

Congress 101



The PBCFL's Congressional Debate Guide 2018-19

Created by Paul L. Gaba
Wellington High School Speech & Debate Coach

What is Congressional Debate?

On weekends, varsity and novice students participate in two 2-hour-long sessions of Congressional Debate (also known as Student Congress), a mock federal legislature where students discuss the “pros” and “cons” of student-written legislation on a variety of important national and international current events. (For other debate tournaments - such as National Speech & Debate Association, Florida Forensic League, and independent competitions - the sessions may range from 2 to 3 hours in length.)

SAMPLE BILL AND RESOLUTION TITLES

Around 10-14 days before a tournament, full-text legislation written by students from the participating schools will be made available to download. Here’s a sample list of titles:

- Dreyfoos School of the Arts: A Bill to Impose Sanctions on Iran
- Boca Raton: A Bill To Combat The HIV/AIDS Epidemic In Sub-Saharan Africa
- Martin County: A Resolution to Disband Immigration and Customs Enforcement
- Cardinal Newman: A Resolution to Abolish Affirmative Action
- Suncoast: A Bill to Support ESEAN to De-escalate Tensions in the South China Sea

Some legislation will be domestic (US-specific), while others will be international (taking a more worldly view). Also, some will be **bills** (the level of government you are representing – federal – has jurisdictional control, and can enforce the provisions), while others will be **resolutions** (the federal government has no jurisdictional control and cannot enforce the provisions). A resolution is used to express the legislature’s attitude toward some important problem in the state, nation or world – in other words, to let others know how we feel. It is non-binding.

Important: there is no guarantee which legislation will be in your chamber. You must prepare for all legislation for the tournament. Usually there are between 20-25 schools in attendance, and, thus, 20-25 items to research in advance.

Also important: YOU ARE ROLE-PLAYING AS A FEDERAL LEGISLATOR, elected to office by your constituents. You are NOT a “high school student” in round!

ITEMS YOU NEED (BESIDES THIS CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE GUIDE)

- Table of parliamentary motions
- Legislative packet
- Folio (professional – no stickers or labels) or legal pad (with a strong cardboard back)
- Ink pens (black/blue and red) – *no pencils!*
- All of your research (on every item)
- Sticky notes
- Gavel (if planning on presiding over a chamber)

