

Parliamentary Debate Audience Participation Guidelines

Parliamentary debate provides a forum for students to enjoy a fast paced match of wit, critical thinking, and oratorical skills. Parli also offers a unique opportunity for the audience to participate. Loosely based on the protocol used in the British House of Commons, audience members are allowed to engage in limited audible feedback during the speeches. While this adds to the fun and energy in the round, it is important to help students and other listeners learn the proper balance between their natural enthusiasm and appropriate decorum.

It is understandable to want to model our audience participation after the college model. However, this does not take into consideration that College Parli judges are trained and paid, while our judges are parents and community members who are often new to this forum. Therefore we need to establish an even higher standard of protocol so that we don't accidentally sway the judge or cause the perception that a room has been "stacked" for one team. The goal of this document is to help students and families learn how to enjoy participating, while remaining respectful and sensitive to the debaters and the judges in the round. The following are not "rules" but general guidelines for reasonable audience participation. Coaches may want to add their own common sense ideas, as well.

Helpful Guidelines:

1. Always be aware of the size of the audience, keeping in mind the more people that are in the room, the more chaotic a room can become if everyone is not careful.
2. Knocking or verbal affirmation is reserved for the strongest arguments. Usually, these arguments fall into two categories:
 - a. Arguments that any reasonable person would agree with. In fact even the opposing team might affirm them.
 - b. The most important points the speaker will make. Agreeing verbally and knocking for every argument of a favorite team is not the purpose of audible feedback. It will help the kids if they understand this is not about cheering on their team. It is about recognizing good thinking and truth from either side.
3. Audible feedback, knocking or verbal, should never drown out the speaker or be loud enough to distract the judge.
4. Knocking should take place on the desk or chair of the audience member, never on a judge's chair or desk.
5. ways be mindful of caring for our facilities. Knocking is intended to be gentle and restricted to appropriate surfaces. Avoid using surfaces that could be damaged.
6. Verbal affirmation should be a short phrase that does not drown out the speaker or distract the judge. Something like, "Here! Here!" or "Well said."
7. No conversation among audience members should take place while a speaker is at the podium. This is the same for any debate round.#
8. If what you do wouldn't be fun if YOU were the speaker (golden rule), don't do it.

9. No negative feedback. This differs from College Parli. No shaming or booing, please.
10. Strive to have a general awareness of how many people are already knocking or affirming. It's not a good idea for everyone to knock or speak together repeatedly. Kids tend to fall into a bit of a band wagon mode. "Oh my friend knocked on that point, I should too!" This is a great opportunity to train our kids to really listen and think critically. Teach them how to recognize really strong argumentation.

These guidelines were compiled from suggestions by Parli coaches and College Parli Alumni.

Further suggestions:

- We encourage coaches to use these guidelines as a spring board for brief lesson plan before your students attend their first Parli tournament.
- It is our hope that Parliamentary debate In Stoa will be a spirited, engaging event for everyone. Helping students understand how they can participate in appropriate ways will make our Parli rounds more enjoyable for our debaters, judges and audience members.