



Parent and Student Guide to **World Schools and Big Questions Tournaments.**

What to expect, what to pack and how to support your debater at a World Schools or Big Questions event, with a day-of checklist and questions to ask your league.

Two formats, side by side

	WORLD SCHOOLS	BIG QUESTIONS
Participants	Teams of three speakers (teams may have more members)	One against one, two against two, or one against two
Topics	Motions across many subjects	Where science, philosophy and religion meet
Speech lengths	8-minute speeches, 4-minute replies	5, 4 and 3-minute speeches plus 3-minute question segments
Interaction	Points of Information during speeches	Open question segments
Judges	One judge in NSDA preliminary rounds, panels in elimination rounds	Coaches, community volunteers and other adjudicators

Details come from NSDA materials and may differ by league or tournament. Check your event invitation.

Before the tournament

- ☐ Confirm the format, level and age division with the league.
- ☐ Ask how motions are released and how long prep is.
- ☐ Confirm team size, who is on the roster, and who coaches.
- ☐ Ask what is allowed in the room: notes, timers, devices.
- ☐ Plan travel, food and sleep; arrive early.
- ☐ Practise at least two full rounds on both sides.

What to pack

For the debater

Silent watch or timer, pens, paper or flow pads, water, a snack, dress that is comfortable and school-appropriate

For the team

Printed prep schedule, speaker order card, extra pens, a folder for ballots

For parents

Charger, a book, patience, and a list of questions for after rounds

Tournament-day flow

- 1 Check in, find your round posting and room.
- 2 Warm up voice: read aloud for two minutes.
- 3 For impromptu rounds, run your prep routine.
- 4 Debate. Be courteous, shake hands.
- 5 After the round, take notes on feedback, then reset for the next.
- 6 Review ballots at the end of the day, not between rounds.

How parents help most

Stay calm, praise effort and specific moments, and let the coach handle strategy. Ask "What did you learn?" before "Did you win?"

Reading results and feedback

- ♦ World Schools judges explain the decision using content, style and strategy; a close margin is common and not a failure.
- ♦ Big Questions ballots ask who did the better debating and invite judges to consider the strongest case for the other side.
- ♦ Look for patterns across several ballots before changing a plan.
- ♦ Pick one goal for the next round, not five.

Want a plan built around your debater?

Scholar Coach offers a free consultation for families preparing for their first debate season. Book through the link below.

Built from public guidance: NSDA USWSDI Manual (2023) · NSDA Big Questions Debate: Judge Training (2023) · NSDA Big Questions Debate Format Manual. 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 →