



**CONNECTICUT MIDDLE SCHOOL DEBATE LEAGUE**  
**Handbook of Parliamentary Debate**

September 2015  
Updated May 2016  
Updated July 2017  
Updated September 2018  
Updated July 2019  
Updated September 2023  
Updated June 2024

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## **CTMSDL: A FEW QUESTIONS ANSWERED**

### **What is the CTMSDL and who may participate in CTMSDL competitions?**

The Connecticut Middle School Debate League (CTMSDL) hosts competitive interscholastic parliamentary debate tournaments for middle school students throughout Connecticut during the academic year. Participation is open to middle school debate teams from all types of schools in Connecticut. Students in grades 5, 6, 7, and 8 may compete. CTMSDL is an approved activity of the CT Student Activities Conference of the Connecticut Association of Schools. We are sponsored by the English Speaking Union, Greenwich Branch.

### **What is CTMSDL Parliamentary Debate?**

CTMSDL's format is similar to that of the Middle School Public Debate Program (MSPDP), which started in 2002. Events are held on Saturdays at member schools. Teams are composed of three students. Teams debate three times at each tournament. Beginning in 2023, CTMSDL will have both prep-ahead debates and extemporaneous debates. High school debaters, coaches, teachers, and parents serve as judges.

#### **Prep-ahead debates**

Prep ahead motions (topics) are released weeks ahead of scrimmages and tournaments. Debaters prepare both proposition (for the motion) and opposition (against the motion) arguments ahead of competitions. Novices debate the prep-ahead motion three times at tournaments: once on proposition, once on opposition, and the third time determined by coin flip. Beginning in 2023, open level debaters will debate the prep ahead motion twice, once on proposition and once on opposition. The third open level round will be extemporaneous. Debaters may use devices and/or hard copies of cases, notes, speeches and sources during prep-ahead rounds to deliver, flow, and time speeches. Debaters may not research during prep-ahead rounds. Debaters may research between prep-ahead rounds.

#### **Extemporaneous debates**

Open level debaters will debate the prep ahead motion for rounds one & two, once on proposition once on opposition. Round three will be extemporaneous. To begin Round three, judges & teams are given two or three motions. Motions may include "info slides" with definitions and/or background information. After presenting the motions, the judge then flips a coin and chooses a debater to call it. The winner of the coin flip chooses whether they want to choose side or motion. The team that gets to choose the motion then does so. Then the team that gets to choose side does so. Note that the decision to debate on the proposition or opposition side is never made before the motion is chosen. After the judge reads the motion, debaters may ask the judge to define terms they are not familiar with. The opposition team preps in the room, and the proposition team preps outside the room.

Debaters may not use devices before or during extemp rounds for any purpose other than timing speeches. They must use paper to prepare cases, deliver speeches, and flow. Exceptions will be made for debaters with IEPs that require them to use devices. No research is allowed before or during extemp rounds. Debaters may not use their prep ahead cases to prep extemp cases. Coaches, parents and other debaters may not talk to debaters about the extemp motions at tournaments. The only people who may choose extemp motions and prep extemp cases are the three team members in the round, using only what's in their heads. Beginning in 2024, all three open rounds at every tournament will count toward rankings, awards and qualifying for the championship tournament. The final round will be on the prep-ahead motion, between the top two open level teams after all three rounds.

### **How can teams participate in CTMSDL competitions?**

To participate in CTMSDL scrimmages and tournaments, middle school debate teams should:

- Join CTMSDL by paying dues. Schools may attend one event prior to joining. Email [inquiry@ctmsdl.org](mailto:inquiry@ctmsdl.org) for more information.
- Secure the commitment of a responsible adult who will coach students, register them for tournaments online, accompany them and supervise them at CTMSDL events.
- Provide volunteers to judge at competitions.

### **What if I only have 1 or 2 debaters, not 3?**

Let us know ahead of the scrimmage or tournament and we'll try to pair them with students from other teams. If we can't find partners, we'll allow two person teams to compete. The debater who speaks twice must deliver the first and third speeches.

