

How to trainee and accredit at New Zealand University debating tournaments

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In the Room

1. Be confident. Act like you belong. Part of being an adjudicator is presenting an authoritative image, so that the debaters in the room trust you. Sit near to, but not next to, the other judges.
2. Don't worry if you think or know the debaters you're judging are better debaters than you are. Being an inexperienced/not-very-good debater does *not* mean you are a good judge. There are plenty of extremely good and respected judges who never had very successful debating careers. Conversely, there are lots of excellent debaters who are atrocious judges. In short, don't judge the debaters in a room by reputation, but by what they say.
3. Be deferential to the actual adjudicator(s) in the room – but not obsequious. Listen to what they say, answer their questions, and ask your own. Listen to their oral adjudications.
4. Be organised. Remember your marksheet, pads, pens, etc. It pays to have a stopwatch handy as well, as trainee judges often get called upon to keep time and do time signals.

During the Debate

5. Adjudicate! Find what works for you in terms of taking notes. Some practice in advance of the tournament may help in this regard. Everyone has different techniques for note taking. There is no right or wrong way.

After the Debate

6. Take your time with your decision. Don't rush. You can think about it for a reasonable amount of time. If the other judges finish ahead of you, try and not feel pressured to hurry. They should wait for you.
7. Remember not to insert yourself in the debate, ie don't dismiss an argument from the debate because you don't believe it or you've read a journal article on it. The opposing team has to dismiss it, not you as a judge. On the other hand though, if an argument appears illogical, patently untrue or poorly made you can penalise the speaker for a lack of matter or persuasiveness.
8. Manner matters. Think about how persuasive a speech is to you and the audience. Different speakers have different styles. There are no hard-and-fast rules about speaking style. If it is persuasive, it is effective.

7. Read over your notes and assess what happened in the debate. Ask:

- Who do you instinctively think won the debate?
- Why?
- Do the reasons you think that team won actually stack up with what happened during the debate?

8. If appropriate (and it almost always is), try and analyse the debate on an issue-by-issue basis. What were the most important issues in the debate? Why were they important? Who 'won' each of those issues? Why?

9. Think about whether there were one or two important issues in the debate that override the others - this is generally called how you weight the issues. For instance there might be three issues in a hypothetical debate: personal freedom, international law and the slippery slope. However, just because one side won two of the issues, doesn't mean that they definitely won the debate. You need to think about which of the issues was the most important. It may be that one team won one issue (personal freedom) while the other team won the other two issues (international law and the slippery slope) but that the main issue in the debate was personal freedom so the team who won the issue won the debate, even though it lost the other two issues. When thinking about weighting the issues and how to elevate issues above others, ask:

- how integral is the issue to the moot/the debate as set up by the affirmative; and
- how much time was spent on the issue by the speakers (if every speaker spent 3 minutes discussing the issue then chances are that it is a pretty important issue)

10. Fill in a marksheet. Your marksheet should reflect the way you saw the debate. Only fill it in once you have decided who won the debate, and why. Take some time to give accurate speaker scores.

11. Trust your instincts. If you think a team won, then they probably did win.

12. Before talking to the other adjudicator(s) be very clear as to which team you think won, and *why*.

Talking to the other judge(s)

13. The other judge(s) will likely ask you to give your thoughts on the debate, before they give you theirs. This is your chance to impress them and show them you understood the debate. Don't waste it. Say who you think won. And then explain why. Explain what you thought the major issues of the debate were, who won the issues, and how that impacted on the overall result. Point out any flaws (even if obvious) of each team and their arguments, and make appropriate observations about the debate (e.g the set-up of each team, who the strongest speaker was, a case-shift, contradiction, best material left until a reply, etc).

14. The judge(s) will probably ask you questions. Answer them. Be confident in your opinions. They may agree with you, and will be testing you (even if they disagree, it is better to be able to argue your point of view persuasively)

15. Don't get disheartened if you split from your adjudicator. Good debates often have splits. A good judge will recognise that and say so to the Chief Adjudicator.

Giving an oral adjudication

16. If you are asked to do the oral adjudication, this is a sign that you have been/are doing well, and are reasonably close to accrediting. However, oral adjudications are probably the most important part of adjudicating at university level. Your job is to convince a team who probably thinks they won the debate that they actually didn't win it.

17. *Be confident!* Confidence builds trust. Even if you're really nervous, just like in debating, try to appear not to be.

18. Structure your adjudication. An easy structure is to highlight the issues in the debate, under each issue very briefly summarise each team's contribution and then *crucially explain why the team which won the issue took that issue in your mind*. Finally, explain why the team that won, did win. Try to be detailed and convincing. Adjudication speeches that don't explain why the winning team won are the biggest cause of frustration for debaters, and the biggest reason why judges score low feedback marks

19. Adjudication speeches don't have to be long, but nor should they be too short. About 5 minutes is the right length. Definitely no longer than ten minutes. Keep constructive criticism of individual speakers until after the formal part of the debate.

20. Think of feedback for each individual speaker before you begin your adjudication. They will inevitably ask for it straight afterwards so it's good to have it ready to go.

Good luck!