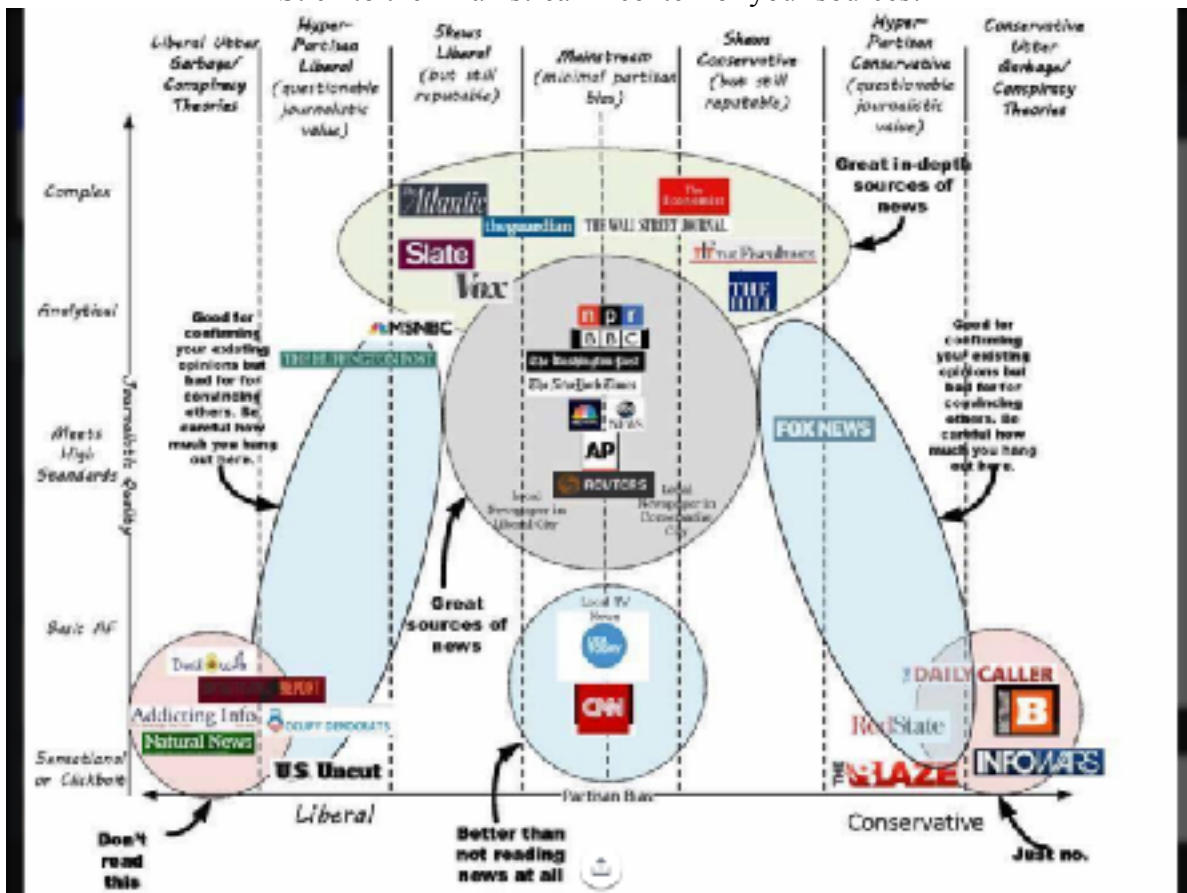
RESEARCH

Congress arguments generally have solid evidence supporting their claims. Evidence can come from anywhere - newspapers, journal articles, studies, books, primary documents, etc. The type of evidence varies based on the topic being debated, but when gathering research, you want to ask yourself four questions:

1. Is the source **reputable**? Sources should have a good reputation for “getting it right” - newswires such as the AP and Reuters tend to be less credible than newspapers. Wikipedia is good background reading to get an overview of a topic, but doesn’t have a reputation of being a credible source.
2. Is the source **verifiable**? This refers to the ability to verify the data and claims made by the source. If a source is based on a personal interview or some other insider knowledge, that generally cannot be verified through independent means.
3. Is the source **authoritative**? Different sources are expert at different fields. The Office of Budget and Management is an authority on budget policy on the US, but may not be the ideal source for a resolution about foreign policy in the Middle East. Think about whether the source in question is an expert on the field the legislation is about.
4. Is the source **recent**? While not every source has to be up-to-the-minute, generally, the more recent the source, the better. As current events evolve, older sources may become outdated or irrelevant, but the nature of timeliness will vary based on the topic.

Media Bias

Stick to the “mainstream” center for your sources!



BEST OPTIONS FOR LEGITIMATE NEWS: The Economist; The Hill; The Wall Street Journal; The Atlantic; The Guardian; Vox; Slate; The Fiscal Times; NPR (National Public Radio); The BBC; The Washington Post; The New York Times

PREPARING YOUR SPEECH

Speeches should be legibly handwritten in an outline/notes format, *not* word-for-word.

Outlines allow you to (a) have more eye contact with your audience and (b) not lose your place when speaking.

Each speech should focus on 2-3 major reasons to support your position on the topic. Each point – also known as a *claim, contention, or justification* – need to be explained to the chamber by (1) clearly stating the issue, (2) addressing why it is important, (3) proving your point by citing legitimate facts and statistics/data, and (4) telling the chamber the positive impact of your point on the community, nation and/or world. Additionally, present a **challenge** to the opposition - force them to answer an issue, or state what they must prove, in order to overwhelm your points or your perspective.

YOU SHOULD CITE AT LEAST ONE CREDIBLE SOURCES FOR EVERY CONTENTION. INCLUDE THE NAME AND DATE OF YOUR SOURCE!

Leave room on the side margins for “flowing” (taking notes) during speeches by other students.

This allows you to reference their arguments in your speech (this is known as “clash”), which judges love to hear! You can use sticky notes to accomplish this by taking notes on them and placing them strategically on your speech outline.

Keep your notes/outline to one side of one page. Flipping pages can be tricky. If you need more than one side, use a second sheet, not the reverse side of the notes you were referring to in the first place.

Don’t use words you can’t pronounce or have no clue what they mean. Spell out difficult words phonetically.

