

Tournament Toolkit: The Complete Guide for Tournament Directors

Introduction.....	4
So you want to have a tournament.....	4
Basic Rules of Engagement.....	7
The Three Things a Tournament Director Has to Keep in Mind.....	7
What do Tournament Customers Want?.....	10
Registration.....	11
Announcing Your Tournament.....	11
Setting Tournament Deadlines.....	12
Part 1 — Registration opens.....	12
Part 2 — Deleting TBAs.....	13
Part 3 — Shutting down registration.....	14
The Waitlist — Why You Need it and How to Manage it.....	17
Breathing Room.....	17
Practical Management of Waitlists.....	18
Sketchy Entries.....	19
Independents.....	19
Camps/For-Profit Programs.....	20
Listing Entries online.....	20
Running the Tournament.....	22
How to Run Registration tables at Invitationals.....	22
Judge Management.....	24
5 Rules of Thumb for Judge Management.....	24
Judge Expectations.....	25
How Many Judges do you Need?.....	27
Judge Obligations.....	29
Why Mutual Judge Preferences are better than all the alternatives, except maybe one.....	32
MJP (or, if you prefer, MPJ) in Practice.....	36
Is It Right For Your Tournament?.....	36
Priorities.....	36
Tiers.....	37
Tier Ranges.....	38
Going off prefs.....	38
Tabroom isn't perfect.....	39
The Issue of the Forgotten Judge.....	39
An Odd Little Wrinkle regarding MJP Panels.....	39
Strikes.....	41
Conflicts.....	42
Judge Conflicts For Distribution to Teams.....	43
Judge Conflicts For Distribution to Judges.....	45
Handling PF Judges.....	46
PF for New Judges.....	49
Assigning Speaker Points.....	52
Complete Guide to Managing E-Ballots During a Tournament.....	54
Introduction:.....	54
In advance:.....	54

At the tournament:	55
* The language posted at the end of this guide:.....	57
Tournament Miscellany	59
Best Practices	59
Time Management and Scheduling	60
Tab	62
Comfort.....	63
Physical comfort	63
Mental comfort.....	63
The Concierge Table.....	65
Round Robins — A short note.....	67
Novices	68
Academy Debate.....	70
Notes for tab staff.....	74
Disaster Preparedness	74
The official version.....	74
The unofficial version.....	74

Introduction

So you want to have a tournament

There are plenty of established tournaments already, but it is not unusual for schools to want to run their own events. One often hears that schools need to get more rounds for their students, so on face it seems like a great thing that you want to help provide those rounds. Just keep in mind two very important things. First, you're probably not going to make money, especially when you're just starting out, and second, you are not going to get a TOC bid any time soon, if ever. Those are raw, hard truths. If you're okay with both of those things, we can get down to business.

A successful tournament serves the needs of the community. People are going to attend your tournament because there's something in it for them. So the first question to ask is, what does your community need? What service can you provide? For starters, in any region there are certain activities that are not getting the rounds they need. Maybe there's not enough policy, or not enough LD. Or it might be that novices or JV in your area aren't getting enough rounds. In reality, this is almost always true everywhere. If the service you intend to offer is a varsity LD tournament in a region where there's already a TOC bid varsity LD tournament every other weekend, you are not going to get very far. (Remember our starting premise that you're not going to get a TOC bid any time soon, if ever.) Your goal should be to give the people what they need. Or more to the point, what they really need.

The second question to ask is, when is a good time to have your tournament? We'll assume we're talking about a weekend, one way or the other. There are two rules of thumb here. First, you shouldn't start too early in the school year, because people aren't ready yet, and second, you shouldn't run too late in the school year, because after a certain point, the season is over. Realistically, in most areas the span at its stretchiest is October through March. If you come up with the world's greatest tournament in May, you'll probably be holding it all by yourself.

The goal, therefore, is to fill gaps. Step one, as explained above, look for the gap that people need to fill in event and level offerings in your region, and step two, look for the gap on the calendar (if any) in your region that people will find agreeable to fill.

As a general rule, the least served students in the community are the younger ones, especially second-year debaters, who seldom have an opportunity to debate at their own level. More often than not, they are up against seasoned varsity, with relatively little chance of success. For this and other reasons, second-years are the most likely to abandon the activity. "Academy" levels of debate might work for this group, and is something for you to consider when thinking about what your tournament will do.

[<http://www.jimmenick.com/Academy.pdf>]

Another possibility is to consider your tournament as a prep to an upcoming high-level tournament. This is not the best strategy, because if the competition at the upcoming tournament is strongly circuit, and you're simply local, you really aren't a prep at all. Nevertheless, if there's a new topic being run, or just a big gap since the last tournament, this might work in your area.

One nice thing about events limited to younger students is that the older students can judge them, reducing your need to acquire hired judges. Student judging can be an important part of the educational process for older students, and often a better use of their energy than creating a division for them that is non-competitive and therefore under-registered. Some areas and leagues are prejudiced against student judging, and it is true that you need to train student judges carefully and keep an eye on them throughout, but the general advice to them to "be the judge you wish you had had when you were just starting out" sums it up. Most of them want to do a good job; why not let them?

When thinking about serving the needs of the community, don't necessarily do what you love: Do what sells. Just because your team only does LD doesn't mean you can only offer LD. Give the people what they want. And mix it up, if it makes sense. Some thoughts:

- Public Forum — You can charge twice as much for 2 people as you can for one-person LD, using the exact same amount of space. Duh.
- PF novice divisions are, as of this writing, relatively rare, while PF as a whole is growing like wildfire. Hmmm.
- If you don't think you can attract a large field of varsity students, attract a small one: Hold a Round Robin, perhaps before the main tournament. This brings a few people in to the RR itself and, hopefully, brings the rest of their teams to the main event later. Those RR debaters can go on to be judges if your regular tournament is all younger students.
- Congress — you may or may not do it at your school, but it has very light judge requirements and can hold 20 to a room. It may not fly, and make sure you have someone running it who loves it and knows how to do it. Still, it's worth considering. One or two rooms, 30 or 40 entry fees...
- IEs — Sure, you're a debate school. But do the schools in your region do both, or are there speech schools in your community that are looking for rounds just like their debate cousins? Another thing worth thinking about.
- Parli — Some regions do a lot of Parli, and get ignored by the non-Parli folks. For instance, Connecticut schools have a thriving Parli community, and the only tournament that caters to them outside of their own circuit is Yale. Is there a Parli community near you that you can hook into?

One of our starting premises was not to expect to make money from your tournament. People don't want to pay much (if anything) for a new tournament, because as a general rule their budgets are already accounted for, covering the whole competitive year. When setting fees, just try to cover your costs: awards, snacks in the judges' lounge, meals for the competitors if you're offering them. College tournaments make a lot of money because they're glorified vacations and field trips to desirable locations for half the field, and a lot of high schools save all year for them, and they have divisions that can number

in the hundreds. You are none of those things. Most bid tournaments make some money, but they also have to spend a lot of it on hiring, transporting and lodging judges, offering fancy awards beyond the norm, and all sorts of things you don't want to get into when you're just starting out. If you end up on the track to being bid-level (and we admit that it can happen), all that stuff will come in its own sweet time. The bottom line starting out is, if you want a fundraiser, bake cakes, wash cars or sell pencils. Seeing a tournament as a fundraiser is misguided at best.

By the way, if you do hold a tournament, sooner or later someone, probably one of your parents, will suggest selling t-shirts. "They don't cost much and you'll make a fortune because our shirts will be snappy and funny and everyone will want one." Well, here's the thing: they can be the best shirts ever since the invention of shirts, and they can be the funniest thing since the invention of funny, but no one is going to buy any of them and you will, to put it into the obviously correct context, lose your shirt in the transaction. In other words, don't even think about it.

Basic Rules of Engagement

The Three Things a Tournament Director Has to Keep in Mind

I have been to every kind of tournament imaginable, big and small, near and far, good and bad. I have probably had every kind of experience imaginable. When I started out, I had no idea what I was doing. (For that matter, there are those who maintain I still have no idea what I am doing.) After a while I got a feel for the kind of tournaments I liked, and more to the point, the kind of tournaments that were best for my students. It wasn't a one-size-fits-all situation. Some tournaments for novices, others for varsity, some for this, some for that. Every coach works it out as best they can.

In the 25 years or so I've been in the debate world, tournaments have come and gone. And some have stayed, almost as icons. The age of a tournament has little to do with its inherent value. Just because a tournament has been around forever doesn't make it a good tournament, nor does it make it a tournament for your team. On top of that, tournaments have good years and bad years, often for reasons over which they have no control. But one thing is clear. You are going to attend the tournaments that you think you ought to attend, for varying reasons. You don't *have* to go anywhere. As an attendee, you can pick and choose.

And this is the first thing a tournament director needs to keep in mind: By running a tournament, you are offering a service. And you are (probably) selling that service. In this regard, you are no different from anyone else selling any other service. It is your job to entice people into wanting to purchase it.

Thing Number One: The attendees of your tournament are your customers.

At the point where you decide to run a tournament, every decision that follows has to be aimed at satisfying your customers. As the tournament director, you can do whatever you want. But doesn't it make sense to do what your customers want? Granted, we are all linked to education and educational goals, so we'll take that as a given. But your tournament is just one on the annual calendar, perhaps just one on a given weekend, and attendees, inevitably limited by time and finances, can pick and choose. If you like a certain kind of tournament, but all the people you wish to attract like a different kind of tournament, why wouldn't you provide that different kind of tournament? If everyone wants red cookies, why would you try to sell them blue cookies?

Of course, any tournament director does indeed have ideas of how to do things, and there's nothing inherently wrong with mixing things up a bit. The history of the activity demonstrates that there is always change. But are your personal changes warranted? And will they appeal to your customers? At the core, the question is, are you doing something because you want to do it, or because it's best for the tournament? More to the point, will your customers like it? No tournament lasts forever, unless it satisfies its customers on a

regular basis.

Thing Number One Variation: The attendees of your tournament are more than just customers: they are your guests.

At a presentation I gave of the idea of attendees as customers, it was suggested that it might be better to think of them as guests. There is merit to this, although I still maintain that, since they're paying money to be there, the customer paradigm is still accurate.

Then again, think of the Disney organization. People who go to their theme parks, while they are obviously customers, are always and officially referred to as guests. This designation is an elevation from merely someone who bought a ticket. Disney tries to treat people in such a way that they forget that they're paying for it. Disney tries to make everyone feel special. Disney tries to provide a magical experience.

How farfetched is it for your tournament to strive to achieve the same goals?

Thing Number Two: The Number One Goal of a Tournament is to End

The vast majority of decisions you make in planning for and running a tournament should be aimed at ending at a reasonable time. This means both a reasonable time each day, if it's a multi-day event, and a reasonable time on the last day, so that people can get home without too much hardship. This means no punishing twelve-hours-plus of debating a day. This means efficient tabbing. This means no lacunae, like endless lunch breaks or unwanted award ceremonies, or waiting for lunch breaks and wanted award ceremonies. It means every cog in your tournament wheel has to be geared toward getting it over with. You are dealing with high school students, not robots.

Everybody wants to go home, including you. Make it so.

Thing Number Three: The Tournament Director is a Manager

The TD has one job: getting everyone else to do their jobs. The TD needs to be everywhere at all times, always available. Maybe there's a problem with the food. Maybe there's a problem with rooms being locked. Maybe a kid fell down the stairs and broke an arm. Maybe there's a protest against evidence use in PF. These are the sort of things a TD has to take care of, not dishing out debate ziti for two hours or finding just the right judge for the bubbles in round 4.

The TD is the CEO of the tournament, the manager who gets other people to perform the necessary tasks. If a TD is in charge of something, say tabbing, their focus is elsewhere. When something comes up—and it will—the TD has to handle it. If the TD is otherwise engaged, either the thing they're doing gets postponed or bollixed, or the emergency they should be handling gets postponed or bollixed. Neither is the way it should be.

If you're directing a tournament, select people to head up all the areas that need to

happen. Tabbing. Food. Judges Lounge. Finding “lost” judges. Help desk for linking to tabroom. Anything else you can think of. You do none of them. Just keep your phone charged, and be prepared to think fast.

What do Tournament Customers Want?

This list is a good representation of what people want from a tournament. We're going to go through these in great depth over time, but this sums it up.

- Good judging
 - A good pool, well managed
- Reasonable time management
 - Prep time going in, plus time for critiques coming out
- Clear schedule, including break requirements
 - Do all down-twos break? What are you breaking to? That sort of thing.
- Good, fair tabbing
 - No hanky panky, preferably completely open.
- Comfortable rounds
 - Not in the first stall on the left in the men's room.
- Decent hospitality, physical and mental
 - Good food, good places to hang out, information readily available.
 - A concierge table! Or, what is a ballot table in an e-ballot universe?
- No surprises
 - Why best practices are, in fact, the best practices
 - User-based mentality

Registration

Announcing Your Tournament

It is April of 2017 as I write this, and everyone and his mother-in-law is announcing 2017-18 tournaments, some of them for events happening almost a year from now.

All right. There's nothing terribly wrong with that. Most coaches keep a calendar, and it's nice to have verification. But it looks a little like an epidemic. One school announces, and every other school thinks it better announce too. A tournament new to the calendar? Sure, why not? A tournament that has occurred on that same weekend since the Fillmore administration? No so urgent.

That does raise the question, nevertheless, of getting the information about your tournament out there into the world, especially if it's a new tournament. I have a few recommendations.

First, create the tournament on tabroom as soon as you've got the dates set. All you really need to do is put in the actual date of the tournament; nobody expects details six months or a year in advance. People do want to verify the dates, though. The point is, creating the bare bones will put the tournament in its appropriate chronological place on the tabroom home page. People looking for it will find it, and people thinking of scheduling their own tournament that weekend might think twice.

Second, send out a notice to all the attendees of last year's tournament announcing the date. This is more proactive, and your regulars will be happy to know that life is going on as it always has. If you're a new tournament or a building tournament, get some of your friends who run tournaments in your region to send the announcement to *their* last year's attendees. If you're trying to drum up business, you need drums.

Third, sign up for the NDCA listserv. This is a big list a lot of people follow, regardless of its connection to the NDCA organization. Announce the dates there.

Meanwhile, I propose the idea of a 2 or 2.5 month lead time from registration opening to tournament weekend. This will play into the realities of who is actually planning on sending whom to the tournament. Anything beyond that is TBA soup, not just on registration opening day, but for as many extra months as you've put in before people really have to think about coming. TBAs are evanescent; team names are money in the bank. You don't want to get caught with a lot of empty slots with the TBS all disappear.

And, oh yeah, don't forget to announce again the day registration opens, and people can actually do something about it.

Setting Tournament Deadlines

Part 1 — Registration opens

There are a handful of meaningful dates for tournaments, aside from the date of the tournament itself. Which means there are a handful of questions tournament directors have to ask themselves to define that meaningfulness.

The key dates are (according to tabroom):

- Registration opens
- New Entries due
- Fees & Obligations freeze
- Judge entries due
- Online drops and name changes
- Nuisance fines apply

Opening registration seems as if it ought to be easy, but there is an art to it. And it's different for a tournament requiring people to make elaborate traveling plans than it is for an easily accessible local event. If a tournament has more prospective entrants than slots, that's also an issue. Let's try to break it down.

