

【研究ノート/Research Note】

## **Building Judging Quality in Newly Developing English Parliamentary Debate Communities**

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As English parliamentary debate becomes more popular around the world, building judging quality is a challenge that new and developing communities inevitably face. As such communities suffer from a lack of experienced judges, they must find a way to both ensure an acceptable level of quality in adjudication at tournaments and build judging quality. This article surveys this issue by identifying three key areas of focus: (1) employing a balanced judging rubric, (2) adopting a conferral judging process, and (3) implementing a system of training and evaluating judges. For each area, an authoritative Worlds-level tournament's implementation along with a national or regional circuit's adaptation is discussed, in order to identify implementable benchmarks. Based on this analysis of best practices, this article provides practical recommendations for refining the quality of judging and tournament experience within nascent and developing English parliamentary debating communities.

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### **1. Introduction**

Debating has long received broad recognition as a valuable educational tool for developing a wide variety of essential skills, such as critical thinking (Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, & Loudon, A, 1999; Colbert, 1995), reading and writing abilities (Green & Klug, 1990), communication and social competence (Darby, 2007; Park, Kim, & Kim, 2016), argumentation skills (Simonneaux, 2001), confidence (Jerome & Algarra, 2005), and academic attainment (Collier, 2004; Mezuk,

2009). But amongst these, English parliamentary debating style has recently enjoyed the greatest amount of international distribution, having been adopted, in slightly different formulations, as the debating style of choice in the two “Worlds-level” tournaments (World Universities Debating Championship and World Schools Debating Championships), as well as many of the highly attended regional and international tournaments around the world. As such, both communities that have relatively recently introduced English debate into their curriculum and/or extra-curricular activities (e.g. Vietnam, Cambodia) as well as those that have already had a history of teaching English debate and running English debate tournaments (e.g. United States, Japan) have adopted parliamentary debating as either the primary or one of the major debating styles.

While the choice of style may matter less in the classroom, where teachers both plan and execute debates according to the educational purpose they set, the choice of style affects tournaments a great deal, as it has implications on how students prepare, deliver speeches, and are evaluated by judges. In order for tournaments to have educational value by providing students the opportunity to showcase and refine skills while seeking to win a competition as in team sports (Warren, 1983), ensuring a high quality of judging is essential. But communities that newly incorporate English parliamentary debate inevitably suffer from a dearth of quality judges and must turn to inexperienced judges (usually judges who have experience in non-parliamentary debating styles or judges without any judging experience altogether) when hosting tournaments. While time and experience will help mitigate such issues, and turning to external help (i.e. inviting quality judges from more established circuits) can help hasten the process of development, it is also important for such communities to approach the issue of developing a judge pool with a clear plan. The following analysis is intended to provide some guidelines for doing so, by identifying three key areas of focus: (1) employing a balanced judging rubric, (2) implementing a “conferral judging” process, and (3) adopting a system of training and evaluating judges. After a discussion of each area of focus, an example of an authoritative, Worlds-level tournament and a national or regional circuit’s adaptation is provided as a benchmark that can be followed.

## **2. Employing a balanced judging rubric**

Judging rubric (also referred to as “judge sheet”, “mark sheet,” “ballot,” etc.) identifies what a judge must pay attention to during the course of a debate, and as such, determines the

mechanism utilized by a judge to reach a decision (Ulrich, 1986). Judging rubrics can run the range from being extremely detailed and numbers-oriented to being vague and comments-oriented.

At one side of the range, detailed, number-oriented rubrics provides a specific list of elements for judges to consider (“checklist judging), requiring judges to look out for and mark each item as it appears during the course of the debate. Such items may include role fulfillment (how a speaker performed their given role), how many arguments or pieces of evidence were provided, how their verbal/nonverbal style rated, etc. This method is often adopted in new communities, because it makes the job of judges far easier, which makes it especially attractive for tournaments that must employ inexperienced judges. However, this method leads to less sophisticated and comprehensive evaluation of debates because judges are focusing on just the items on the checklist without being able to compare and evaluate the main issues of clash in the debate. For example, they may focus on the number of arguments provided rather than the impact of those arguments. They may also award wins based on role fulfillment technicality (e.g. whether a team had speakers exceeding the time limit, whether a speaker accepted points of information, etc.) without weighing the impact of role fulfillment on overall persuasion. This leads to a mismatch between what average reasonable individuals versus judges employing a checklist consider to be a winning case. This not only means decisions and feedbacks will be less satisfactory to students, it also harms the educational impact of hosting debate tournaments.