Know what you are talking about. If you refer to NATO in your speech and don’t know what NATO stands for, you’re setting yourself up for trouble ... especially if someone asks you what “NATO” means during cross examination. (Incidentally, do you know what NATO means, or what it is/does?)

Speeches are three minutes long, max.

OPENING BUSINESS

Students are assigned to chambers, labeled as a “Senate” or “House (of Representatives),” where they would be assigned the appropriate courtesy title (Senator or Representative). The first task a chamber assumes is to determine seating arrangement. At many tournaments, a **seating chart** with assigned placements will be created in advance.

SETTING THE AGENDA (AKA/THE DOCKET)

A morning congress session begins by **setting the agenda**, using the **legislation docket**, by nominating and voting on proposed agendas prepared in advance. At most tournaments, agendas are proposed and voted on by the chamber at the start of the opening session;

LEGISLATION WITH SCHOOL SPONSORS IN THAT CHAMBER MUST BE DEBATED FIRST!

YOUR PRESIDING OFFICER – THE CHAMBER’S COORDINATOR

After the agenda is set, **election of a presiding officer** takes place. At the PBCFL All-Congress in September, the novice house POs will be varsity debaters assigned by the league. *They will not be competing for a trophy in your chamber.*

SPEAKING

Authorship/Sponsorship: this is the “first constructive” speech on each item of legislation. The speaker has a maximum of **three minutes** for the *speech itself*. Afterwards is a full, mandatory two-minute questioning period by fellow legislators.

Affirmative and Negative Speeches: After the authorship speech for each item of legislation, alternating negative and affirmative speeches are given. *The first negative speaker has three minutes to speak with a mandatory two-minute questioning period by fellow legislators.* After that, each speaker is allowed a **maximum of three minutes to speak, with a mandatory one-minute questioning period.** Members of the assembly may request suspending the rules to extend questioning.

Use elegant rhetoric and smooth transitions to present your ideas.

Do not stand behind podiums or lecterns, as they separate you from your audience.

Be **passionate!** Don’t just talk about the topic, show you **believe** in your position and your points.

After the PO calls upon a legislator to give a speech, the legislator thanks the PO, goes to the front of the room, and *legibly* (in fairly large letters) writes the following information on the board: last name, school code, and the side s/he will be speaking on (authorship, sponsorship, affirmative or negative). For example:

**LEVKOVITZ
SCHOOL CODE Q
AFF**

You then introduce yourself to the chamber. *Your introduction must be memorized, and follows the following format:*

“For the judges, my last name is (state your last name – spell out if needed) from School Code “_____” speaking on the _____ side of this legislation; please give me a nod when you are ready.”

Wait for the PO to give you the go-ahead. After the PO has given approval to speak, the legislator may begin to address the chamber. Always wait for the “OK” from the PO!

Congressional closing statement (post-speech):

After restating why the chamber should side with you, which includes restating your claims, make the following final statement before cross-examination takes place:

“I now stand ready for cross examination.”

This lets everyone in the chamber know you have completed your speech.

NOTE: NEVER SAY “IN CONCLUSION” LEADING INTO YOUR ACTUAL CONCLUSION!

SPEECH CONSTRUCTION

CWDI = CLAIM, WARRANT, DATA, IMPACT

CLAIM:	A declarative statement An easy statement to explain	“First, America is obese.”
WARRANT:	Justification of your claim Why your claim is true (This is the sentence right after your claim!)	“This is because ... people can’t stop eating Big Macs, Whoppers, and other unhealthy fast food items!”
DATA:	Your valid source, including statistics	“According to an August 2010 study published in the <u>American Economic Journal</u> , among 9 th graders, a fast food restaurant within one-tenth miles of a school results in a 5.2 percent increase in obesity rates.”
IMPACT:	Why does this matter?	“This is important because ...” <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Why claim is bad for society✓ Therefore, vote the following way (support my position!) CREATE PRIORITIES! <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ dead people✓ dead animals✓ security and safety✓ social welfare✓ money

INTRODUCTIONS:

OPTIONAL: Open with a pertinent anecdote, story, evidence, or quote that ties into your speech on the legislation

- ✓ Things people can relate to
- ✓ Triads – captivate attention with triads of words, phrases and sentences

