

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.