If space is an issue, you need to waitlist all entries. Over time we've settled on a process that says dealing with the waitlist should begin two weeks after registration opens. The process, which we'll talk about separately, aims at giving everyone two weeks to get signed up and to be treated equally after that, as compared to a first-come, first-served approach, which rewards the unimportant characteristic of signing up the minute registration opens. Promptness is not a particularly meaningful virtue; it usually means that some eager varsity student was poised to sign up the team at the starting gun, grabbing an endless number of TBA slots. The point here is, registration-opens-date minus two weeks is when people are admitted.

You probably want two months between admission and the tournament for people to make their travel plans if they're flying in or need lots of hotel rooms. This is not because it takes two months to make these arrangements, but room and flight availability is better earlier on. By the way, the process of teams organizing transportation and lodging works in your favor in getting TBAs turned into real names.

So, that's two and a half months from registration opens to tournament begins: two weeks to allow everyone to register, and two months for them to get their arrangements sorted out. Keeping in mind that the majority of teams attending any tournament are from the same schools as last year, meaning that most people attending already have your tournament on their schedule, this makes pretty decent sense.

I'm more wary of opening too early than too late. Last year Penn opened three and a half months before the tournament. There were a lot of entrants, way more than could be accommodated, meaning that clearing the waitlist after a couple of weeks was totally a business of playing with too many TBAs. Because, realistically, only a few schools

needed to make serious arrangements that early, about a full month of this three and a half was filled with smoke and mirrors, which would be no big deal if a decent number of teams didn't have serious flight and lodging arrangements to make. If you get 6 teams in right away, but a month later get another 6 teams in, it's not a big deal if you live down the street, but if you're flying in from Timbuktu, the problems are obvious.

With a tournament where everyone is probably coming from nearby, I would say two months lead time is quite enough. If you need to do a waitlist, so be it (I recommend waitlists for any invitational), and take it out of that two months. Your guests will not be needing to jump through quite that many hoops, and a month and a half of time from waitlist clearing to tournament is plenty.

For a local free-for-all type event, where you've got plenty of space and your guests are going to be a lot of novices whose faces their coaches barely recognize, about a month is time enough.

Needless to say, there may be specific reasons for doing things differently, but this makes general sense overall. It's roughly the way most tournaments are handled in the northeast, including the colleges.

Part 2 — Deleting TBAs

There is one important date that isn't listed on the dates and deadlines page of tabroom, but is simply a function of tabroom's data management: deletion of the TBAs.

Setting up a waitlist for your tournament enables teams to reserve TBA slots. If you're working on the usual sort of advance timeframe, this makes sense. Schools have a decent idea relatively early that they want to come to your tournament, but they're not sure yet which teams they'll be sending. No problem: they reserve TBA slots. Your reliable attendees will, over time, replace those TBAs with real names.

It is your unreliable attendees who are the problem. For as many schools as reserve the slots they need, there are other schools that automatically reserve every slot they can, with little or no likelihood that they will be filling those slots. This is obviously a problem for a Tournament Director looking to get realistic numbers.

Fortunately, there is that tabroom data function that can delete all TBAs. This is a doomsday button: when you press it, there is no going back. Deleted entries are—*whoosh!*—deleted. Gone. They are nowhere to be seen in the system. George Orwell couldn't have disappeared them better. So you'd better make sure that you delete in a very public and very deliberate fashion.

I recommend deleting all TBAs about a month before the tournament. At this point, people are reasonably certain who is attending, or at least certain enough to put in names that they can change later. Given that changing names on their end is a pain in the patoot, you're sort of forcing coaches to get their act together now. A month in advance of a tournament is not an unreasonable time for this.

A week before you're going to delete TBAs, send a message out to all your registrants that you're going to do it, telling them exactly when. The day before, send another, similar message. As often as not, by the time you actually get to the deletion moment, most of the TBAs will already be gone. As for the rest, push the button, and—*whoosh!*

If there were still lots of waitlisted entries, now they can be let in, taking the vacated TBA slots. And you are now pretty close to having some certainty over your number of attendees.

Part 3 — Shutting down registration

At some point, registration has to shut down. You need to order food, finalize trophy orders, hire judges (who have a tendency to back out willy nilly after the most fervent commitment promises)—all those things that depend on knowing exactly how many people will be attending your tournament.

There are five different dates you can play with in tabroom:

- *New Entries due*
- *Fees & Obligations freeze*
- *Judge entries due*
- *Online drops and name changes*
- *Nuisance fines apply*

As far as I'm concerned, there should just be one:

- *Registration closes*

The whole point of shutting down registration is getting your final numbers and proceeding accordingly. You will now be laying out money; if the number of people attending your tournament isn't the number you think it's going to be, you can develop a real pain in the balance sheet. On the other side, there comes a point where your guests have to make their commitment. For the sake of both sides, closing registration a week to ten days before the first day of the tournament is the way to do it. At this time, fees and obligations are frozen. Whatever a team says it's bringing, they have to pay for, and cover with judging. End of story.

This includes judge entries. In a world of MJP and strikes, teams attending a tournament need to know who is judging. Teams hemming and hawing and changing their judge names at the last minute is unacceptable. Your other customers are penalized by this bad behavior, and tournaments that allow it are, indirectly, condoning it. So, I suggest making it a rule: **No judge entries/changes after registration closes.** Think about it. You opened registration two months ago. Schools have had plenty of time to get their judging organized. The schools that haven't are the ones that should be penalized, not the schools that have. Maybe this means forcing them to buy hired judging, if you've got it. Or maybe this means their dropping uncovered entries, if the tournament can't cover them. It's not your problem, it's their problem. No tournament has unlimited judging to cover unlimited entries. (We'll talk about this in detail later.)

More absolute is this rule: **No judge entries/changes after preferences/strikes open.** While you might be lenient a week in advance, it is completely unacceptable for teams to change judges once prefs are open. That means that everybody else has to pref multiple times. You just can't allow this.

As for online name changes and drops, who cares? Once a school is committed and fees are frozen, what's it to you if John Doe becomes Jane Row? Let people change names online themselves up until the point where you're printing registration documents, say the night before the tournament. (An argument could be made that teams want to know who they'll be debating, but in real life, people who are registered at the freeze point are the ones who tend to come, and few to zero coaches are in the business of posting false names to trick the opposition.)

Nuisance fines? I recommend against them. Here's what's going to happen. Maybe there will be ten or fifteen last minute changes at the registration table. It's hard enough getting those changes into the system and tabbing around them. Do you really need the extra \$10 for each? They're almost inevitably out of the coaches' control, and as often as not unaccounted for by their administrations, so the money is coming out of their pockets. And it makes you look mean, for no great reason, while they scramble into their wallets and hold up the registration line. Let's face it. Little Petey got dengue fever the night before. You've already paid Petey's registration. Now you have to pay another ten bucks because he got sick? This is an educational activity, not a financial wringer exposition. As the tournament, you've already got their money. Let it go.

(By the way, this does not apply to fines for missed judging. This is malfeasance on the part of the judges, and should be punished accordingly.)

I do have one suggestion. There's a fee you can set up in tabroom for how much people owe you if they show up at the tournament without enough judges. This shows up on the invoices until judges are put into the system. A lot of tournaments set the cost of a missing judge as the same as a judge hire. This means that people who were unable to purchase judges because you didn't have enough in the first place, will now be able to

purchase judges by default. I recommend putting \$500 in the box for every missing judge. This shows up on their invoices from day one. You should not allow people to sneakily steal hired judges. Again, we'll talk about judge numbers elsewhere, but if people are going to try to pull a fast one, you've got to be even faster. A couple of thousand dollars of fines on an invoice for a school that isn't covering its judges is a mighty strong incentive to get out and do the job.

The Waitlist — Why You Need it and How to Manage it

“If men were angels, no government would be necessary.” When James Madison wrote these words, he was no doubt thinking about the debate community. If everyone were a good actor working for the best results for all, you could just open the door to your tournament and let in everyone who shows up. Unfortunately, in the real, angel-challenged world, if you did that you’d be potentially letting in a whole bunch of devils. Hence the use of a waitlist is a must. Waitlisting probably isn’t necessary for local one-day tournaments where all entrants are welcome, e.g., novice scrambles, or where there’s no question about space limitations, meaning that everyone is welcome, and they’ll all debate, somehow, even if it’s both teams from the same school doing it in the custodian’s closet. We’re mainly talking invitationals here.

Managing the waitlist—and the tournament numbers in general—in a rational, intelligent fashion, is one of the most important obligations of the tournament director. There are best practices proven over time for this, and adhering to these practices will make for a more satisfying tournament experience from start to finish. That’s what we’re going to discuss here.

There are three chief reasons for waitlisting entries:

1. Waitlisting all entries gives your customers breathing room for signing up.
2. Waitlisting all entries allows you to manage the slots in the various events
3. Waitlisting all entries gives you time to analyze sketchy entries.

Breathing Room

Once tournament registration went electronic, popular tournaments without waitlists could easily run out of space within minutes. People just put in a lot of hopeful (and often jokingly bogus) names, and suddenly the tournament was filled. Famously Bronx Science, among others, opened registration at midnight in the middle of summer, and shut down the next morning. East coast coaches stayed up late that night so as not to get shut out, or had their students who were on Pacific Time handle the registration chores. But signing up quickly hardly seems like the best way to determine who attends your tournament. If you are limited to, say, 100 entries in a division, the first schools will claim them all with TBAs, even if you limit them to 5 or 6 (or whatever) slots each. Even if you eventually sort things out, not using a waitlist can be shutting out your regular and reliable tournament customers, making it more difficult for them to manage their entries. You need to be on top of this.

Over time we’ve settled on a process that says dealing with the waitlist should begin two weeks after registration opens. The process aims at giving everyone plenty of time to get signed up and to be treated equally, as compared to a first-come, first-served approach, which rewards the unimportant characteristic of signing up the minute registration opens.

Practical Management of Waitlists

1. All entries in all divisions should be set up as waitlist only.
2. Allow two full weeks for schools to register, so that people don't feel unnecessary pressure to sign up at some artificial deadline.
3. One person manages the waitlist. Too many with their fingers in the pie can be problematic. If a tournament is *that* big, at least coordinate on questionable entries.
4. After the two weeks elapse, you start clearing the waitlist by letting in an equal number of entries for each school. First, decide how big the division should be. Then on tabroom's waitlist page, arrange the entries by school. Admit 1 from the first school, then 1 from the next school, and so forth down the list of schools. Then admit another one from each school, going on until you reach your limit. This distributes the slots fairly and reasonably.
5. Check the waitlist every day after that, because people will drop, especially closing in on your Delete TBA date. Keep the numbers at the limit, and keep them fair and square, giving every school equal access.
6. You might want to make exceptions. For instance, at the college tournaments I run, where a few schools from the other side of the country regularly attend every year, I might give them more slots starting out—knowing that local teams will catch up later—because of their need to make plane reservations. If virtually all of your entries are flying in, of course, you wouldn't need to make such an exception. One tournament I run economically supports a local high school program and gives them special treatment. Another tournament rewards the local high school that provides them extra building usage. These and some other exceptions can be handled early on, and transparently. No one will reasonably object to them.
7. The fact that someone writes you a lot of emails asking you for extra slots or early slots or any other sort of special treatment does not obligate you to grant those slots. While you can make an argument for supporting an economically challenged school in your neighborhood, you'd be harder pressed to argue in favor of granting the most slots to the most annoying people.
8. On the other hand, be helpful to newcomers. There are always a few people for whom this is the first time. Make sure you clearly communicate your process as you go, and if necessary, take these novices by the hand. The debate/tournament experience can be daunting. Be an undaunter.
9. There is always a decent droppage at the point where registration closes and fees are frozen. You can continue to let in people after the drop-dead date, but keep in mind that in the final post-freeze run-up to a tournament people may not really want any waitlist slots they're still holding, so don't inadvertently charge them for those slots. In other words, give them the option to not accept them.
10. Keep in mind that it is important that you stick to team limits. Just because a school has 10 LD teams doesn't mean that your tournament has to accept them all. The best tournaments run with the most diversity in the number of

schools attending. When one or two schools have more entries than any other schools, it can seriously unbalance the pairings; while there are settings in tabroom to monitor this, they are obscure and complicated. Worse, if a school is particularly strong in a division, they can completely dominate the top brackets. You may be tempted to let in a lot of entries from a big school and not worry about imbalancing your field, but don't do it. It's not worth the money. A balanced field is a happy field. If all your competitors, in every prelim, are hitting a team from Big Local HS, they are not going to be happy. Plus, your judges from BLHS will be worthless. Yes, you need to be flexible, but having an imbalanced field diminishes the quality of your tournament.

Sketchy Entries

Who is allowed to enter your tournament is entirely up to you. That said, it is interesting to read what the NSDA has said about non-school-based memberships:

To best serve our students, strengthen the creation and sustainability of programs, and establish continuity from middle school to high school, the Board of Directors voted at the Fall Board Meeting to require school affiliation for all memberships beginning with the 2016-2017 school year. Any high school, middle school, home school, or virtual school recognized as an accredited public or private school by the state in which those schools compete may join the National Speech & Debate Association. All current non-school-based clubs and organizations are encouraged to work with the Association and area school districts to create speech and debate programs through their students' schools.

Independents

In other words, inclusion is limited to bona fide high schools. Most tournaments follow this guideline, as they follow NSDA rules in general, extending it to exclude any students who are not officially representing their high schools. These so-called independent entries are often unaccompanied by an adult empowered to act on their behalf in cases of emergency, and at times have been discovered to be competing in direct violation of their school's authority. On the other hand, some schools allow their students to travel independently, and to officially represent them, usually with a parent or a reputable local coach as chaperone.

It is usually easy to detect in tabroom who are the questionable entries. For a start, look at the email address of the person who signed up the independent. The same name as the student (perhaps even the students themselves)? Dot com vs dot edu addresses? Is there one entry and no judge listed?

You want to use the time before you start accepting entries to distinguish between the good and bad independents. Usually, requesting an official notification from the school is good enough, and not a problem for bona fide school-supported albeit team-free competitors. The point here is, of course, if an issue of any sort arises, you

want the issue to be addressed by a school administrator. Anything else simply doesn't make sense. Keep in mind that when a kid falls down your stairs and breaks a leg, it will be a lot different if that kid is without an adult chaperone when it comes to handling the emergency, and without the backing of school when it comes to liability. And don't think that emergencies don't happen. In the fall of 2016, we had students taken to the emergency room from four tournaments in a row, at which point I stopped counting. What if one of those tournaments is yours?

Keeping this in mind, it is important that an adult oversee all onsite registration the day of the tournament. In the rush of getting things started, it's easy for a sketchy kid to slip in, especially if it's your kids running the registration table. One of the most important things a TD should do is eyeball everyone who comes through the door (or give this job to a trusted adult associate). No adult? No tournament. End of story.

Camps/For-Profit Programs

The non-school-based clubs and organizations, on the other hand, are a easier call. Arguments can presumably be made in their favor, but I won't be making them, as my experience with clubs is heavily studded with, to be kind, shenanigans. The same paradigm applies as above: when there are problems, who do you want to deal with? A school administration sharing an understanding of your school's situation, or a for-profit organization that has its own goals and ideas?

