

## **Congress- Precedence**

Student Congress is a pretty straightforward event in Forensics. The Presiding Officer runs the room while the other competitors take turns giving speeches and asking questions. At the end of the session the top speakers (and possibly the Presiding Officer) will make the board to be voted on to decide who wins the tournament. But in order to be poised to where this is possible, there are two concepts to understand: precedence and base. An understanding of precedence and base is essential to winning a tournament in Student Congress. Speakers need to know what they are and how to keep track of them to know how to plan for upcoming speeches. Even the best speakers fail to make the board because they did not pay attention to precedence and base. Thus, they disqualified themselves. With that said, this essay will provide a detailed breakdown of precedence and base so speakers can avoid the pitfalls of not following them.

### **Precedence**

Precedence is an easy concept to understand, but utilizing it during a tournament requires attention to detail and quick thinking. Precedence is what someone has when they have spoken the least amount of times or, if tied, has not spoken most recently. For example, if two people stand to speak the Presiding Officer will choose who gets to give a speech based on the established precedence. If one speaker has spoken once and another has not, the speaker who has yet to give a speech has precedence. If they have both spoken once and they gave the 24th and 31st speeches overall, the one who gave the 24th speech

has precedence because he or she has not spoken in the longer period of time.

Why is this important? It is important because speakers need to understand how to maximize the number of speeches that one can get in so there is less work to do in the second half of the day. Let us say the average number of speeches per speaker (base) is going to be four by the end of the tournament. The more speeches a speaker can give early on, the less work there is to do later. This matters. After spending four or five hours in a session, everyone gets tired from competing. And this is the last time one wants to rush a speech. So how to work precedence to the advantage? The first key is to deliver the first speech as early in the tournament as possible. Try to be one of the first five speakers. Doing this will put a competitor in the forefront for the rest of the tournament. It works like this. If Speaker A gives their first speech and speaks third overall, that means only two people have precedence over Speaker A for the second speech. In other words, when Speaker A stands to give their second speech later on, only two people will trump Speaker A if all (Speaker A and the two preceding) have spoken once. This is vastly important. If at the end of the tournament half the students have spoken three times and the other half four, only the competitors who have spoken four times stand a real chance of making the board.

Another advantage to understanding precedence is for the sake of positioning with authorship or sponsorship speeches. Competitors do not want it to be the first one chosen, but they do want it in the first seven or eight on the docket. This is where strategy comes in. Going back to the earlier example, let us say Speaker A spoke third overall.

That was Speaker A's first speech. Speaker A has an authorship speech coming up as the fourth bill and they want to make sure that is their third speech and not their second. The fact that Speaker A spoke third overall will dramatically help. By the time Speaker A gets to their bill (the 4th one), there will have already been about 20-25 speeches given. If Speaker A can be the 3rd and 21st speech overall, they automatically have precedence for their authorship speech. Authorship or sponsorship speeches completely disregard precedence. Speaker A can give these regardless of whose turn it is. When Speaker A's bill comes off the table, they will be on their third speech while most others are just starting to give their second. Not only will most of Speaker A's work be done in the first half of the day, but they will have top precedence for the fourth speech since they were the first one to give a "third" speech. That is why precedence is so important. Only the Presiding Officer is made to keep precedence. However, any veteran Congress competitor knows that they should keep precedence not only for their own sake but for keeping track of other speakers' positions.

## **Base**

Keeping base is much less tricky but just as important. Staying on base means a speaker has to stay in sync with the average number of speeches. The formula for base is number of speeches divided by number of speakers. For instance, if there are 61 speeches given and 23 speakers, base is  $61 / 23 = 2.65$ . That means every speaker should have given an average of 2.65 speeches. Base is only tricky because most competitors do not realize that it never rounds up. A base of 2.65 means the ending base would be two, not three. Base is whatever the

whole number is. A base of 2.99 is still considered a base of two and not three. This is important to know because many judges and parliamentarians will only choose speakers who have stayed with base. Base was created to make sure everyone has an equal opportunity. If a few speakers gave four or five speeches and the average was three, then they would have an unfair advantage. So, when at a tournament be careful of the base. If a speaker has already presented three speeches, and the base is currently 3.22, make sure to consider the time factor and decide if it is worth it or not to give a fourth. This could end up hurting rank if the base does not cross the threshold of four.

Precedence and base seem like tricky concepts, but once a competitor gets used to them, they never forget. Practice learning them early on. Master them. Because using them for an advantage throughout the tournament adds one more level of control to making the board and placing.