

Chapter A4 – Additional Debate Standards and Rules

This chapter addresses certain specific issues or situations that affect how CCNW participants approach debate by providing additional rules and standards designed to help ensure that the framework set forth in prior chapters is carried out as desired thus helping to ensure a positive and productive educational environment.

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A4.1 In-Round Debate Conduct

I. Debater Ethics

General CCNW participant behavior standards and expectations are addressed elsewhere in this Manual. The purpose of this section is to briefly set forth expectations regarding their approach to debate and their treatment of their debate opponents during the debate round.

The ideal and the goal is for all CCNW debaters to seek to excel in their own performance, while extending the highest level of courtesy and respect to their opponents. No list of standards or rules can cover every situation that may arise. Excellence in conduct and respect must arise from a personal determination to maintain personal standards regardless of the failings or perceived failings of others.

Working from that foundation, the following guidelines are set forth so much as an explicit list of what may or may not be allowed, but as a means of exemplifying the attitudes CCNW wishes to see in its debaters at all times and under all circumstances.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Debaters should always be asking themselves, “Would I like it if someone did this to me?” If at any time the answer is no, then that debater should not engage in the potentially offending action.

Debate the issues actually being put forward by the other team. Do not attack unintended errors as though they were the actual position of your opponent. If a question arises, seek to clarify their real point, and then address the true issue rather than a false misrepresentation.

Present your arguments as clearly, directly, and honestly as possible. Seek to present and represent your evidence as true to the facts as you can.

CCNW understands that a debate round can be an intense competition as everyone is directly challenging his opponents at every turn. As iron sharpens iron, so can each debater challenge the others to achieve at their highest level. Intense competition is not a problem in and of itself. The problem arises when someone allows the competition to lead them to act in a way that they know, or should know, is inappropriate. CCNW challenges its debaters to do their best at all time, both in their argumentation, and in their integrity and demeanor.

II. Audience Conduct

One of the most likely places for problems at a debate event is during the round, especially when many inexperienced people are involved. Almost without exception, during the round is the worst possible time to try to deal with problems. There is a head-to-head competition going on and only the debaters are really involved. Anyone else stepping in is going to disrupt the activity.

Therefore, everyone needs to remember that there is only one person in the debate room besides the debaters that should be involved in the round at all. That person is the judge. Everyone else is supposed to be as close to invisible as possible. They should not interrupt, or involve themselves in any way. If the judge has any questions or problems and feels the round needs to be interrupted, the judge should seek the Tournament Director for guidance.

If anyone else in a round sees something that is not right, the time to deal with that issue is after the round. When such circumstances arise, the issue should be directed to the club leaders for the teams involved, and the club leaders will resolve the matter either with the Event Director or other club leaders or both as appropriate.

A4.2 Handling Topicality

I. Introduction and General Philosophy

The purpose of this section is to provide guidance to debaters, parents, coaches and club leaders on the philosophical and practical approach CCNW wants taken with regard to topicality. CCNW's general philosophy is summarized by the following statement:

Topicality is a protection for the negative team and should not be challenged frivolously or unnecessarily.

II. Discussion

Topicality is unique among the stock issues. It divides the ground between what is intended to be debated, and what has been left outside and should be avoided.

The heart of good debate is a clear focus on the subject matter under discussion. Thus, when combined with a well crafted, carefully worded Resolution, a strong emphasis on Topicality provides a firm foundation from which both Affirmative and Negative debate teams can work. On this basis CCNW considers strict adherence to a strong position regarding respect for Topicality as a key element of its program.

If a Topical Case is brought forward for discussion, the Negative Team is responsible for being prepared, and the stage is set for meaningful exchanges regarding the substance of the case. If the case presented by the Affirmative Team is not Topical, there is nothing to debate, rendering the other stock issues become completely irrelevant.

Therefore, Topicality is to be viewed as a gate, or a hurdle that the Affirmative Team must clear. However, once cleared, the issue of Topicality should be laid aside and the round should proceed to a debate over the substantive matters highlighted by the remaining three stock issues of Significance, Inherency, and Solvency.