### **For More Information**

More information may be obtained by emailing [inquiry@ctmsdl.org](mailto:inquiry@ctmsdl.org).

## **CTMSDL SCRIMMAGES & TOURNAMENTS**

CTMSDL holds four events per season. The October/November event is a scrimmage for novices and a tournament for open level debaters. Tournaments with novice and open level categories are held in December and February. The April tournament will include two divisions: a championship event and a tournament for debaters who competed in the novice and open level categories during the season but did not qualify for the championship division.

### **Scrimmage & Tournament Oversight**

CTMSDL scrimmages and tournaments are planned and run by CTMSDL board members. Questions, comments, problems and concerns should be directed to them by emailing [inquiry@ctmsdl.org](mailto:inquiry@ctmsdl.org).

### **Novice & Open Divisions**

CTMSDL events have two divisions: novice & open. The novice division is for brand new debaters. The open division is open to all debaters. Coaches have discretion regarding which category to place debaters in. Debaters must compete in the same division as speakers and as teams. Coaches are encouraged to move novices to the open Division after they have been to two events, regardless of their record. Novice teams that go 3-0 (three wins, no losses) at any tournament should move to the open division. Novice division ranks are not published. Novice teams that go 3-0 are given gavel pins.

There are three rounds at Tournaments. The first is randomly matched; the second and third are power-matched (2-0 teams compete against 2-0 teams, 1-1 teams compete against 1-1 teams, and 0-2 teams compete against 0-2 teams). There is a fourth public round between the top two Open teams. Trophies are awarded to the top five open division teams and the top five open division speakers. Open debaters who win all three rounds but not trophies receive gavel pins.

### **October/November Tournament Structure**

CTMSDL's first event of the year is a scrimmage for novice debaters. No awards are given. The purpose is to introduce new students to competitive debate. The day includes a demonstration debate, a skills-building workshop, and two rounds of debate on a previously released motion. The first event of the year is a regular tournament for open level debaters.

### **Qualifying for the Championship Division of the April Tournament**

The April tournament includes a championship division. Debaters qualify by being part of an open division team that went 3-0 at one or more tournaments OR by placing first through 15<sup>th</sup> as an open division speaker or team member at one or more tournaments. Debaters qualify as individuals, not as teams, so coaches may reorganize teams and add debaters if necessary to make teams of 3. Only three person teams may compete in the championship division.

### **Invitations**

CTMSDL members are invited to all CTMSDL events by email. Invitations are also posted on our website: [www.ctmsdebate.org](http://www.ctmsdebate.org).

## Registration

Member teams register through [www.tabroom.com](http://www.tabroom.com). Coaches receive the motion and invitations to events well in advance of events by email and website posting.

## Providing Volunteers

CTMSDL teams provide judges who CTMSDL coaches should train before events. Judges receive additional training at CTMSDL events.

## Supervision

Students must be accompanied at CTMSDL events by adults who agree to be responsible for supervising them and who possess their emergency contact information. Those adults must also abide by their schools' policies regarding permission slips, up to date health forms, medications such as epi-pens, etc.

## Observing CTMSDL Policies

All scrimmage and tournament attendees are responsible for knowing and observing CTMSDL policies. Each team's coach is responsible for ensuring that their attendees are aware of and abide by these policies (see Important CTMSDL Policies in this Handbook).

## CTMSDL Parliamentary Debate Format

Speeches: Each speaker presents one speech per round. Each team is allotted two minutes of preparation time during a round, as designated in the chart below.

| Speech                                   | Duration      |
|------------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Proposition Constructive | 5 min         |
| Prep time                                | 1 min         |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Opposition Constructive  | 5 min         |
| Prep time                                | 1 min         |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Proposition Constructive | 5 min         |
| Prep time                                | 1 min         |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Opposition Constructive  | 5 min         |
| Opposition Rebuttal                      | 5 min         |
| Prep time                                | 1 min         |
| Proposition Rebuttal                     | 5 min         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                             | <b>34 min</b> |

**Grace Periods:** Every speech has a 15 second grace period. Judges stop flowing and cut debaters off when the grace period ends.