MAKE TWO STRONG CLAIMS IN EACH SPEECH

Each MUST be backed with warrants, data, and impacts

REFUTATION

Start during the third cycle
Choose one legislator whose arguments you disagree with
After your claim, state who it is contrary to
Further elaborate later on
Use sources that negate other legislators

CRYSTALIZATION

Last two speeches of the legislation or round

TIME MANAGEMENT: CONCLUSIONS

Start your conclusion around the 2:30-2:40 mark

THE QUESTIONING PERIOD (CROSS-EXAMINATION, OR CROSS-EX)

Cross-ex is the period when one or more legislators may question a speaker on the floor.

Asking questions shows participation and genuine interest in what other speakers are saying.

Listen to their speeches and take notes, so you can ask *meaningful* questions. Questions are not graded by the judges, but how *speakers answer* is.

When responding, succinctly answer **just the question** – no more, no less. Look the questioner directly in the eye when responding. Do not avoid answering questions – give them your best shot. (You may not respond with a question of your own.)

When wishing to ask questions of other speakers, you must wait for the speaker to finish his or her speech. **Only the PO is allowed to recognize legislators with questions – not the speakers!** The PO will say something to the effect of, “The time of that speech was _____, questioners please rise.” Do **not** stand up until *after* the PO has finished this statement! After the PO acknowledges you, *thank* the PO, then address the speaker by his/her title and name (Senator Gordon, Representative Sanchez, etc.), and ask your question. *Keep your question tight; do not ramble.* Wait for the speaker to finish his or her answer, then *thank* the speaker and be seated.

HELPFUL HINTS IN CROSS-EXAMINATION

If you are asked a question to which you are unsure of the answer: Respond by referencing a key point from your speech you think relates to the question. Never say something to the effect of, “I don’t know, but I have that information back at my desk.” (Everyone knows that’s a lame, pathetic cop-out!)

If you need a question repeated, ask the PO; the PO will then either ask the questioner to restate the question, or move to a different questioner.

You are allowed to leave the center of the floor to respond to questioners, but you still want to remain at the front of the room.

Legislators may only ask *one question at a time*; two-part questions are not allowed.

Do not preface the question with a statement.

RESPONSE SPEECHES

Every speech after authorship should *refute* arguments of the opposing side and/or *rebut* (rebuild) arguments on the same side. This is known as **clashing** with previous speakers.

NOTE: During speeches, you should be tracking their arguments by listening and taking notes (flowing).

Refer to **general themes/threads** made in the arguments. After a debate gets “one-sided,” a speech of summarization is a welcome relief. Relate everything back to the *big picture* of the debate.

CLASH – YOUR BEST FRIEND IN A CONGRESS ROUND!

It is very much encouraged to refer to previous speeches and speakers – that’s known as CLASH.

You can do it in a variety of ways. For example ...

- ✓ “As Senator Seabrooks previously pointed out, BLAH BLAH BLAH”
- ✓ “This proposal would lead to lower taxes, something both Representative Maravankin

and I agree with. In fact ...”

- ✓ “While Senator Gilchrist claimed earlier that Americans would favor this legislation, BLAH BLAH BLAH”
- ✓ “Representative Rich earlier stated WHATEVER SHE SAID. However, this ignores evidence that BLAH BLAH BLAH”

In addition, you can refer to a previous speech made on a different piece of legislation, as long as you can *legitimately* reference it. Say, for example, you have prepared on topics dealing with Iraq, tax reform, affirmative action, and the Kyoto Protocol. If you are giving a speech about tax reform, you can refer to something Senator Aikey or Representative Walker said in a prior speech about affirmative action during the previous debate – as long as it relates to tax reform. If what Senator Aikey or Representative Walker said about AA is irrelevant with what you are discussing, stay away from it.

Does this make sense?

