

Understanding the Adjudicator

This final chapter focuses on the adjudicator in competitive debates. The chapter first looks at the basics of the adjudicator's role. Then examines what she might be thinking or looking for in a debate and explains how best to influence that process. Finally, the chapter discusses the importance of the feedback adjudicators offer at the end of a debate.

Adjudicators

Adjudicators come from a variety of backgrounds. At university-level debating, the background of the adjudicator varies according to the format. Judges may be teachers or lecturers, but some will be retired debaters who volunteer because they enjoy listening to debates. At the secondary school-level, teachers are likely to do the bulk of the judging, but active debaters from nearby university clubs often help out. All of these individuals have usually seen many debates and developed a clear sense of what works and what doesn't based on both theoretical and practical knowledge.

Realistically, each adjudicator sees a debate differently, which is why many competitions use a panel of judges. How that panel reaches a conclusion varies among formats. In some, panel members simply vote, in others they are required to reach a consensus. Different formats have different rules for adjudication and ask adjudicators to look at different elements. For example, in World Schools, judges are asked to give marks for style, whereas in Karl Popper they are specifically asked not to. Consequently, this chapter does not touch on those areas where there are differing requirements but focuses instead on points that are broadly true of all formats.