**Monitoring Time:** Timekeepers (if available) and judges are responsible for timing speeches and prep time. Debaters are also encouraged to time speeches.

**Prep Time:** Prep time is built into the structure of the round; teams do not request prep time. Prep time is mandatory, not optional. Prep time in addition to what is specified above may not be taken. Notice that two minutes are given before opposition speeches and two minutes are given before proposition speeches.

**Judges:** Debaters refer to judges as *judge* or *speaker*. Judges listen to all speeches, take notes (flow), choose winning and losing teams, assign points and rank in room to all debaters, and provide short verbal critiques and written critiques on ballots. Judges do not disclose the winner or speaker points in the room – they do so on the ballot only.

**Constructive Speeches:** Lines of reasoning are presented during the first four speeches of the round, called the Constructive phase of the debate. The first proposition speaker has the right to define terms in the Motion. If the first proposition speaker does not define terms, the first OPPOSITION speaker may do so. If the Proposition team chooses to present a plan (details on how they would implement the motion), they must do so in the first proposition speech. If the opposition team proposes a counter-plan, they must do so in the first opposition speech. Plans and counter-plans are not required.

**POCs:** Time is paused while Points of Clarification (POC) are asked and answered. If the opposition team requires clarification of the definitions offered by the first Proposition speaker, an opposition debater should rise after definitions are presented and say, “point of clarification.” The first proposition speaker should then answer all of opposition’s questions about the definitions. This type of POC saves the round from becoming a long argument about what proposition’s definitions were or what they meant. It is not appropriate to ask a POC if the speaker does not understand the points their opponent is trying to make or if they think the speaker is speaking too quickly. POCs are not to be used to argue about definitions; that should be done during the first opposition speech.

**POIs:** During constructive speeches, speakers should be interrupted by points of information (POIs) – questions and/or remarks made by opponents to weaken the speaker’s case. A debater making a POI must stand. POIs are permitted during the middle three minutes of constructive speeches — the first and last minute and grace period are protected time. Speakers may accept the POI, dismiss it (with a hand gesture or a “not now”) or postpone it (“later”). Speakers must respond to accepted POIs. The best speakers weave responses to POIs into the flow of their speeches. It is considered poor form for the speaker to accept no POIs and for opponents to offer no POIs. Time is not paused for POIs.

**POOs:** CTMSDL allows one type of point of order (POO). If a debater believes the opposing team’s rebuttal speaker is making a new point, she or he may stand and say, “point of order.” As explained below in the rebuttal speeches section, new points are only allowed in the proposition rebuttal speech

if they are in response to new points introduced by the 2nd opposition speaker. The judge will stop the clock. The judge may ask the debater who called the POO to explain why he or she believes it is a new point. The judge should then ask the speaker to explain why it is not a new point. The judge will then say:

“Point well taken” if the judge agrees that the rebuttal speaker introduced a new argument.

“Point not well taken” if the judge disagrees and believes that it was not a new argument; or

“Point taken under consideration” if the judge needs to review her or his flow to determine if it was a new argument or not.

**Heckling and PPPs:** Heckling and Points of Personal Privilege (PPPs) are not used in CTMSDL.

**Rebuttal Speeches:** The first four speeches of a round are called the constructive phase of the debate because teams are constructing their cases for and against the motion using arguments and clash (refutations). The last two speeches are called the rebuttal phase. This is a bit of a misnomer because teams must rebut each other’s arguments in the constructive phase. Rebuttal speeches are for explaining to the judge why your team’s case wins the round. Rebuttal speakers do this by summarizing the clash, crystallizing the most important points in the round, and weighing the arguments. An excellent rebuttal speech essentially writes the ballot for the judge. The opposition rebuttal speaker goes first, after the second constructive speaker (called the opposition block). No new lines of argument may be presented during rebuttal speeches unless they are made by the proposition rebuttal speaker to refute new arguments presented in the second opposition constructive. The second opposition speaker should refute arguments introduced by second proposition speaker. Rebuttal speakers may support arguments and lines of reasoning presented during the constructive phase with new examples and illustrations if the underlying argument is not new.