NOW ... what you DON'T want to do is the following:

- ✓ **NEVER PERSONALLY ATTACK A PREVIOUS SPEAKER.** You can attack his or her *evidence*, or the *argument*, but NEVER THE SPEAKER PERSONALLY. If you disagree with something stated earlier, you can say something like “While Senator Sweet brought up some very interesting arguments earlier about stem-cell research, the information he presented was not entirely accurate.” (Then you go on to explain why your information is better!)
- ✓ HOWEVER, saying something like, “In his previous speech, Senator Gaba had no clue what he was talking about ...” or “Senator Gaba’s speech was filled with nothing but lies and stupidity ...” or “Senator Gaba is a flipping idiot!” or “Senator Gaba is a loser! Not only did he give an awful speech – perhaps the worst I have ever heard in my life – but he needs a better haircut ...” well ... **NEVER GO DONALD TRUMP IN A SPEECH!**

BODY LANGUAGE – POSITIVE IMPACTS!

- ✓ The “triangle” should be utilized if you feel comfortable. For the triangle, visualize you begin your speech at “Ground Zero.” When you are bridging to your first point, you’ll take two or three natural steps diagonally forward to your right. When segueing into your second point, you’ll take several natural steps to your left. As you begin your third point, take several more natural steps to your left. And as you begin your conclusion, you should take several natural steps to your right, ending your speech at roughly the same place you began – center, a few steps in front of where you started.
- ✓ If you are not comfortable doing the triangle, standing in one place is acceptable.
- ✓ Try to look at your audience, even if you are using notes for your speech.

BODY LANGUAGE – WHAT NOT TO DO

- ✓ Pacing is bad. Don’t walk back and forth in front of your audience while speaking. Judges will write this on your ballot. *You don’t want this on your ballot!*
- ✓ Swaying back and forth is bad. Coach Gaba calls this the “Dramamine Effect,” because it makes him seasick. Judges will write this on your ballot. *You don’t want this on your ballot!*
- ✓ Don’t do the “pee-pee dance.” This is where you lift up your foot and drag it behind your

other leg, giving the impression you really, *really* have to go to the bathroom. Judges will also write this on your ballot. *You don't want this on your ballot, either!*

- ✓ Don't use exaggerated or unnatural hand gestures.
- ✓ Don't put your hands in your pockets - or in any one else's pockets!
- ✓ Don't hide behind your folio or legal pad - or anyone else's folio or legal pad!
- ✓ Don't face the ground when speaking. The floor is not your audience.
- ✓ Don't read off your notes word-for-word. Eye contact is a good thing.



**A CFL-Formatted Bill to [Action Word] [article] [Object] to
[Summarize the Solution Specifically]**

1 *Be it enacted by this Student Congress here assembled that:*

2 Article 1. State the new policy in a brief declarative sentence, or in as few sentences
3 as possible.

4 Article 2. Define any ambiguous terms inherent in the first section.

5 Article 3. Indicate the implementation date/timeframe. (Remember, Congressional
6 legislation needs to be approved by both chambers – the House and Senate
7 – and signed by the president in order to become law. Legislation can
8 *never* be effective immediately! Try to use logic when determining an
9 implementation date.)

10 Article 4. Name the government agency that will oversee the enforcement of the bill
11 along with the specific enforcement mechanism.

12 A) Go into further details if necessary.

13 B) Go into further details if necessary

14 Article 5. State that all other laws that are in conflict with this new policy shall
15 hereby be declared null and void.

Respectfully submitted,

Name of School

NOTE: Number each line of the actual legislation. Double-space the document. Make sure the correct format is followed, because sometimes a bill will not be allowed into a tournament when the proper formatting is not used. There's no suggested or required length of a bill. ALSO, at some tournaments, an author's name will be required; it would be on the line after "Respectfully submitted."

Presiding Officer Script
ALWAYS STAND WHEN ADDRESSING THE CHAMBER!

Good morning/afternoon, fellow legislators and judges. I am _____ from School Code ____, and I am your presiding officer for this session. It is an honor to be here with you today.

Before we begin this session, let me lay down a few ground rules to help move debate along more smoothly today.

First, my gaveling procedures. I will gavel one time at two minutes, twice at 2:30, and three times at 2:55. You will have a ten-second grace period. At 3:05 I will start softly gaveling, and will pick up the pace for five to ten seconds, at which time you WILL be instructed to stop for questioning.

I encourage you to keep questions and responses tight in cross-examination, preferably a maximum of 15 seconds for each question and each answer. Please don't abuse time for either speeches or the questioning period. All sponsorship and first negative speeches have a mandatory two-minute questioning period, and all other speeches have a mandatory one-minute questioning period.

