

Roadmapping should not become an exercise in demonstrating how much debate terminology you know. Statements such as “I will start with some rebuttal of what First Aff has said and then move on to our constructive case, including an extension” can have a negative effect on adjudicators for two reasons. One, the adjudicator who knows what all those terms mean will find their use patronizing. The second, albeit worrying, possibility is that the adjudicator doesn’t know—so she is baffled. Either way, patronizing or confusing the panel should be avoided. If the judge cannot determine when you’re disagreeing with other speakers and when you’re agreeing with them, you have major problems with your speech that are unlikely to be rectified by demonstrating that you know the meaning of the word “rebuttal.”

Finally, be alert to the practicalities of judging. Judges take notes but not shorthand. If you have a complex point that is fundamental to your case, give the adjudicator time to hear it, understand it, and write it down. Where necessary, rephrase the same point a couple of times to allow her time to take it down. If you mention a point at the beginning of your speech, use the same term when you return to the point in more detail later. If you’re speaking at the start of a debate, the odds are against the adjudicator remembering anything you said that wasn’t written down, so it may be more important to allow her time to take notes than for you to race on to the next argument—no matter how brilliant or urgent.

FEEDBACK

Adjudicators have two interconnected roles: they are both judge and teacher. They determine the winner of the debate, but they also offer feedback on it, analyzing the arguments and speeches from the round. They present feedback for two reasons: first, to provide accountability and demonstrate that the decision hasn’t been pulled out of a hat and, second, to give some suggestions for improvement that speakers may find useful. Usually the chair of the adjudication panel presents an oral account of the decision and the reasons for it. In those formats where consensus is not required, if there is a dissenting minority, a representative of this group may also explain their view of the debate. In some circumstances, the adjudication may be given in written form for distribution after the competition is over. As a general rule, adjudicators criticize generally and praise individually. They do not approach their task with an “I could have done this better” attitude or express their views on the subject of the debate because either is likely to suggest a bias in their approach to the debate.

Adjudicators’ opinions are always worth listening to and, usually, worth remembering. As a result, it’s useful to take notes when they are giving feedback. Review these notes from time to time and look for comments that come up repeatedly, even where these