On the other end of the spectrum are broad, comment-based rubrics, perhaps without any scores or only a single, cumulative score for each team. This, combined with an inexperienced judging pool, means that each judge will employ their own judging standard, potentially leading to more decisions that are perceived to be illegitimate or interventionist. Not having a clear judging standard means that result of a round is determined more based on what a judge wants to hear as opposed to an objective evaluation of the quality of arguments. This incentivizes debaters to spend less time developing their knowledge base and skills as debaters and more time worrying about who will judge them.

What is preferable to the two extremes described above is to adopt a more balanced judging rubric. Such rubrics provide clear guidelines for what is an effective speech while guiding judges to focus on key issues and clashes that take place in the debate. Discussed below are some examples of key parliamentary debate tournaments that employ a more balanced rubric, which newly developing parliamentary debating communities can benchmark.

**World Schools Debating Championships (WSDC):** World Schools (WSDC) requires judges to consider three elements: *style*, *content*, and *strategy*. While the rubric provides explanations for how to score each of these elements, judges are provided with a level of flexibility, with the mark sheet providing just a guideline to view the debate. In fact, in cases where scores do not reflect a win-loss result that the judge believes justified, judges are encouraged to correct the mark sheet, as opposed to correcting their decision to match the points indicated in the mark sheet (WSDC Tournament Committee, 2017).

**Canadian National Debate Format (CNDF):** CNDF looks at five elements: *content and evidence*, *argument and reasoning*, *organization*, *presentation and delivery*, and *refutation and rebuttal*. (Canadian National Debate, 2012). Similar to WSDC, the ballot is designed to provide a guideline on how to evaluate the debate. As such, they are encouraged to provide a holistic score of the debate before filling out each section of the ballot, rather than filling out each section, then adding them up to deliver a total score.

### **3. Adopting a conferral judging process**

“Conferral judging” refers to a process (implemented in British Parliamentary circuits) whereby at the conclusion of a debate, the panel of judges spends a set period of time discussing (or “conferring”) the round between themselves as a process of decision making. This can be distinguished from “independent judging,” (implemented in WSDC and Asian Parliamentary circuits) where judges are required to reach a decision without having any discussions with other members of the panel. Since nascent communities tend to have only a small number of skilled and experienced judges, it is recommended that tournaments adopt conferral judging as opposed to independent judging. Because independent judging provides every member of the judging panel with equal weight, with no member of the panel influencing each member’s decision, this process functions well when quality of all members of the panel can be reasonably assured. However, this process functions less effectively when there is a small number of experienced judges, as they are provided with the same weight as inexperienced judges. Furthermore, because discussion is largely forbidden among the judges, there is little room for educational exchange and growth as a result of judging together in panels. On the other hand, conferral judging encourages judges to discuss the debate as they each saw it, going over key clashes, assuring that each member of the panel is

applying the rules properly, and going over the rationale for the decision critically. This usually leads to more well-reasoned decisions and better feedbacks for debaters. The interaction between experienced and inexperienced adjudicators means that each round can be a clinic where inexperienced adjudicators can learn from their more experienced counterparts. And even in a case where a panel is wholly made up of inexperienced adjudicators, they can still share their own insights and feed off each other, developing their skillsets as a result.

**World Universities Debating Championship (WUDC):** World Universities Debating Championship is the most prestigious debate tournament at the university level. It employs conferral judging, as is the case for all other tournaments that follow the British Parliamentary format (WUDC Debating and Judging Manual, 2018). The conferral process is led by the chair of the panel, with each member being asked to provide their initial rankings (there are four teams in BP debates) with justifications. During the conferral process, judges talk about the round and are strongly encouraged to reach consensus on team rankings, as well as speaker points, with votes only being reserved for situations where judges cannot reach a consensus.

**Canadian National Debate Format (CNDF):** CNDF allows tournaments to implement independent or conferral judging (or both). Conferral judging in CNDF encourages judges to remind each other of the key points in the debate and discuss views and has less emphasis on reaching a consensus. CNDF has adopted this choice-mechanism, being a circuit that has a mixture of regions, where some regions may have a strong majority of experienced judges while other regions may have a smaller number of experienced judges.

