



Attending Your First Speech and Debate Tournament

Tournaments are the best method for getting new students hooked on speech and debate. The thrill of competition wins over students. Interacting with others who are passionate about similar things is also extremely persuasive. However, before students get to their first tournament, it's important to orient them to the tournament experience.

This guide is designed to help prepare new coaches for what they and their students should expect at their first tournament experience.

PREPARING FOR A TOURNAMENT

Find Tournaments

A calendar of upcoming speech and debate events is available at [Tabroom.com](https://www.tabroom.com). If you have questions about offerings, reach out to your local leadership! All NSDA high schools are part of a district, led by a District Committee. To view your committee members, log in to your NSDA Account and select District Info. When you identify a tournament in your area, you can register to attend via Tabroom.com. Need a hand getting started? Check out this [guide to registering for tournaments](#).

Getting There

Arrange transportation in the manner most appropriate for your school and region. While many areas charter school buses, some schools require coaches to reserve and drive vans, while still others require families to find their own way to tournaments. When arranging transportation, consider what time registration for the tournament begins. Set up the transportation so your team arrives at the start of registration, and not later. It's better to arrive early and have additional time to practice than to arrive late because of a weather issue or other mitigating circumstances.

Liability

With transportation and supervising students, there are often several liability issues, so be absolutely clear on your school's policies. You can purchase liability insurance from the National Federation of High Schools through your NSDA Account.

Lodging

If you are traveling a distance to a tournament, you must also consider booking lodging and other modes of transportation, such as airfare. This, of course, requires additional advance planning and meticulous organization, such as communicating details to parents. Sample forms for travel-related purposes have been included in the Appendices.

- [Travel form 1](#)
- [Travel form 2](#)

Student Signups

Register for tournaments promptly and accurately. Many coaches require students to sign up for each tournament, to indicate their availability and readiness. [A tournament signup functionality](#) is available through Tabroom.com. Tournaments have registration deadlines—often at least a week prior, and earlier for larger tournaments. Schools who host tournaments plan much in the same way as for a wedding: ordering food for participants and coaches/judges, determining use of rooms, ordering awards, making sure enough custodial staff is available, etc. Any time coaches are late or inaccurate with registration, they contribute to degrading the efficiency of the whole tournament. Please be a team player with your colleagues. Read the special procedures and rules for each particular tournament and follow instructions carefully.

Payment

Make sure your school issues a check for the tournament promptly. Many tournaments require payment when you enter; some require it when you arrive with your students.

Judging

Confirm with the judges you need for each tournament, and make sure you share logistical information (e.g., when they should arrive), as well as any rules particular to that tournament.

Schedule

A speech and debate tournament is unlike anything commonly associated with the public's perception of a competition. Where a basketball game is a 1.5 hour competition, a speech and debate tournament is typically more than 9 hours long (and that's just for a one day tournament). Common questions students and parents need to have answered before the tournament:

- When and where should students arrive for a tournament? Are they meeting you at the competition site or at their school to be transported to the tournament?
- If the tournament flights rounds, how does that work?
- When is lunch? Do they need to bring money?
- When is the awards ceremony scheduled? Does your team require students to stay for awards? Is there an expectation of staying dressed up for awards?
- If parents pick up their children from the tournament or back at your school, what is the estimated time when they should plan on picking up their student? What process is in place for updating parents if things get behind?
- Are students permitted to watch their teammates during an off round?



Paperwork

Prepare an attendance roster of students and their events (you can also use this to track their achievement after the tournament). Make sure you have medical forms and any other essential paperwork with you before you leave for the tournament. If students are missing any classes, share the attendance list with the office/faculty, so teachers are aware those students will be out of the building.



Supplies

Students need to come to tournaments with various materials, depending upon their event. The number of things they need to bring is dependent upon the policies of the tournament they are attending. As a coach, be sure you're aware of what rules the tournament follows, and what that means you and your students are responsible for having at tournaments. Additionally, even if there are not specific rules governing the tournament, you may have team policies/best practices to which your students should adhere. Here are some questions you can ask to best prepare your students for the tournament:

- What rules are in place to govern evidence used in a debate round? What might that mean for a debater coming to that tournament?
- Do Original Oratory students need to bring their speech manuscript with them? Are they required to highlight directly quoted words and/or provide a works cited page in MLA or APA format? Are they required to sign the document? Is the coach required to sign the document? Depending upon the rules that are in place, some, all, none, or more than these things may be required.
- Do Interp students need to bring their manuscript with them? Do they need to bring their original source with them? Do they need to highlight transitions or include page numbers? Depending upon the rules that are in place, some, all, none, or more than these things may be required.
- Are laptops allowed? If so, what are the rules concerning Internet connectivity? Regardless of event, students should bring pens and the tools necessary for taking notes. These notes could be specific comments made to them by judges or their own reflections from round to round. Debaters may keep these notes on individual flows from round to round, while speech kids may keep a journal.



TOURNAMENT DAY

Downtime

Encourage students to bring homework and other materials for the bus ride or during downtime. Students should pack high-protein, low-carbohydrate snacks and refillable water bottles.

