



Tournament Best Practices

NDCA Development
May 2016

Basic Rules of Engagement

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- A tournament director is a manager
 - One job - have everyone else do *their* jobs

Before You Start – Basic Issues

- Are you offering the right activities?
- Who can attend?
- Are the fields manageable?

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 - Parli?
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- Manage the field
 - Deserves its own slide

How to Manage Entries

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- Evenly distribute the slots after a two week open entry period
- Avoid the temptation to let in imbalanced entries from large schools.
 - They are problematic to tab
 - They do not make your other customers happy.

What do Your Customers Want?

- Good judging
- Reasonable time management
 - Prep time plus time for critiques
- Clear schedule, including break requirements
 - Do all down-twos break? What are you breaking to? That sort of thing.
- Good, fair tabbing
 - No hanky panky, preferably completely open.
- Comfortable rounds
 - Not in the first stall on the left in the men's room.
- Decent hospitality, physical and mental
 - Good food, good places to hang out, information readily available.
 - Concierge table!

Judging Basics

- Judging is your customers' number one requirement. Good judging sells a tournament.
- Hire more great judges than you need, and don't sell them back to the field
- Use your judges to the fullest extent to provide your customers with the best prefs possible
- But do give your judges a break. No one should have to judge every prelim.
- Pay your alums. The alternative is paying someone else's alums.
- Use services; start one if you need to. Hit up the judges who are already coming. Ask around. Any tournament that just hired judges has a list they're probably happy to share.

Judging

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- “Lay” judges

Number of Judges

- One of the worse things I see is when local tournaments (and even some bid tournaments) don't hire enough judges.
 - You need not just enough to cover the tournament, but extra.
 - You need 1 judge for every 1.5 policy teams and 2.5 LD/PF teams for the optimal tournament, regardless how you arrange obligations.
 - I recommend about a 10% overage beyond absolute needs.
- Don't sell your overage
 - Always keep a 10% overage for the house
 - Only sell judges about the overage
- Never sell judges you don't have
 - People don't want to buy arithmetic
 - And arithmetic can't judge rounds when all your real people have gone home

Not having enough judges can end your tournament before it's over. Don't let it happen to you!

Judge Obligations

- By the round
- For the entire tournament
- Whichever you do, announce the elim policy clearly before the tournament starts; it's the same for both
 - Recommend that you state a round through which all judges are obligated (rather than “first elim” which could be a run-off)
 - Then add a +1 for one's own team's participation

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 - You have overage/leeway of 30 rounds ($180-150$)
 - Partially obligated (average 3 rds) $30 * 3 = 90$ rounds
 - In a field of 50, that's 150 rounds needed
 - You have a deficit of 60 rounds ($150-90$)
 - You need 20 more judges ($20 \text{ judges} * 3 \text{ rounds}$)

Judge Obligations— By the Round

- Increases the number of higher preffed judges with mandated rounds off
 - Fewer people will get their most favored judges
 - Because they're out either scouting them to beat them later
 - Or sleeping in the judges' lounge
 - More people getting better preps = happier customers
 - Fewer people getting better preps = unhappier customers
- This is the TD's call. By-the-round obligations require more judges, and result in worse prefs. The math is unassailable.
 - BTW, makes no difference in the tab room, if you're staff is paying attention to not burning obligations early.

Judge Obligations

- For the entire tournament
 - On for every round, plus the mandated elim rounds
 - Small tournaments, every round till its over
- Your tab room needs to give everyone at least one round off
 - Even your hires, but they're the last to get a break
- In PF, there's often a lot of judge overage. Make sure to spread the obligation fairly among all of them.
 - No one wants to think they've been forgotten by the computer.

Mutual Judge Preferences

- Is it right for your tournament?

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- Tabroom isn't perfect
 - Always maximize prefs
 - And watch for imbalances in elims

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- But keep them preffed, but inactive
 - Just in case...

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- Make the number meaningful
 - It increases with the size of the pool.
 - Recommendation: between 5% and 10% of the pool
 - 10% is commensurate with MJP strikes

Conflicts

- The people who love you too much
 - We already have prefs and strikes for the people who hate you
 - Not monitoring conflicts allows unlimited strikes
 - Severe penalties need to be set for any misuse
 - Not noting a favorable judge
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- Follow the guidelines
 - Send to all participants and judges
 - People can't say they thought they were something else
 - Outline the penalties
 - Might want to include a penalty for not disclosing until a round is set
 - Since it penalizes *somebody*

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- Sometimes they're the only adults with a team.



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 - Follow the speech guidelines on the ballot

What do Your Customers Want?

