

a judge defines “persuasive” varies depending on the format. For example, some formats assess the role of manner in determining the persuasive force of a speech, others do not. Some formats have more exacting standards than others for what evidence can be presented, and the adjudicator will consider how well teams have met these. Although an adjudicator does not utilize specialized subject knowledge when judging the debate, she will bring her expertise of debate to bear and this will be reflected in how she appraises areas such as role fulfillment and manner.

Persuasion is not easy to judge, but the adjudicator will certainly look for consistency, coherence, and reasonableness. Does the argument make sense? Is it internally consistent with itself and with other speakers on that side of the debate? Does the speaker engage with others? Does the speaker demonstrate an understanding of the subject under discussion? Has the debater brought additional insight to the table? Where manner is also an element in scoring, the adjudicator is also asking: Does this person hold my attention easily? Does she have a fluent and engaging style? Is her pace easy to follow? Is the manner appropriate to the subject under discussion? Does the speaker appear convincing? Other considerations include eye contact, audibility, and the avoidance of distracting physical and verbal mannerisms.

Adjudicators will keep notes throughout the debate, although different judges do this in different ways. Where scores are required for individual speakers, a judge will usually determine your score at the end of your speech. Most competitions require adjudicators to give the highest total speaker scores to the team that also won the debate and the lowest to the losing team. Some require members of a panel to agree on speaker scores and the outcome of the debate, so remaining engaged in a debate is additionally important because adjudicators may have to review their initial score after the whole debate is over. In other formats where adjudicators simply vote and consensus is not required, the typical adjudicator will still review her marks in light of those given to other speakers so that she is confident that she has applied a consistent standard throughout.

What’s Catching the Adjudicator’s Attention?

There is a scene in the movie *The Great Debaters* where the coach drills his team into reciting: “Who is the judge? The judge is God. Why is he God? Because he decides who wins or loses. Not my opponent.” Modern adjudicators probably wouldn’t put it in quite such megalomaniacal terms. Nevertheless, because the judge decides the winner, it’s worth trying to figure out what is going on in her head. Although all adjudicators should be looking for consistency, role fulfillment, effective use of evidence, interaction with other