



Judge Adaptation and the Tournament-Day Parent Checklist.

Different judges want different things. Students learn how to adjust for a parent judge or an experienced flow judge, and parents get a simple plan for packing, arriving and supporting their debater.

Know your judge

Public Forum rounds are often judged by volunteers with no debate background, but real judging pools are mixed. Most tournaments post judges' names and many offer judge philosophies or preferences online. Read them. If you cannot find one, ask politely before the round: 'Do you have any preferences for how we speak or present evidence?'

	LAY JUDGE	FLOW JUDGE
Who	Parent, community volunteer, new judge	Coach, former debater, experienced judge
Speed	Conversational pace	Faster is often fine, but clarity matters
Vocabulary	Plain words, define terms	Debate terms are usually understood
Structure	Clear roadmap, a story	Strong line-by-line, signposting
Evidence	Short, memorable examples	Cited sources and specific warrants
Weighing	Say why it matters to real people	Specific mechanisms and comparisons

Rule of thumb

When unsure, speak clearly and a little slower than you think necessary. A judge who understands you will vote for you.

Adapting in the moment

- ♦ Watch the judge. If they stop writing or look confused, slow down and simplify.
- ♦ Replace jargon with plain words: say 'the main reason to vote for us' instead of 'voter.'
- ♦ Use short, specific examples when you can, so ideas stick.
- ♦ Be courteous in crossfire. A calm tone persuades more than a loud one.
- ♦ Never insult or talk down to the other team or the judge.

Tournament-day checklist for parents

Details vary by tournament and whether it is in person or online, so check the invitation and the tournament website. Start with these basics.

- ☐ Read the invitation and schedule the night before. Confirm the address, check-in time and dress code.
- ☐ Pack water, snacks, a phone charger, a pen or two, paper for flowing, and a backup device if evidence is digital.

- ☐ Arrive early enough to find rooms and breathe.
- ☐ Check postings for room and opponent when each round is announced.
- ☐ Let your student own the debate. Offer a calm word, not strategy, before each round.
- ☐ After each round, ask 'What went well?' before 'What went wrong?'
- ☐ Thank volunteers and judges.

Rules about parents watching rounds or talking with judges vary by tournament. Ask the tournament director before the first round.

Handling results

After a win

Celebrate briefly, then skim the feedback. Winning rounds still hold lessons.

After a loss

Read the ballot together. Pick one thing to improve this week, not ten.

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

Built from public guidance: NSDA Public Forum Debate event page (speechanddebate.org) · Wikipedia: Public forum 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.

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