

Observers' Guide



chicago middle school debate league

Welcome to the Chicago Middle School Debate League, part of the Chicago Debate League (CDL), one of the oldest, largest and most competitive of the urban debate leagues in the nation. The CDL, a partnership between the Chicago Debate Commission and Chicago Public Schools, has provided over 13,000 Chicago high school and middle school students with the powerful academic benefits of debate. Participating in our debate program is a proven and exciting strategy to improve Chicago students' academic results, school engagement and 21st century skills.

Middle school teams participate in five regular tournaments each school year, competing in four conferences. The last tournament of the year, the Chicago Middle School Debate Championships, brings all our middle school conferences together.

Tournament structure

Schools send multiple two-person teams to each tournament. At the tournament, teams debate in five or six "preliminary rounds" against teams from other schools. Teams argue both the affirmative and negative of the resolution. Judges determine the winning team in each round and assign speaker points to each speaker. Win/loss results and individual speaker points determine which teams advance to the elimination rounds. The final round determines the winning team.

Debate speeches and judging

Each round includes the following speeches, plus four minutes of discretionary preparation time per side. After the round, judges provide oral critique and fill out ballots with their decision, speaker points and written critique.

First Affirmative Constructive (1AC) – 5 minutes
Cross examination by Negative – 1.5 minutes
First Negative Constructive (1NC) – 5 minutes
Cross examination by Affirmative – 1.5 minutes
Second Affirmative Constructive (2AC) – 5 minutes
Cross examination by Negative – 1.5 minutes
Second Negative Constructive (2NC) – 5 minutes
Cross examination by Affirmative – 1.5 minutes
First Negative Rebuttal (1NR) – 3.5 minutes
First Affirmative Rebuttal (1AR) – 3.5 minutes
Second Negative Rebuttal (2NR) – 3.5 minutes
Second Affirmative Rebuttal (2AR) – 3.5 minutes

Judges assess each speaker's use of evidence and logic, knowledge of the issues, ability to refute opponents' arguments, cross-examination effectiveness, and persuasiveness. Notably, competitive academic debate provides little weight to oratorical skills, although debaters do bear the responsibility for making sure their judges – often "specialists" comfortable with fast-paced debate style and jargon – understand them.

Watch for these skills

- **Substantive content:** Debaters must become well-versed in complex policy issues. Watch for their depth and breadth of knowledge on issues surrounding trade, climate change, human rights, regional hostility and more.
- **Use of evidence:** Having a good idea is not enough to win a debate. Students must be able to argue their cases based on evidence. Notably, evidence-based argumentation is recognized by education experts as a key skill for college and career success.
- **Argumentation and refutation:** Students develop the ability to formulate their views into persuasive arguments and to quickly grasp and analyze opposing arguments. Because an unanswered argument is deemed conceded, students develop keen skills in point and counterpoint, learning how to refute other students' cases effectively and respectfully.
- **Organization:** Students learn how to organize an argument, organize evidence, and access it quickly for full effect.
- **Focus and listening:** Students do not know their opponents' cases and arguments in advance; every round is different. Students must focus intently and listen closely to effectively refute their opponents' cases.

2016-17 Resolution

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its economic and/or diplomatic engagement with the People's Republic of China.



Chicago Debate Commission

Empowering the Voice of Urban Youth

The responsibilities of each speech

The 1AC makes a **case** for a change in U.S. public policy, citing **harms** in the status quo that its **plan** will **solve**, leading to an **advantage**. The 1NC usually **attacks** the claims in the affirmative case and can also argue that the plan has **disadvantages** or falls outside the boundaries of the **topic** of the resolution. The 1NC can also present a **counterplan** or a **critique**, challenging the philosophical premise of the case. The 2AC responds to the Negative strategy. In the 2NC and 1NR (called the **Negative Block**) the Negative fully develops and extends its position. The final three speeches provide refutation and critical analysis on all the issues.