



A Parent Guide to the Speech and Debate **Season.**

For parents of new competitors. Use the calendar template, support tips, tournament-day expectations and glossary to feel confident from the first practice to the last ballot.

A season at a glance

Seasons vary by league and region, so use this as a template and fill in your own dates from your team's calendar. Do not rely on a date until your coach confirms it.

PHASE	WHAT HAPPENS	PARENT ROLE
Pre-season	Choose events, set goals, pay dues	Register, read rules, ask about judging needs
Early season	Learn basics, first practices	Provide a quiet practice space
Competition	Tournaments with several rounds	Transport, judge or volunteer, feed and cheer
Mid-season review	Read ballots, adjust	Listen, ask what the student wants
Championship period	Qualifying events, if offered	Check deadlines and travel
Off-season	Camps, workshops, rest	Support reflection and downtime

MY CALENDAR: KEY DATES FROM THE COACH

Supporting without pressure

- ♦ Praise effort and specific choices: 'Your story hooked me.'
- ♦ Ask 'What did you enjoy?' before 'How did you place?'
- ♦ Let your child own the speech or case. Offer help; do not take over.
- ♦ Be a practice audience when asked. Keep feedback to one strength and one idea.
- ♦ Protect sleep and meals in tournament weeks.
- ♦ Treat a bad round as information, not a verdict.
- ♦ Be kind to other families, judges and officials.

Quick script

After a round, try: 'I loved watching you. What are you proud of? Want my thoughts or just a snack?'

What to expect at a tournament

- 1 Arrival and check-in.** Arrive early. Find the team area and the posting board.
- 2 Pairings and schedules.** Rooms and times are posted or online. Check for changes.
- 3 Rounds.** Each round is a short performance or debate in a classroom, with one or more judges.
- 4 Waiting.** Expect gaps between rounds. Bring snacks, a charger and a book.
- 5 Results.** Some tournaments post results online or hold an awards ceremony. Timing varies.
- 6 Ballots.** Written feedback is returned later or posted online. Read them together once emotions settle.

- ☐ Directions and parking checked
- ☐ Student has the schedule and tournament contact
- ☐ Water, snacks and a lunch plan
- ☐ Comfortable professional outfit, with layers
- ☐ Charger, pen, folder
- ☐ Cash or card for concessions, as needed

Glossary for parents

Ballot

The judge's written feedback and score sheet

Break

Advancing past preliminary rounds

Extemp

Extemporaneous speaking: a speech prepared with limited time

Interp

Interpretation events performing published works

Schematic

The posted list of which students compete in which room with which judge (called pairings in debate)

Rank and rating

How judges order or score competitors; varies by league

Tab room

Short for tabulation: the tournament headquarters where results are computed

Elims

Playoff-style elimination rounds after prelims, also called break rounds or out rounds

Cross-examination

Questioning period in some debate formats

Impromptu

A speech given after very short preparation

Judge

The person who watches and scores the round

Prelims

Guaranteed preliminary rounds early in a tournament, before elimination rounds

Round

One performance or debate session

Flight

Back-to-back contests held in the same room during one round's time slot, used when rooms or time are limited

Want a plan for your family's season? Book a free consultation at the link below.

Built from public guidance: NSDA Speech and Debate Glossary · NSDA High School Unified Manual (speechanddebate.org). Rules change by league and tournament, so always confirm against your tournament invitation and current league rules.

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

BOOK NOW →