

Congressional Debate/Student Congress

INTRODUCTION TO STUDENT CONGRESS:

- It takes a special kind of speaker to excel as a Congressman or Presiding Officer. Here's how Congress works: you prepare arguments and warrants to debate on the Affirmation or Negation of a series of bills and resolutions given to you weeks before the actual tournament. There are over 10 people debating against you and with you in your "House." There are a series of "motions" that comprise "parliamentary procedure," and a "Presiding Officer" determines the order of speakers. If this doesn't make sense to you, just start competing; you'll find that this is a surprisingly easy event to comprehend and master.
- Congress is a lot about roleplaying. You are a "Senator" or a "Representative," as are your competitors. The Presiding Officer is "Mr./Madame President." You can reference your "constituents," refer to the actual Congress's past decisions as "this Congress decided...", and talk about popular opinion in your "district."

CONGRESS STRUCTURE:

- Congressional Debate speeches last for up to three minutes. The first speech on each piece of legislation is known as the authorship speech.
- The authorship is followed by a mandatory one minute of cross-examination. One three minute speech in negation follows it, with another mandatory one minute of questioning. After these two three-minute speeches, debate continues with three minute speeches and one minute of questioning.
- Within this time, speakers must lay out two or three organized and logical arguments for why the chamber should vote for or against a given piece of legislation. The general format of a speech is as follows:

1. Introduction : Usually, speeches begin with some sort of attention-getting device, such as a quote or statistic. The introduction is then tied into the argument of the speech, as the speaker urges the chamber to vote one way or another. Often, the two or three main lines of argument are "foreshadowed" to give the audience an idea of where the speech is leading.

- Here are common types of introductions: historical (link the bill/resolution to a historical event), analogy (make a comparison between the bill/resolution and something else), refutation (quote what other competitors have stated and clash with one of their points), summarize (rehash the main points in the debate and state their relevance to the debate), quote (use a quotation and link it to the legislation), anecdote (provide a humorous or factual story to illustrate your point).
- THE INTRODUCTION IS ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO BE MEMORABLE! YOU SHOULD WRITE YOUR INTRO AHEAD OF TIME FOR EACH BILL.
- EXAMPLE -- "Brittany Baker is one of my constituents. She was a 3.8 GPA student, a recent graduate of Sarah Lawrence College. When asked about her student debt by the Christian Science Monitor, she had this to say: "I guess I have to thank the higher education system. To the loan companies and banks:

thanks. I and my peers will FOREVER be INDEBTED to you." My fellow Senators, Brittany--and so many like her--are being weighed down by the immense debt they're being forced to shoulder. With the threat of the interest rate being doubled, and those heavy burdens growing immensely in size and scope, it's no wonder that the Economic Intelligence Unit just ranked the US 17th in Global Education. I stand with Britney and the 85%of Americans in favor of keeping the interest rate where it is."

2. **Contentions:** Two or three arguments for or against the legislation. Each contention should be explained in the speaker's own words and supported by evidence from reputable and relevant sources.

3. **Conclusion :** The speaker often restates his 2 or 3 contentions and returns to the attention-getting device from the introduction to give the speech thematic unity. In some leagues, it is customary to end with the phrase "I am now open for cross-examinations and further points of clarification." Alternatively, conclusions can consist of merely 1 or 2 sentences, such as "For these reasons you must pass/fail this bill/resolution/legislation."

- After the authorship or sponsorship speech, the Presiding Officer calls for a speech in opposition to the bill. If there is no one who will speak in negation, a student will be called to affirm. However, one sided debate (negation after negation or affirmation after affirmation) is frowned upon.
- Whichever debaters wish to speak on the bill stand, or otherwise indicate their desire to speak.

How the P.O. chooses speakers varies greatly by region and by level of competition. In general, however, these rules are observed.

- There are generally 10 to 20 speakers in every round, and one presiding officer.
- When one speaker has given fewer speeches (either in that session or in the tournament as a whole) than another speaker, the former has precedence. If their speech amounts are equal, then the speaker who spoke earliest receives precedence. When everyone is making their first speech, either the P.O. chooses the speakers however he/she pleases or whoever has asked the most questions receives precedence.
- Another process that is used: In the first preliminary round, as well as the semi-final and final rounds, each speaker is issued a set of priority cards, typically one through five or one through six depending on the number of rounds and bills. Speakers wishing to speak on the side of the bill (Proponency or Opponency) currently in order hold up their lowest number priority card to indicate the desire to speak. Lower numbers have priority over higher numbers, and in case of tied numbers, priority is given to the speaker who has unsuccessfully attempted to speak the most times or asked the most questions.
- In cases of an absolute tie, speakers are asked to yield or to participate in a coin toss or quick game of Rock, Paper, Scissors. The speaker who wins the floor surrenders their lowest number priority card to the Presiding Officer. A

speaker who has exhausted the supply of priority cards may only speak if no other speakers contest said speaker for the floor.

- Basically, speak once on every bill/resolution, unless nobody else in the room really wants to speak--then, you can speak twice.

TIPS FOR SPEAKING

Make Congress personal!

