



# **NCFCA**

**CHRISTIAN SPEECH & DEBATE**

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## **ONLINE TOURNAMENT TECHNOLOGY GUIDE**

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## Version History for *2021 Online Tournament Technology Guide*

### Version 1.1

Added Tech Support

Updated Debate Evidence Exchange

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# General Tips

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## REMEMBER OUR MISSION

*To challenge and equip ambassadors for Christ to communicate truth with integrity and grace*

Online tournaments offer the unique challenge of handling technology with grace while practicing communication skills in a format that is gaining increasing prominence in our world. The devices and connections involved can present “trials of various kinds” but we should “consider it all joy” to face the trials for the sake of meeting our mission to become better ambassadors for Christ (James 1:2). Embrace the challenges and rejoice in them!

## REVIEW BALLOT GUIDANCE

Ballots are designed to keep competitors and judges mindful of critical communication skills. Some effective techniques used during onsite tournaments will need to be adapted for online competition. This is part of the skill-building process. We encourage you to look with fresh eyes over the ballots and debate speaker point guide, and consider how each element may take on new dimensions when filtered through cameras, microphones, and computer screens.

## MIND THE RULES

Online competition also provides the opportunity to demonstrate integrity. Remember that each competitor will affirm the NCFCA Ethics Statement for every tournament: *“As an NCFCA competitor, I am committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and ethical behavior in all areas of competitive forensics. I will comply with all tournament policies and rules whether competing in person or online. I understand that through my participation in NCFCA, I serve as a witness of Christ and will seek to reflect this in both word and deed at all times.”*

While our system was built with fair competition as a primary goal, the adage of “where there is a will, there is a way” still applies. Competitors should hold themselves and one another accountable to the Ethics Statement in every situation. NCFCA takes violations of academic integrity and ethical behavior very seriously.

As you contemplate ideas for how to effectively debate and deliver speeches online, don’t forget to carefully review the Online Debate Rules and Protocols, the Online General Speech Rules, and the individual Online Event Rules for each one of your speeches. These documents are all available in the NCFCA Resource Library. Knowing your freedoms and boundaries will increase your confidence within the limits of your technology and spare you needless frustration.

## **LEARN, TEST, AND PRACTICE**

There is no substitute for rigorous preparation and practice in any area of competition. For online tournaments, your preparation must include taking ample time to learn how the components of your technology work. You must know how to calmly reset, reboot, and troubleshoot problems with your equipment. This responsibility falls on all participants. Parents and students will each have their own tournament responsibilities, so everyone should know how to handle predictable challenges without relying on other participants.

Plan to test and retest every combination of equipment you may use on the NCFCA tournament platform. If you plan to use external microphones, speakers, or cameras, practice for times when those accessories may not work by switching to the ones on your device. Learning to solve problems ahead of time will help you remain calm and maintain graciousness when inevitable difficulties arise, and educating yourself about terms and techniques will help you communicate more effectively with tournament staff regarding any technology challenges you may face.

Several no-cost opportunities will be available in December to practice with the NCFCA online competition platform. Please make EVERY effort to participate! View the [Competition Update](#) published November 20, 2020 for details.

# Equipment and Connections



## DEVICES

**Each competitor and each parent-judge must have an independent, supported device** available throughout the entire tournament with the exception of Duo, Team Policy, and Moot Court teams during the duration of a round in which they choose to share a device.

Supported Devices	Devices Not Currently Supported (These devices cannot be used)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Windows laptop or desktop computers</li><li>• Mac laptop or desktop computers</li><li>• Chromebooks</li><li>• Microsoft Surface Pros</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Android phones</li><li>• iPhones</li><li>• Tablets and iPads</li><li>• iPods</li></ul>

### Device Management Tips

- Keep your device plugged in whenever possible during the tournament. If this is not possible, be sure that the device is fully charged prior to each competition round.
- Download any outstanding operating system updates in the day or two prior to the tournament.
- Cancel any automatic or scheduled updates and security scans that may try to run during the competition.
- Close email programs, browser tabs, background functions, and other applications not needed for the current round of competition.

### Display Setting Adjustments

Devices differ in how they scale display windows, and some devices will default to settings that cut off necessary portions of the platform display space. If parts of the display window are cut off from the visible area, or if video panels appear with slider bars, you will need to resize the display.

- For Windows computers, press and hold the [CTRL] key while tapping the [-] key. (Pressing [CTRL] with [+] will reverse the change.)
- For Mac computers, press and hold the [COMMAND] key while tapping the [-] key. (Pressing [COMMAND] with [+] will reverse the change.)

Additionally, you may need to resize components within the platform display window. The slider bar between segments can be dragged with a pointer to change the relative display size.

## CAMERAS, MICROPHONES, AND SPEAKERS

Generally, the built-in camera, microphone, and speaker for a supported device will be adequate for tournament participation. External headsets or earbuds are highly recommended to reduce feedback and ensure that multiple participants in the same location hear only what is happening in their own portion of

the tournament. Having two devices connected to the competition platform within the same room could create feedback loops and is highly discouraged.

Competitors will also want to evaluate the quality of their video and sound. Options for optimizing sound and video quality are discussed in the vocal and physical delivery tip sections below.

## BROWSERS

**Participants must use a supported web browser.** An unsupported browser may appear to be working upon entering the tournament; however, many of the platform’s features (including audio and video) will not work properly.

