

RONALD REAGAN DEBATE SERIES



OFFICIAL JUDGE'S HANDBOOK



RONALD REAGAN DEBATE SERIES



Dear Judge,

Thank you for dedicating your time, insight, and expertise to the Reagan Debate Series. Your participation directly contributes to an enriching, supportive environment where students grow as communicators, leaders, and critical thinkers.

This program is built on the values President Reagan championed, respectful discourse, optimism, and civil debate. As a judge, you help uphold these values and ensure that each competitor is evaluated in a way that encourages skill development and personal growth.

Your time, professionalism, and thoughtful written evaluations shape students into leaders capable of engaging with civility, clarity, and optimism.

Sincerely,

Reagan Education Team
The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute



RONALD REAGAN DEBATE SERIES



Competition Overview

The Ronald Reagan Debate Series is designed for high school students in grades 9–12. It provides a platform for students to develop their communication, leadership, and critical thinking skills while engaging in civil discourse on important civic issues.

Key Features:

- \$50,000 in total scholarship awards
- Emphasis on civility, clarity, and persuasion
- Judges act as “average American voters”
- Focus on Reagan-like communication: humor, warmth, and storytelling

About the Reagan Style Debate

The Reagan style debate is inspired by Ronald Reagan’s approach to communication.

Reagan Style Debate Principle	Description
Optimistic Tone	inspired by Reagan’s positive, big picture communication style
Respectful Delivery	emphasis on civility, composure, and listening
Solution-Oriented Focus	encourages debaters to propose ideas rather than dwell on problems
Persuasive Storytelling	clear ideas supported by relatable narratives and examples
Emphasis of Format	prioritizes public speaking and constructive dialogue over adversarial tactics



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Role of the Judge

Judges in the Ronald Reagan Debate Series serve as evaluators of communication, civility, and persuasive leadership, not as technical policy experts.

Judges are responsible for:

- scoring debaters using the provided rubric
- observing communication style, tone, clarity, and story integration
- ensuring adherence to Reagan-style values
- submitting written evaluations only (no oral feedback)
- providing constructive comments that encourage reflection and growth

Judges should look for:

- clear communication and relatable explanation
- use of stories or real-world examples
- constructive tone and respectful engagement
- solution-oriented thinking
- evidence of preparation and understanding

Important Key Values

Judges score competitors based on how well they demonstrate:

- clarity
- civility
- ideas, not attacks
- constructive engagement

Important Differences from Traditional Debate

Judges do not give verbal feedback or oral critiques. All feedback is written only, because written evaluations:

- encourage students to self-reflect
- promote careful preparation
- build resilience and professionalism
- reduce pressure during the event
- allow for a fairer, more consistent judging experience

Judges' comments and ballots are shared with students only after the competition concludes.



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Debate Topic

2026 Regional Competition Topic

Debate topic coming soon!



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TYPICAL REAGAN DEBATE REGIONAL SCHEDULE

TIME	ROUND
8:00 AM - 9:00 AM	Registration & Q/A
9:00 AM - 10:00 AM	Round 1
10:00 AM - 11:00 AM	Round 2
11:00 AM - 12:00 PM	Round 3
12:00 PM - 12:30 PM	Lunch Break
12:30 PM - 1:30 PM	Round 4
1:30 PM - 2:30 PM	Semifinals
2:30 PM - 3:30 PM	Finals

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STRUCTURE	TIME
AFFIRMATIVE OPENING STATEMENT	5 MINUTES
NEGATIVE OPENING STATEMENT	5 MINUTES
CROSSFIRE	3 MINUTES
AFFIRMATIVE REBUTTAL	4 MINUTES
NEGATIVE REBUTTAL	4 MINUTES
MODERATOR QUESTIONING	3 MINUTES
AFFIRMATIVE CLOSING STATEMENT	3 MINUTES
NEGATIVE CLOSING STATEMENT	3 MINUTES
PREP TIME PER DEBATER THROUGHOUT DEBATE	2 MINUTES
TOTAL DEBATE TIME	30-40 MINUTES