- Good judging
- Reasonable time management
 - Prep time plus time for critiques
- Clear schedule, including break requirements
 - Do all down-twos break? What are you breaking to? That sort of thing.
- Good, fair tabbing
 - No hanky panky, preferably completely open.
- Comfortable rounds
 - Not in the first stall on the left in the men's room.
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- Reasonable time management
 - Prep time plus time for critiques
 - Half hour between announcement and start time is maximal
 - 15 minutes MAX for critiques
 - AFTER the ballots are submitted

What do Your Customers Want?

- Clear schedule, including break requirements
 - A schedule should be posted with the invitation.
 - All updates publicly announced and posted
 - Do all down-twos break? What elim are you breaking to? That sort of thing.
 - In smaller, less predictable events, you might not know ahead of time.
 - But post it as soon as you do

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 - Tab staff can be an advertisement for, and a draw for, your tournament
 - Known tab staff with good reputations can drive business your way

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Concierge Table!

Where do people go if they have a question?

Where do people go if they need ballots (and there's always a few PF parents who do, plus the occasional loose-brained LD or Policy judge)?

Where do people go if they need help setting up tabroom.com?

Where do people go if they need directions to room 101?

Concierge Table!

The Hub of Your Tournament

- The concierge staff is two or three of your best and brightest.
- The only people at the table should be the people working the table, on their side of the table. It is not the tournament playground.
- The table needs to be very close to the tab room.
- The people at the table need to know that they are NOT running the tournament, they are running the help desk.
- A table should look like a table, not a collection of food containers, computers streaming “Breaking Bad”, textbooks, poker decks and anything else that gets in the way of the people at the table and your customers. Also, no one at the table should be eating better food than the attendees of the tournament.
- If anyone sitting at your table is, or would be, a highly preferred judge, then find someone else for the table. That is, don’t put in alums who should be judging.
- The table should never be unattended. Ever.
- If you’re actually collecting ballots, the table needs to understand how ballots work, and to check each one carefully. It’s easier to find the judge standing in front of you than to find the judge who dropped off the inaccurate ballot and then immediately drove off to Starbucks.
- There are worse places for the TD to be during the tournament than within hailing distance of the concierge table (which, as we said, is also near tab).

TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR'S TOOLKIT

This collection of documents is offered as help for folks running tournaments. Consider them as suggestions, aids for managing your tournament from start to finish. They are not intended to reflect the official procedures/rules of the NDCA. If you have documents like this you want to share, please pass them along (contact@debatecoaches.org).

- First things first. If you already run a tournament, you don't need this, but if you're just thinking about running a tournament, start here: [So you want to run a tournament.](#)
- **Guide to Tabroom.com:** A fairly exhaustive guide to how tabroom's debate tabbing software works, beyond the helps available in the program. Available both as a [pdf](#) of the entire guide, and a [webpage](#) breaking it down into smaller bite-sized pieces. Since this was written, tabroom has vastly improved its help screens, and this one has not been updated lately, but you can print it out and most of it is still accurate.
- **Setting up registration at a tournament:** The difference between a smooth registration process and a traffic jam is knowing how tabroom.com works, and how to use it to move people quickly out of the world and into your events. [This pdf](#) works regardless of whether you're actually doing your tabbing on tabroom. And consider this a **strong** recommendation: have an adult (maybe even the tournament director) run registration and, especially, collect the money and enter the amounts collected into the system.
- **E-Ballot instructions.** Using e-ballots and want to make sure your judges are plugged into tabroom.com? First, here are the instructions from one tournament, in a docx file. Edit it with your own wifi specs, and claim it as your own: [Word file for editing](#) Or, take this general [PDF](#) and distribute it without your own specific site instructions. It is probably a good idea to have a station set up somewhere for your judges to get connected throughout the tournament: often even the most constant of judges find they're no longer plugged into tabroom for some reason or other.
- **One approach to tournament conflicts, for teams and for judges** Distribute these before every tournament. (Note: these are not the NDCA's official rules on conflicts for its own tournament.)
- **Mutual Judge Preferences** Recommended as part of an invitation to events where a lot of the attendees in the LD field might not be familiar with MJP (although this population may be dwindling). This explains how MJP works in general, and urges all teams to use it as the best tool for engineering the activity towards their own preferences. (This article was also published in *Rostrum*.)
- If you're going to us MJP at your tournament, do it right. [MJP analysis](#)
- It is important to control who attends your tournament, for a variety of reasons. You may want to limit your tournament to official entries from bona fide high schools, for instance, which is standard practice. And you may want to manage the size of the fields to maintain balance in the competition. The waitlist is the tool for this: [Managing Entries: The Waitlist.](#)
- How to handle the assignment of [speaker points](#). This will especially help get new judges, e.g. PF parents, on the same page.
- An [introduction to PF](#) for parent/new judges. There's thoughts here on what to say at a short opening assembly, and a possible handout. You might use this in conjunction with the [NSDA's original handout](#).
- [How to judge](#) A collection of how-to materials for judging both speech and debate. Print up some of the relevant ones for your tournaments where you're training a lot of new judges.