
NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL ETHICS BOWL

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Rules for Judges

All matches at the Nationals or a regional competition should be judged by a panel of three neutral judges. That is, a judge should not be a coach or parent of a child on any participating team; teachers should not judge their own students; judges should not have other obvious conflicts of interest. If a regional organizer is unsure if a judge is neutral, contact the NHSEB Executive Committee before assigning the judge in question.

Judges should not interrupt teams during their presentation, commentary, or response periods by asking questions, offering prompts, or gesturing. Judges should maintain a judicial and unbiased tone towards all teams. Socializing with teams and/or their coaches before or after to a match is discouraged (e.g. greeting teams or coaches you may know). This behavior can appear to confer an unfair advantage to one team over another. Please wait until the competition has completely ended to approach teams or coaches to avoid the appearance of unfair judging.

Judges should direct their questions to a team as a whole and not an individual or a subset of the team. It would be particularly inappropriate to ask a question of student(s) based on an immutable characteristic, such as race, religion, gender, gender identity, ethnicity, disability, national origin, sexual orientation, appearance, etc. (e.g. addressing a question about immigration to a student who speaks with an accent).

Judges should score based solely upon content, not on whether one person, a few, or all team members speak.

- Each team decides for itself how to divide up speaking time during all portions of the match. Some teams choose to have an individual “own” a certain case. Other teams prefer to have each person on the team speak for a portion of the match.
- Teams should be neither rewarded nor penalized for taking either approach. Teams have been advised to explain who will speak at the beginning their Presentation so that everyone has an idea of how the presentation will be structured.



Judges should not discuss their scoring decisions with each other; each judge is to rely on their own private judgment.

It is counterproductive when judges talk to teams about their scoring (particularly other judges' scoring). Teams will receive score sheets with comments after the event is over.

Please refrain from explaining scores, giving overt criticism to a team during or after a match, or expressing disagreement with a fellow judge's scoring. Teams need to focus on their next match, not a comment that a judge made at the end of the previous match.

The moderator "rules the room." The moderator will direct the match by indicating whose turn it is to speak and how much time remains. At the end of the match, the moderator will collect the judges' score sheets, help assist with math if needed, and ask individual judges' to announce their team vote and score using the winner tally sheet. In the unlikely event that something out of the ordinary occurs or the match is disrupted, the moderator will direct participants on next steps.

Guidelines for Judges

A judge's role in ethics bowl is to gauge a team's breadth and depth of thought as applied to a specific ethics case. These guidelines will help to explain how to evaluate a team's performance in combination with the score sheet and scoring criteria:

- Teams have received the cases several weeks, if not months, in advance. They have "practiced" by meeting to discuss the ethical components of the cases and to formulate their analyses. During ethics bowl, the teams know that the cases they will discuss come from this set, but they do not know which case will be used in any given round, nor do they know the question asked (until announced by the moderator).
- A good answer indicates both breadth and depth of thought. A prepared team recognizes that there are multiple viewpoints or possible "answers," discusses them, and then explicates its own position about the case. The presentation should clearly and systematically address the moderator's case question.
- The second team then has time to comment on the first team's presentation. This commentary should be focused on the team's primary answer. That is, during the commentary, the second team can ask for clarification, point out contradictions, ask for more information, etc. The second team should NOT use this time to present its analysis of the case. They will have the opportunity to present a case during the other half of the match.



During the Commentary period, the first team is under no obligation to answer any or all questions raised by the second team (or vice versa). The presenting team, however, should be able to answer the most crucial or morally pressing question or two (in the event that there are more than two questions).

- Teams are expected to ask insightful questions that target the primary position, key implications, or unaddressed central issues.
- When scoring the Commentary period, judges will consider the questions raised by the opposing team and whether the questions addressed truly substantive issues—both in relation to the presentation and the moderator’s question.
- A “question shower” or “spit-fire questioning,” during which a team rapidly asks many questions in an attempt to overwhelm or dominate the other team, is inconsistent with the aims of Ethics Bowl, and will not merit a high score.

During the answer, commentary and response, judges do not ask questions or comment. However, after the primary team responds to the other team’s commentary, the moderator will indicate that it is time for the judges to ask questions. **This is the longest individual portion of the match because the questions posed give the team an opportunity to think on their feet—they cannot prepare for this portion of the match.** As a result, judges will gain more insight into the breadth and depth of the team’s analysis of the case.

- A judge’s question should be short and to-the-point (usually 30 seconds or less) and should be designed to help probe the team’s understanding of the case. Please do not use this opportunity to argue your own perspective. When asking your question(s), please be mindful of the time that remains for other judges to ask their questions as well as for the team to respond.
- Most importantly, please remember that the main criterion for judging is to evaluate teams based on the breadth and depth of their thinking about a difficult ethical situation. This includes addressing and evaluating opposing or different viewpoints. Judges should NOT engage a team in an argument based on a personal viewpoint nor score a team based on whether the judge agrees or disagrees with the team’s position.

On occasion, team members may discover that they want to modify or perhaps change an aspect of their initial “position” as a result of the second team’s commentary. Some judges may think this indicates that the team did not fully think through its initial position. However, because the ethics bowl is about ethical inquiry, and because these are high school students, and changing one’s mind can be considered a sign of fluid rather than crystallized intelligence—a hallmark of higher-order thinking—changing or modifying a position is not necessarily negative. Before making a judgment, consider several questions: Was the team’s initial position well-



founded and thought-out? Is their revised position well-founded and thought-out? **In short, modifying or changing a position needs to be judged on its individual merits.**

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Finally, at the bottom of the score sheet, a team can receive 1-5 points for engaging in productive and respectful dialogue as opposed to combative debate. This is to underscore the importance of civil and respectful dialogue, an essential value of ethics bowl. Teams that earn five points in this category demonstrate their awareness that an ethics bowl is about participating in a collegial, collaborative, philosophical discussion aimed at earnestly thinking through difficult ethical issues. Ethics bowl is not a contest between adversaries. Teams that score poorly in this category are those that resort to rhetorical flourishes, adopt a condescending, critical tone, and are unduly adversarial.

Thank you for taking the time to volunteer with the NHSEB!