STUDENT CONGRESS HANDBOOK
Revised 9/9/2011

Description

Student Congress is a mock legislative session modeled after the procedure for floor debate in a legislature. It is designed to test a student's ability to speak to an issue in both an extemporaneous and impromptu manner and to reveal the individual's knowledge of parliamentary procedure. Students are assigned to "houses" of approximately fifteen to twenty-five members where they debate pre-assigned "bills" or "resolutions." Bills and resolutions are submitted either by students or their teachers; then, are reviewed and edited as appropriate for future congresses. Bills and resolutions to be debated have been determined in advance and students have had time to research and to prepare to speak on these issues.

Each session of Congress is usually at least 90 minutes long, but times may vary from competition to competition. As a general rule, 5 minutes of speaking time should be allotted for each member in the chamber. Session time should begin when the first speaker starts. A Presiding Officer will run each session. To speak or ask a question, a member will be recognized by the Presiding Officer. Many congresses use priority cards. All speeches must be delivered from the front of the room. Each speech is limited to three minutes. In addition, each speaker is subject to one minute of cross-examination from the members. Notes and prepared material are allowed in delivering speeches. Props/visual aids are not allowed. Debate speeches alternate from affirmative to negative, but individual speakers should support only one side of the debate. For complete State Tournament rules and procedures see congress packet and by-laws on the CHSSA website: www.cahssa.org. See also www.congressionaldebate.org

Preparation

1. Review all tournament procedures. Refer to your league's by-laws or to the invitation.

2. Review the rules of parliamentary procedure.

3. Obtain copies of the bills and resolutions.

4. Research. Researching the topics can be handled in a variety of ways depending upon school resources and time available prior to the tournament. Investigate sources of information including libraries, the internet, friends, parents, teachers, and other professionals with expertise in the issue. Only cite experts in your speeches.

5. Organize research and materials into outlines which support either the affirmative or negative side of each bill or resolution. although each student may speak on only one side of each bill or resolution, it is strategically advantageous for each student to prepare an outline for each side of the legislation.

6. Consider potential questions to use in cross-examination. Also consider how you would answer the questions.

7. Participate in practice congress sessions with team members. These sessions allow for practice in parliamentary procedure, hearing other arguments, and handling cross-examination questions.

8. Students should be trained as presiding officers and need to practice these skills prior to competition.

The Competition

How do I get recognized to speak?

- Speakers must stand up to be recognized.

- It is the Presiding Officer's job to maximize the number of speeches and questions on the bill/resolution under consideration in the house and be fair and equitable in giving each representative the opportunity to deliver speeches and ask questions during cross-ex.

- Priority to deliver a speech and ask a question is based on "frequency and recency." At the start of the first session, you will receive a packet of "priority cards." These help the Presiding Officer quickly "eyeball" who has made the fewest speeches. Each time you deliver a speech, you will surrender your highest priority card. The Presiding Officer will explain the color or numbering scheme used on the cards at the start of the first session. (Anyone holding up a bogus priority card will be disqualified.)

- Do not be discouraged if you are not immediately called upon. The Presiding Officer is keeping track of how many attempts you have made, and also how long it has been since you last spoke.

Priority Rules for Speeches

- FIRST PRIORITY goes to representatives who have delivered the fewest speeches. Priority cards will help the Presiding Officer "eyeball" which speakers have given the fewest number of speeches. Representatives must surrender a priority card when they make a speech. There is no rule for recognizing the very first speaker.

- SECOND PRIORITY goes to Representatives who have stood up the most number of times to be recognized should be given priority over those with fewer attempts.

- THIRD PRIORITY. When choosing between representatives who have delivered the same number of speeches and have equal standing time, the Presiding Officer will give priority to the ones who have asked the most questions in cross-examination.

How do I get recognized to ask a question?

- Speakers must stand up to be recognized.

- Highest priority for asking a question during cross-examination ought to go to representatives with the fewest questions. Most tournaments give the presiding officer much discretion in who to call on for speeches. Some presiding officers will give priority to representatives referred to in the speech. If you are unsure of the priority being used by your presiding officer you may use point of order—**see below**.