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Rules and Expectations

- Debaters are expected to conduct themselves with civility and decorum; aggression is not tolerated.
- Judges are to assume the role of the average American voter. The scores of debaters' who use debate terminology will be lowered.
- No use of electronic devices (i.e. laptops, tablets, etc.) during rounds. Cell phones may be used for timing purposes only.
- All speech documents and research materials must be printed (i.e. paper documents, note-cards, handwritten notes, etc.).
- Judges are required to use the rubric provided to evaluate the round, assign speaker points to each competitor, and determine the winner.
- The debater with the highest scores wins the round; the debaters may not receive the same score.
- Debaters are allowed two minutes of optional preparation time, which may be used at their discretion, throughout the round.
- Debaters should keep their own time and state how much they have used and how much is remaining after each use.
- Any questions regarding rules or issues should be directed to the tournament administration.
- Please be aware that the tournament schedules and forfeit rules are subject to change at the discretion of the tournament administration.



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Moderator Questioning Guide

- Unique to the Ronald Reagan debate format, judges, also known as moderators, ask the debaters questions just like a real presidential debate!
 - The purpose of this period is an opportunity for debaters to show their breadth/ depth of knowledge or clarify their points.
 - There are no “gotcha questions,” questions that argue against, or criticize the debater.
 - Judges should ask each debater an equal number of questions.
 - Engaging questions encourage the debater to think critically about what they are arguing and apply their knowledge.
 - Judges can ask the same question to each debater.
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Example Questions

- Could you further elaborate your point about _____?
- How would this impact you and me personally?
- How would this impact our community?
- What do you believe is your opponent’s strongest point?
- Why should I care about this issue?



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CATEGORY	1- POOR	2- FAIR	3- GOOD	4- VERY GOOD	5- EXCELLENT
LIKENESS TO RONALD REAGAN Much like President Reagan, competitors should present their ideas with a variety of ways including storytelling, humor, charisma. Debaters should aim to connect with their audience.	Debater showed no personality and uniqueness and/or was disrespectful.	Debater showed little personality and minimally incorporated Reagan.	Debater incorporated some but not all elements of Reagan's speaking style.	Debater incorporated all aspects of Reagan's speaking style, but can have a more polished style.	Debater excelled at incorporating the attributes of Reagan's speaking
ORGANIZATION AND CLARITY A successful debater communicates ideas with clarity, organization and eloquence. Competitors should appeal to the Average American voter and enunciating clearly.	It was impossible to follow the debater's speech and logic.	Only people with technical knowledge can understand the debater/ unreasonable speaking pace was used.	Debater was somewhat organized, but can greatly improve clarity	Debater was decently organized, and most people can understand.	Anyone could have understood this debater/well-organized.
KNOWLEDGE OF THE TOPIC Skilled debaters should demonstrate their knowledge of both the topic in both moderator and competitor questioning periods. They should be able to competently answer a question.	Debater demonstrated little to no topical knowledge/ was completely dependent on notes and speech documents.	Debater did not have a firm grasp on the topic and relied heavily on notes and speech documents.	Debater somewhat understood the topic but could have been less dependent on notes and speech documents.	Debater demonstrated subject competence and did not rely heavily on notes and speech documents.	Debater demonstrated a strong grasp of the subject at hand and was not dependent on notes.
PERSUASIVENESS Competitors should use a balance of storytelling, logic, and evidence to make their points. While quality evidence should be used, win/loss should not be determined by evidence alone.	Debater made no arguments/ had no balance of storytelling, logic, and evidence/ used flawed logic/evidence.	Debater used some but not all of the elements of persuasion/ ideas were limited in scope.	Debater used storytelling, logic, and evidence, but wasn't persuasive enough in doing so.	Debater was persuasive and effectively used all elements.	Debater was very persuasive and used all elements to present a better case.
REBUTTALS (RESPONSE TO OPPONENTS' ARGUMENTS) Rebuttals include all responses to opponents' logic. Debaters should respond to all major arguments given by opponent.	Debater did not address/ counter any of their opponent's main arguments.	Debater only minimally addressed/countered some of their opponent's main arguments.	Debater only addressed/countered some of their opponent's main arguments.	Debater addressed/countered most of their opponent's main arguments.	Debater successfully addressed/ countered all of their opponent's main arguments.
CONDUCT AND CIVILITY Debaters are expected to model the civility, respect, and courtesy exemplified by President Reagan throughout his life. This includes respectful engagement with opponents and judges and active listening, appropriate body language.	Debater was disrespectful, dismissive, or hostile toward their opponent or the judge: demonstrated poor sportsmanship or inappropriate behavior.	Debater had noticeable lapses in civility or professionalism; may have interrupted, rolled eyes, or demonstrated frustration.	Debater was generally respectful and professional, though some minor lapses in tone or demeanor may have been present.	Debater was consistently respectful, professional, and courteous, showing clear understanding of the competition.	Debater was a model of civility and sportsmanship, demonstrating respect, humility, and encouragement toward others.