The point here is not to denigrate non-school organizations. As the NSDA suggests, the clubs should be working with their local schools to build bona fide teams. Just as your high school's football team only plays other high school's football teams, so your high school debate team should only play with other high schools' debate teams. The logic is undeniable.

Listing Entries online

There is a way in tabroom.com to publish who all your teams are (and elsewhere, who all your judges are). DON'T DO THIS.

Or more to the point, don't do it yet.

I run some tournaments that are very popular, where everyone can't get in. Fact of life. I have a whole set of calculations and procedures to work through that. It takes weeks. The last thing you want, early in the process, is to have people who haven't gotten in bugging you that someone else got in, and why didn't they? If School X, who registered yesterday, sees that School Y from down the street, who registered two months ago, has 6 PFers, and they have none, they will harangue you. Trust me on this.

Once you've got your waitlist cleared to the capacity of the tournament, and accommodated everyone so far, and cleared all the TBAs, about a month before the

tournament, then you can publish. Everything will look on the up and up, everyone will have the same max of entries, and latecomers will know that they're coming late. Besides, how does the name "TBA" provide any useful information?

For smaller tournaments, the advice is the same, but for a different reason. The thing is that people look at who's going to any tournament to get a measure of the competition. Publishing that list provides that measure. You might not want to provide it at all. If you're trying to build a small tournament, showing small numbers might deter people on the fence. Keep in mind that there are way too many people out there who think they're too good for the room and will only do circuit events. Then keep in mind that lots of those people aren't circuit-worthy, and regardless, there is a limited number of circuit slots available. People need rounds. Why shouldn't they get them at your tournament?

Running the Tournament

How to Run Registration tables at Invitationals

Registration of teams at an invitational accomplishes a few things. Most importantly, the tournament gets to find out who is actually there and who isn't. Secondly, a tournament can distribute packets of important information, including not just invoices but maps and other ephemera (although a lot of schools lately are putting virtually all their formerly printed packet, aside from registration lists and invoices, online on tabroom; it's up to you). And a station can be set up to make sure your guests are linked to your wireless.

Your registration can be as smooth as butter on hot toast, a quick way to get teams' checks out of their hot little hands and into yours, or a totally disorganized snafu that sets the tone for the rest of your tournament. Setting things up correctly in advance is your best bet for getting through registration with the least amount of damage.

Before registration, go to Entries/Reports in tabroom. Under Onsite Registration go to Complete Packets. Print up Reg and Invoice. This gives you packets for each school to hand out at registration. Best to put them in folders with any other info you're handing out (maps, etc). It is recommended that you do NOT include a schedule. Given that schedules can (and usually will) change, publishing one schedule online, and changing it there as necessary, is highly recommended. This will keep people from consulting a piece of paper you gave them yesterday when that piece of paper is no longer valid, and then coming to you and waving the paper at you as an excuse for their not having picked up their ballots.

At registration, set up five stations:

- Greeting (with physical packets)
- Changes/Verification (with tabroom.com up and running)
- Payment (with tabroom.com up and running on a computer attached to a printer)
- Judges, for check-in of hires and entering late conflicts (with tabroom up and running)
- Tech help desk, for getting people signed up for tabroom, if necessary, and logged into your wireless, if they're having trouble

At the **Greeting** station, give schools their physical packets to check and update. If it's a really big tournament and you have the staff, divvy up the packets into a couple of alphabetical piles. After people get their packets, tell them to look at them carefully. Pass the registrants along to the next station.

The folks at the second station, **Changes/Verification**, are logged into tabroom. (You can have more than one person/computer at a big event.)

- For each entrant, go to Entries/Schools/Not checked in (the box on the left), and click on the appropriate school as they stand in front of you with their reg sheet.
- Verify—ask them specifically if the registration is correct. Make sure they really have looked and verified, especially if it's parent chaperones. (If it's a kid, tell them to send an adult.)

- Make any necessary changes from the reg sheet into tabroom. Remember: Drop people, don't delete them.
- Check in the school. Move the status button on the top right from N to Y.
- Pass the registrations along to next station after any changes are input and the school is marked as onsite.

At third station, **Payment**, bring up the appropriate school in tabroom at Entries/Schools/Checked in.

- The fee is shown on the front page.
- Collect the money, then click on the Record button to enter the payment into the system.
- If you need to print an updated invoice, you can do it on the screen right under Printouts.
- Once a school is registered, thank them profusely for their support and send them to the next station.

The fourth **Judges** station may or may not be necessary, depending on the size and nature of your tournament. If you have a lot of hired judges, this is where they come to check in. Give them the conflict data even if you've already done so online, to make sure that they get any conflicts in before the assignments are made. For the schools attending, this is their reminder to get their conflict sheets to their judges (who may be hires for them) to assure that everything is correct before the tournament starts.

Finally, there's the **Tech Help Desk**. First of all, have a printout of how to access your wifi. That should answer 90% of your tech queries. After that, you need students here who understand how to get a person signed up for tabroom, how to link a signed up person to a judge account, and how to attach people to the wireless. You'll probably need to keep this help desk going throughout the first day of the tournament (or attach it to your concierge desk).

Judge Management

5 Rules of Thumb for Judge Management

Judging is probably your customers' number one requirement. Good judging sells a tournament. For that matter, it's often the judging that *defines* a tournament. Let's face it: How often have you gone back to tournaments that consistently have crappy judging?

Here is a capsule summary of what we'll be discussing about judges. This is the strategy you should embrace.

1. **Hire more great judges than you need, and don't sell them back to the field.**

In a word, you can never have too many judges.

2. **Use your judges to the fullest extent to provide your customers with the best prefs possible.**

Are you maximizing the judges you have? Or are your highest prefs lounging with their feet up somewhere?

Spread the wealth, especially in PF.

3. **But do give your judges a break. No one should have to judge every prelim.**

4. **Pay your alums. The alternative is paying someone else's alums.**

Lots of schools expect people to give back. That's nice. But is it productive? How reliable are give-back judges anyhow?

5. **Hit the streets.**

Think outside your own box. Use judge listing services; start one if you need to. Hit up the judges who are already coming: have they got a friend? Ask around the region: Any tournament that just hired judges has a list they're probably happy to share.

Judge Expectations

We ask a lot of judges at tournaments, and more than anything, we expect them to act as the educators in the room. But what does that mean? What, exactly, are the reasonable expectations for a judge at a high school forensics tournament? What follows is a general guide to the job that judges should be doing, including knowing the rules of their events, running their rounds professionally, and maintaining educational accountability and propriety. Copy it from here, or download the doc file on the Tournament Toolkit website. Edit as you see fit. I recommend sending this out or posting it early in the week before the tournament.

The judge in the room is there primarily as an **educator**. Although not all judges are literally teachers/educators, in the context of a debate round they do take on this role. While they are obviously in the room to make a competitive assessment of the round, they are also in place to provide education to the students in that room, with all that entails. As educators, their obligations include making informed and reasoned critical determinations, insuring that the rounds remain within the boundaries of an acceptable educational experience, and that they themselves, as the authority pro tem, conduct the proceedings in a professional manner.

New judges should familiarize themselves with training materials before the tournament. Many of these materials are available here: <http://www.debatecoaches.org/tournament-directors-toolkit/>

As the authority in place, it is the judge's responsibility for the rounds to proceed in a timely fashion. Judges need to be in the rooms at the posted start time. This means that, in cases of paper ballots, that they have their ballots in hand before they arrive. When a tournament is using e-ballots, this means clicking start when (and not before) all the competitors are in place. If the competitors aren't in the room at the start time, the tab room should be notified. Debaters should start debating within five minutes of the posted start time.

At the end of the rounds, debaters deserve meaningful, educational critiques. But to keep the tournament moving, all critiques should take place *after* ballots have been entered/sent to tab, and should take no longer than 10 minutes. If a judge has more to say than can fit into this time period, it can be added to the ballot later. It only takes one missing judge, team or decision to throw an entire tournament off schedule.

While debate is at its core a free speech activity, it is the judge's obligation as the educator in the room to check certain activities (physical assault, use of pornographic materials or actions, etc.) that go beyond the boundaries of acceptability in a high school environment. These are usually clearly delineated in (and easily inferred from) the students' own high school's rules handbook.

Judges have an implicit contract with the tournament to act according to the sense of this document. Judges whose behavior is unacceptable (missed rounds, late rounds, inappropriate behavior) will be fined and/or removed from the tournament. Hired judges will not be paid, and school judges will be charged the full cost of a judge replacement or, in extreme cases, asked to leave the tournament.

How Many Judges do you Need?

How many judges does a tournament need?

This is one of those things you just sort of intuit your way through. I mean, there's the obvious ratio—one quarter of double-flighted events, one half of single flights—but if all you have is the exactly correct number, the minute one judge goes off to call his Uncle Charlie about how the trout are biting this year, you're in trouble. So how many more than the obvious number do you need?

I say 20% overage is pretty good. More is better. 10% is barely scratching by, and is the absolute minimum. An example: a tournament with 100 LDers requires 25 judges in each round. A tournament that size should have at least 5 extra judges ($20\% * 25 = 5$).

If you're using MJP, the more judges you have, the better the mutuality. That's a fact of life. Another fact of life is that you're probably organizing your break rounds on the assumption of judges obligated one past participation. This means that the number keeps shrinking, and often the usability shrinks even more: if there's only two or three schools left toward the end, they are limited in how much they can judge one another. I have been at tournaments where there were literally no unconflicted judges for the final round. This is bad planning on the part of the tournament, for not hiring (and keeping on the premises) enough extra judges.

Which brings us to hired judges. A lot of tournaments offer hired judges, but the only way hiring really works, and is ethical, is if you sell judges you actually have. Some tournaments sell the arithmetic of the obvious numbers. That is, they tell attendees the ratio is 1 to 3, then sell off the difference because it's really 1 to 4. That's not selling hired judges, that's selling questionable math. It inevitably leads to too few judges, and the next thing you know you're throwing a PF parent into an undefeated LD round. That's the sort of thing that marks a tournament as a low-rent stinker. Even if you do make it to the 20% overage, you're not really selling hired judges. Don't do it.

It is almost inevitable that attendees will want to hire more judges than you have to sell. Hiring out judges is something of an art, sort of like running a waitlist. I negotiate hires for some pretty big tournaments, college affairs where people travel great distances and can really use hired judges because of the expense of transporting and lodging their own. There's never enough hires at a tournament for everybody, so long distance gets you first crack. On the other hand, private schools from down the street? Last crack. Those types are notorious, at every tournament, in not supporting their kids and thinking they can buy anything. They can't. At least not from me. One of the things I do as mentor is convince the colleges that they are under no obligation to honor every single judge hire request. They are, on the other hand, obligated to provide enough judging to insure a great tournament.

It is important that mega-tournaments understand that no number of judges is ever big enough. With MJP, the bigger the pool, the happier the field. The math speaks for itself. With the other divisions, providing rounds off and people who have some decent idea what they're doing is important. Colleges just can't throw in their cousins from Milwaukee—if you just muttered, she's got a voice so squawky, we're kindred spirits—and call it judging. We'll talk about judge qualifications separately.

This stuff about judge numbers is hard to capture in a short essay. A lot of this is simply based on experience and getting a feel. The point is—have I said this enough?—get as many judges as you can. They are the chief measure of the quality of a tournament.

Judge Obligations

There are two ways of handling judge obligations, by the round, or by the tournament. I will argue strongly against one of these for 99.9% of high school tournaments. That said, whichever you do for prelims, announce the elim policy clearly before the tournament starts; it's the same for both.

- State a specific round through which all judges are obligated (rather than “first elim” which could be a run-off). As a general rule, the hardest round to pair is octos, following a double where, at this point, a lot of judges are no longer obligated. Therefore, keep judges obligated through octos, if you can. It will greatly benefit the tournament, especially in divisions with MJP.
- Then add a +1 for one's own team's participation. A sample phrasing of this in an invitation is: *All judges are obligated through the Octos round, and then one round after their own team's participation.*

Judging by the round

Judging by the round is the latest thing in high school tournaments. College tournaments do it, and now high schools want to do it. But just because it's what the cool kids are doing doesn't make it a good idea. Yeah, you want your tournament to be a cool kid tournament. Sure. But this isn't the way.

The usual by-the-round setup in LD is that a judge is obligated for two rounds for each debater.¹ Or looked at the other way around, applicable for big circuit programs, for each debater you have in the tournament, a judge is obligated for two rounds. So if you have 4 debaters, your team is obligated for 8 rounds of judging. This could be split between as many judges as you want. 8 judges could judge 1 round, or 2 judges could judge 4 rounds.

In some cases, let's say a team with 3 LDers, this would mean that their coach judges 6 rounds. Normal, and just what it would be if the obligation were by the tournament. But if a school sends 2 LDers and 1 judge, that judge is only obligated for 4 rounds. If a school sends only 1 LDer and 1 judge, that judge is only obligated for 2 rounds.

Let's do a little math. These numbers are unrealistic, but they paint a clear picture. Let's say that your tournament has 30 judges and a field of 100, going 6 rounds.

- Using fully obligated judges
 - $30 * 6 = 180$ rounds of judging
 - 100 debaters = 25 rounds * 6 = 150 judges needed
 - You have overage/leeway of 30 rounds (1800-150)

¹ I think, but I'm not sure, that it's one round for each policy team. We'll stick to LD for our discussion.

- Using partially obligated judges
 - Let's average them out as obligated for 3 rounds each
 - $30 * 3 = 90$ rounds of judging
 - $100 \text{ debaters} = 25 \text{ rounds} * 6 = 150$ judges needed
 - You have a deficit of 60 rounds ($150 - 90$)

The math here is unassailable. You need more judges to run a partial-obligation tournament than a full-obligation tournament.

Let us state that, as a general rule, schools sending 1 or 2 debaters to a major bid tournament are in the hunt, and their judges/coaches are going to be highly preferred. As often as not, then, in real life a highly preferred judge will be spending 2, 3 or maybe 4 rounds not judging.

Going back to the idea that judging is a crucial measure of a tournament, and that your customers are going to be happiest when they get the best possible judging, and adding in the supposition that your customers will consider the highest preffed judges to be the most desirable, are you serving your customers well by limiting the number of rounds judged by the highest preffed adjudicators? In the partial-obligation scenario, fewer people will get their most favored judges because those judges are either out scouting them to beat them later, or sleeping in the judges' lounge. As Mr. Micawber might put it:

- More people getting better prefs = result, happier customers
- Fewer people getting better prefs = result, miserable customers

The setting of obligations is the TD's call. By-the-round obligations require more judges, and result in worse prefs. The math is clear, but even if the math were identical, the pref issue remains. BTW, it makes no difference in the tab room, if your staff is paying attention to not burning obligations early. The tabroom.com is perfectly capable of managing partial obligations. As a matter of fact, for engaged tab staff, it's even a little more fun to play the partial game. But if you're a debater getting a lot of 3s in tough rounds, it's probably no fun at all.

Handling full obligations responsibly

So, obviously, the recommendation is for full-tournament obligations. Every judge is on call for every round through a specified elim +1. This is the time-honored (or, alternately, the old-fashioned) way of handling it. The fact that it is the way it's been done for years does not necessarily mean there's something wrong with it. May I alert you to the cliché, if it ain't broke, don't fix it? Full obligations is the default because it makes the most sense.

