

Seminar Contents

Sound adjudication is essential to the development of strong debaters. However, one of the greatest challenges in debating is achieving consistent adjudication standards – especially at large competitions. In the seminar, we will discuss adjudication practices and techniques that can be employed to overcome this challenge.

The seminar will focus on two key areas: First, we will discuss some general principles of adjudication. The second topic for discussion is how to strike a balance between matter (content) and manner (style) when assessing a debate. Towards the end of the seminar, we will give a synopsis of the debating skills that will be covered in the Student Workshop so that teachers may put particular emphasis on these elements when giving feedback to students in the afternoon sessions.

1. General Principles:

Objectivity

- There is no such thing as a ‘stacked’ motion – i.e. a motion that favours one side or the other
- The personal opinions/ideas the adjudicator has on the topic must not be considered in the adjudication process
- If an argument is not rebutted during the debate, then the argument stands, and the team raising that argument gets full credit for it, no matter how weak it actually is or how easily the point *could* have been rebutted
- A team cannot be penalised for what the adjudicator personally feels that team “failed to do”, or based on what the adjudicator feels that team “should have done”. Adjudicators should award marks for positive things that a team has done, rather than thinking in terms of teams losing marks for what they haven’t done or for what they did wrong. Adjudicators are free to advise teams on alternative strategies when they give feedback – in fact they are encouraged to do so – but should not factor these ideas into the adjudication.

Judging On a Panel

It is common in debating that adjudication is carried out not by a single adjudicator, but rather by a panel. Meaning that panelists must work together to reach a result. This requires adjudicators to be flexible, and to enter the adjudication room prepared to change their mind or be convinced by other adjudicators.

Depending on the rules of the debate or competition, the result may be reached through ‘consensus judging’, via a simple vote, or through point-judging:

- Consensus judging usually has (up to) three stages:
 - *Step 1.* The debaters leave the room. Adjudicators discuss the debate and form a consensus as on the winning position. If a consensus is reached, then the panel agrees upon who wins the debate. Ideally, the winner is decided by consensus
 - *Step 2.* If a consensus cannot be reached after in-depth discussion of all the issues within the debate, then the panel votes. A simple majority is sufficient to decide the result
 - *Step 3.* If a simple majority cannot be reached, the Chairperson of the panel will decide the result

Consensus judging has many benefits, as it requires the adjudicators to negotiate and to consider the issues of the debate in-depth in reaching their decision. This process helps to remove arbitrary decision-making.

- Some competitions require adjudicators to reach their decision by a simple vote, normally *without* first conferring. This system has the benefit of being simple and time-efficient, however it can encourage lazy adjudication, as adjudicators are not required to justify their position to other adjudicators
- Another possible method for reaching the result is through point-judging. Here, each speaker is awarded an individual score, and the team with the highest sum-total of individual scores wins the debate. This method is generally slow and ineffective, as adjudicators frequently have to go back and adjust the scores so that they reflect the desired outcome.

Oral Feedback

Oral adjudication is standard practice at international debating competitions. It makes each debate into a learning exercise rather than a strictly competitive activity. When approaching oral feedback, consider the following:

- **Careful note-taking is essential for good adjudication.**

Adjudicators should record each and every argument and rebuttal raised, as well as any stylistic points that might influence the outcome of the debate. These notes are helpful not only in reaching a decision on the result, but also in providing feedback to debaters

- Normally, oral feedback would include: the result (where applicable), the reasons for the result, and the strengths/weaknesses of each team and each individual speaker
- Criticisms should be phrased constructively
- After the adjudicator(s) has/have deliberated and reached a result, the result may be announced before or after feedback is given.

There are three views, each of which is perfectly acceptable:

- Some adjudicators prefer to state the result straight away, and then go into the feedback. The advantage of this is that the debaters are not kept in a state of suspense waiting for the result. Also the adjudicator can comment freely without worrying about giving away the result
- Alternatively, some adjudicators prefer to deliver their comments first, and then state the result at the end. These adjudicators feel that if the result is announced straight away,

teams do not listen to the feedback, and in particular that losing teams are resistant to the advice given

- It is also possible to give some general comments, then the result, and then go into in-depth feedback for each team/speaker

Scoring, Roles and Rules

Each style of debating has different rules that affect the adjudication in one way or another. For example, in some forms of debating, speakers are penalised for transgressing the allotted time, while in other styles no penalty is used. Another key piece of information that can normally be found in the competition rules is the **role that individual speakers** are required to play in the debate. For example, it is common in 4-a-side debates that the earlier speakers are required to deliver new material and new arguments, while the later speakers are expected to allocate more of their time to responding to the opposing team with rebuttals and case-comparisons. Knowing what is expected of each speaker is crucial in assessing that speaker's performance. **Be sure to know the rules!**

2. Matter and Manner Judging

In international adjudication practices – notably at the World Universities Debating Championships – scoring is divided into two areas: matter and manner. These are terms that every adjudicator should be familiar with.

Matter

“Matter” is the *content* or *substance* that a team brings to a debate. Matter includes facts, reasoning, examples and analysis. So what is good matter? According to the World Universities Debating Championship Adjudication Guide, “Good matter is matter that is logically developed, relevant to the case at hand and substantiated.” Matter questions would include ones such as, “Which team brought the most ideas into the debate?” or “Which teams examples were more relevant in proving their points?”

Manner

If matter is the substance of what is said, then manner refers to *how* a team brings their matter into the debate. Often referred to as ‘the technical elements’ of debating, manner includes speaking style, individual speech structure, team split (apportioning work between the speakers), and being entertaining (where appropriate). According to the World Universities

Debating Championship Adjudication Guide, “Good manner is manner that is effective in strengthening the argument/case, is entertaining.”

Matter vs. Manner: Weighing the Elements

To some extent, matter and manner overlap. For example, the logical flow of a speech and of individual points is effects how relevant or strong the point is (a matter question), and yet it is also relevant in considering how persuasively the speaker presented the argument (a manner question). The important thing is to be able to separate the matter and manner elements so that the performance of each team may be weighted. In the final analysis, a debate may be won on either matter or manner (or both). Traditionally, these elements were weighed on an equal basis, however more recently emphasis has shifted in favour of giving slightly **greater weight to the matter** element. This means that where Team A team has stronger matter, Team B would need to have comparatively much stronger manner in order to win the debate.