

PROVIDENCE URBAN DEBATE LEAGUE

Declaring Your Judging Philosophy: An Elaboration

At a fundamental level, each judge brings a singular philosophy into debate, and applies it in the understanding and assessment of all speeches. There are a set of rules, concepts, and terms that define policy debate; then within this format, there are pliable areas, where there is space for differing conceptions, different views on "unsettled" or varying issues. Judges should feel that they have the autonomy to apply their own philosophies on the rounds they judge, within the limits prescribed by the policy debate format. This autonomy results in an intellectually vital pluralism. It will prevent policy debate jargon and assumptions from ossifying, losing their attachment to principles of rhetoric and rational inquiry. Additionally, judge pluralism will require our students to exercise and improve their ability to adapt their speaking and arguing style to various audiences, since it is on matters of style and presentation that seem to generate most judging differences in policy debate. In order to make this effort to protect pluralism in our league, we encourage judges to make a short declaration of their judging philosophy before each debate. This way, too, all four debaters have "fair warning," and then are stripped of any possible grounds for complaint after the debate if they failed to adapt to your preferences.

We recommend that judges consider covering some or all of these areas in your brief statement.

- 1) **Clarity and Volume.** Some judges have expressed concern that not all debaters clearly enunciate, or project their voices with sufficient volume. You may wish to emphasize your standards here.
- 2) **Speed.** The issue of National Circuit Style use of rapid speaking and reading is covered elsewhere in this memo. Simply put, if you don't like speed, tell the debaters.
- 3) **Explanation of Evidence.** In order to require students to do more than simply read briefs in the constructive speeches, you may want to strongly encourage the debaters to explain what each piece of evidence says after they read it, and to articulate its impact on the debate as a whole. E.g., "This piece of evidence says that Nationalism is dead in Russia, that it has no real popular support. This proves there's no way the impact to this disadvantage could occur, even if the Nationalists hate our plan."
- 4) **Explanation of jargon.** Policy debaters tend to use a lot of it.. You might tell them that every jargon term (e.g. inherency, topicality, voting issue, threshold, turn) must be defined the first time it is used in the debate.
- 5) **Encourage the Students.** This activity is very difficult, very rigorous, and is intimidating to most students. Avoid making your declaration a list of "Do Nots;" use some positive phrasing ("I like it when debaters . . .") and include simple words of encouragement and moral support.