How does the debate on a bill/resolution come to an end?

- When the debate becomes repetitive, or when there are not sufficient speakers who wish to present an opposing viewpoint on a bill/resolution, a representative may make a previous question motion. ("I move the previous question.")

- If the motion is seconded (it is not debatable), the representatives in the house will vote on whether or not they should stop debate to vote on the bill/resolution. If 2/3 of the house votes "yes", then the house will vote on the bill/resolution.

- Following the vote, the next bill/resolution in the list is debated. Refrain from moving to the previous question too early in the debate, but keep in mind that a goal for Student Congress is to discuss more than one/bill resolution each session.

What if I do not like the way a bill/resolution is worded?

- You may choose to write an amendment.

- Germane amendments that do not alter the intent of the legislation must be submitted in writing to the Presiding Officer in advance of obtaining the floor.

- The Presiding Officer then decides whether or not to read the amendment to the house. Some tournaments such as the State Tournament require amendments to be submitted to tournament officials before the start of the round.

- The Presiding Officer must wait for two affirmative and two negative speeches before making a motion to amend. A 1/3 vote is required to consider an amendment. Any member can speak to the amendment. This speech requires a priority card. The house then debates the amendment. A simple majority will pass it.

Suppose I think the Presiding Officer made a mistake?

- You may make a motion by saying, "I rise to a point of order," if you believe the Presiding Officer has not followed parliamentary procedure. The Presiding Officer will ask you to "state your point. No one else may speak until the Presiding Officer responds to you.

- If you are not satisfied with the Presiding Officer's response and believes a wrong must be corrected, you may "appeal a decision of the chair." A second is required for this motion, and a majority vote.

- Beware! If you are wrong in your challenge, you may be judged as demonstrating poor decorum and knowledge of parliamentary procedure.

- **Remember:** The Presiding Officer is in charge of running the session and deserves your respect. You will be called, "out of order," if you speak without being recognized, ask a leading question, ask nuisance questions, make inappropriate motions, act discourteously to anyone, and talk, whisper, and distract others.

How will I be judged?

- The judges will use these criteria to score your speech on a six-point scale (see below):

1. **Delivery**—communicative, persuasive manner, appearance and gestures.
2. **Original arguments**—new and innovative views on the issue backed up by evidence.
3. **Clash**—directly responds to the issues presented by previous speakers.
4. **Questioning**—incisive, knowledgeable, and direct answers during cross-examination.
5. **Analysis**—logical examination of the issues.

- In determining your final rank in the house, the judges will also take into consideration your overall decorum and knowledge of parliamentary procedure, and your skill in asking appropriate and direct cross-examination questions.

- Student who receive high ranks typically deliver one or two speech on two or more bills/resolutions, and they ask at least two cross-examination questions. Keep in mind that the judges have been told, "Active participation should be taken into consideration, but several mediocre speeches and questions are not better than few high quality ones."

- You should not speak on both the affirmative as well as the negative side of a bill/resolution.

What is the structure of an excellent Student Congress Speech?
1. Introduction (15-20 seconds):
   a. Attention-getter (usually a quote, analogy, or evidence)
   b. Purpose *("I rise to the affirmative--or stand negative-- on the bill/resolution under discussion...")*
   c. Preview *("...for the following reason--or reasons...")*

2. Body (2 minutes)--CLASH
   a. State the issue on the floor. (SIGNPOST)
   b. State your point in conflict. (ANSWER)
   c. Prove you point with evidence of logic. (REASON)
   d. Tell the assembly the impact of your point and how it should affect their vote. (COMPARE)
   e. Present a challenge to the opposition. Challenge them to answer an issue or state what the opposition must prove in order to overwhelm your points or your perspective. (BURDEN)
3. Conclusion (30 Seconds)
   a. Summarize your key issues of clash
   b. Summarize your key points
   c. Come full circle
4. Open yourself up to cross-examination (*"I am now open for cross-examination"*)

How should I prepare?
- Prepare two speech outlines per bill/resolution—one affirmative, one negative.
- Prepare refutation evidence (both affirmative and negative) on all bills/resolutions.
- Prepare affirmative and negative talking points (a brainstormed list) regarding all of the bills/resolutions.
- Prepare cross-examination questions for the affirmative and negative sides.
- Study and understand the "Table of the Most Frequently Used Parliamentary Procedures."

