

The Role of the Audience

High School Debating

For the Audience: Understanding Debating and Adjudication

Debates can be highly entertaining and engaging for both students and parents. In order to get the most out of the experience as an audience member it is important to have an understanding of the fundamentals of debating adjudication and how current practice has shifted over the last 30 years.

Generally speaking, adjudicators have shifted their focus away from presentation and delivery (Manner) and toward argumentation and logic (Matter). In current best practice, adjudicators make their decisions based around the idea of identifying which team was 'more persuasive' at the end of the argument.

It is important to understand that, just like in any competitive environment, sometimes decisions made by officials can be confusing, irritating, and very occasionally, contentious. These contentious decisions are generally found in close debates that are high quality and full of entertaining and engaging ideas with persuasive speakers. In this scenario it is important for audience members to remember two things:

1. The decision of an adjudicator is **final** and there has **never** been a decision overturned
2. A negative reaction from an audience member or coach can adversely affect the attitude of a team and tarnish their debating experience.

Given these ideas, it is even more important for parents and guardians to gain a better understanding of debating in order to encourage and support their children.

Keywords and Techniques used in Debating

- **Matter, Method and Manner** - The framework of content, structure and delivery that all debates are judged upon
- **Types of Debate** - Normative (Policy Debates) and Empirical (Cost Benefit/Comparative Debates)
- **Definitions** - A structural tool that provides an understanding of what is included in the scope of the debate and what is excluded from the debate
- **Models** - An outline of how a team, usually the affirmative, wants their policy to work. Models are only seen in Normative debates (debates with the word 'should' in the topic sentence)
- **Principles** - The ethical and moral questions surrounding the topic in question
- **Rebuttal and Engagement** - The way that teams listen and respond to each other during the debate. All debaters should engage with the content of their opposition as often as possible.
- **Logic** - The process of using deductive and inductive reasoning during a debate in order to prove that ideas are true or persuasive.

Things to remember for Audience Members:

- Debating is primarily about being persuasive
- Most debates come down to the idea of net benefit and detriment for the most amount of stakeholders
- There are no 'instant losses' in debating
- Adjudicators in high school debates (generally) do not give scores
- There are no hard and fast rules of debating
- Both sides of the arguments (affirmative and negative) are equal in difficulty
- Public speaking and debating are different - debates concentrate much more on the content rather than delivery.
- Engaging in the important issues in a debate is key to taking the initiative and winning the debate