**Pre-Written Speeches:** Debaters are expected to speak from notes and not to read from pre-written speeches. Coaches should instruct their students to speak instead of reading. We understand that middle school students may take time to develop confidence so while reading is strongly discouraged, it is not banned. Debaters should understand they will not receive as high of a score if they read.

| Speech                                   | Duration | Burdens                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Proposition Constructive | 5 min    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides clear definitions of the terms of the motion.</li> <li>May lay out a plan.</li> <li>Provides 2 or more clear arguments, each with a topic sentence, reasoning, evidence &amp; impacts.</li> <li>Speaks instead of reads</li> <li>Answers at least 1 POI, if offered.</li> </ul>                                                                      |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Opposition Constructive  | 5 min    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly states opp’s case.</li> <li>May lay out a counter-plan.</li> <li>Provides 2 or more clear arguments, each with a topic sentence, reasoning, evidence &amp; impacts.</li> <li>Explicitly refutes all prop arguments, including restatement of the prop argument with a directly related refutation of it.</li> <li>Speaks instead of reads.</li> </ul> |

|                                          |       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                          |       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Answers at least 1 POI, if offered.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Proposition Constructive | 5 min | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May introduce new prop arguments.</li> <li>• Rebuilds and extends 1st prop's arguments with new analysis &amp; examples.</li> <li>• Refutes opp's refutations.</li> <li>• Explicitly refutes all opp arguments.</li> <li>• Speaks instead of reads.</li> <li>• Answers at least 1 POI, if offered.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                 |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Opposition Constructive  | 5 min | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May introduce new opp arguments.</li> <li>• Rebuilds and extends 1st opp's arguments with new analysis &amp; examples.</li> <li>• Refutes prop's refutations.</li> <li>• Explicitly refutes all prop arguments.</li> <li>• Speaks instead of reads.</li> <li>• Answers at least 1 POI, if offered.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                 |
| Opposition Rebuttal                      | 5 min | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlights most important points of the round &amp; explains why each of these are more effectively dealt with on the opp side.</li> <li>• Analyzes why opp's impacts are more important/meaningful.</li> <li>• Crystallizes the whole round down to a central value(s) or key issue(s) and demonstrates why the opp side wins.</li> </ul>                                                                                    |
| Proposition Rebuttal                     | 5 min | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responds to any new opp points introduced in 2<sup>nd</sup> opp constructive.</li> <li>• Highlights most important points of the round &amp; explains why each of these are more effectively dealt with on the prop side.</li> <li>• Analyzes why prop's impacts are more important/meaningful.</li> <li>• Crystallizes the whole round down to a central value(s) or key issue(s) and demonstrates why prop wins.</li> </ul> |



## **FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE**

### **Arguments and Refutations**

Debaters' cases should be supported with sound reasoning. Each team has the obligation to clash with the arguments presented by their opponents (i.e. they should respond to their opponent's arguments specifically and in detail). Good debaters listen to their opponents and respond directly to their contentions, reasoning, evidence and examples. Teams are encouraged to point out when opponents have dropped arguments (offered no refutation) and judges should count dropped arguments against teams that drop them.

### **Contentions**

Arguments should be clear and concise. Good contentions always answer the question "why" for the proposition and "why not" for the opposition in response to the motion. There is no correct number of contentions to offer but one is probably too few to support a case and five is probably too many to defend adequately.

### **Organization**

Arguments should be presented in an orderly, logical way that's easy to follow. Speeches should be "signposted" (for example, "my second contention is..." or "in response to opposition's third contention..." or "in response to proposition's refutation of our example concerning...").