What about getting out to recess and getting home on time?
- Start and end times for each session should be written on the board at the beginning of each session.
- At the end of the last session it would be appropriate to make a motion to adjourn.

How many NFL points do I earn in Congress
- Points should be assigned per speech using the following rubric:
  6 for *outstanding*,
  5 for *very good*
  4 for *good*
  3 for *average*
  2 or less points *below average/poor*

Helpful Phrases and Terminology

Make a motion... "I move that (or to)…"
Leave the room (toilet, etc.)... "Motion! Personal privilege. To leave the room."
Make an amendment (see "Amendments" above)... "Move to amend."
Close debate on the current issue... "I move for the previous question."
Ask about an error... "Motion! Point of Order. …"
Second a motion... "Second!"
Table... "I move to table the legislation."

Agenda - the order of legislation as suggested by a committee or member, and voted on by the assembly (sometimes called the "calendar")

Amendment - a specific change to an item of legislation, explaining exactly which words it modifies, and not changing the intent of the legislation itself.

Authorship Speech – A constructive speech of up to three (3) minutes given by a member, which introduces an item of legislation for debate by the chamber. It is called a sponsorship speech if given by a student who is not affiliated with the school the legislation originated from. All authorship speeches are followed by a two-minute cross-examination period.

Bill - type of legislation that describes the details of how a policy would be enacted, if voted into law by the assembly.

Chair - the leader of a legislative assembly who runs its meetings by recognizing members to speak or move. Also called the "presiding officer," or "P.O." Modeled after the Speaker of the House, or the Vice President or President pro tempore of the Senate.

Committee - small group of members who meet and bring recommendations to the full assembly.

Cross-examination - period where the members of the assembly ask individual questions of the speaker. Multiple-part (or two-part) questions are not allowed because they take time from other members who may wish to question the speaker.

Divide the House – division of the house in parliamentary procedure refers to a vote. However the motion to divide the house in student congress is more commonly used to determine how many speakers wish to speak on each side of a bill or resolution.

Docket - the complete packet of legislation (as titles or full text) distributed by a tournament.

Floor - when a member has the full attention of the assembly to speak (also refers to the area where the assembly meets, where its members speak, and where it conducts its business).

Legislation - a specific, written proposal (in the form of a "bill" or "resolution") made by a member or committee for assembly to debate.

Leading Question: any question that begins with a preface ("according to the NY Times…") or suggests the answer or contains the information the examiner is looking for ("wouldn't you agree that this bill would…)

Motion: a formal proposal to an assembly to take a certain action.

Open Podium: refers to a situation that occurs when no one wishes to speak on either affirmative or negative side of a piece of legislation.

Priority or Precedence - standard rule in most leagues (including NFL and NCFL), which requires the presiding officer to choose speakers who have spoken least (or not at all).

Priority Card – Numbered cards used to signify how many speeches a student has given. 1 would equal a member's first speech, 2 a member's second speech and so on.

Recency - widely-used system (not a rule NCFL or NFL), where the presiding officer not only employs precedence, but also selects speakers based on who has spoken least recently (or earlier). Before precedence is established (applies to students who have not spoken), the following methods are often used:

> **Standing Time** or "Longest Standing" - notes when students first seek recognition to speak; those who were standing earlier, but were not called on initially will be recognized before students who wait until later in the debate to stand.

> **Geography** - this method is employed to balance recognition of speakers among various spatial zones in the chamber, so students seated in any given area aren't disadvantaged. The chair should ensure that an equal number of affirmative and negative speeches are called from the same zone.

Resolution - an expression of conviction, or value belief of an assembly, which may urge, request or suggest further action by another decision-making authority or amend the Constitution.

Shut Out – refers to a competitor who did not get the opportunity to give a speech in a session.