- Congress is boring if you just go up and essentially read evidence you've come up with before the round. Make sure you ALWAYS reference a person in your speech. REFUTATION IS A MUST, in absolutely every speech you give--no excuses.
- Even if you are the VERY FIRST SPEAKER (probably won't be), you should still find a way to say "The negation would like to believe that etc., etc., etc." Pre-empt the other side's points, and you'll look quite good.
- When I say make it personal, I literally mean that. One of my secrets is that when I refute people, I don't simply say "Senator Lampert brought up this argument; this is why they are mistaken." INSTEAD I would say something like, "Senator Lampert, YOU brought up this argument in your speech, but here is why you are mistaken."
- LITERALLY walk up to the person's side of the room, look them in the eye, and talk to them for a tiny bit of your speech. If you get this down, it looks GREAT to judges.
- Reference the other Senators from our school in the speech. Do this like so (if you're disagreeing with them):
 - "Now, Senator X, you had a good point when you said XYZ, and I understand that you're trying to provide for your constituents, just like we all are. BUT, we have to take ABC into consideration when evaluating ALL of the effects this legislation will have."

Use compromise!

- Never be one-sided in Congress. Every refutation should include a statement like, "Senator Lampert, I understand where you are coming from, and we both want to help our constituents, but..."
- At the end of your speeches, try to have a specific compromise. Come up with a solution (AFF or NEG) that can satisfy the demands of both sides. For example, let's say that you are discussing how you are AGAINST universal healthcare because you feel that there are NOT enough doctors. Your COMPROMISE at the end of your speech is that the government should create incentive for people to become primary care physicians BEFORE passing this bill. THIS WAY, you can say that you are "satisfying the goals of the affirmation by letting them have their way in the future while supporting a realistic plan on the negation." USE COMPROMISE!

Don't be too serious!

- This goes along with making Congress personal. Make sure you are friendly. Think of it this way—you are NOT giving a speech, but rather having a DISCUSSION in which you are leading the discussion. So you feel comfortable talking TO people, pointing them out directly, and discussing your own thoughts (supported by facts).
- That said, you still want to have formal diction. Don't be too casual. Everyone in the room is still a "Senator."

Movement!

- As far as movement around the chamber goes, you want to move at the following times: when you're directly refuting another Senator, or when you're transitioning from one major point to another.
- Aside from that, you should be firmly planted behind a podium.

Introductions!

- When introducing yourself, say something like "That's Senator X," and make a small, inoffensive joke about your last name. If your last name isn't at all funny, just spell it out ("L-A-M-P-E-R-T").
- Feel free to use political humor in order to make a point (P.J. O'Rourke quotes are particularly relevant and funny), or a convincing statistic regarding the topic at hand. Then, say something like: "And it is because I agree with X quote that I stand in the most firm Affirmation/Negation of the bill/resolution at hand today. I'd like to specifically talk about two reasons why we must pass/defeat this piece of legislation." If you're using a statistic or anecdote, say something like: "And it is because we as American legislators must no longer tolerate these [bad things] that I stand in the most firm Affirmation/Negation, etc., etc."

Use the concept of "Burden!"

- Force the other side to "prove something." Example: You're discussing a bill saying that the "USFG should prioritize government spending over tax cuts to stimulate the economy." You are on the negation, and you say that "the affirmation not only has to prove that government spending is effective, BUT ALSO that we should PRIORITIZE when stimulating the economy AT ALL instead of just using a case-by-case basis theory."
- Essentially, with "burden" you are forcing the other side to answer an almost impossible question, and you must say that "if they fail to respond to the question, they lose the debate." So ultimately you DEMAND that speakers address you after you discuss it. THIS WAY they are forced to refute you and SAY YOUR NAME, making you more memorable which is ALWAYS good.

Questions!

- Ask questions that give you an advantage, and use gestures while asking questions.

- Set the people up so that they answer the way you want, and then you USE IT AGAINST them in a speech.
- Your questions should begin with something that forces the other side to think on their feet: "Senator, EXPLAIN TO ME HOW..."
- When responding to questions, be concise. If they asked for a yes or no, give them that. Then, explain your answer in a sentence. Then, say, "That's why it's even more important to Affirm/Negate!"
- If they ask, "Are you aware of X?" Just say, "Of course." That's a dumb question that comes up too much.
- **ASK A QUESTION DURING EVERY CROSS-EXAMINATION SESSION.** Remember, questioning the side you agree with can go one of a few ways:
 - [Warmly] Senator, you'd agree with me that (one of your points that they'll agree with)?
 - [Confused] Senator, what did you mean when you talked about (vague term)?
 - [Insistent] Senator, explain the difference between [technical point A] and [technical point B] to us.
 - [Indignant] Senator, what did you think of when (a senator on the opposite side) said (some good point against you)?

Questioning the side you disagree with is easier:

- Senator, what did you mean when you talked about (vague term)?
- Senator, what actual EVIDENCE can you give us to back up your assertion that (something they had no evidence for)?
- Senator, can you please address (a point they didn't address because it's a good one)?
- [IF you've already spoken and imposed a burden] Senator, can you please directly address your side's logical burden in today's debate?

GENERAL TIPS:

- WRITE DOWN EVERYBODY'S NAME, AND THE MAJOR POINTS THEY SAID, SO YOU CAN REFERENCE THEM EASILY.
- Always attempt (to get the best priority possible). Don't yield more than once.
- Fill your time COMPLETELY. Remember this to fill your time:
- Have some kind of introduction (anecdotal or a rhetorical "my fellow senators" bit)
- Be sure to signpost two major points.
- Be sure all of your points have warrants
- Be sure to address other senators' points
- Be sure to impose a burden on the other side
- Be sure to conclude in a way that goes over everything you've already talked about, and conclude with a strong last sentence--"That's why we all must stand in strong affirmation/negation! I'm now open for cross-examination and other questions."