

Typically, the judge or timekeeper indicates the time remaining in a section by holding up the appropriate number of fingers: three fingers indicate that three minutes are left, and so on. When 30 seconds are left, the timekeeper closes her hand halfway; when time is exhausted, she forms a fist. Another option is for a timekeeper to use time cards with numbers corresponding to every minute that elapses in a speech or cross-examination. Still another alternative is for a timekeeper to verbally announce the time as it elapses, although some debaters find this distracting. Of course, the debaters, judge and/or timekeeper must agree on the system to be used.

When the timekeeper gives the stop signal, the speaker may complete a sentence or a thought, but she is not free to simply disregard the signal. If the debater begins a new point or a new train of thought, the judge should ignore it and should not take it into account in making a decision. If a team habitually overruns time limits, the judge should certainly note this on the ballot and may weigh it as a factor in making his decision. Respondents may finish their answers in cross-examination, but the questioner may not ask a new question. If the stop signal comes in the middle of a question, the cross-examination ends at that point, with the question unanswered.

Timekeepers must also carefully track preparation time. Each team has a total of eight minutes to take at their discretion. The timekeeper must keep a running account of this time as it is taken, so the debaters know how much time they have left. Typically, debaters will announce that they want to use time, but they are not required to. Ultimately, the timekeeper must pay attention and start counting time if the debaters are sitting down to write or confer, even if they have not announced their intention. Some debaters will announce that they intend to take a specific amount of time (e.g., “I would like to take two minutes of prep time.”), but this should be regarded as a gesture of courtesy, not a contract. If the debater says two minutes but takes three—or only one—the timekeeper must record the amount of time actually used.

Because debaters are usually writing or talking during prep time, hand signals are inefficient. Usually, the timekeeper will announce the passage of time verbally, at intervals of 30 seconds (e.g., “You have used two minutes, you have six minutes left” or “Two and a half minutes used, five and half left”). A team will rarely continue to prepare after their eight minutes have been exhausted; if they do, the timekeeper must deduct the additional time from the team’s final speech.

- 2. Establishing and maintaining a positive atmosphere.** The judge can do much to establish a positive atmosphere at the beginning of the debate. If the judge treats the debaters in a friendly manner, the debaters are likely to treat their opponents in the same way. The judge should be encouraging and supportive, not threatening. Speakers can easily get rattled if judges make nonverbal signs of disapproval. Judges should not frown or shake their heads if they disagree with a point. Even overly positive signs can be disconcerting—not for the speaker, perhaps, but for their opponents. By