Table – to put a piece of legislation aside and move on without voting on the legislation.

Voting – there are three types of votes in congress:

> 1. **Voice Vote**: the most efficient but least accurate. "All those in favor say 'Ay' , opposed say 'Nay'.

> 2. **Standing Vote**: More accurate than a voice vote and the most common manner of voting in congress. Students will raise their hands or stand up.

> 3. **Roll Call Vote**: The most accurate form of voting in congress. The PO calls on each student one by one to cast his or her vote. A motion for a roll call vote requires a 1/5 vote.

Yield – a action in which a member is called on to speak but declines recognition thus yielding his time to another member who wishes to speak. Members who yield should lose their standing time.

Presiding Officer: Order of Business

The following is offered as a suggestion for the Order of Business at any Congressional Debate:

1. Call to order by the presiding officer
2. Roll call of members and confirmation of seating charts
3. Special announcements and questions
4. Election of presiding officer (if needed)
5. Presiding Officer review of priority and how they will run the round
6. Review and/or set the agenda or order of the legislation if more than one in the session.
7. Read the bill or resolution to be debated
8. Floor Debate on Bills/Resolutions (time of the session begins when this first speaker starts speaking)
9. Selection of outstanding presiding officer(s) and/or legislators
10. Awards
11. Adjournment

Presiding Officer: Steps for Opening a Session

1. If you give a candidacy speech for election, state that you will be fair and work to make time is best spent giving speeches.
2. After you are elected, say "this session will come to order." State that you will use your best effort to recognize speakers around the chamber in a fair and balanced manner. If time signals have not been explained previously, demonstrate how you will conduct them. Explain procedures clearly ahead of time to save time later. Always stand when addressing the chamber (to project authority). Use a calm, controlled and caring voice to show a genuine interest in the chamber's business.
3. When you are ready to begin, say "Who would like to speak affirmative on the first item of legislation?" When you recognize speakers, use the third person: "The chair recognizes..."
4. When a speaker concludes, say "Time of that speech was __minutes and __seconds. Questioners, please rise." Call on one legislator at a time, until the questioning period is over. You should keep track of questions to allow a fair distribution.
5. You may gesture for questioners to sit down when it is apparent time is running out. Afterwards, say "The questioning period has concluded, and the speaker may be seated."
6. "Those wishing to speak in opposition, please rise. Call on a speaker, using precedence and equity for all legislators. It is appropriate to first recognize speakers who have the least number of speeches. If tied, choose a speaker who consecutively sought to speak earliest (most standing time). If tied, choose the speaker with the greatest number of questions.
7. When you call on the last person seeking recognition to speak on a bill/resolution, say "since this is the last senator/representative who wishes to speak on this issue, if no one objects following his/her speech, we will move to the immediate previous question following his/her speech." (That way, a separate vote to call "previous question" is unnecessary).
8. When it is time to debate the next legislation, say "The next item of business is —" (say the legislation's title). Legislation should be considered in the order established on the agenda, unless it is laid on the table. Laying on the table should only be done to allow a legislator time to construct a speech to continue two-sided debate, or introduce new information. It should not be abused to allow another legislator an earlier opportunity to get to a later agenda item. Time and prudence is spent by the entire chamber to set a fair and balanced agenda to give everyone an equal opportunity to debate their own legislation, and attempts to circumvent this should not be allowed.
9. Use of the motion for previous question should be discouraged, particularly when legislators have something new to contribute to discussion.
10. Never end a session early if a student still wishes to speak.

HOW TO WRITE A BILL OR RESOLUTION FOR STUDENT CONGRESS

In Student Congress, speakers debate a topic or an issue. These are commonly called "bills" or "resolutions" and become "main motions" for debate. If a bill or resolution is voted upon by a majority of the members and passes, it will eventually be put into effect exactly as it was written. It is, therefore, extremely important that a bill or resolution be written precisely to avoid any vagueness. There are several rules to follow.

Choosing a topic/proposition:

1. The resolution or bill should contain only one central idea. Avoid putting two ideas into one topic. The following example shows a faulty motion: Be it resolved that the Welfare Department should increase the amount of monthly payments and the number of people eligible for food stamps. The motions is faulty because it includes two separate issues.