### **Presentation**

Debaters should address judges and audience members, not their opponents. They should make eye contact with judges and speak with conviction. Good debaters use all their time effectively. The very best debaters use a wide range of vocabulary, wit and tone and volume to emphasize points. Debaters should not read pre-written speeches. Team members may confer with each other but they should do so quietly, so they don't disrupt the speaker. Team members may not speak to their team's speaker while that speaker is at the podium.

### **Asking POIs**

Teams should offer several POIs during their opponents' constructive speeches. POIs can be used to:

- Ask for clarification of arguments or evidence or examples;
- Point out a contradiction in an oppositiononent's case;
- Respond to an argument;
- Point out a factual error or misstatement;
- Preview an upcoming argument;
- Inject some humor into the round.

## **Answering POIs**

Each constructive speaker should accept at least one POI, if offered. Obviously, speakers should not be penalized for not accepting POIs if their opponents don't offer them. Speakers should not interrupt the flow of their speeches to accept POIs; instead, they should wait until finishing their idea before accepting. It is ok to wave a POI down or tell an opponent you'll accept the POI later. Good debaters are not derailed by POIs, rather they turn them to their advantage.

## **Civility**

Debaters should be polite and respectful. They should be emphatic but never rude.

## **FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF JUDGING PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE**

### **Before the Round**

Pull up your ballot on Tabroom and make sure the debaters in the room are those listed on your ballot. DEBATERS WILL NOT SPEAK IN THE ORDER LISTED ON YOUR BALLOT SO MAKE SURE YOU KNOW WHO IS SPEAKING IN WHICH POSITION! When all debaters are present, press START.

### **During the Round**

Flow! Coaches and debaters can teach you how to keep track of arguments before you judge for the first time. Judges are responsible for timekeeping if no timer is assigned to the round. Use silent hand signals warning students that their time is running short. Use a clap or knock to announce when the grace period has ended and announce when prep time begins and ends.

### **After the Round**

Congratulate debaters and encourage them to congratulate their opponents. Ask debaters to leave the room and submit win/loss, points and ranks. Then call the debaters back into the room and give them some verbal feedback. Next, enter your RFD and comments. You'll have until 9 pm to finish your ballots. Results are confidential and are not to be disclosed until after trophies are awarded. Decide which team won based on Judging Instructions. Then, use the speaker score rubric chart to rank speakers from first to sixth and assign speaker points. Debaters may tie on speaker points but not rank. The losing team may have more points than the winning team (a low point win). We ask judges to explain low point wins to Tab.

### **Questions, Concerns**

Talk to any CTMSDL Board member. After a tournament, email [inquiry@ctmsdebate.org](mailto:inquiry@ctmsdebate.org) with questions, comments, suggestions, etc.

### **Civility**

Judges, as well as debaters, should always be polite and respectful. Judges may caution any debater who the judge believes is not behaving properly. Judges should note that debates are competitive and exciting. Judges shouldn't discourage enthusiasm and passion.

#### **Tips for Effective Judging:**

- Avoid bias. Don't allow your personal opinions on the motion being debated to influence your decision. Base your decision only upon what you heard the debaters say.
- Debaters can't be expected to know what you know so don't hold them to that standard.
- Don't interrupt the debate except to stop time for POCs & POOs.
- Use common sense to handle any interruptions that happen.

- Terms should be defined by the first proposition speaker. First proposition the right to present reasonable definitions. First opposition may define terms not defined by first proposition and may dispute what they think are unreasonable definitions and offer their own, reasonable ones.
- New arguments may be raised in any constructive speech. New arguments may not be made in Rebuttal speeches unless the second opposition speaker introduced a new argument: those should be refuted in the proposition rebuttal speech. Second opposition should refute any new points introduced by second proposition. Disregard new arguments even if the opponents do not call a POO.
- During rebuttal speeches, debaters should support existing arguments with new illustrations and examples as long as the underlying reasoning is not new.
- A dropped argument is an argument that the opposing team ignores. Those arguments are won by the team that made them.
- Never comment on or consider a debater's appearance or clothing when judging a round.