#### **4. Implementing a system of training and evaluating judges**

While rubrics and process of judging have a large indirect influence in the development of judging quality, there also needs to be a direct system of training and evaluating judges to build judging quality more effectively. These can be broadly divided into measures to be implemented *before* the tournament and *during* the tournament.

Before rounds begin, it is effective to have an educational workshop/briefing session and a pre-tournament test for judges. First, tournament briefings and/or workshops should be organized, as these provide a direct opportunity for judges to be educated and calibrated. At such workshops

or briefings, debaters should be invited to come as well, to provide clarity and transparency for both groups of participants. Second, pre-tournament judge tests should be organized to provide a pre-tournament analysis of the judge pool. This can be conducted by requiring judges to watch a round (either a live debate onsite or a video recording of a debate), evaluate it, and give their oral and/or written adjudication to the Chief Adjudicator(s). This may be supplemented with a multiple-choice test (with the ability to provide comments) to test for familiarity with debate rules. However, a test that involves actually judging a round tends to provide a truer elucidation of judging level in most cases.

After educating and testing judges before the tournament, Chief Adjudicator(s) should also implement a system of evaluating judges' performance during the actual tournament itself. For this, judge evaluations, both debater-to-judge and judge-to-judge, should be made mandatory. Doing so provides several benefits. First, it provides debaters with a feedback mechanism in the event they feel the decision was either inadequate or not reflective of the round. Second, it allows for an evaluation that is not fueled by emotional debaters who have a vested interest in the decision, providing a check against potentially emotional debater feedback. Third, it allows for more transparency in the event there is a judge break, because the tournament should be able to release a judge tab similar to the team tab. Fourth, it allows for the Chief Adjudicator(s) to track performances of judges throughout the tournament and provide advice or educational feedback to judges as necessary. Finally, it allows judges to objectively analyze their own performance tournament after the tournament, providing them a key reflective opportunity to measure their own development.

**World Schools Debating Championships (WSDC):** WSDC schedules mandatory full-day judge training session prior to the beginning of rounds. It also requires all judges to take one or two pre-tournament test, using test results to determine whether a judge should be a Chair, Panelist, or a Trainee. During the tournament, teams are required to rate each member of the panel upon the conclusion of each round. Judges are also required to fill out feedback about each member of their panel at the end of each round (WSDC Tournament Committee, 2017). Scores collected from these processes before and during the tournament are used (in combination with an awareness for diversity needs) to determine judge breaks.

**United Asian Debating Championship (UADC):** UADC is the regional championship for Asian universities that uses the Asian Parliamentary debating format. UADC provides a debater and judge briefing prior to the beginning of rounds, which both debaters and judges are required to attend. It also implements a pre-tournament judge test, usually involving two sections, the first being a test that examines a judge's knowledge of rules and applications and the second being a test that requires judges to view a live and/or online debate and provide a decision with justifications. During the tournament, UADC requires each member of the panel to deliver a 5 minutes oral adjudication to teams, with other members of the panel being required to stay outside of the debating chamber. Communication between judges is strictly forbidden. Debaters are required to then fill in feedback about each judge. Judge to judge feedback does not exist, as judges are not allowed to watch other judges provide feedback. Judge break is determined by a combination of feedbacks, and the pre-tournament test score (UADC Tournament Rules, 2010). This mechanism puts a premium on forcing each judge to deliver an independent oral adjudication each round and places the greatest amount of evaluative authority on debater-to-judge feedback.

## **5. Conclusion**

Communities attempting to adopt English parliamentary debating will inevitably go through growing pains. Finding a way to assure adequate quality and coming up with a system to nurture judges poses challenges that must be overcome in order to provide a satisfactory experience for students participating in tournaments. Implementing some of the best practices at Worlds-level and adapting them at regional levels, developed through years of trial-and-error processes, can hasten the development process for new parliamentary debating communities. By (1) employing a balanced judging rubric, (2) implementing a “conferral judging” process, and (3) adopting a system of training and evaluating judges, new and developing communities can establish a uniform standard that can help improve the quality of judging immediately and provide a mechanism where few numbers of experienced judges can train inexperienced judges, building judging quality in the long term. By doing so, such communities can fully actualize the value of English parliamentary debating, benefitting from the variety of educational gains it has proven to provide.

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