2. The bill or resolution must be debatable. There must be sufficient information available to research the topic.

3. The bill or resolution must call for a change in current policy or practice. There is little point in supporting something that already exists; debate is created when change is proposed.

Wording the proposition:

1. The bill or resolution must be worded in the affirmative (positive). Avoid words like "not." Instead of writing "Be it resolved that the Welfare Department should not increase its payments." write "Be it resolved that the Welfare department increase its payments."

2. The wording of the bill or resolutions must be neutral. "Loaded" words and emotional language give one side an unfair advantage. Imagine trying to oppose a resolution that called for a ban on the inhumane, tortuous gas chamber as a form of capital punishment.

3. The bill or resolution should be phrased clearly and precisely.

Structuring the bill or resolution

1. The bill or resolution is always typed, double-spaced, and each line is numbered.

2. Bills or resolutions should fit into the following topic areas; National, International, State/Local, Public Welfare, Economic, and Constitutional.

3. A bill contains the phrase "BE IT ENACTED BY STUDENT CONGRESS ASSEMBLED THAT:" and goes on to say exactly what steps the author has in mind. A bill has the force of law and may contain sections to clarify how the law would be implemented and/or enforced.

4. A resolution should state two or three possible reasons why the proposition should be considered and accepted. These are called "whereas clauses." The last "whereas clause" is followed by the words "THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED IN STUDENT CONGRESS ASSEMBLED THAT:" (The proposition then follows:)

A Resolution to Amend the Constitution

1   **WHEREAS**, ; and

2   **WHEREAS**, ; and

3   **WHEREAS**, ; and

4   **WHEREAS**, ; and

5   **WHEREAS**, ; now, therefore, be it

6   **RESOLVED,** By two-thirds of the Congress here assembled, that the following article is

7   proposed as an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which

8   shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution when

9   ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several states within

10 seven years from the date of its submission by the Congress:

11 ARTICLE --

12 SECTION 1: State the first part.

13 SECTION 2: The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by

14 appropriate legislation.

Introduced by

A Resolution to

1   **WHEREAS**, (reason 1) ; and

2   **WHEREAS**, (reason 2); and

3   **WHEREAS**, (reason 3); and

4   **WHEREAS**, (reason 4); and

5   **WHEREAS**, ; now, therefore, be it

6   **RESOLVED,** By the Congress here assembled that

Introduced by

A Bill to

1   BE IT ENACTED BY THE CONGRESS HERE ASSEMBLED THAT:

2   **SECTION 1**.

3   **SECTION 2**.

4   **SECTION 3. A.**

5   **B.**

6   **SECTION 4.** This law will take effect within six months of passage.

7   **SECTION 5.** All laws in conflict with this legislation are hereby declared null and void.

Introduced by

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRESIDING OFFICERS

1. **Know what makes an effective presiding officer.** An effective presiding officer demonstrates competence and confidence, not arrogance. As the person in charge of business, appropriate, even professional, dress will enhance the presiding officer's credibility. The presiding officer's demeanor should be friendly, yet businesslike. The presiding officer should be a model for effective communication skills.

2. **Know the role of the presiding officer.** The role of the presiding officer is to maximize the number of speeches and questions on the bill/resolution under consideration in this house. The job, then, is to advance the debate. A superior chair does not permit non-germane amendments or unnecessary parliamentary maneuvers. A superior chair grants recognition to all speakers and questioners equitably.

3. **Keep to the time schedule.** Time begins when the first speaker begins a speech. Put the starting time on the board. The session must last according to the scheduled time.

4. **Use and explain the following system of priority in the house.**
   First priority goes to the representatives with the fewest speeches.
   Second priority goes to the representatives standing the longest.
   Last priority goes to representatives who have asked the most questions. (only count those that advance the debate.)
   On the presiding officer seating chart, you should use marks to indicate the categories for priority listed above. Accurate records are essential to insure a fair session.