In-person Registration

When you arrive at the tournament, you will likely check in and register your students, and receive such materials as judge assignments, schedules, maps of the school, and competition schematics. Remind your students to abide by both your own school's and team's rules, as well as the host school's in terms of respecting space, and return any moved furniture to where it was when you arrive. Don't forget to share judge assignments with those whom you hired!

Getting to Rounds

A schematic (or "schem") is a 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. It is unlikely that novices have seen anything that resembles a schematic for a speech and debate round before their first tournament. Before they go to their tournament, make sure they know what a schematic/posting is and how to read it! Will the schematic list a code, a code/name combination, a school code with initials, or something different altogether?

Behavior

Competing in a round for the first time can be an intimidating and nerve-wracking event. Even a school's best behaved students can let their emotions get the best of them. Before the tournament, make sure students understand the expectations

for how they behave in and after a round. Additionally, try and simulate these expectations before the tournament during practice rounds. General expectations for behavior at a tournament may include, but are not limited to:

- Never talk negatively about other schools, coaches, competitors, or judges.
- Never be discouraging toward your teammates; uplift them or celebrate with them.
- Win and lose with dignity.
- When observing other speech competitors, be an engaged audience member—no stone faces, texting, or looking around the room! Don't hesitate to laugh at your competition if they are funny. Even if your opponents do not respect you the way you deserve to be respected, you must respect them.
- When debating, engage your opponents with respect—do not raise your voice, do not roll your eyes, do not make demonstrative gestures when they are speaking, etc.
- Between rounds, focus on things that you could improve from the previous round.
- Do not chew gum when speaking.
- During Extemp prep, stay quiet and do not give the impression you are speaking to another student in prep.
- Remember that all of your actions are a reflection of not only yourself, but your coach, teammates, and school!

Proper Mindset

Leading up to the tournament, remind students why tournaments are a great experience. Focus on the educational

and personal growth aspect. Do not overhype winning. Here are some potential ways to frame tournaments for novices (and for that matter, even your most successful kids!): If students can answer these three questions at the end of a tournament, it was a success:

- What did I do well?
- What could I improve upon?
- What steps will I take before my next tournament to improve upon those areas of growth?



Coach Responsibilities

Coaches have varying responsibilities while at a tournament. They are often asked to judge; sometimes they are asked to help compute results (tabulate, or “tab” for short); they may follow their students around and offer advice on performance; and they may socialize. As a newer coach, do not discount the value of networking socially at tournaments. As educators, most coaches love to share their techniques, and the more enthusiastic a novice coach is, the more likely an experienced coach is to share the wealth of their knowledge. Often, tournaments have a “lounge” or hospitality area for the adults—this is where you will meet people and learn about the various leagues, rules, standards/conventions, methods/techniques, etc.

Observing Rounds

New students and coaches should observe rounds whenever possible. For students, this means elimination rounds, even if you didn’t “break” (advance). In addition to watching students who did break in your event, going and supporting teammates who advanced is also a great opportunity for observation. You may pick up a technique you can incorporate elsewhere. Watch the specific techniques of successful contestants. Coaches should not be afraid to observe rounds, either! Sometimes the greatest introduction and learning of an event is done through watching rounds. Take notes and use them as a follow-up with a district leader or coach mentor to better understand what you saw.

Awards

At the awards assembly, remind your students to represent your school with decorum and appropriate conduct. Losing with dignity is an important skill to foster. Never allow students to speak ill of students, judges, or coaches from other schools—until you’re back at your own school (if at all). Even a school bus with open windows or an airplane can attract unsuspected listeners.

POST-TOURNAMENT

After a tournament, you should take time to help students digest what happened and process what the next steps are for the following tournament. An astute student once said, I learned what I do not know! This statement was extremely profound and indicated that they got a great deal out of that experience. If students can come back with a list of things they did not know, coaches can begin helping them figure those things out.

Take your students through a ballot analysis. Have them read each ballot and identify themes or comments they particularly feel are spotHon. One useful strategy for ballot analysis involves you or another coach reading the ballots before the kids do and making the same notes you’ll ask the student to make. Then, after the students complete the exercise, you can go through and compare notes with them.

Be sure to reinforce the healthy mentality. One way to do this is to ask each student to share one thing they did well at the tournament with the full team. Start small and build from there!



APPENDIX: SAMPLE TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

Travel Tournament Itinerary Sample

Tournament/Location:		
Assemble at:	on this date:	<i>no later than</i> this time:
Specific transportation details (flights, connecting flights, etc.):		
We return on this date:	at this time:	at:
Specific transportation details:		
Hotel:	Phone ()	
Address:		
Tournament Contact Name:		Cell ()
Student Financial Responsibility: \$	<i>must be paid by:</i>	

General Expectations:

- ❖ **Identification:** bring driver’s license or state/government photo ID and school ID (for security; proves affiliation with trip).
- ❖ **Food/Money:** we provide student meals, except during competition and other snacks (I recommend bringing about ___ for the duration of the trip for those meals). Spending money over and beyond this amount is at your discretion.
- ❖ **Clothing:** bring dress clothes and shoes for ___ days of competition. Look your most professional! Bring a “main” competition outfit, with an extra shirt/accessories (tie, scarf, lapel pin, etc.)
- ❖ **Luggage:** pack lightly and efficiently, since we need room for evidence. Don’t forget supplies/materials; bring what you’ll need for performance (cases, piece/binder, pens, paper, stopwatch, legislation, “padfolio,” Constitution, etc.).

