Speech and Debate Glossary

As with any specialized activity, jargon and abbreviations pervade speech and debate activities. This guide covers some of the most essential terms of art that will alleviate your uncertainty as a new coach, as well as the hesitancy any students new to speech and debate may feel.

BASIC TOURNAMENT TERMINOLOGY

Ballot: the sheet of paper or online location where judges write the results of an individual round of competition, which they submit to the Tab Room or online tabulation system.

Break: *(v.)* advancing to the next level of competition; *(n.)* break rounds—also called elimination *(elims)* or out rounds—are much like "playoffs," with certain numbers of students eliminated at the end of each heat. The last break round of a tournament is the final round, or "finals," featuring two opposing debate teams or six speech contestants. Also see "posting."

Code: many tournaments use a code system to keep the identity of contestants—and their schools—anonymous. Codes are often a combination of numbers and letters, which designate school, event, and sequence *(how many students from a particular school are in a given event).*

Divisions: categorizations of competition at a tournament, such as "varsity," "junior" or "JV," "novice," and "open."

Flight: due to room or time constraints, tournaments will sometimes schedule back-to-back contests in the same room during a single round's timeframe.

Forensics: overarching term for speech and debate, though it sometimes connotes speech competition, particularly in states with split debate and speech seasons.

Judge *(or adjudicator)*: an adult who evaluates a round of competition. Judges are drawn from educators, former competitors, and business professionals. Judges drawn from members of the local community, including parents are considered lay judges, for their lack of technical understanding of competition standards. Judges should be equipped with a timing device, writing utensils, and paper.

Prelims: guaranteed preliminary rounds at a tournament, before competition breaks to elimination rounds.

Posting: *(v.)* process or *(n.)* location of prelim schematics or list of contestants breaking to elims.

Record: in debate, the win-loss ratio, or in speech, the total ranks; a general standing of success.

Round: an individual heat of competition, where students are matched to *(an)* opposing contestant*(s)* in a particular room with a particular judge or panel of judges. Rounds are sometimes divided into flights.

Schematics *(or "schem," "schemats")*: matrix that assigns students to compete in particular rooms with particular judges for each round. In debate, these are often called "pairings." These can be physically hung at tournaments or released online.

Tab Room *(or Tab)*: short for tabulation, this is the tournament headquarters, where results are computed. To protect the integrity of competition, there are usually protocols about seeking permission to enter the tab room.

Tabroom.com: *(or Tabroom)*: An online tournament software hosts can use for registration, creating rounds, and results calculation.

DEBATE TERMINOLOGY

Affirmative/Pro: the team or competitor who argues in favor of adopting the resolution.

Burden of Proof: the affirmative's responsibility to prove that the resolution is true. If the affirmative fails to prove the resolution, they ought to lose the debate.

Burden of Rejoinder: the negative's responsibility to disprove the affirmative case. If the negative fails to disprove the resolution, they ought to lose the debate.

Clash: Direct responses to an opponent's arguments. Also see "refutation."

Constructive: the first speech given by each debater *(both teams)* in a round, used to build a case. New arguments are permitted during constructive speeches, which distinguish them from rebuttals *(wherein new arguments are not allowed)*.

Contention: claims made for or against the resolution, often stated in one declarative sentence. A debate case may be organized into contentions.

Cost Benefit Analysis: one of the most common ways to decide a debate round, this philosophy requires a judge to analyze the benefits of a policy versus the cost. In other words, does the proposal do more harm or good?

Counterplan: the negative admits the present system should be changed, but argues that the negative team's proposal *(plan)* is better than what the affirmative has offered.

Criterion: standard, rule, or test on which a decision or judgment is based. In policy debate, the basis for establishing or evaluating policy *(i.e., net benefits)*. In value debate, the criterion is the method by which the value is assessed *(i.e., the value of "safety" can be measured in terms of freedom from harm; i.e., a person is safe when they are not being harmed, and that's how you know that safety is occurring)*.

Cross-Examination *(or "Cross-Ex," "CX")*: period of time when debaters ask each other questions.

Flowing: note-taking during a debate, accurately recording the most important arguments and rebuttals. The paper on which this note taking occurs is known as a flow. Inherency: the reason a problem still exists. Also understood as the barrier to solvency. For example, if the federal government passed a discriminatory law, then that law would be the inherent barrier to a just society.

Judging Paradigm/Preferences: a judge's educational philosophy; the model or view that guides his or her decision. In other words, what a judge does or does not want to hear in a round.

Negative/Con: the team or competitor who defends the present system and argues against the resolution.

Power Matching: system of ranking in elim rounds where teams with equal records debate each other.

Rebuttal: speech that rebuilds arguments after attacks, refutes arguments of the opposing team, and summarizes the debate. Generally, no new arguments are allowed in rebuttal speeches.

