, printing, timers
Fundraising	Plan events early; follow school rules

Keep records of every dollar and share a simple report with families. Want a hand building your team plan? Book a free consultation at the link below.

Built from public guidance: NSDA High School Unified Manual (speechanddebate.org) · NSDA Speech and Debate Glossary. 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 →