Trip Itinerary (at Destination) and Daily Tournament Schedule:

Rooming List:

Room A	Room B	Room C	Room D
Coach			

<i>Event/Competition</i>	<i>Destination</i>	<i>Departure Date</i>	<i>Return Date</i>



Milwaukee Public Schools

**Travel Release and Indemnification Agreement
Covering Conduct, Personal Injury, Death, and Property Damage**

1. For purposes of definition, "MPS" refers to the Milwaukee Public Schools, the common name for the Milwaukee Board of School Directors, the school district in which my child is enrolled.
2. I understand that my student may not be under the direct supervision of the forensic/debate coach or approved chaperones during the competition above. I further understand that it is of utmost importance that my student alert the forensic/debate coach as to his/her whereabouts at all times during the trip, and must abide by any of the Director's directives restricting his/her whereabouts.
3. I as the student's parent/guardian, agree to and do authorize the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and its employees, agents, chaperones and volunteers, to act on my behalf in any emergency, accident, or illness, and further agree that MPS and its employee or such designated individuals shall not have any liability for taking any such action.
4. I agree that MPS has the right to terminate my son/daughter's participation in the field trip program for any behavior deemed detrimental to the program or the students, and further agree to accept all responsibility for any costs involved due to his/her return home to my care.
5. I affirm that my son/daughter has no chronic medical condition or disability that has not been stated in the Student Health Certificate (filled with the team) or which would make participation in the program inadvisable.
6. I agree to release and waive any and all liability and discharge MPS and its agents, chaperones and volunteers from any claims or demands that might arise in connection with 1) any accident, illness, injury, or other consequence or event arising from my child's actions or participation in the MPS program; 2) any cause beyond the control of MPS including, but not limited to, natural disasters, civil disturbances, acts of terrorism, and wars.
7. I understand that I am signing this document in addition to, and not in replacement or exclusion of, any and all other forms and agreements required by MPS. I agree that MPS reserves the right to change, or cancel travel or other arrangements should conditions necessitate.
8. I understand that MPS is not responsible for the loss of, or damage to, the personal belongings of any participant.
9. I understand that in arranging for student travel, MPS uses commercial airlines, trains, buses, restaurants, hotels and other services whose performance and service cannot be controlled. Consequently, MPS is not responsible for the actions of these commercial firms for matters including but not limited to strikes, lost luggage and the like.
10. I agree to be responsible for and to pay any bills for additional expenses of a personal nature (e.g., laundry, room services, phone calls, passport and visa replacement).
11. I agree to be responsible for and to pay any bills for medical, optical, dental or related services, whether or not such services are covered by insurance. I understand that the student field trip accidental injury insurance and emergency assistance services for specified amounts is available to MPS, and that the cost for this insurance and emergency assistance coverage is included in the field trip program fee. I understand the limits of this insurance and emergency assistance services and accept responsibility for any costs above those limits provided in the policy. I affirm that my son/daughter has adequate medical and hospital insurance coverage and that the policy will continue in force during the entire extended field trip. I affirm that the information stated in the Student Health Certificate/ Permission for Medical Care is accurate.
12. I further agree to pay any responsible attorney's fees and costs of litigation should any lawsuit against the Milwaukee Board of School Directors result from my child's participation on this trip.

Conduct: The purpose of this trip is competition. To ensure optimal preparedness, proper rest is paramount. Students must be in their *assigned* rooms by 11 p.m. (please purchase snacks/vending items before 10:59). Please pick up after yourselves: throw garbage/food wrappers/containers in the proper receptacles, do not leave open food laying around to spoil and leave an unpleasant odor for housekeeping staff, and (for multiple-night stays) leave a clear path for housekeeping staff to change bed linens and vacuum.

If you damage any hotel property, please alert a coach immediately.

I have read the above and attached information and am in full support of my child's participation in this trip, with the appropriate, expected conduct. I am prepared to accept the financial responsibility for this trip should my child fail to do so him/herself. If at the discretion of the forensic/debate coach, my child needs to be sent home due to illness or violation of student rules, I agree to be responsible for all transportation and subsequent costs.

Parent/Guardian Signature	Date	Daytime or Cell Phone	Evening Phone

Student Agreement Statement: I agree to abide by all school and speech and debate activities policies while participating in the tournament named above, **including any spoken directives from coaching staff.** I understand that a violation of these rules may result in being sent home at my family's expense, expulsion from the team, and potential disciplinary action by the school administration. I further understand that my actions jeopardize the safety and success of my fellow teammates, so I will strive to uphold the standards of good character and ethics as a representative of Milwaukee Public Schools.

<i>PRINT</i> Legal Student Name (w/ Middle Initial)	Student Signature	Date	Cell Phone (during travel)