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REAGAN
EDUCATION
BALLOT

JUDGE NAME

ROUND/FLIGHT

ROOM NUMBER

TOPIC

AFFIRMATIVE SPEAKER

SPEAKER NAME:

LIKENESS TO
RONALD REAGAN

1

2

3

4

5

ORGANIZATION
AND CLARITY

1

2

3

4

5

KNOWLEDGE OF
THE TOPIC

1

2

3

4

5

PERSUASIVENESS

1

2

3

4

5

REBUTTALS

1

2

3

4

5

CONDUCT AND
CIVILITY

1

2

3

4

5

TOTAL SCORE:

WRITE 1-2 AREAS WHERE THE
SPEAKER COULD IMPROVE:

NEGATIVE SPEAKER

SPEAKER NAME:

LIKENESS TO
RONALD REAGAN

1

2

3

4

5

ORGANIZATION
AND CLARITY

1

2

3

4

5

KNOWLEDGE OF
THE TOPIC

1

2

3

4

5

PERSUASIVENESS

1

2

3

4

5

REBUTTALS

1

2

3

4

5

CONDUCT AND
CIVILITY

1

2

3

4

5

TOTAL SCORE:

WRITE 1-2 AREAS WHERE THE
SPEAKER COULD IMPROVE:

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Tabroom Account



Directions

- Create an Account

1. Go to Tabroom.com and click sign up/ register.
2. Choose your role (coach/ judge/ student) and enter name, email, and a secure password.
3. Verify your email if prompted.
4. Complete your profile (school affiliation, phone number, judge credentials if applicable).

- Find & View a Tournament

1. From the homepage, use the search box or browse upcoming tournaments by state/ date.
2. Click the tournament name to open its tournament page.
3. Read the tournament info: dates, events offered, entry deadlines, fees, and contact information.

- For Judges: Accept Assignments & Submit Ballots

1. Log-in to your Tabroom account and open the tournament page.
2. Check the judges assignments section.
3. At the assigned round time, open the round's ballot link.
4. Fill out the ballot and submit.
5. If you need to be excused, notify the TD through Tabroom's messaging or the tournament contact.



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Resources

- Website: <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/debate>
- Judges Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HL80lbJgUb8&t=8s>
- Ronald Reagan Debate Series Championship: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzToLC8VlvQ>
- Debate Resources: <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/education/ronald-reagan-civil-discourse-project/debate-resources>
- Tabroom: <https://www.tabroom.com/index/index.mhtml>
- Tabroom Account Video: <https://reaganeducation.box.com/s/4xzxu6lcp7oc9e9gkpypc88dezs7mx29>

