

sending overt signals, the judge is engaging in the debate, rather than leaving the debate to the debaters.

Judges must also ensure that spectators do not interfere with the debaters. Because debate requires intense concentration, the debaters should not have to deal with distractions, such as spectators talking, even during preparation time. The judge should reprimand or expel any spectators who are disruptive.

3. Taking notes. Judges must take notes to have an accurate view of the debate.

They should keep track of the points, counterpoints, and refutations as they are made. Most judges do this by “flowing” the debate on a pad of paper that is divided into columns. One column is given to each section of the debate. In outline form, the judge can note the arguments made in the affirmative constructive in one column. In an adjacent column, the judge can list the refutations made by the negative in its following speech, and draw links between the two. With good notes, a judge can follow a line of argument through an entire debate. Notes help judges see whether points have been dropped and conceded. Without notes, judges are at the mercy of the debaters, who will sometimes interpret the progress of the debate to suit their own purposes.

4. Writing comments on ballots. Although judges may offer oral comments

at the conclusion of a debate, it is very important that they include written comments on their ballots. In fact, writing comments is one of the most important functions of the judge for two reasons: first, the ballot clearly communicates the reason for the decision. When debaters know the reasons why they won or lost, they have greater opportunities to learn from the experience. Communicating these reasons is the judge’s primary task in writing a ballot. Second, the ballot provides constructive feedback to the debaters and their coaches or teachers, pointing out areas of weakness and offering suggestions for improvement. A written ballot is helpful to the coaches who may not have attended the debate and also to the debaters who may not have been able absorb everything a judge said immediately after the debate when emotions were still running high.

On the ballot, the judge can identify arguments that seemed especially strong or weak. The judge can also address specific aspects of the debate, e.g., the negative cross-examination was especially good or the affirmative rebuttal seemed confused. The ballot also gives the judge a chance to address matters of style and performance, e.g., if a speaker was inaudible, overly aggressive, or rude.

When writing comments, judges should remember that debating is difficult for most debaters. They may feel sensitive or insecure—even if they win the round. Comments, therefore, should be supportive. There is a world of difference between writing “Your second contention was stupid” and writing “Your second contention was unclear and did not seem consistent with your first.”