Still, having maximum use of your judge pool does not mean that you have free rein to abuse your judges. Your tab room needs to give everyone in the pool at least one prelim round off. Even your hired judges, who tend to be the first up for abuse, need a round

off. Nobody needs 2 or 3 rounds off, but 1 round off does clear the head, and also makes the judges feel as if they're being treated humanely. Of course, this obligates you, as the tournament director, to have enough judges in the pool so that rounds off are indeed possible. Here's where that 20% overage comes in, not just to protect you and get better prefs, but to have the human resources to give everyone a break. By the way, in MJP situations, a lot of judges only end up judging one of the two flights in later rounds especially. This is identical to a round off, so keep an eye on who's judging lots of doubles and who's judging lots of singles. (Tabroom.com won't tell you this, and goes by round, not flight.)

It's important to realize that, despite rumors to the contrary, judges are human beings. If you work them to death, they will zone out because, simply put, endless back-to-back rounds can be exhausting. It's not so bad in single-flighted elims with decent prep breaks in between, but it's murder in a series of endless double flights. Plus they tend to get resentful if you abuse them. If you're counting on hiring a fair number of judges year after year, you want to treat them well. If they resent coming to your tournament because you work them to death, the word will get out and your tournament will suffer in the long run.

In Public Forum, where the tendency is to treat the judges like cattle, you might have a different situation. The bigger the tournament, the more parents and whatnot in the pool. Overages in PF are not unusual. Your obligation here is to make sure that the rounds are evenly distributed among the judges. You don't want some poor parent thinking "the computer has forgotten" them. Lately tabroom has been good at this (it wasn't always). But keep an eye on it. In PF, everybody should have had at least one round by round 3. If not, something's wrong, and you need to fix it.

Why Mutual Judge Preferences are better than all the alternatives, except maybe one

(When MJP was first coming along, it was necessary to convince people of its desirability, and I handed out a version of what follows. This may no longer be necessary information now that MJP is pretty common, but it might be useful to new programs trying to figure out why the world is the way it is.)

Let's cut to the chase. The one alternative to MJP that may be better than all the rest is pure randomness. Many people can, and have, made the argument that the best debaters are the ones who can pick up the greatest diversity of ballots. This is analogous to saying that the best speakers in general, outside of debate, are the ones who can win over the greatest diversity of audiences. Probably true. Pure randomness at debate tournaments would, the logic goes, be a better educational preparation for the world at large later on. Perhaps. Public Forum debate, which is probably the most popular debate event in the country at the moment, is based on successful oratory (among other things) in front of a diverse, often lay, audience, and it is thriving, probably as a result of the resulting approachability. And, of course, most novice and JV level debate tournaments assign judges randomly (or mostly randomly, depending on the tab staff), which does assume acceptance of the argument of appealing to the greatest diversity of judges, given that we train students that way. But by the time we get to the varsity level, at least in LD and Policy, the stakes are high and there are different expectations. (By the way, I've also heard people argue in favor of totally random team assignments rather than brackets. We do live in a debate universe, after all, where people are not only opinionated but also clever and vocal. But this idea has never gotten much traction, and it is not really judge-assignment related, so we'll let it go.)

At most invitational tournaments, LD and Policy judges are not assigned randomly. After all, tournaments are competitive events. People pay to be there, and they have expectations that they will get judging of a certain quality. Most people at invitational tournaments want something other than random judge assignment. Aside from PF, even having a few strikes is not enough. There's a lot riding on the competition these days. People want a fair shot at winning. Insofar as winning is entirely based on having your judges pick you up, focus on the nature of judging, and the nature of the assignment of judges, is warranted.

Absent total randomness, there are three possible ways of handing the assignment of judges: tab room, consensus, or MJP. One underlying goal of any assigning is that the best judges are placed in the rounds that count the most. It is commonly agreed that bubble rounds, where the loser will be unable to advance to elims, are the highest priority, then down-1s (assuming you need to have an X-2 record to break), then undefeateds, then out-of-its. The question is, how do you define best judges?

The tab room decides:

The tab room can see who is in which brackets, so they can assign the best judges in the

rounds that count the most, as described above. In fact, they can rank the entire pool as A, B, C, and let the software do the literal assigning according to these criteria. The thing is, this requires that tab actually knows who the best judges are. How do you define best? The same way I do, if I'm in tab? Obviously, determination by the tab staff means a very prejudiced view of the pool from one or two people. This was the way it was done since tabbing was invented, but it isn't very confidence-building.

The community decides:

The parochialism of relying on the tab staff led to a short-lived system of community rankings being occasionally used, where all the teams ranked all the judges, and an average was established, and judges were ranked A, B or C accordingly. But this simply moved the prejudice from the tab staff to a tyranny of the majority of the field. This might not be so bad at primarily local events, but even the most national of tournaments tends to draw judges (especially hires) mostly from its region, and the further away one is from that region, the less likely one can confidently agree with the community rankings. I mean, it's not your community. Your vote is less informed because, even if you read all the paradigms, you really don't know all the players.

The teams decide:

Mutual Judge Preference (MJP, alternately referred to as MPJ, Mutual Judge Preferences) moves the ranking directly to the teams debating; they get to decide for themselves, on an individual basis, which are the best judges. Prejudice is removed, or more to the point, the prejudices of anyone other than the people involved in the round. MJP is not perfect, and I think we'll see changes going forward in some of how it is implemented, but it is a better system for judge placement than any other, provided everyone uses it. Moving the decision of the quality of the judges to the teams makes sense: they are the ones who paid to attend the tournament, they are the ones who know the judges best (or at least enough of them) insofar as a particular judge's preferences on their own debating, and given that tournaments are competitions, the tournaments should make that competition as fair and efficient as possible.

WHAT MJP IS: An agreement between the two debaters about the nature of the judge. Whatever one debater has ranked the judge, so has the other, hence the word mutual.

WHAT MJP ISN'T: Selecting a judge favorable to you, thus gaining an unfair advantage. You and your opponent both rated the judge equally, so presumably any bias evens out.

WHAT MJP ALSO ISN'T: A guarantee of getting your most favored judge, i.e., all your A+ judges all the time. Some schools have been spoiled (I'll explain why in a second) and are used to getting only top choices, but that's just not the way MJP works. Once again, the word is mutual. So how does MJP operate? After all the judges for a tournament are set, the week before the event every team can rank every single one of the judges, usually on a scale 1 (highest) to 6 (strike). There is a set number for each ranking;

conflicts are separate, and automatically removed from the math. A team can also have an unlimited number of 1s, if they are so inclined. The rest of the tiers have maximums. During the tournament, in each round the tab room will provide the best mutually preferred judge it can, according to a set procedure: assign to the bubble first, usually the down-2s, then the down-1s, then down-0s, then down-3s, to the end. (Much of this is automated, of course.) If a debater in a pairing has not ranked the judges, the opponent's ranking is followed. If neither debater ranks, judge assignments are random. Standard tabbing procedures insure that everyone gets the best judge the system can come up. Competitive needs (bubbles) are determiners of the order of placement. But keep in mind that mutual placement means mutual, not mutual until the number is too high; a lot of people don't get this. You can have a 2-2, a 3-3, a 4-4 or even a 5-5. At the point where we're giving you a 1-2 or 2-1 instead of a 3-3, it isn't mutual anymore. (The impacts of casting off mutuality to preserve high rankings are devastating to the judge pool at large, but that is not an issue for this discussion. The point is, if you advertise Mutual, you need to deliver Mutual—end of story.)

In the beginning, MJP in LD, for a variety of reasons, was a tool of what we'll call the Circuit teams. They would go to, say, Yale, which offered MJP, and rank all the judges. The non-Circuit teams, suspicious of the whole MJP thing, did not rank. This means that the Circuit teams got to call the shots. Since there was no issue of mutuality, and in practice the non-Circuit, non-ranking teams were telling the system they would take any judge in the pool, those who ranked always got their 1s and those who didn't rank either got their opponent's 1 (if the opponent ranked) or else any available judge in the pool if neither ranked. No wonder the average non-Circuit team looked at MJP with suspicion. MJP seemed to require a lot of in-depth knowledge of the judges, gleaned either from experience or from the judge paradigm wiki, and it was the sort of thing that seemed to exclude the average team (or anyone who doesn't have the masochistic streak necessary to read all the judge paradigms). So to start out, the system was that the Circuit teams got super judging, and everyone else either got the Circuit teams' judges or potluck. Since the average non-Circuit teams are what we might call Traditional style, the effect of this was to almost guarantee that Circuit style succeeded over Traditional style. And for no other reason than that the Traditionals weren't doing preferences! This is obviously a bad situation. Styles in LD have been evolving since day one, but by a natural selection process. This was genetic engineering. Something had to be done to ameliorate the situation, so we added a mandate for teams that, when initially registering for a tournament, a coach has to define his own judges as either Circuit, Traditional, or (trained) Newcomer. Simple as that. Either a judge claims to prefer Traditional LD, whatever that is, or Circuit LD, whatever that is—we all know both of them when we see them. So now the Traditional teams can mark all the traditional judges as 1s, and all the Circuit teams can mark all the traditional judges as 5s, and vice versa, with a lot of shading in-between. Circuit teams no longer call the shots of who wins at tournaments simply on the basis of Circuit-biased judging.

There is a big—BIG—unexpected result from this. On the obvious side, it means that if you and your opponent are roughly on the same page, your judge will probably also be on that page. But in the LD world where there are big differences in approach, and as more

and more Traditionalists catch up with ranking as do the Circuits, the likelihoods of 1-1 or even 2-2 prefs diminish. We've seen it already. More 3-3 pairings. Even some 4-4s, and once or twice a 5-5. After all, a judge pool is only so big. And what does this mean? If a Traditional kid hits a Circuit kid, in a world where everyone prefs, they are likely to have a judge neither of them considers a top choice. They're going to have to debate in front of a 3-3, someone who may be unknown to them, or someone who has a peculiar approach, or someone who doesn't like something either of them does like. What is a poor debater to do? Two words: judge adaptation. MJP, when used by half the field, is judge maximization for that half. MJP, when used by all the field, is the great leveler. LDers have to relearn how to adapt to all kinds judges, just as they used to 20 years ago, back in the day when judge adaptation was the number one means to success. Adaptation is probably not even on most people's list nowadays, but it's going to have to go back.

So why should you always pref? First, you give your students competitive equality; second, you keep the activity from going off in a single direction (i.e., the Traditionals are not handing LD to the Circuits on a silver platter of preferred judging); and third, you're actually bringing back the need for speakers to adjust to their audiences, which in the public speaking world outside of high school debate, is always the number one concern. As I said, there may be some rough edges on the procedures of MJP at the moment (nothing's perfect), but it works, and it's a better system than letting the tab room staff rule the world based on their personal prejudices. Plus it has the potential to keep LD honest—but only if everybody does it. MJP is a good thing. Do it.

MJP (or, if you prefer, MPJ) in Practice

It is easy to believe that, for the foreseeable future, Mutual Judge Preferences are here to stay in LD and Policy. No doubt there are also those who would like to see prefs in PF, but given the nature of the PF judging pool, that is, the large number of parents who come and go quickly, that's probably not going to happen, or when it does, it will be end of PF as we now know it.

Is It Right For Your Tournament?

Tournaments do not have to use MJP. It is the Tournament Director's decision. There's not much question about using it at circuit tournaments, but you should ask yourself, if your tournament is not at the circuit level, if it's right for you. Keep in mind that part of public speaking education is learning to address any and all audiences. Look at whether your tournament is primarily educational or competitive. Obviously MJP makes no sense at a novice scrimmage, but where do you draw the line? If you expect your field to be young, attending your tournament for experience, probably MJP is out. If your tournament is entirely regional, and MJP is only marginally accepted in your area, why rock the boat? Obviously, the call is easier to make in some circumstances than others, but make sure it makes sense for your event.

In any case, MJP is here to stay at any circuit tournament and plenty of others as well, and if your customers—the people you want to attend your event—expect it, you need to offer it. But do it right. There is nothing about it that is etched in stone, and using tabroom.com you can mold it a hundred different ways to Sunday. But that doesn't mean you should.

Priorities

First of all, you need to decide how preferences will be applied, and to let your participants know that decision. For six tiers, the standard order is

1-1, 2-2, 3-3, 2-3, 1-2, 4-4, 5-5, with a concentration on the bubbles

Loosely translated, that means that in every round, the people who can not reach elimination rounds if they don't win this round, i.e., the bubble—usually the down-2 bracket—get priority on the prefs. They should get mutual 1s. Then the down-1s get second priority. And so forth.

The natural result of this, when you think about it, is that the debaters with the best records, the undefeateds, are the least likely to get their mutual 1s. This plays out in real life. But the reason these debaters are undefeated is because they're good, and they can pick up ballots from a variety of judges. At the point where coaches forget to train their students to succeed in front of every kind of judge, the coaches are failing to do their jobs. MJP does not insure lots of 1s and 2s. It only insures equal preferences. It could be an equal 5. But you still want to win the round, and will work accordingly. If you don't, your opponent will.

Note that 2-3 takes precedence over 1-2 pairings. The point of this is that, in a round where the prefs aren't equal, we shouldn't default to one opponent getting a top 1, when that no-longer mutual judge could be at the bottom of the other opponent's 2s. Granted, the spread is potentially no different in a 2-3 pairing, but at least in that pairing you're not debating in front of your opponent's 1.

Tiers

Unless your pool of judges is bigger than the population of Cleveland, it is recommended that you use 6 tiers of prefs, which is 5 rankings of usable judges and 1 ranking of strikes. Conflicts are handled separately. Using 9 tiers is tempting because it is mathematically more satisfying—ditto using ordinals, for that matter—but there are a couple of good reasons not to. First of all, your customer base is used to 6 tiers at most tournaments. It is never a good idea to overtax the users of any system. They've done 6 tiers their entire career. Now at your tournament they have 9 tiers. Judge Joe Fonebone, who is always one of their 3s out of 6, now has to be translated to a scale of 9, as does every other judge on their list. It's just not good system management on your part to ask users to do this. Even if they understand that this makes smaller tiers, and therefore mutual preferences that are in fact more mutual, they will be unhappy at having to do all the work you demanded of them.

Second, because of the unfamiliarity, often coaches just don't understand what they're getting. When a 3 judge is assigned in a 6-tier system, coaches sigh and understand. When a 5 judge is assigned in a 9-tier system, **the exact same judge in the exact same position on the team's list**, the coach storms the tab room demanding better preferences. They don't do the math in their heads. They just see a 5 and get riled over it. Granted, if all tournaments were 9-tier, this would go away, but their not, so it won't. Never overestimate the flexibility of users.

The third reason to use 6 tiers is because it will guarantee a greater number of mutual rounds than 9 tiers. You can do this math until the cows come home, but the point is undeniable: the larger the number of tiers, the greater the number of non-mutual assignments. So yes, a 2-3 is better in 9 tiers than a 2-3 in 6 tiers, but a 2-2 in 6 is better than a 2-3 in 9, and when you have 9, your chances increase of having a 2-3 rather than a

2-2 (or whatever uneven vs. even match). If you have 100+ judges fully obligated, 9 is probably fine. But I'm guessing you don't have anything like that.