Refutation: directly attacking the opposing teams' arguments *(also known as "clash")*.

Resolution: the proposition or subject offered to debate.

Status Quo: the current state of affairs, the present system.

Topicality: an argument that states a competitor has misinterpreted a word in the resolution. Usually found in policy rounds—less common in value/public forum rounds.

Value: a concept, standard, or ideal in value debate rounds. Something which, according to the debater, should be upheld, i.e. justice, freedom, equality, etc.

Voting Issues: the key points in a debate that are crucial to the outcome, reasons why the judge should give the decision to a team.

Weighing Mechanism: the standards by which a judge evaluates the success of the affirmative and negative's cases, standards by which a decision is made *(criterion)*.

CONGRESS TERMINOLOGY

Agenda: the order of legislation as suggested by a committee or legislator, and voted on by the assembly *(sometimes called the "calendar").*

Amendment: a specific change to an item of legislation, explaining exactly which words it modifies, and not changing the intent of the legislation itself.

Authorship: a constructive speech of up to three *(3)* minutes given by a legislator, which introduces an item of legislation for debate by the chamber. It is called a sponsorship speech if given by a student who is not affiliated with the school from which the legislation originated. All authorship speeches are followed by a two-minute questioning period. All affirmative and negative speeches that follow an authorship speech should introduce new ideas *(arguments)* and respond to previous arguments *(refute or rebut).*

Bill: legislation that describes details of how a policy would be enacted, if voted into law by the assembly.

Committee: small group of legislators who meet and bring recommendations to the full assembly.

Docket: the complete packet of legislation *(as titles or full text)* distributed by a tournament.

Floor: when a member has the full attention of the assembly to speak *(also refers to the area where the assembly meets, where its legislators speak, and where it conducts its business).*

Legislation: specific, written proposal *(bill or resolution)* made by a legislator or committee for debate. Precedence: presiding officer recognizes speakers who have spoken least *(or not at all).*

Presiding Officer: the leader of a legislative assembly who runs its meetings by recognizing members *(legislators)* to speak or move. Also called the "presiding ofcer," or "P.O." Modeled after the Speaker of the House, or the Vice President or President pro tempore of the Senate.

Questioning: period where the members of the assembly ask individual questions of the speaker *(sometimes called cross-examination).* Multiple-part *(or two-part)* questions are not allowed *(unless the rules are suspended for that instance),* because they take time from other members who may wish to question the speaker. Recency: recognizing speakers based on who has spoken least recently *(or earlier).*

Resolution: legislation that expresses a conviction, or value belief of an assembly, which may urge, request, or suggest further action by another decision-making authority.

SPEECH TERMINOLOGY

Blocking: movements made during a performance.

Category: another word for "event," referring to a specific contest, such as Original Oratory or Duo Interpretation. *(to)*

Cut *(or cutting)*: to take only selected sections from a literary piece; to cut to meet time limits or to cut inappropriate material.

Double Entered: entered in more than one event in a pattern. Also called cross entered.

Draw: limited prep events, such as Extemp, require that students prepare their response to a question or prompt distributed at the tournament for each round. The draw time is when students select their topic; followed by a prescribed preparation time before they speak *(which, for Extemp, is 30 minutes)*. During that time, students must stay in the Prep Room, until they leave to speak.

Evaluation *(or "Critique" or "Ballot")*: form where judges write specific, constructive comments. Extemporaneous: speaking without the benefit of a prepared or memorized manuscript. Brief notes are sometimes allowed. Interp: short for Interpretation; refers to a performance based event where a student brings literature alive of the printed page. Also see "piece.

Introduction: opening of a piece; often referred to as an "intro," which is written by the competitor and *(usually)* memorized or *(sometimes)* given extemporaneously.

Patterns: different groups of events. Events may be divided into "Patterns" and run at different times. Usually there are three patterns in a tournament: Pattern A events, Pattern B events, and Debate.

Piece: literary selection *(title and author)* performed in interpretation events. It's good practice—and several leagues require—that students find quality works of literature from printed, published materials, which "show insight into human motivations, relationships, problems, and understandings, and not by sentimentality, violence for its own sake, unmotivated endings, or stereotyped characterizations."

Pop: when an individual performer suddenly changes characters when performing an Interp event.

Speaking Order: the order contestants are listed on the schematic for each round is the order in which those students should present. Conventional wisdom about speaking order is that primacy *(first impression)* and recency *(the last word)* are the choicest positions, so tournaments tend to mix the order in which students present, to allow each contestant an equal opportunity to present close to first and last.

Teaser: just prior to the introduction, a brief selection from the piece, which grabs the audience's attention, much as television shows have before the opening credits begin.

Time Signals: hand signals showing how much time a competitor has left to speak in a limited preparation or debate event. Time signals are not given for interpretation or public address events.