**HOW TO JUDGE SPEECH TOURNAMENTS**

**Bancroft Speech Team**

First and foremost, thank you for volunteering to judge! We could not compete if it were not for our judges. Most judges greatly enjoy their day and come back very impressed. So welcome, and thanks again.

**The Basics**

There are 16 distinct speech events at any Massachusetts tournament. (You can read specific descriptions of each at www.massforensics.org/events.mhtml.) Thankfully, the same basic standard applies in each, namely which student communicated the best with the audience. Each event has details dealing with structure, eye-contact, characterization, etc, but all of those are secondary to the evaluation of which student presented their point or characterization most clearly. That, most simply, is what you are being asked to judge.

**The Shape of the Day**

Speech tournaments often seem chaotic; however, with the advent of computer-managed tournaments, they tend to run fairly smoothly (if a little late.) Keep in mind, that in the midst of the chaos, a judge’s responsibilities are fairly simple; you must arrive at your rounds as close to on time as possible, manage the round while it occurs, fill out the ballots with constructive comments, and promptly return the ballots to the Tab room. That’s it!

Your day will start at Bancroft, usually early. Most of the students will ride to the tournament on the bus. You are welcome to ride on the bus, although at times, we have enough students attending that we will need you to drive students in your own car. **In order to drive and/or judge, you must have undergone a CORI check. To do so, you have to come to the business office with your driver’s license a few days before the tournament.**

Once we arrive at the tournament, the Bancroft coaches will register the team. Once registered, the coaches will give you your judge’s number/code and your schedule for the day along with room numbers.

The tournament consists of three preliminary rounds in each event followed by a final round in each. Each preliminary round has one judge while each final round has three judges. Most rounds consist of five or six speakers.

Before the first round starts, there will be a judges’ meeting where the individual events will be described and you can ask questions. Ballots for the first round are usually distributed at the end of the judges meeting.

During the day, you may judge every round, but usually you will be free for 1 of the first 3 rounds. During free time, you can join the team in the cafeteria. Also there is often a more peaceful judges’ lounge which will generally have coffee, snacks, etc. for judges.

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You should eat lunch when it is convenient between rounds. The tournament will sell pizza, bagels, etc. Tournament food is generally of snack bar quality so if you prefer something else, you should bring your own.

After the 3 preliminary rounds, there will be an hour or so of waiting before they post which students broke to finals. When finals are posted, you should check each posting to see if you are judging a final round. If so, you need to pick up your ballots and make your way to that round. If not, go watch Bancroft students who broke to finals.

After finals, the entire team sits together in the auditorium during the Awards Assembly.

**Judging a Round**

Before the round begins:

When you judge a round, remember that you are really an educator. Some of the students you see will be remarkably talented and polished; some will be at their very first tournament. Your goal is to help them all come away from this tournament with an idea of how to do better next time. Try to make your demeanor one that will make the students comfortable. Remember, however, that you are the authority in the room and should stop any behavior that distracts from another student’s performance.

When you get to most rounds, the students will write their numbers, titles and authors on the board, if applicable. You should write that information in the appropriate place on each ballot. There is usually a list of competitors’ numbers in the upper corner of your first ballot. Please check to make sure none of the students are in the wrong place.

Some students may be “double entered.” They may ask to speak first in the round or may show up late because they were speaking first elsewhere. They will usually write “DE” next to their number on the board. Work them in as convenient.

REMIND EVERYBODY TO TURN OFF THEIR CELL PHONES.

Have the students randomly draw for speaking order. A scratch piece of paper does the trick, but you can also bring a set of playing cards to use for this purpose. The exception to this process is in the draw events of Extemporaneous Speaking and Radio Broadcasting where the students will be sent to you one-by-one in the proper order. There is also no need to draw for speaking order in Group Discussion.