Fairly real example: Let's say you have 44 judges. 44 judges means 4 strikes which means 40 judges to rank. That's 5 of each ranking in 6 tiers equaling a range of 8, or 8 of each ranking in 9 tiers equaling range of 5. Since you increase the number of non-mutual rankings—if each ranking is smaller, you have fewer judges to match in a given tier to your opponent—you increase the possibility of a span of 10 in an off-match, versus 8 in an on match.

The only time 9 tiers benefits you mathematically is when your match is mutual, but you are setting up for fewer mutual matches, and therefore potentially worsening the spread of preference. I maintain that the fact that 9 is not the norm, and the math is, at best, dicey, stick to the norm.

Tier Ranges

My recommendation is that you use even tiers, aside from strikes. Going with 6 tiers, as I know you will, that means 17%, 17%, 17%, 17%, 17%, 10%.[2] This is absolutely even, and is the accepted norm. It also makes the most sense, if you want the tiers to be meaningful. (18% looks better on paper, but Chris Palmer claims that 17 works better in real life.)

Yes, you can adjust the tiers however you want. For instance, you can do uneven tiers like 25, 25, 20, 10, 10, 10. This would certainly result in debaters getting more 1s, but they're not *real* 1s. You're not fooling anybody. You could just as easily have made it 90, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2 if you just want to give people a lot of bogus 1s. Keep in mind that by increasing the sizes of the lower tiers you're only artificially increasing the likelihood of mutuality, and you're still not fooling anybody. People know when they're getting a judge they really want, a judge they can live with, or a judge from depths of hell. Whatever you do, it will be readily apparent to your registrants when they fill out their prefs. I say, make them happy. Stick to the norms.

Going off prefs

Try to give decent prefs in the rounds to ALL your customers. That is, when assigning judges during prelims, don't forego prefs completely for teams who cannot break into elims. Yes, there is a good Rawlsian argument for preffing highest starting at the bubble and then to those still in, and no doubt your attendees all accept it, but there is no good argument for dropping prefs completely for out-of-competition folks. After all, ALL your customers have paid to be there. You are still obligated to give them the most decent judging you can.[3]

Tabroom isn't perfect

Tabroom will do its best to find mutuality (although there are controls for other things, e.g., prioritizing hired judges). One of the jobs of the tab room is to check every non-mutual pairing. They can almost always be improved. Tabroom gets you 95% there. Your tab room people get you that last 5 %.

This is especially true in break rounds. A 1-1-5 and 1-3-3 may both add up to 7, but two 1s can be powerfully different than one 1. There's fair and then there's fair.

The Issue of the Forgotten Judge

In an MPJ world, about a third of the pool sits around a lot. On the one hand, the fields rank the majority of the judges more or less the same. Some judges are simply more popular than others. On top of that, most teams expect to get assigned judges between 1 and 3, and consider 4s and 5s an abomination before God. In other words, there is a tacit expectation of striking a third of the field (although few if any coaches will admit this). The problem is, at a big tournament with lots of LD judges, the bottom preffed people get few or no rounds, no matter how you slice it. Preffing has the undesired result of creating a tier of second-class judge citizens. These are usually parents or unpopular coaches who, when they finally do get a round, will be judging a couple of down-5s. It is recommended that, if you have the numbers, you offer to move lower preffed judges to PF. They'll be useful because they'll get rounds, and they'll mostly be happy because they're not turning moldy sitting all by themselves in your judge lounge. Make sure that you get, and keep, them preffed in LD. One never knows...

By the way: If you're doing per-round obligations for your judges, then your out-of-its are not only getting their personal dregs, they're probably unlikely to even be mutual dregs.

An Odd Little Wrinkle regarding MJP Panels

This is what we might call a nice point, and it's worth knowing about.

When I was working with the Paginator at some point last year, he noticed that debaters were getting judged in elims by people who had voted against them in previous elim rounds. There is a button that prevents being judged by someone who has voted against you, and we had selected that option. But it was happening anyhow. So we went to tabroom.com and filed a notification that the option wasn't working. But, in fact, it was. The thing is, the option was moot. The tournament we were running was using MJP, and if you have prefs, they are prioritized over other issues. That is, if your judge was ranked a 1 in the octafinals, and your judge votes against you, your 1 ranking does not magically become a strike in the quarterfinals.

I guess one could make an argument against this, but the logic seems pretty strong to me. Once we accept and use prefs for a tournament, those are the prefs for all of that tournament. Given how much we're trying to optimize panels in tab (and, presumably, how much the software is trying to optimize panels), the idea that rankings are not fixed for the tournament is nightmarish. Also, it really doesn't make sense. The idea behind MJP, like it or hate it, is that you rank a judge because that judge is the kind of judge you like to debate in front of, not because that judge always picks you up. After all, the judge you gave a 1 to is the same judge to which your opponent also gave a 1. If the rationales for those 1s was a guaranteed win, you have some learning to do about the way competition works. At the point where rankings are mutual, they inherently become preferences for style over an assumption of a victory. (Actually, the idea that MJP is a path to guaranteed victory is an old one that came up back in the earliest days of the option, when dinosaurs still roamed the earth. We should be past that by now.)

In a tournament where there are no prefs, on the other hand, it does make sense to block judges who have voted against you, which tabroom can do automatically. When there's no prefs guiding the hand of tab, one judge on a panel is presumably just as good as any other, until the point where that judge has just voted against a student. Since presumably it is no big deal to put in a different judge, and not doing so can easily have a negative effect on the debater who didn't pick up that ballot last time, especially on the same side, it makes sense to avoid this situation. Everyone is happier (who wants to judge a kid you just voted against?) and no one is unhappier.

Strikes

Every division in a tournament should probably get some strikes. Maybe not at a first-timer novice division, but just about anywhere else. Everybody has that couple of judges they can't pick up come hell or high water. Why not give them a break? This is especially true of PF. There are still plenty of people who do not believe in strikes in PF. So be it. They don't have to use them. But you should nonetheless offer them.

Remember, the tournament is not you dictating the way you think the world should be. The tournament is you being sensitive to the desires of your customers. Give them the choice.

Will PF ever move into MJP? Probably not. What defines PF is its oratorical side, and the fact that the judges are often parents. It makes for what we might call a less "professional" debate, but it is also the most popular debate in the country. You think there might be a connection? It's the parents that keep it honest. Lose them, and PF will be just one more disappearing star on the horizon.

The number of strikes you should offer is variable, but make it count. The bigger the event, the more you can allow. Think between 5-10% of the pool.

Conflicts

Conflicts are handled separately from strikes or MJP rankings. (Or they should be.) Conflicts are the way we handle the judges who love you too much. (We already have prefs and strikes for the ones that hate you too much.) Conflicts are the people you work for or with, whose teams you travel with, who have privately coached you, etc. We have a thorough description and a comprehensive list of examples elsewhere.

You need to make it clear how you are handling conflicts. Alert everyone before the tournament; send out our document to clarify it for them. Use that line: “the judges who love you too much.” And you need to propose and enforce penalties, up to and including disqualification. We have seen incredible abuses of conflicts. There are people out there who will try to hide a favorable relationship, or put in a conflict because they want to bar a judge with whom no conceivable conflict exists, except they do not want to be judged by that person and they don’t want to “waste” a strike. In tabroom, folks can put in a conflict that will travel from tournament to tournament. You need to take care about all of this. The next few pages are documents you can copy and send out to your teams and judges, advising them as clearly as possible what a conflict is.

Judge Conflicts For Distribution to Teams

Conflicts are defined as situations where debaters are perceived to have an unfair favorable advantage with a judge, usually due to previous working or personal relationships. Situations where you feel a judge is prejudiced against any of your students, for any reason, should be handled by strikes and preferencing, and not by conflicts.

A judge conflict exists with a student:

- whose high school the judge attended in recent years
- to whom the judge is related;
- who attends a school with whom the judge has had a coaching or judging relationship, paid or unpaid, during the past two school years (does not apply if the only relationship to a school was as a hired judge at that school's tournament);
- who attends a school that has offered to hire the judge to coach or judge for the team in the future;
- for whom the judge has ever had primary instructional responsibility as, e.g., a school coach or a personal coach;
- with whom the judge has or has had in the past personal friendships or romantic relationships, or with whom the judges socializes in non-debate settings;
- who personally has provided a judge's transportation or housing at this tournament, or who attends a school that has provided the judge's transportation or housing at this tournament;
- who has been hired by, or who has an outstanding explicit or implicit offer from, a debate business (e.g., workshop or brief company) to which the judge has financial ties;
- if the judge's current, or in the past two years, coach of record is currently coaching the student;
- If the judge coaches or debates for a college/university, any student that is debating for the judge's program next year or whom the judge's school is still actively recruiting;
- with whose coach(es) the judge has or had in the past had romantic relationships;
- to whom the judge bears any other relationship that might reasonably be thought to compromise the judge's impartiality as a judge. To determine whether a relationship meets this test, the judge might ask, "If I were a competing student and knew nothing about my judge except that he or she bore the relationship in question to my competitor or my competitor's coach, would I have any doubts about his or her impartiality?" If the answer is "yes," that is a conflict.

A list of judges will be posted online prior to the tournament, and conflicts must be reported by the closing of prefs/ratings/conflicts. Failure to report conflicts or misrepresenting conflicts will result in penalties ranging from a team losing all its prefs up to and including disqualification and removal from the tournament of a team's entire

school, at the discretion of the tournament director.

Judge Conflicts For Distribution to Judges

Conflicts are defined as situations where debaters are given an unfair advantage by their judge.

A judge conflict exists with a student:

- whose high school the judge attended in recent years;
- to whom the judge is related;
- who attends a school with whom the judge has had a coaching or judging relationship, paid or unpaid, during the past two school years (does not apply if the only relationship to a school was as a hired judged at that school's tournament);
- who attends a school that has offered to hire the judge to coach or judge for the team in the future;
- for whom the judge has ever had primary instructional responsibility as, e.g., a school coach or a personal coach;
- with whom the judge has or has had in the past personal friendships or romantic relationships, or with whom the judges socializes in non-debate settings;
- who personally has provided a judge's transportation or housing at this tournament, or who attends a school that has provided the judge's transportation or housing at this tournament;
- who has been hired by, or who has an outstanding explicit or implicit offer from, a debate business (e.g., workshop or brief company) to which the judge has financial ties;
- if the judge's current, or in the past two years, coach of record is currently coaching the student;
- If the judge coaches or debates for a college/university, any student that is debating for the judge's program next year or whom the judge's school is still actively recruiting;
- with whose coach(es) the judge has or had in the past had romantic relationships;
- to whom the judge bears any other relationship that might reasonably be thought to compromise the judge's impartiality as a judge. To determine whether a relationship meets this test, the judge might ask, "If I were a competing student and knew nothing about my judge except that he or she bore the relationship in question to my competitor or my competitor's coach, would I have any doubts about his or her impartiality?" If the answer is "yes," that is a conflict.

A list of competitors will be distributed to all the judges at sign-in. Please mark any conflicts and submit it prior to Round 1. [Or, do this online via tabroom in advance of sign-in.] Any judge who fails to report a conflict will face penalties up to and including immediate removal from the tournament. Tournament hires will forfeit their fees; schools bringing any such judge will be fined the cost of a replacement.

Handling PF Judges

At most debate tournaments nowadays, Public Forum is the biggest draw. Hence, it's probably your biggest moneymaker. There are still plenty of people in forensics who remember when PF was the debate upstart, an only marginally legitimate activity that looked like imitation policy, with complex rules designed to keep it from becoming real policy. Over time, it has become the activity with the greatest accessibility for both coaches and students; it's become no more or less legit than any other activity, with a great range of skills and styles, and its popularity growth remains undiminished. The original disdain has almost—but not quite—completely disappeared. PF is not only here to stay, it rules. Accept it for what it is, and make the most of it. It has unique issues that need to be addressed. A good PF tournament this year is a tournament PFers will want to go to again next year.

By definition, a broad swath of the PF pool is lay judges. The fact that the activity can be judged by parents helps define what happens in the rounds, and vice versa. Maybe someday there will be a specialized body of judges, as with policy and LD, a select pool who alone can understand what's going on, but for the time being, it's all about convincing folks in the back of the room who may be doing this for the first time that you are the team they should pick up. Which means that a successful tournament needs to understand the nature of lay judging, and to address those judges in a fitting fashion.

If everyone who attends your tournament is your guest/customer, then it is likely that the biggest source of your revenue, the biggest number of your guests/customers, are in PF. The parents who are there, or the newish coaches, are what make PF possible. That is, when you connect the dots: they are the ones who enable your tournament to make the biggest amount of its money. They're the ones who pay their kids registration, who chaperone, who are the adults in place who assist the coaches, and sometimes even are the coaches, or become brevet coaches thanks to valor under fire.

So here's some facts about lay judges in PF:

1. They want to do a good job, but the newer they are, the more they are afraid of screwing over kids because of their own inexperience.
2. They don't necessarily understand obligations. They might want to leave when their own kid or team is eliminated. For that matter, they may not understand a lot of tournament procedures that we take for granted (e.g., e-ballots). This does not make them unintelligent. Given #1 above, it means that they are probably eager to learn. After all, if they have their own kids in the activity, they can probably see a long commitment on their part of helping out at tournaments. Trust that, as a rule, they have good intentions.
3. Sometimes they're the only adults with a team. This means, especially if they are unaware of a lot of the norms of a tournament, they are both worried about the

responsibility of chaperoning a bunch of kids and slightly afraid that everyone knows what they're doing except them.

The key thing, as has been key to almost everything in the Toolkit, is to treat them with respect and understanding. Treat them as customers. Treat them as guests. Treat them so well that they will make sure that their school comes back next year. Alternately, you can treat them like inexperienced idiots and build up a lot of bad feeling and malice or ignore them completely so that they never grow in the activity. Given that, as a Tournament Director, you are in the education business, doing a good job here means, as it would in virtually any debate context, being a good educator. These customers/guests probably need and want education about what's going on more than anything else. As TD, you should be the one to provide it.

Training PF Judges

There is little question that, at any tournament, there will be relatively (or even completely) inexperienced PF judges. As already noted, they want to do a good job. Here's how to help them do that:

1. **Provide how-to handouts in advance of the tournament.** There are plenty out there, including the link on the Toolkit page. Connect judges to the handouts four or five days before the tournament to give them a chance to absorb the material
2. **If you can, provide on-site training.** The important thing to remember, if you do so, is that your training is NOT the history of discourse in the Western World starting with Socrates and Balzac and Shakespeare and all those other hifalutin' Greeks. On-site training is not an opportunity for you to blivate. On-site training is a five-minute briefing to touch on the most important issues. Hit these marks below, and then let them go:
 - a. Decisions are based not on your personal preferences about a topic, but on what happens in the round. You are a tabula rasa. The debaters' job is not to change your mind, but you inform you of a situation on which you have no opinion, and guide you to an opinion based on their persuasion.
 - b. Debaters will quote evidence. You can ask to see it if you are so inclined, but only what they literally say out loud—and what you hear—matters in the round.
 - c. Avoid conversation. Do not announce a winner until after you have entered your ballot. Tell the teams why you made your decision, and that is the end of it. Sometimes debaters want to keep debating, trying to persuade you to change your decision. DON'T!
 - d. Follow the guidelines on the ballot for assigning speaker points.
(Tournament Director: You did put guidelines on the ballot for assigning speaker points, right?)
 - e. *(This is the one you may or may not want to talk about. But they need to know. I prefer explaining this in an email before the tournament.)*
Occasionally one side will challenge the other side's evidence. This is

usually just saying that a source is not as good as their source, but occasionally a team will accuse the other team of falsifying evidence or misreading it or otherwise, in a word, cheating. A team that makes this accusation must go all in on it to matter. That is, nothing else matters in the round anymore except that one side cheated. The judge in the round, after looking at the evidence that's being challenged, makes the decision in the round solely on the basis of the reading of that evidence. At that point, the round is over. The judge should report what happened on the ballot, so there will be no confusion.