As noted above, “Topicality is a protection for the Negative Team.” It is the Negative Teams defense against being forced to debate against issues for which they did not have a legitimate opportunity to prepare. Such a situation is truly unfair and a strong deterrent against it arising is fully justified. If an Affirmative Team truly fails to bring a Topical Case, they deserve to lose. It is a waste of everyone’s time to discuss any other issue.

Conversely, if the Affirmative Team does set forth a Topical case, the basis for a legitimate debate has been provided and the Negative Team should not abuse the power provided by the Topicality ruling. While it may be tempting to try to gain a “quick and easy win” through a Topicality challenge, to do so degrades debate as an academic activity and turns it into a game.

III. Guidance for Affirmative Teams

A. Choose Cases that are Topical.

Make sure you clearly understand how your Case fulfills each of the requirements of the Resolitional Intent Letter.

B. Construct your Cases with care.

Use proper definitions and set forth the issues such that conformance to the resolution, as defined by the Resolitional Intent Letter, is as obvious as you can make it.

C. Come prepared with a strong Topicality defense.

The best deterrent to a Topicality Challenge is to be known as a team that is always prepared to respond vigorously to such. A failed topicality challenge is a waste of time for the Negative Team. Such time could have been better spent attacking the substance of the Case.

IV. Guidance for Negative Teams

A. 1. Never attack a Case you sincerely believe is Topical.

B. 2. Always attack any Case you sincerely believe to be non-Topical.

As stated above, debating non-Topical Cases is a waste of time and should not occur. The Topicality ruling is specifically intended to discourage non-Topical Cases. Make sure it fulfills its purpose.

V. What to do with Questionable Cases

Such situations must be handled based on the considered judgment of the Negative Team. The question that should be asked is “Is the case Topical?” The question should not be “What are my chances of winning a Topicality Ruling?” Remember, the goal is to have a vigorous debate on the substantive issues whenever possible.

VI. What to do if a Topicality Challenge is Made

Assume the challenge was done in good faith and with a clear conscience. Accept the decision of the judge with every good grace. Remember that debate is an academic activity intended to make debaters better communicators for Christ, and whether you won or lost the challenge, to learn as much as possible from the experience. Remember that in this league we are all Brothers and Sisters in Christ, and don’t let any disagreement over academic issues spoil the unity of Christian fellowship.

VII. Protocol for Rounds Ended by Topicality

A topicality ruling can be very painful for the Affirmative Team. It also has the potential to be disruptive to the overall event. As such, the quieter things are kept regarding a Topicality ruling the better. The following steps are to be taken to minimize the potentially adverse effects of a Topicality Ruling should one occur.

A. The Negative Team

The Negative Team is prohibited from talking to anyone outside the round about their having won a Topicality ruling. They may not tell anyone about the arguments they used, or what the judge used to decide to make the ruling. If asked about how the round went, they should answer something like “fine” and say as little else as possible.

B. Debate Round Observers

No one else watching the round may say anything about the Topicality ruling. This includes timers, parents, friends or anyone else who may have been watching the round.

C. The Affirmative Team

The Affirmative Team is strongly encouraged to take the information provided by the judge on why the Topicality ruling was given, and if at all possible modify the Case to reduce the exposure to another Topicality ruling in future rounds. If the Affirmative Team’s coach and/or parents are available to help, they should be sought and counseled with. All of this should be done as privately as possible.

D. Everyone Else

Those outside of the round who may have reason to suspect, or somehow otherwise find out about the Topicality ruling are requested to consider their suspicions or knowledge to be a non-topic. Topicality rulings should not be a topic of conversation for anyone until after the event is over.

VIII. Concluding Remarks About Topicality

The CCNW Board recognizes that even with the above precautions, some knowledge about a Topicality ruling may get around. But, to the greatest extent possible, Topicality challenges should be brought forward only when the Negative Team hears a case they personally believe fails to reflect the resolution and conform to the information in the Resolitional Intent letter. The last reason for anyone to run a Topicality challenge should be that they think someone else might have one a round by challenging Topicality on a particular team.

