

DELIVERY SKILLS IN POLICY DEBATE

Speech *delivery* refers to the management of the voice and the nonverbal elements of public speaking. Effective public speaking requires the proper management of eye contact, vocal variety, rate of speech, vocal fluency, and gesturing.

Policy debate has been justifiably criticized for its failure to cultivate these skills. The inattention to speech delivery in policy debate is a natural outgrowth of the decision model.

Judges award wins and losses based on the arguments presented and the evidence offered in support of those arguments. Given this logical emphasis, few debate judges are willing to say they voted in favor of the weaker argument but did so because the debaters sounded better. Logical substance should trump style of delivery. In an ideal world, however, a debater would have both substance and style.

So, what are the elements of effective style in policy debate? Judge adaptation should be the guide. Debate is a contest in which a judge's decision is final. How do you know what a judge expects? Often debate tournaments provide *judge philosophy* sheets, allowing debaters to read a judge's own view of how winners and losers are determined in debate. Sometimes the judge philosophies involve answers to standardized questions such as, "What do you think about speed and rate of delivery in debate?" If judge philosophy sheets are available, pay careful attention to what your judge expects and try to adapt to those expectations. If a judge philosophy sheet is unavailable, you might be able to gather information from your coach or from other debaters from your school who have had experience with your same judge. Gather as much information about your judge as you can before the debate round begins. Sometimes judges will answer questions from debaters just before the beginning of the round. You should do whatever you can to adjust your speaking style to match the expectations of your judge.

What about eye contact? Most policy debaters make very little eye contact during the early portions of a debate. All participants—including the judge—are writing the arguments down on their flowsheets. There is little point in looking at the judge if the judge is writing on her flowsheet rather than looking at you. Also, the fact that you are reading your constructive arguments from pre-prepared briefs makes it difficult to maintain eye contact. As the round draws closer to the end, however, eye contact becomes more important. You are no longer making new arguments, but instead trying to convince the judge of the logical power of the arguments already made. In the late rebuttals the judge will still be flowing but will now be paying more attention to you. As any good public speaker knows, eye contact plays an important role in projecting