PF for New Judges

These are some pages that you can edit for your own purposes as you wish. While you can use it as the basis for an opening meeting with PF judges, there's way too much in it for most people to absorb right prior to going off to judge rounds. It is recommended that you save your version of it as a pdf and send it to your judges/schools in the days before the tournament. Or add it to your registration packet, copies for each PF judge. You also might want to add the NSDA introduction to PF, which gives instructions in its own way.

If you do want to make opening remarks, briefly go over these five things:

- Your decision is based on the debate, not on your personal preferences about the topic – i.e., tabula rasa*
- You can ask to see evidence, only what was said in the round matters toward your decision*
- In the unlikely event that a team challenges evidence, it must go all-in saying evidence is falsified or used incorrectly – this becomes the only voting issue*
- Avoid unnecessary conversation, which can be misconstrued as a bias on your part. Announce the winner after you've filled in your ballot. Tell them why they won/lost, i.e., the Reason for your Decision (RFD), and discourage them from continuing to debate now that the ballot is entered. You've already made up your mind.*
- Follow the speech point guidelines on the ballot*

Going on at great length about the actual topic or the history of PF or, well, anything, will just lose them. They're there to judge, not to listen to you bloviate.

Again, you might want to use what follows below as a handout. Feel free to edit it as you see fit.

Public Forum Debate was invented as an event where students would present arguments to lay, non-debate adjudicators. The other forms of debate at the time were getting progressively more complicated and growing into closed systems of speed and complex argumentation. The intention with Public Forum was to create an activity that would be more open and accessible to a wider group of students. The popularity of PF since its inception has proven this to be the case. The use of lay judges, usually parents, combined with the short one-month life span of the topics, virtually guarantees that the event remains what it was intended to be. It is a great educational opportunity.

Originally the paradigm for making a decision in a round was the idea of evaluating newscasters. The activity was called "Crossfire," and you were expected to evaluate it on the level of which arguing newscaster made the most believable, persuasive arguments. (The money to launch the event came from Ted Turner, hence the Crossfire/newscaster

connection.) There is use of evidence to support arguments, but there is only so much evidence one can present in the short speech times, not to mention that the topic changing every month prevents powerhouse teams from amassing overwhelming amounts of evidence (as they might with the year-long topic in the Policy debate event). When it comes to making your decision, the real question is, who convinced you that they were right? That is the side you vote for.

The topics are usually about current events, and what we should do to solve a specific problem. The most important thing to remember when listening to a debate is that you must not bring your own opinions on a topic into the round. Often you won't have an opinion, but there are times when you might feel strongly that one side or another is correct before the students even open their mouths. You need to put that aside. Their job is not to change your mind, which would be an unfair burden for the team on the "wrong" side. Their job is simply to convince you for the next half hour or so that they are right and that the opponents are wrong. Your job is to judge the debate in front of you as if it were the first time you had ever heard of the subject.

Although some tournaments are exceptions to this, most tournaments decree that PF teams flip a coin at the beginning of the round. The winners of the flip get to decide either which side they wish to be on, or whether they wish to go first or second. The losers of the flip get to decide whichever the winners of the flip didn't decide. This will take a couple of minutes to sort out.

It is strongly recommended that once the flip is done and sides are chosen, that you take careful note of who is who and on which side. Write down all their names in such a way that you'll remember which speaker is which, from which school. You might write down: "Bill = red tie, Fred = eyeglasses, from Benjamin Harrison High School"—anything so that you'll know, as they're speaking, who's who, since you will need to evaluate them separately, including assigning individual points to each speaker. It is easy to get the who's who in PF wrong; even seasoned coaches can screw this up. You can't be too careful.

You should take notes throughout the round, as thoroughly as you can. This is called flowing, and if you can do it on your computer or tablet, go for it. Using paper to take notes is perfectly acceptable if you prefer it (even if the tournament is using e-ballots). In either case, it is recommended that you use two different colors, black for pro and red for con (or whatever), so that when you're evaluating your notes, you'll know which side said what.

Most PF rounds concentrate on a couple of main lines of argumentation. Teams might start with more than a couple of contentions in their cases, but what matters is how they argue things throughout the round. By the end, they may have whittled things down to just one or two big areas. Keep in mind that you're voting on their debating, and what they said when they clashed, and how the arguments they made developed throughout the round. If something was simply said at the beginning in a case and never mentioned again, it really doesn't matter anymore. What matters is what stayed alive for the whole debate.

After the round ends, you write up a ballot. This might be either paper or, more likely nowadays, electronic. You can offer advice to either side, or various notes that you think might be helpful to them, but the most important thing you will put into your ballot is your Reason For Decision, or RFD. Why did you vote for this side and not that side? Answer that question. That is what the teams and their coaches are really looking for.

You also need to assign points, usually to each individual debater (which is why it was important to sort out who was who). There is usually a scale and a range on the ballot. Follow that. (If there isn't a scale/range—30 is perfect, 29 should get a trophy definitely, 28 probably will get a trophy, 27 you doubt it they'll get a trophy, 26 needs work, 25 or less is rude or unacceptable behavior, which you'll clearly explain on your ballot). The assigning of points is terribly arbitrary, but thinking of it in terms of your expectations of where the teams will be at the end of the tournament at least ties it to something.

You should announce your decision in the round after you have written up or submitted your ballot (it's going to be posted online anyhow in a few minutes), but you are strongly urged to discourage any further discussion about the round from the debaters. Sometimes students will want to change your mind about something you've already decided. Don't let that get started. Also, in general it is a good idea not to express too many opinions aside from your evaluation of the round that you just saw. If you comment, say, that you think it's hard for the pro to win on this topic, the pro team will go straight to their coach and claim you have a con bias. Things like that happen, and you don't want to get caught in them.

On the business end of things, most rounds comprise two flights; that is, most rounds are actually two rounds back-to-back, and you will usually judge both of them. Normally you judge the first flight, watch those kids leave and get replaced by the second flight, and then you do that one right away. When the next round is released, it will probably be announced electronically, even if there are paper ballots being used, so you should register for tabroom.com to keep plugged in to what's happening.

Judging obligations vary from tournament to tournament, but the longstanding tradition is that judges are obligated one round past their school's participation in the tournament. That is, we need judges to stay one round past the point their students are still in it, otherwise there won't be any judges left in the elimination rounds. This may not be the case at the tournament you're attending, but make sure you know that your obligation is and that you fulfill it. Schools whose judges don't show up for rounds can suffer penalties including fines and, in the worst-case scenario, inability to sign up for future tournaments.

Assigning Speaker Points

Speaker points in debate have the beauty (?) of being entirely arbitrary. When attempts are made to explain what the points might mean or what they ought to represent in aid of quantifying speaker points, those explanations are linked to concepts that are inevitably unquantifiable. There is a range of points, historically from 0 to 30, but that range is seldom if ever is actually used. The present-day de facto range, 25-30, at least theoretically narrows things down, but the common practice of allowing tenths actually makes it worse, although at least it no longer precludes two thirds of the range (1-20) from actual use. Nevertheless, it has been empirically proven that humans are incapable of making 50 quantified distinctions on much of anything, much less something as unquantifiable as speaker points—I mean, just ask someone to explain the difference between 27.3 and 27.4. Meanwhile, definitive data exists demonstrating that various regions of the country differ substantially in how they apply points, including at the circuit level, so even if people were able to manage the 50 tenths possibilities between 25 and 30, they are not all doing it the same way.

In other words, speaker points, in practice, are a mess.

The train has already left the station when it comes to circuit-level judging. Few are the regular circuit judges who don't already have a fully developed idea of what points are supposed to mean. That no two judges may have the same idea is unimportant. These people are convinced that they can, indeed, distinguish between a 27.3 and a 27.4, and they act on this conviction every week. You are never going to get them to change, so don't bother trying. Come to think of it, these are the ones who never read your emails about the tournament, and who never show up at any judge assembly you might hold. They're a lost cause.

On the other hand, in many divisions, like PF, we regularly have new judges or lay judges who are trying to do the right thing, and with these folks, while you can't necessarily get them all entirely thinking alike, you can at least provide them with guidelines that they can follow which get them, mostly, on the same track. The more the judges think and act alike, the better the chances the teams performing the best at your tournament have of achieving the best results.

We need to do two things: limit the possibilities, and add meaningful distinction to those possibilities. So, first, limit the judges to half points. This gives them some leeway to make finer distinctions without them getting lost in a meaningless jungle of fineness. Second, attach milestones to each point, thus:

30 — Perfect. You will never see a round as good as this again in your life.

29 — Excellent. Definitely worthy of a trophy at this tournament.

28 — Very good. Probably worthy of a trophy at this tournament.

27 — Average. Unlikely to get a trophy at this tournament.

26 — Below average. Should not get a trophy at this tournament.

25 — Unprepared.

Tying the points to the idea of earning a trophy makes them more tangible to the judges. Even a parent who has never judged before can have a pretty good idea whether someone is trophy-worthy. And since most folks in the PF pool, while far from over-skilled, nevertheless have at least a little experience, and therefore an easy sense of good and bad in the activity, you will get fairly decent results. And since any judge can understand what you are talking about insofar as trophies are concerned, you don't have to explain it to death.

Make sure that you include your point scale, and explanations, on the ballot. And if you are conducting a judge assembly, this is one of the few things to mention, especially at a local tournament with younger students and newer judges.

Complete Guide to Managing E-Ballots During a Tournament

Introduction:

The use of e-ballots has two benefits. It is convenient for the judges, who no longer have to pick up a paper ballot and, after the round, deliver it back or find a runner to do the same. And it saves an enormous amount of time in a tournament overall. The general estimate is a saving of one half hour *per round*. You can see how this adds up overall.

Going to e-ballots can be a major event for a tournament. There will inevitably be growing pains. But as more and more tournaments go digital, it will get easier for everyone.

These instructions should help you from start to finish through the tournament. They are applicable to both small tournaments in a reasonably manageable venue and large tournaments spread out over a vast college campus. And they have repeatedly proven effective in LD, PF and Policy, for novice divisions through varsity. You may be able to improve on them; if so, do so. But we do not advise ignoring any of them. Keep in mind that the judge pools, especially in PF, are a moving target, with new people coming in at virtually every tournament. They will always need guidance. These instructions give you the means to provide that guidance.

In advance:

Set the following rule: all ballots will be electronic, with no exceptions. Include that in your invitation. The thing is, a partially electronic system isn't terribly better than a non-electronic system. Printing up ballots, even for just a small handful of luddites, still requires printing up ballots, distributing and retrieving them. All your time savings go down the drain.

Make sure that there are solid fines in place for missing rounds, and make sure that the team's coach is notified whenever a fine is levied. (There's a box to click on the fines page in tabroom.) This will guarantee responses from the teams affected.

A few days before the tournament, after all your entries and judges are set, and before you open prefs/strikes (if any), send out a message to all coaches reminding them to make sure all their judges (and, for that matter, students) are linked to tabroom. We suggest including language like that posted at the end of this guide.*

At the tournament:

The biggest issues at a tournament are lingering luddites who still need to be linked, judges who press start (sometimes even for both flights) the moment they get the notification as compared to when the round actually starts, judges who don't press start when the round does start, and judges who don't enter results in a timely manner. There are other issues, but these are the big ones.

When you do the pairing, you will see any luddites on the schematic; they're marked with a little L. Before issuing the pairing, replace and fine the luddites. This will alert the schools that there is a problem, and they will shortly come into tab, and you can explain that judges must be linked, and you can, at that point, link them. And remove the fine, because you've made your point.

Once a pairing is set, publish it on the web and blast it. We recommend allowing half an hour from blast to start time. Half an hour has proven workable over many tournaments. More is unnecessary, and less is unwieldy. Give people half an hour, and they will use it and then, more than likely, start the round.

Then there is the poke:

- Using the Blast Message Only field, send a 10-minute warning before the round to all unstarted rounds, telling them that it is, indeed, the 10-minute warning. Specify flight 1, if that is appropriate.
- Using the same field, blast a "start now" message at the literal start time. You will see actual individual start times appearing on the schematic as rounds start. Poke individual judges whose rounds haven't started 5 minutes after start time, using the blast message ability to that round only, and to that judge only. Begin with pokes and escalate to phone calls. We recommend pulling a list of the judges (use the csv option on the judge page) for a handy guide to all their phone numbers, although this information is also on their judge page in tabroom. (Our theory is that the last thing a judge wants is the tab room calling them and asking them what the hell is going on. As the fact that such calls are possible starts entering into the mindset of the activity, judges are going to start getting the message that they need to do their jobs in a professional fashion or else get challenged on it. Who needs that annoyance?)
- If judges are absent or unresponsive, find new ones, and reblast. Include both the new and judge names in the blast, so everyone knows what's what replaced. and replace so that there's only one judge set for the round.
- If students are absent, forfeit them. There is no excuse for not being on time for a round for which you have had a half-hour warning. We usually give them no more than 10 minutes for a flight 1 and 5 minutes for a flight 2.
- Send a 10-minute warning toward the end of the round to judges who have not yet

entered decisions.

- Escalate from pokes to calls of judges running seriously late, usually the last two or three unentered ballots.
- If rounds are flighted, at the appropriate time send a message to all unstarted rounds to start now.

It works. Nevertheless, we strongly recommend at least one tournament staffer (in each building, if you have multiple venues) as boots on the ground to report problems to tab, such as when judges don't respond and the like.

You might think that this ends the need for humans in the tab room, except that the chasing down of unstarted rounds, or rounds that haven't started but the judge says they've started (like the schmegeggies who press start at the same time for both flights fifteen minutes before flight 1) has not ended. Subbing in and forfeiting student no-shows and unforfeiting student no-shows is an issue. Customer service is an issue. (Kaz answers the phone like she works for a spa—"This is Kaz in tab. How can I help you?"—whereas I just grunt out the word "Tab!" Same effect.)

The key here is, keep people alert to making the tournament run on time, and start calling people when things go awry. You have all their numbers in tabroom. If you're using a system that enables long-distance tournaments, use your phone, the device that eliminates long distances. Do you really care if you annoy a judge too dumb/obdurate/befuddled to click the start button or call you up when a student doesn't show (after you've given out your number a hundred times)? Tab's job includes keeping the trains running on time. Feel free to put on your police hat to make it so, if that's what it takes.