## **IMPORTANT CTMSDL POLICIES**

### **Motions**

The CTMSDL Motion Committee is responsible for choosing motions for scrimmages and tournaments. They may solicit ideas from debaters and coaches, but they are not obligated to choose from among those. The committee will do its best to release motions four weeks prior to a scrimmage or tournament.

### **Judges**

The CTMSDL Board will do its best to recruit varsity CDA debaters to judge. Next, if necessary, CTMSDL coaches will be asked to judge. When there aren't enough student or coach judges, coaches will be asked to bring additional adults to judge. Coaches are expected to provide their judges (including High School debaters) with this Handbook and Judging Instructions well before events. CTMSDL will hold judges' training workshops at tournaments before competition begins.

### **Supervision of Students**

To attend any scrimmage or tournament, students must be accompanied by an adult who possesses their emergency contact information and agrees to be responsible for supervising all students in their charge. Those adults must follow their teams' and schools' rules regarding supervision and acquisition of permission slips and emergency contact information.

### **Policy Regarding Observers**

We want to encourage debaters to become comfortable speaking in public. We welcome observers to watch CTMSDL rounds.

### **Policy Regarding Ethics in Argumentation and Evidence**

Debaters are expected to be truthful and honest with respect to the arguments they make and the evidence and examples they cite. Debaters should not lie or fabricate evidence or examples or use evidence or examples that they know to be untrue. Judges should not penalize students for misspeaking or for honest mistakes. However, blatant or flagrant dishonesty should be penalized in judging a round. The CTMSDL Board may expel students who repeatedly violate these standards. Any further disciplinary actions are at the discretion of the CTMSDL Board.

### **Policy Regarding Rudeness**

Debaters, judges and coaches are expected to be polite and respectful to each other. Shouting, bullying, harassment, threats, violence, name-calling, insults, unbecoming language, or any similar behavior is never appropriate at any time during debates. Debaters may be emphatic but not rude. A judge may caution debaters, who, in the opinion of the judge, overstep the bounds of acceptable behavior. The

appropriate penalty for rude behavior is a reduction in speaker points and a corresponding reduction in ranks on the ballot, or, in extreme cases, directed loss. A judge may, in the face of flagrant misbehavior, end the debate and declare a directed loss against the offending team. Incidents of rudeness should be reported to the CTMSDL President. Any further disciplinary actions are at the discretion of the CTMSDL Board.

### **Policy Regarding Student Attire**

There is no CTMSDL dress code. For all CTMSDL events, students are expected to uphold their team's and or their school's dress code standards. Judges should not speak to students about students' attire and students' attire is not to be considered in judging the rounds.

### **Policy Regarding Electronic Devices and Hardcopy Resources**

#### **Prep ahead rounds**

Debaters may use devices and/ or hard copies of cases, notes, speeches and sources during prep-ahead rounds to deliver, flow and time speeches. Debaters may not research during prep-ahead rounds. Debaters may research between prep-ahead rounds.

#### **Extemp rounds**

Debaters may not use devices before or during extemp rounds for any purpose other than timing speeches. They must use paper to prepare cases, deliver speeches, and flow. No research is allowed before or during extemp rounds. Debaters must use only what's in their and their partners' heads. Debaters may not use hard copy prep ahead cases to prep extemp cases. (Exceptions will be made for debaters with IEPs that require them to use devices.) The use of electronic devices for research by debaters and coaches is prohibited during CTMSDL Rounds. It is allowed before and after prep ahead rounds. This includes, but is not limited to, computers and phones and any other electronic device that could be used for the collection, preparation and/or storage of data. Students may use phones and other time-keeping devices to time their speeches. Students with accommodations for handwriting difficulty may use computers to flow.

### **Policy Regarding Hardcopy Resources**

Students may bring hard copies of notes, speeches and sources with them into debate rounds.