During the performances:

Each student will get up one by one to deliver his or her piece. You should write comments on the ballots during each performance; students expect you to do so, but try to look up as much as possible. It is often best to just watch the student for the first minute or so without writing anything. Even if you are writing “Amazing beginning,” starting to write quickly often makes the students think they’ve already made a mistake.

Students may request time signals so they know how much time they have remaining. You should hold up a number of fingers corresponding to the amount of time left. A big C indicates 30 seconds left; a fist indicates time has elapsed. Remember that in almost all events, the student then has 30 seconds of grace period. NEVER STOP A STUDENT. If a student goes beyond the grace period, note that clearly on the ballot and be sure to tell the Tab room when you turn in your ballots.

Once the student is done, finish writing your comments on their ballot, but try to do so expeditiously so that the tournament can move along. If the next student stands while you are writing, feel free to ask them to wait.

Remember to write comments about what the student did well AND ways they could improve. The more specific the better. Students hate ballots that just say “Good job” with no indication of why they didn’t win the round. They will hang on every word you write, so be fair, clear and constructive. NEVER be sarcastic, pointed or harsh.

At the end of the round, you must also rank the speakers from 1 to 6 (or however many are in the round). Remember that 1 is best. There can be no ties. The Bancroft coaches can show you an easy “dot system” for ranking the students as each one competes.

You also must give the students Quality Points ranging from 70-100. Again, no ties. In this era of grade inflation, you should only give a student less than 88 if they stumble or clearly do not know their piece well. 100 means you couldn’t have expected any better. Above 96 means you would expect to see the student in finals. It is always better to err on the side of generosity; only very rarely do these have any impact on who gets to finals.

If the round is over and others are waiting outside the room to begin their next round, vacate the room and finish your ballots elsewhere. Once you are done with your ballots, drop them at the Tab room ASAP. They will give you ballots for your next round.

How to rank the students:

This can be very hard at times. Pay attention to the specific criteria on the ballot, but in the end, the winner is the best communicator: the one who touched you or convinced you. Remember, however, that you are judging the performance not the piece itself. Consider the following:

1) Is the student familiar with the piece? Are their gestures appropriate? In non-interpretation events, do they make good eye-contact? Is their rate, tone, use of pauses, volume, etc. conducive to helping you understand the piece?

2) In an interpretation category, are the characters given life? Are you transported into their world? Are their personalities clear and believable. Keep in mind that best doesn’t necessarily mean the funniest or the saddest; it means the most convincing. Remember that one character done in depth is not inherently easier than multiple characters.

3) In Extemporaneous Speaking, does the student answer the question? A brilliant speech that avoids the question asked should be ranked last.

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**What to Bring**

• A writing utensil or two.

• A notebook to write on.

• A stopwatch if you have one. (The Bancroft coaches will bring several to loan.)

• A book or something to pass the time between rounds if you aren’t judging.

**Miscellaneous**

• Dress code—The students will be quite dressed up. Most will be wearing suits. That level of dressiness is not necessary for judges. Slacks are fine, as are a nice pair of jeans.

• Appropriateness—According to Massachusetts Forensic League rules, any piece appearing in a tournament is assumed to be “appropriate” and to have been approved by the student’s coach. Do not downgrade pieces you personally find offensive or inappropriate. In extreme cases, talk to a tournament official or a Bancroft coach.

• Interventionist judges

—Keep in mind that you are judging the student’s performance not the piece itself (The main exceptions being Extemporaneous Speaking and Original Oratory where judging the piece is part of the process.) Therefore do not rank a student lower just because you hate Shakespeare or have seen The Crucible a million times. If a student makes an argument with which you disagree, but may be true to a reasonable person, you should not use that as a judging criterion. However, if the point is unsupported or unclear, or if a character is poorly performed, you should rank the performance lower.

—Similarly, be very careful of ranking a student lower because you think he or she has broken the rules of the event. The students know the rules well and usually are within the boundaries of what is acceptable. If you think there has been a violation of the rules, postpone your final ranking until you have talked to a tournament official in the Tab room or to a Bancroft coach.