By the way, as a tournament progresses, problems tend to diminish. Keep posting the start warnings and the like, but once you get into elims, most people are just as anxious to get the thing over with as you are, and cooperation will be virtually a hundred percent.

*** The language posted at the end of this guide:**

We are mandating e-ballots in all divisions of debate this year. It should mean a faster tournament for all, and for the judges, less schlepping around delivering paper ballots back to tab. The following is everything the coaches and judges need to know.

Coaches: If your judges have not already done so, have them create an account on [tabroom.com](http://www.tabroom.com). Do this before coming to the tournament. They simply click on “sign up” at the top of the [tabroom.com](http://www.tabroom.com) home page and follow the instructions. Both judges and students should have unique accounts in their own names. (Judges who have accounts in their coach’s name, which some do occasionally, are unable to access their ballots.)

NOTE: You might want to link to this doc for complete instructions:

<http://www.debatecoaches.org/s/e-ballots.pdf>

All judges should come prepared with electronic devices capable of entering results. There is wifi throughout the campus, and any device—smartphone, tablet, computer, Chromebook—will do. Make sure that it is charged, and that it works. E-balloting does not necessarily mean that you need to bring a computer to rounds for flowing or whatnot; the device you decide to use in rounds, and how you adjudicate a round, is up to you. But you do need a device to enter results. And keep in mind that even if the wifi were to go to hell in a handbasket, you can still always use your phone to enter results, and write up your ballots later when the wifi comes back.

The tournament will not be able to accommodate any paper ballots in the debate events. Judges who are unprepared to judge electronically will be taken out of the tournament, and their schools fined the full missing-judge fee. [Lately we’ve been setting the missing judge fee as twice the cost of hired judges to disabuse people of the idea that if they didn’t get a hire they can show up anyhow and pay literally the same fee, thus stealing the judges you need to run the tournament effectively.]

One half hour before the scheduled start of a round, pairings and assignments will be released, and all participants will be notified of where to go. You will have plenty of time to get there, especially if you use the official school map at [xxxxx](#). [We strongly suggest you post a map on your invitation website page.] Judges who have not gotten an assignment shall remain on call in case an assigned judge does not show up. For those in rounds, there will also be a 10-minute warning and a start-now message.

We will be enforcing strict rules on making the rounds happen. Everyone is expected to be in the rooms and starting the rounds at the posted times. Judges who are not in their rooms within five minutes of the posted times will be replaced and fined. Students who are not in their rooms within five minutes of the posted times will forfeit. If both students are in the room and there is no judge five minutes after the posted time, students must report missing the judge to tab for replacement. Failure to do so will result in double forfeits.

Judges: The only way we can measure what’s happening is by your correct use of the start-round button. Please do not hit the start button until you and both of your teams are

in the room and, literally, starting the round. If you press the button willy-nilly before the round starts, it jeopardizes the scheduling of the rooms. If you don't press the button as the round is starting, we will assume that you are a no-show, and replace and fine you.

The phone number(s) for tab are xxxxxx. If there are any problems, call or text us.

What constitutes a problem:

- *No judge in room five minutes after start time*
- *All competitors not in room five minutes after start time*
- *Other, as it relates to reasons there's not a debate going on*

By the same token, if rounds do not start on time, we will be calling you. We have found that the phone is a marvelous device for talking to people who are some distance away from us—who knew?—like judges who haven't pressed start, or coaches of judges who have gone missing.

Judges must enter results immediately when the round concludes. (We'll call you if you keep us waiting.) The decision must come before the critique. We ask judges to limit oral critiques as much as possible so that we can turn the rooms around in a timely manner. Results will be posted on tabroom as soon as they are all in after each round, and, of course, you can write critiques on your e-ballots whenever you have a free minute, which means that not only will the debaters receive them, but so will their coaches. In fact, judges can add to or modify their comments on e-ballots until the "end of tournament" results are published, which means they can add to them during whatever free time that might arise (although, of course, they cannot change decisions or points).

Thank you. For those of you new to e-ballots, and that may be a lot of PF judges, we realize that all of this sounds rather fierce, to say the least, but for e-ballots to work with this many people in this many buildings requires everyone to be on the same page. The goal is a fair, on-time tournament. Let's make it so!

Tournament Miscellany

Best Practices

Things are called best practices when they have been proven over time to be superior to any other practices. Debate tournaments mix teenagers and competitive coaches and baffled parents and over-eager college students and all other manner of humanity. Best practices are those that make all of these people as happy as possible.

One thing to keep in mind about tournament attendees is, like just about everyone else in the universe, they do not like change. Like just about everyone else in the universe, they especially do not like change that is not to their benefit, while if change can be demonstrated to, in fact, be to their benefit—making their life easier or better—they will quickly embrace it.

Keeping your tournament customers happy mostly means adjusting to a user-based mentality, doing not what you think is best but what your customers think is best. If you're going to do something different from other tournaments, even if you know empirically that it's better for your customers, the question you have to ask is whether your customers will know this and understand it and embrace it. If your tournament is the one with Unique Procedure #72, which you know makes for a better tournament but which no other tournament embraces and which means getting your customers to do things differently than they've done them at every other tournament, you might want to reconsider.

It's probably worth noting that, while the debate community is conservative in many ways—in the rounds themselves, in the material presented, in the styles of presentation, in everything from the minute people walk into the room to the minute they walk out—all conservative bets are off. In debate, change is dynamic and exciting and demanding, and it's intrinsic to the activity. High school students studying complex new ideas in a world where new ideas are presented every day leads to nonstop evolution. The LD and Policy and even the PF of today is almost unrecognizable compared to the same events 5 or 10 years ago. This is a good thing. It is also not much in the Tournament Director's control. Perhaps this environment of dynamic change makes it even more important that the structures of a tournament are fixed and maximized. A round taking place in a custodian's closet is a bad idea today, and it was a bad idea 5 or 10 years ago. Some things don't change. Some things do. A good Tournament Director can distinguish among them, and act accordingly.

Time Management and Scheduling

One of the worst things that can happen to a tournament is for it to go radically off schedule. And one of the best things that can happen to a tournament is that it stay radically on schedule. Running a tournament on time will get you accolades from your guests. While timeliness is admittedly not entirely in your hands, there are things you can do to make it more likely.

The most important thing is understanding the nature of a round. It starts the moment you announce the pairings, and it ends the moment everyone leaves the room. Here's how it should work:

- Allow a full half hour, but no more, from the announcement of the round to the start time of the round.
 - Debaters need to prep. Few are the teams that walk into a round cold. If you don't give them enough time to prep, they'll take it anyhow, and the next thing you know, you're behind schedule. A full half hour gives them time to meet with their coaches, prep for about 15 or 20 minutes, then get to their rounds. That is reasonable.
- The rounds themselves take longer than you think. Don't kid yourself. Assume 2 hours debate time for every Policy round and every double-flighted LD and PF round.
- One of the great joys of electronic ballots is that the tab room has the results the minute the last ballot is completed. Make sure your judges understand that the sequence is decision first, then critique. Allow fifteen minutes for a critique. That is, let's say that you get the decision from the last ballot now. You then pair the next round and have a pairing ready in maybe 5 minutes. Sit on it a bit. Let that last critique play out. Then release the pairing. That's the signal that critiques are over and it's time to move on.

You can do the math yourself when plotting out the schedule for a tournament in advance. The random pairings, usually the first two rounds, do go faster than later rounds, but do factor in the confusion of everyone finding their way around. At college tournaments, we'll usually do a round at 5:00 and another at 8:00 the first day. At high schools, it's usually more like 3:00, 5:30 and 8:00. Plenty of time for everyone. After that, we figure between two and a half to three hours for scheduling purposes. Be realistic.

Rounds should not go on forever. Second flights excepted, nothing should start after 8:00 at night. These are high school students, not robot warriors. They need to be treated like human beings. If you've gotten yourself into a bind schedule-wise, postpone things to the next day. Get creative. But don't punish the attendees.

A good tournament posts a realistic schedule in advance, with online updates as necessary. I recommend that no one include a schedule in their actual invitation, and instead that it always resides online. This way there's less confusion, and no one saying that your schedule was this when you changed it completely later on. What's online is

what's real. Of course, make sure that, if you do update the online sked, that people are made aware of it.

Another factor that needs to be determined fairly early on is the break requirements. At a relatively early point you have an idea of your tournament numbers. From that, you need to determine who's going to break to what. All down-twos? All winning records? Partial or full break? To Octs or Doubles or Runoffs? The sooner you know this and post it, the better. At big, regular tournaments, you can probably include it as part of the invitation, because you know it historically. At smaller, less predictable events, you might not know ahead of time, but I assure you that everyone even marginally in the running is worried about it and theorizing about it. The sooner you can clarify, the better.

Tab

You can take it as a given that your tournament customers want good, fair tabbing. You, as the tournament director, should not be tabbing yourself. You've got other things to do.

- There should be more than one tabber per division. While it's not inconceivable that one person can handle things entirely alone at a smallish event, a helper makes errors less likely, and problem-solving (if necessary) more likely.
- Tab staff should be from different schools. This will deflect any perception of hanky panky.
- Tab staff should have at least one experienced old hand. While new people have to learn somewhere, you want at least one person in tab who's been there and done that. While the tabroom.com software might look capable of running everything automatically including making change at the concessions table, this is just an illusion. Things go wrong. Plus, in complex MJP pairings, simply accepting the computer's decisions may not be the best set of assignments. Experienced people know how to work with this. Inexperienced people simply release less-than-maximized pairings. And when things go wrong, and tabroom.com tells you "Well, that's just unfortunate," you want someone who can roll up their sleeves and keep things moving.
- Tab should be open to any coach/adult. Things happen, and questions arise, and attendees ought to feel free to discuss them. And aside from the need for quiet and calm during an actual pairing, there should be nothing about the doing of the pairings that shouldn't be open to auditors.
- Tab should be closed to students. If students have an issue, it should be communicated through their coaches, except in cases of, for instance, medical emergencies.
- Your tab staff is the engineering team at your tournament, not the decision makers. While it is extremely likely that you'll want the advice of your presumably experienced tab staff if an issue arises, it is the Tournament Director who is in charge of the tournament, and who should be the one to make the difficult decisions. An example might be as simple as granting a double bye up to evicting a team from the tournament. Those are things the TD needs to do, with full knowledge and authority. Tab is there to get the pairings out.
- Competent, experienced tab staff can serve as an advertisement for your tournament. Attendees want people they can trust not only to be fair but to be fast and efficient. Tab staff with good reputations can drive business your way.

Comfort

There are two kinds of comfort at debate tournaments, physical and mental. A good TD looks to both kinds.

Physical comfort

- Rounds need to be in spaces appropriate to good debating. It is one thing to dump a hundred first-time novices into the boys' gym and hope for the best, and another thing entirely to dump the varsity LDers working on their second TOC bid into that same space. If your room designation is "First stall on the left in the men's room," you need to rethink things. A tournament has as much space as it has good rooms for rounds. At the point where you run out of such space, draw the line. People are paying money to attend your tournament. Crappy spaces are a surefire guarantee that you'll get bad press in social media and fewer attendees next year.
- Think through the food. If you're feeding your attendees, no doubt your fees reflect this, meaning that those students are paying for that lunch. Make sure there's options for vegans and vegetarians and gluten-averse and everything else you can think of. Offer simple salads. Act as if you have to eat the food yourself. (As a corollary to this, forbid your own school's students bringing in food from outside. It is the height of bad manners to serve debate ziti to the masses while your kids are scarfing down lobster rolls and handmade chips at the registration table.)
- If possible, provide even better food to the judges. Get your parents in on this one. Nothing college student judges like more than decent food. And lots of it. This gives your teams' parents something useful to do.
- The first thing to arrive in the morning in your judges' lounge had better be coffee.
- Make sure students and judges have good places to hang out. They should be separate (although plenty of coaches prefer to hang out with their students). They should be big enough. Students need an auditorium or cafeteria where they all fit comfortably on decent seats, where they can relax and prep and nap and whatever. Judges need quieter spaces that are even more comfortable.

Mental comfort

- Tournament attendees are hungry for information. When's the next round, what are they breaking to, what are the judge obligations—all of this matters. Your best bet is to keep your tournament website active and up-to-date before and during the festivities. And every time you make a change, send a tournament-wide email informing everyone about it.
- Equip your tournament with a concierge table. Which requires its own separate discussion.

The Concierge Table

Where do people at your tournament go if they have a question? Where do people go if they need ballots (and there's always a few PF parents who do, plus the occasional loose-brained LD or Policy judge)? Where do people go if they need help setting up accounts on tabroom.com? Where do people go if they need directions to room 101?

Once upon a time, a tournament had ballot tables. (Then again, once upon a time, a tournament had ballots.) For all practical purposes, the ballot table was where attendees, be they judge or contestant, communicated with the tournament. And as a general rule, the ballot table was where the cool kids from your school all congregated and ignored the judges or contestants who wanted to communicate with the tournament, while they were instead engaged in eating takeout food, binge-watching Game of Thrones, or otherwise being useless.

Those days are over.

A good tournament needs a concierge table, a tournament hub with the job of acting as liaison to your tournament. Since they no longer need to distribute ballots, they have only one job: helping your guests.

- The concierge staff is two or three of your best and brightest. Presumably this means your top seniors on the team, the ones you trust the most, who know the most, who've been at every other tournament you've run over the years.
- The only people at the table should be the people working the table, on their side of the table. It is not the tournament playground. The rest of the team needs to find something useful to do somewhere else.
- The table needs to be very close to the tab room. A table seventeen miles away from the adults running things is a table in the middle of nowhere, incapable of anything.
- The workers at the table need to know that they are NOT running the tournament, they are running the help desk. They do not change pairings, they do not reassign judges. If something is needed at that level, they connect with the tab room (which is very close to them) to make it so.
- A table should look like a table, not a collection of food containers, computers, textbooks, poker decks and anything else that gets in the way of the people at the table and your customers. If the concierge staff needs to eat, they can do so in the cafeteria. They are at the table to do the job of running the table.
- If anyone sitting at your table is, or would be, a highly preferred judge, then find someone else for the table. That is, don't put in alums who should be judging. Ditto if you need judges in your novice division.
- The table should never be unattended. Ever.
- If you're actually collecting ballots, the table needs to understand how ballots work, and to check each one carefully. It's easier to find the judge standing in front of you than to find the judge who dropped off the inaccurate ballot a half hour ago and then immediately drove off to Starbucks.

- There are worse places for the TD to be during the tournament than within hailing distance of the concierge table (which, as we said, is also very close to tab).

Round Robins — A short note

The point of a Round Robin, to put it bluntly, is to make your tournament look cooler. Theoretically, RRs bring in a higher level of competitor, who will stay on for your tournament that, presumably, follows immediately after the RR ends.

I won't argue the pluses or minuses of RRs. They are sort of fun, after all. It's up to you. But don't expect them to turn your basic everyday tournament into a TOC bid at Octas. Not going to happen. But they may improve your basic everyday tournament a bit. Or not. All the truths about running a regular tournament, the whys and wherefores, apply to running an RR.