At various times there will be differences of opinion regarding Topicality. Ultimately the matter must rest on the desires and attitudes of those involved. Christian Communicators Northwest wants to see Topicality retain its rightful place in the world of debate. For it to do so both Affirmative and Negative Teams must approach the issue with care, restraint, and even humility.

The Topicality ruling is intentionally powerful. It must never be abused.

A4.3 Collaboration Rules

I. Introduction: The Educational Purpose of Debate

One primary objective of the CCNW debate program is the educational growth the debaters achieve from debate related activities. For the program to be effective the debates must perform the majority of work themselves. While it is possible for a debater to “look” better in a debate round using materials he did not prepare, significant educational opportunities are lost under these circumstances. The rules set forth in this part of the Manual are designed to help coaches, parents, and debaters know what is and what is not allowed with regard to collaboration and sharing of information within CCNW, thereby ensuring CCNW participants have the greatest opportunity to learn the skills deemed most important by the league.

The remainder of this section is divided into two primary parts. The first part addresses the categories of information that underlie virtually all substantive debate discussion. The second part addresses the relationships that arise among debate participants, and the allowable types and levels of assistance considered acceptable for each type of relationship.

I. Categories of Information

A. Technical Debate Skills

With regard to the study of debate fundamentals, the goal of the league should be to bring each debater up to the highest possible level of effectiveness in presenting their position in a debate round. The active participation of everyone is important in effectively and efficiently achieving this goal. Those with less knowledge gain from input from more experienced debaters, as well as coaches and parents. At the same time those with more knowledge always stand to gain from everyone else. This can come in the form of being challenged to explain a concept in a better way, or it might come through group discussions of complex topics.

All league participants are encouraged to assist one another in bringing the league to the highest level of technical competence. As a general principle, there are no prohibitions on discussions on technical debate matters among any participants either within a club, or between people of different clubs.

Within the framework described above, the following limitations apply:

1. All discussions and instruction should be intended to promote debate practices that are consistent with league philosophy and policies.
2. Communications and discussions by individuals belonging to different clubs should not result in debaters being instructed contrary to the guidance provided by the leadership of their club. Where questions or concerns arise about possible conflicts with this guidance, the leadership of the club or clubs should be informed as to the nature of such discussions. This is particularly true where a parent or coach provides instruction to a debater from another club, whether in general conversation, after observing a debate round, or in any other circumstances.

A. Resolution Topic Knowledge Case Construction

The process of learning about the topic for the year, writing cases, and developing negative arguments forms the heart of the competitive environment that makes debate interesting, challenging and fun for all involved. Here again, everyone gains greatly when there is active discussion across the entire league. However, particularly with regard to the development of cases, a level of privacy is often desired, and should be respected.

1. Team's wishes should be the primary determinant as to whether or not their case is discussed outside the club. Only after receiving explicit permission from a team may anyone else discuss that team's case outside the club prior to it being debated in competition.
2. Once a case is debated in competition it becomes public knowledge. After that, subject to certain limitations, the case may be discussed openly both within and outside a club. The primary limitation is that public discussion outside of the club for that team should be handled such that the discussion should be exclusively about the case itself, and it should become separated from association with the team that presented it. The purpose of this is to keep the focus on the subject matter, and away from any attempt, either in appearance or reality, to "get" a particular team.
3. Within a club, providing it is OK with club leadership, it is acceptable for working on negative arguments as a group. For example, the group may choose to brainstorm on a particular case. In doing so they may work through how such a case might be structured, and both general and specific arguments against that case. These discussions may be developed into a framework for a negative brief. However, each debate team should be responsible for researching the evidence and putting together the specifics of the brief. At no time should anyone be given a fully prepared brief for their use. When a team debates negative in a round, they should be using materials they have researched and assembled themselves.