A reminder, there are no recesses during this PBCFL congress session, and we are required to have 2 hours of actual debate, which begins once the first speaker of this session begins her or his speech.

We will debate the legislation which has sponsors in this chamber first. After we have finished all those items, we can move on to other legislation.

As to how I will call speakers, the first speech on all items will be given by a sponsor. To ensure fairness, after that I will use geography, calling speakers from different areas of the room. Next, the number of speeches given comes into play, where if multiple legislators are standing to be recognized, whoever has given the fewest has priority. And finally, recency, where if multiple legislators are standing and have given an equal number of speeches, whoever has spoken least recently has priority.

Questioning will also be spread fairly across the chamber.

For "personal privilege," no more than one legislation can be absent at a time.

We are now in line to start the session. Is there a motion to open the floor for debate?

Is there a second?

All in favor?

Motion clearly passes.

Our first item is a bill/resolution to _____. Is there a sponsor present?

AFTER THE SPEECH IS DONE, SAY, "The time of that speech was _____, questioners please rise." **USE YOUR SEATING CHART AND SPREAD THE WEALTH.** If you are able to say the last name of the questioner, do so; if not, just pointing at the questioner and saying "representative" will suffice.

WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE "MOVES TO PREVIOUS QUESTION," BUT (in your opinion) THERE ARE STILL A DECENT NUMBER OF SPEAKERS LEFT ON BOTH THE AFFIRMATIVE AND NEGATIVE SIDES: *The chair does not have to automatically accept a motion from the floor to end debate on a bill or resolution and move to previous question. Say the following:*

"I appreciate your request, but seeing there are still legislators wishing to speak on this legislation, I will not accept your motion at this time. I will reconsider after we've had a few more speeches on both sides of the legislation, though."

WHEN FINALLY VOTING ON THE QUESTION:

For what purpose does the speaker rise?

"Move to previous question."

Is there a second?

"Second."

It's been moved and seconded, all in favor? All opposed?

(If it seems like it's not a 2/3 majority, say, "Is there a call for division of the house?"

Someone should say yes, after which you do a hand vote. If it's more than 2/3, say,

"OK, we are now voting on a bill/resolution to _____, all in favor,

please stand. (Count the votes and write it next to the item on the board.) All opposed?

(Count them and write them on the board.) Abstentions? (Same.) On a vote of (aff-neg-abstain), this legislation clearly passes/fails.

Our next item is a bill/resolution to _____. Is there a sponsor present?

Congressional Debate Overview: Grading Congress Speeches

Maximum Time Limit: 3 minutes

- 6 The speech is between 2:15 and 3:00 in length. The speaker shows evidence of research and/or clash with previous speakers on the topic. The speech is well organized and points are clearly made. Delivery is smooth and convincing. Eye contact is nearly continuous. The speaker conveys conviction for his/her position and is persuasive in his/her reasoning. It is apparent that the student understands the argument completely and has put thought into the preparation of the speech.
- 5 The speech is between 2:00 and 3:00 in length. The speaker shows evidence of research and/or clash with previous speakers on the topic. Organization of the speech is clear. The speaker attempts a fair level of eye contact and works to convey conviction for his/her position. Delivery may show some nervousness, but it is apparent that the speaker has put thought into the preparation of the speech.
- 4 The speech is brief – between 1:30 and 2:00 in length. The speaker shows evidence of research and/or clashes with previous speakers on the topic. The speaker maintains a good amount of eye contact and delivery is fairly free of distractions. Preparation is apparent.
- 3 The speech is brief – between 1:30 and 2:00 in length. The speaker shows some evidence of research and/or clash with previous speakers on the topic. The speaker makes some eye contact. Delivery may be nervous, but preparation is apparent.
- 2 Speech is brief – between 1:00 and 1:30 in length. The speaker shows no evidence of research and/or clash with previous speakers on the topic. The speaker makes little eye contact and conveys little conviction for his/her position.
- 1 Speech is very brief – between 1:00 and 1:30 in length. Speaker shows no evidence of research and/or does not clash with previous speakers on the topic. The speaker does not make any eye contact and does not convey conviction for his/her position.
- 0 Speech is under 1:00 and/or speaker claims he/she is giving the speech for a grade in class. A ZERO MEANS THE SPEECH NEVER HAPPENED!