5. **Adhere to the time limits and order of the speeches.** Speeches are an uninterrupted three (3) minutes immediately followed by one (1) minute of cross-examination of the speaker. Debate begins with a speech in the affirmative (in favor of the bill/resolution) followed by a speech in the negative (in opposition to the bill/resolution). The speeches in the session continue to alternate throughout the debate.

6. **Be familiar with the required vote on parliamentary motions**. For example, the vote to move the previous question requires a 2/3 vote while the motion to table requires only a simple majority. [Charts are available from the coach and/or the league officers.]

7. **Know how to handle amendments.** Amendments that do not alter the intent of the legislation under consideration must be submitted in writing to the presiding officer. The presiding officer then decides whether to read the amendment to the house. Wait until two affirmative and two negative speeches have been given prior to introducing any amendment. A 1/3 vote is required to consider an amendment. The author can speak to the amendment. This speech requires a priority card. The house then debates the amendment only. A simple majority will pass the amendment. If the amendment passes, the house resumes debate on the resolution as amended; if the amendment fails, the house resumes debate on the resolution as it was.

8. **Keep track of standing time on a separate sheet of paper**. Ideally you should use a t-chart to keep track of most consecutive attempts to speak or most standing time. List affirmative members standing to speak on the left and negative speakers on the right. Cross off members when you call on them to speak and add tally mark to members you don't call on. This chart allows easy reference when determining standing time.

AFFIRMATIVE	NEGATIVE
~~Mary Smith 11~~	~~Nancy Johnson 11~~
Terry Jones 111	Barry Hill 111
Ed Baxtor 1111	John McCain 1111
Harry Potter 1111	Louis Chen 1111

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STUDENT CONGRESS JUDGE INFORMATION

Student Congress should be viewed as a process that includes argumentation, analysis, questioning, clash of ideas, and delivery. A thorough knowledge of parliamentary procedure should be reflected in each speaker's courtesy and decorum. Judges should evaluate or rank speakers based on the speaker's overall contribution to the debate in this house. Since most bills/resolutions generate an imbalance of support, the side a student speaks on should be irrelevant to the final rank assigned.

Student Congress is modeled after the procedure of floor debate in a legislature. It is designed to test a student's ability to speak in both an extemporaneous and impromptu manner and to reveal the individual's knowledge of parliamentary procedure. Bills and resolutions to be debated have been determined in advance, and students have had time to prepare to speak on these issues. However, speeches should reflect the views of the speakers and not be a totally polished or "canned" speech.

A student presiding officer will chair each session. In order to speak or ask a question, a congress person must be recognized by the presiding officer. Congress persons who ask questions during cross examination are recognized at the discretion of the presiding officer. All speeches should be delivered from the front of the room. Each speech is limited to three minutes. In addition, each speaker is open for a maximum of one minute of cross examination. Notes and prepared material are allowed in delivering speeches. Debate speeches should alternate from affirmative to negative positions on the bill or resolution under consideration. Open podium (skipping a side of debate) is not allowed.

You are strongly encouraged to take notes during the session as a number of students will speak, and notes will help differentiate the speakers. You will be provided with a seating chart to identify the students. Students will take positions on the bills or resolutions for reasons of competition. Please be objective about the views expressed in the debate. Your personal attitudes toward the bill/resolution should not intrude on your evaluation of the speakers.

Please use the questions below in mind as you judge the Student Congress speakers.

- **Delivery:** Did student communicate in a persuasive manner? Did student effectively use eye contact?   Was student's voice volume and rate of delivery easy to follow? Did student use voice and gesture to effectively communicate emotions and ideas?

- **Logical Arguments and Analysis:** Were student's arguments new and innovative? Were ideas on issues backed by evidence? Did student's arguments demonstrate a solid understanding of the legislation?

- **Clash:** Did student directly respond to the issues presented by previous speakers?

- **Knowledge and use of Parliamentary Procedure:** Did student use parliamentary procedure to facilitate debate and further the business of the assembly, not to slow down procedure or unfairly prevent other students from speaking?

- **Questioning:** Were student's questions incisive and knowledgeable? Were questions and answers direct and to the point?