II. Debate Relationships

Debate involves a variety of relationships, all of which are important to the educational process. Because each situation is a little different, any set of rules is unlikely to deal directly with every possible situation that may occur. Therefore, CCNW strongly encourages everyone to endeavor to follow the spirit of the guidance set forth herein, rather than looking for loopholes that might appear to allow certain practices that are intended to be avoided.

A. Debate Teams

The debate team is really the primary functional unit for debate. Debate partners should be encouraged to work together as closely as possible, and with the greatest possible unity and harmony. Within parameters established by parents and coaches, there are no limitations on collaboration and information sharing between debate partners.

1. It should be the responsibility of each debate team to create and write their case, and to research and prepare the evidence that will be used to support it in a debate round.
2. It should be the responsibility of each debate team to conduct the majority of the research for the negative arguments to be run against other cases.

B. Clubs

While the debate team is the basic working unit, the club is the primary educational unit. It is the interaction within the club by all participants: debaters, coaches and parents, that provides the interaction and variety of perspectives essential to a productive educational environment. A healthy club environment should motivate each club member to excel to their highest potential. The educational activity within a club covers two key elements of successful debate: (a) Knowledge of debate protocol, theory, technique, etc, and (b) Knowledge and understanding of the topic set forth by the resolution, and the various possibilities for cases and negative arguments.

C. Coaches and Parents

This category covers everyone who assists in the teaching and training of the debaters. These individuals must keep in mind that the true goal is the development of the skills of the debaters. All manner of assisting, exhorting, encouraging, critiquing, etc. is desirable and encouraged, as long as the primary effort and activity is being carried out by the debaters.

Such support and encouragement may include:

1. Engaging in wide ranging discussions about the topic of the resolution.
2. Suggesting issues as potential case topics.
3. Reviewing and critiquing the cases that have been written by the debaters.
4. Discussing other possible cases and negative arguments against such.
5. Suggesting general research areas and methods of finding particular information.
6. Passing along items of interest encountered in personal reading.
7. Reviewing evidence developed by the debater for quality, applicability as well as formatting and management.

In the course of assisting, care should be taken not to:

1. Write a case for the debater.
2. Write negative briefs for the debater.
3. Perform specific, detailed research for the debater. Judgment is appropriate here. In order to familiarize themselves with certain material a club leader may identify and review a variety of material. From this knowledge, the leader may recommend the debaters investigate certain sources or articles. However, it should be left to the debater to retrieve, review, and determine what if anything is of interest to them. Such research assistance by club leaders should be the exception rather than the norm.

D. Interclub Relationships

With the club as the basic educational unit, it is common and acceptable for clubs to see interclub rivalry as one of the competitive elements that appropriately motivate effort. However, such should be done keeping a clear vision that all participants in CCNW are brothers and sisters in Christ. Any competition that arises from participation in CCNW debate should have at its root the building up of the body of Christ.

As noted above, interaction between members of different clubs is expected and encouraged as long as that interaction is intended for the benefit of all involved. However, similar to the concern about a particular team becoming the focus of everyone's efforts rather than the subject matter, clubs should refrain from forming "alliances" against a particular club. There should not be activities such as, "If you will give us all you know against the cases for a certain club we will give you all we know."

With the club as the basic educational unit, it is recognized that teams that do not have the benefit of a club are at a definite disadvantage. For that reason, the following exception is allowed. Clubs with two or less teams may associate themselves with another club, providing the other club agrees to the association. Under such circumstances the two clubs will be viewed as one for the purposes of discussions of the resolution and sharing information.

E. Forum Discussions

CCNW operates a web based discussion forum that is closely monitored for professionalism, content, and adherence to CCNW rules. This forum provides a venue for all CCNW participants to become more knowledgeable with respect to both debate techniques and the subject matter of the resolution. Therefore, subject to the approval of parents and coaches, debaters are encouraged to participate in discussions on this forum. When doing so, they should remember that all other guidance provided in this document applies.