If you do run one, two things. First, you need more judges than you think you do. Assuming that each competitor brings (or hires) one judge won't work. Always have a couple of extra, otherwise you'll be pulling in the cafeteria staff to help out with the final rounds. (And needless to say, don't include yourself. You should be making sure the doughnuts arrive, the coffee is hot, and sorting out what to do about the judges who called in from half an hour away at the start time of Round 1.)

Second, tabroom will tab a Round Robin pretty much from start to finish, but it might need a little help. What you want to do is set it up so that judges only judge a competitor once, then run assignments automatically. Most likely you have judging holes. Now go in and set it so that judges can judge a competitor on the other side, and fill in the holes manually. This will maximize your judge use, and minimize judges seeing competitors more than once.

Novices

For the record, when a tournament I work is offering novice divisions, I recommend language like this: *Novice LD is for students in their first year of high school forensics only.*

Once upon a time, a novice debater was a high school freshman in their first year of debate. There were those who tried to muddy the waters a little, claiming that if they were a freshman novice last year in one kind of debate, they could be a sophomore novice this year in some other kind of debate, but that was pretty sketchy thinking. There's a difference between someone standing in front of the room the first time, and someone standing in front of a different room after a year's experience.

There were reasonable exceptions from the clear cut. I often had debaters who started out in their sophomore years. To me, they were still novices, but I would feel a special drive to get them into open divisions as soon as possible, not so much for any advantage over freshmen, which I didn't necessarily see, but in aid of maximizing their debate experience at the varsity level, if they were up to it. They usually were. Then one year I had two 8th graders who wanted to debate. I saw no reason against it, and they were novices in 8th grade and not novices the year after that.

There have been interesting discussions, and disagreements, about what, exactly, is a novice at a high school tournament in our present age which includes relatively common middle school debate. The easiest answer applies to the situation where the MS debater was quite active. That debater, with many rounds experience, is by no means debating at the level of a novice when that debater enters high school. A year or two of rounds of experience ought to blow away any noob. But what if a MSer has only a round or two back in October of their 8th grade year? That's a bit tougher. Probably that debater doesn't have much of an advantage over a well-prepared HS freshman.

I would like to say that it should be left to the discretion of the coaches, but my experience with coaches leads me to believe that there are a handful that are either craven or just dumber than granite when it comes to things like this. They will conveniently forget prior experience, or dismiss it. This is not just true of the MS example. There are still coaches who don't see a year of LD as prior experience for PF, or vice versa. I mean, if there are novice divisions in LD, PF, Policy and Parli, are you saying that the same student could be a novice in one after the other each year spanning their entire high school career?

It seems like different regions and leagues have different rules on this, and honestly, I don't think there's an overarching solution. Should a tournament aimed at high school students, that calls itself a high school invitational, allow middle school entries? Should experienced middle schoolers be allowed to debate as novices, and how do you define

experienced if you're thinking the answer is no? There is always the solution of creating new divisions, as we used to do in the Metro Hudson League with what we called (and which we expected were, absolutely) first-timers. Or a tournament can add a MS division or two, if they're so inclined. There are work-arounds to some of this, although they might not be available or possible in all cases.

As I say, there's no easy answers here. But it's something that a tournament needs to be clear about if they're conducting anything other than open divisions. Who comprises what division has to be clearly stated in the invitation. Anything less than 100% specific will lead to people coming into the tab room complaining that so-and-so shouldn't be in that division, which, if true, is a problem no one wants to deal with.

Academy Debate

We need a division of debate that recognizes that while every student can benefit from forensics, not every student wishes to make it their life's work. Additionally, we need to provide a better link from beginner to varsity, regardless of a student's commitment to the activity. And finally, we need to insure that all our regional tournaments provide the community with appropriate levels of competition and engagement, so that our rich competitive calendar continues to thrive.

Academy Debate answers all those needs.

There are three main facets of Academy Debate:

- Academy Debate is, primarily, a specific level of competition in Policy, LD and PF. Academy is intended for sophomores and juniors, and is not open to seniors or students past their third year of debate (i.e., juniors who debated in middle school who are now in their fourth year are not eligible to participate at the Academy Debate level, and while ambitious first-years would be welcome, they are already well-served in the community with our present novice level tournaments).
- Academy Debate rounds can be judged by seniors in their fourth year of debate. In fact, seniors in their fourth year are urged to judge, and will be considered not only judges but instructors at tournaments that embrace the Academy Debate designation. We have many students at the senior level who have a lot to give at a tournament beyond their ability to adjudicate rounds less expensively than college students (although one advantage of Academy is indeed less expensive judging requirements). Academy Debate can use those other skills of our upperclassmen.
- Finally, if a tournament adopts an Academy Debate structure, a program of educational activities beyond the rounds can be interwoven into the tournament. Beyond-the-Rounds activities can include lectures and brainstorms on new resolutions, demo rounds by TOC-level seniors with commentary, stop rounds (judging watching a round can break in at any time with advice and questions), background lectures by coaches and student instructors (e.g., a unit on sovereignty or due process or whatever), etc. The intention is to slot maybe two or three of these special events into a tournament, during down time and even in lieu of a round.

In a nutshell, Academy Debate will invigorate tournaments that do not have TOC bids by making them appealing to younger students, who can come and actually learn something and enjoy the competition, and to older students, who can come and, quite frankly, show off their skills. Additionally, it will make those tournaments more affordable by reducing the need to obtain and house hired college judges.

The educational modules: Any tournament can find educational material that would be of great interest in the Academy Debate model, depending on the time of year. There are always new resolutions to explore and new techniques to learn. For instance, look at January in the northeast. On Martin Luther King weekend we have Big Lex, a triple-threat TOC-level tournament with heavy competition in each division. Additionally, for most LDers this is the first TOC-level shot at the Jan-Feb resolution that will also be the TOC resolution and the NDCA resolution. In our present system:

- Seniors and TOC-level hopefuls are working hard on their cases, and have little interest in “prepping for Lex” at a tournament with competition not at their own level.
- Younger students, especially sophomores (if they are even able to register), are preparing to have their heads handed to them at Lexington, starting for some what might be the inglorious end of their careers because they are not interested in continuing at high stakes TOC-level competition. We all know the drop-off rate in forensics after sophomore year, and the inaccessibility and high cost of buy-in at the varsity level is one very big reason for this.
- Nobody knows what material other schools are going to be running, and everybody finds out during the competition. If you happen to be running something totally illogical that sounded really good back home, well, it’s too late now.

These apply fairly equally across the debate activities, but of course with different ramifications. January in PF, for instance, is rich with competitive opportunities, but again, is it best to dive into a TOC bid tournament with a new case filled with untested ideas?

Well, what if there were an Academy Debate tournament the week before Big Lex?

- Seniors in LD and PF who are working hard on their cases would not have to present a finished case in competition, but as judges they could hear what other folks are running and maybe get some ideas therefrom.
- Seniors who have been working hard their entire careers will get a chance to lecture and brainstorm their ideas.
- A coach or two might do a half hour unit on background for both the PF and LD divisions.
- A “lab” might do a training session on CX for all divisions.
- Students not at the level of a TOC Quarters Bid tournament will not have to face those who are at that level, and will therefore have a chance for meaningful competition.

The nature of non-Bid tournaments: Some tournaments, especially those without TOC bids, do not get the attendance they deserve, despite the fact that one often hears among coaches a longing for more rounds for their younger students. And the likelihood that any

non-bid tournament will somehow work its way up to attaining bids is very slight, given the politics of TOC. And for that matter, do we really want to live in a world where the only tournaments worth attending are perceived as nothing more than gateways to the TOC? The problem is, whether or not a tournament has bids, once you have to travel and hire judges, the costs are easily the same.

- The removal of the need to provide a lot of hired college judges for sophomore and junior debaters seriously reduces the cost of debate for the attendees.
- At the same time, there is a big issue that we want younger students to remain in the activity if at all possible without becoming dispirited. A tournament without bids will naturally draw competitors of a similar level, excluding bid trawlers and the like who can put a serious dent in a young debater's self-esteem. Also, there will be less emphasis on hardcore circuit style debate with the younger Academy field. Academy is a promising way to hold longer on to our borderline debaters.
- For large programs, there becomes a logical way to split the squad between events. If you always send your top debaters to the bid events, here's a place to send your non-top debaters (except for those you send as judges).

What Academy isn't: Academy is not aimed at changing the present debate activities. It is not any sort of new debate activity, nor is it somehow a preventative against or a curative for certain practices that some coaches might find displeasing. This is not the intention. Academy, as it relates to actual debating, should be seen as no different than the connotation of novice or varsity or junior varsity levels as they relate to their particular brand of debate. Although we specify who can do it and who can judge it, we do not attempt to interfere with the actual content, nor make claims for any new content of debate.

Benefits to tournaments: Speaking frankly, there are some tournaments in my region that are in trouble, or will be in trouble, and Academy might be the help they're looking for. In my region, the Northeast, it seems that there's about one big relatively local TOC-qual tournament every month, and there's a lot of jockeying around attending those. They anchor a team's calendar at the varsity end. Then there's the regular one-dayers provided by the local CFL. There's two of these, and they anchor the team's calendar at the other, younger end. And then there's the handful of tournaments with no bids, and maybe no plans for trying to get bids. The bid-seeking varsity debaters aren't very interested in these, not only because of the lack of bids but because the competition won't be at their level. Monticello is the perfect example of this. It comes between Yale and Big Bronx, and used to have bids, but lost them over the years for one reason or another. It's a very welcoming venue, with great amenities for judges and coaches. It's also big enough to hold the Winter Olympics (and, in Monticello, it is always winter). But after it lost its TOC bids a few years ago, programs seemed to lose interest in it. What programs presumably didn't do, on the other hand, was lose interest in developing their

sophomores and juniors, many of whom might not debate at the bracketing tournaments of Yale and Bronx because of entry limits. But since Monticello had no lure for the top varsity, and since divisions that were called varsity (or open) that had to be judged by paid adjudicators, the tournament became much less attractive. It was one thing to get some rounds for lightly seasoned debaters when you also had the chance to pick up a bid, and another thing altogether to get some rounds for lightly seasoned debaters between the expensive Yale and Bronx events, at the same cost. Over the last couple of years attendance has declined steadily at Monticello, and the tournament runs the risk of disappearing, yet it is a venue that has proven it can hold a tournament of great size successfully year after year, which is no easy feat. If it were to disappear, someone else would probably grab the weekend, but the same issues would ensue. The bracketing tournaments determine that this weekend will always be what it is, tucked between Yale and Bronx. So we are faced with the possibility of lightly seasoned debaters losing an opportunity for rounds on this weekend. As a community, we can let the weekend expire, or we can try to revitalize it. Academy is seen, at the moment, as a way of revitalizing it. Since Academy Debate was proposed, it has not taken off. The same complaints about the lack of rounds for teams are still being aired, while at the same time smaller, non-bid tournaments simply aren't getting the respect they deserve. Can Academy fix that? Maybe not. But when we don't fix it, and we lose competent tournaments that offer good opportunities for younger debaters, while at the same time we focus all our time (and budget) aiming at the TOC, we are, in my opinion, simply shooting ourselves in the foot.

Notes for tab staff

Disaster Preparedness

The official version

This is from one of tabroom's feature updates, on making backups.

Short version: Go to Entries->Data and then click "Full tournament backup/restore" under the "Import" box on the right. You can make an offline backup of your tournament you save to your local computer, and if things go horribly amiss you can restore the backup.

Notes:

- 1) The backup is NOT automatic. You need to click the button to download the backup. If your tournament gets destroyed and you ask, "where's the backup?" the answer will be "wherever you saved it." The answer to "how recent is the backup" will be "when did you save it?"
- 2) You can start making backups during registration, so if someone's registration is totally jacked you can restore that.
- 3) You can restore an entire tournament, just one division, just one round, or just the registration for one school.
- 4) In very extreme cases, if you've entirely deleted an event or round, you'll need to enter the ID number from the offline file, which will be in JSON format. You might wish to review JSON format to find those numbers just in case.
- 5) Unless you are working with a test tournament, I would strongly advise against uploading and downloading things just to see how it works.

I can think of only 2 instances where things got to the point that an offline backup would have saved the day, but it will take under a minute to make a backup. You might do it after you have entered all the ballots for a round or, at least, at the end of the day. There are some more instructions on the page itself.

Hope this helps somebody!

The unofficial version

That is probably all you need to know. However, here's some other tips.

If tabroom goes down completely, and you can't get it back up, and you've been regularly saving things, try backup.tabroom.com. It will probably survive even when regular tabroom is sinking like the Titanic. Be careful, though. You could muck things up royally if you're not paying attention.

If you want to be totally free of tabroom out of fear that tabroom might go down, and want something to do other than twiddle your thumbs and wait for it to come back up, this is a complete system of disaster recovery. Keep in mind that it may be worse than just waiting and twiddling your thumbs.

When a tournament begins:

1. Create a folder on Google docs or the like, and share it with everyone in the tab room. When we say “print” in the instructions below, we mean save out as a pdf. Put all the pdfs into the disaster folder, so you’ll know where to find them, when and if, and everyone will have access to them. You can print ‘em on paper by the dozens later if you have whatever pdfs you need on-hand.
2. Print a blank ballot for each event.
3. Print out the judge prefs, if any, using the Download function under Export to TRPC.
4. Print out a room list.

Do the following after you release each pairing:

5. Keep an updated printout of the schematic.
6. Save a spreadsheet of the schematic.
7. Keep an updated printout of all the team cards.
8. Keep an updated printout of all the judge cards.
9. Keep on your screen, in separate windows, the list of teams a judge has seen, by judge and by team. This might help when it’s time to assign judges, and will still be there in a browser tab even if tabroom goes down, as long as you don’t do anything other than look at it.

The key question is, when do you act? There are two scenarios.

First, system goes down during a round, and e-ballot judges have no way to enter results.

- If this happens, print up blank ballots on paper and get them into the rooms and into the hands of the judges. If the system comes back up, no problem. If not, judges fill out paper ballots, which you then enter into the system.

Second, you have all the results for the last round, and need to pair the next one. (If you don’t understand how cards work, and pairings, you probably want to learn before the system goes haywire. Play around on your own time.)

- Get the Excel schematic for the last round on the screen. You can use this to copy/paste to create a new schematic.
 - If it’s an even numbered round, just switch sides, and you’ve already got half the skem done.
 - If it’s odd, sort everyone alphabetically and do a lot of drag-and-paste.
- Use the team cards to pair. If you have to, enter the results of the last round into the cards manually. (This was how it was done before you were born.)
 - Obviously, stay in bracket, following side constraints, if necessary. If you have to pull up, do so from the middle of the bracket below.

- Create the pairings in Excel. Needless to say, this all takes multiple people.
- Use the judge cards to assign judges. Again, if you have to, enter the results of the last round into the cards manually.
 - Those lists of previous judge assignments will be a helpful extra guide.
 - You will have the prefs on a separate sheet. You should try to follow them, but prefs on cards is a mug's game, and trying to optimize them will take so long that it you might as well just wait for tabroom to come back up. Just look that the judge, in addition to being clean, isn't a 4 or worse.
 - Start with the down-2 bracket and work your way up, then go to the down-andouts.
 - Enter the assignments into Excel.
- Add the room assignments.
- Print up paper pairings and plenty of paper ballots, and disseminate.
- When the system comes back up, and it will, enter what you did. You are now back in business.