<b>Recommended Browsers (listed in order of preference)</b>	<b>Unsupported Browsers (These browsers cannot be used.)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Google Chrome (version 78 and later) for macOS, Windows, and Ubuntu LTS 16.04 and later</li><li>• Chromium-based Edge (version 79 and later) for Windows</li><li>• Mozilla Firefox (version 60 and later) for macOS and Windows Microsoft Surface Pros</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Any version of Internet Explorer</li><li>• Any version of Safari</li><li>• Chrome for iOS</li></ul>

## INTERNET ACCESS

Broadband connections with unlimited data work best for all video-integrated platforms, and the speed and quality of the connection are generally of far greater importance than the age, speed, or model of any device used. We encourage all participants, but especially competitors, to review the best practices below and to implement any that are feasible to improve their connection to the tournament platform.

- Know how your particular router model works and learn how to optimize its performance by reading any tips available in the user manual or online. Be sure you know how to assess its status and reset it if necessary. Check the manufacturer’s website for any available firmware updates and install those.
- Prior to each tournament, restart your router after unplugging it for at least ten minutes. This will clear it of interference from any stale connections.
- If possible, connect directly to the router using an ethernet cable rather than connecting through WiFi. Direct connections are far more stable than wireless connections.
- If connecting through an ethernet cable is not possible, move as close as you can to the router. Avoid major obstacles such as thick walls, bookcases, or appliances between your device and the router.
- Test your internet connection speed in the area(s) where you plan to connect your device. Speed tests are available through browsers and online sites.
- You might consider purchasing signal boosters to help strengthen weak WiFi signals in areas of the home that must be used for competition. Most internet service providers offer these devices.

- Minimize the number of nonessential devices and apps using the same router during the tournament. Routers handle connections on a first-come-first-serve basis and maintaining a stable video connection will require plenty of room in the traffic lanes passing through your router. Consider disconnecting smart phones from WiFi and make sure other users, not actively participating in the tournament, avoid high data usage activities such as streaming video.

## **SECURITY AND FIREWALLS**

Internet firewalls on networked computers and parental controls or other filtering software on individual devices may interfere with connecting to the tournament platform. Be sure to test all devices through the actual connections you will need to use during the tournament.

## **TECH SUPPORT**

Tech support will be available for the online platform during competition. Please note that we will only provide support for participants using supported devices and recommended browsers.

# Vocal Delivery Tips

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A high-quality audio connection will improve a competitor's ability to achieve positive vocal delivery assessments.

- Consider using an external microphone as these generally produce better sound quality than built-in computer microphones. Examples include lavalier microphones, wired headsets, bluetooth headsets, and airpods.
- Test the sound quality of any microphones (and backups) you plan to use in the competition platform and ask for feedback from others on how you sound.
- Locate and learn how to use any mute and volume buttons that might inadvertently be activated.
- Determine where to position the microphone in relation to your mouth for the best sound quality.
- Give extra attention to pacing and enunciation so that you will be understood as clearly as possible even if judges have speakers that aren't ideal.
- Minimize potential background noises. Areas with sound-absorbing materials like carpet, curtains, and upholstered furniture will help reduce the distraction from inevitable sounds from the environment around you.
- Silence notifications on your computer and nearby cell phones.

# Physical Delivery Tips

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Your video quality will be critical in providing a positive experience for judges.

- Plan for your camera position. If you intend to use a built-in camera, you will want to practice positioning the device and yourself to best frame the picture judges will see, leaving some room around the edges for variations in judges' display settings.
- Consider alternatives. If your device camera is awkwardly positioned and/or prevents you from simulating natural eye contact, you may want to consider using an external camera that can be positioned more effectively.
- Be sure you know how to change the image resolution of any camera you intend to use. Higher is NOT better for camera resolution in the tournament platform. You will want to set the resolution as low as possible for a clear picture because a higher resolution will require more upload bandwidth and may negatively impact your ability to participate, especially with an older computer or slower connection.
- Experiment with lighting options to best illuminate your face and allow you to convey your expressions clearly. Position your strongest light source behind your camera rather than behind you, otherwise you will appear silhouetted rather than highlighted.
- Plan for what will be visible in the background while you are competing. Ideally your background should be neutral and fairly unobtrusive.
- Evaluate and adapt your hand gestures and posture for effectiveness within the confines of your screen space.

## DEBATE EVIDENCE EXCHANGE

File uploads are strongly recommended as some formatting may not be retained if evidence is copied directly into the evidence-exchange chat.

- Prior to the tournament, have evidence files named, saved as pdfs (recommended), and organized in order to upload promptly, if requested. Examples include:
  - AC/1AC
  - Every piece of evidence that may be presented in a debate round saved as individual files (recommended)
- Ensure that each file includes a proper citation in accordance with the rules.
- Lengthy pieces of evidence (more than 2,000 characters) cannot be copied and pasted into the evidence-exchange chat.
- Brief pieces of evidence (less than 2,000 characters) may be shared via the evidence-exchange chat if created and formatted in Google docs or other web-based word processing platforms.

## DUO AND DIGITAL PRESENTATION: MIRRORING

Mirrored video is standard for most online platforms. On the NCFCA platform, all speakers will see themselves mirrored on their own primary device screen, meaning that they will see themselves the way they would in a mirror. Judges and other observers will see a non-mirrored, normal view of the presenter. For most events, mirroring is natural and will go unnoticed, but in Duo and Digital presentation competitors will need to factor this phenomenon into their presentation plans.

- For Duo competitors who choose to use separate devices, mirrored video creates a unique challenge for blocking, especially in the case of “interactions” between the video boxes. You will see yourself as if in a mirror, but you will see your partner non-mirrored. The judges will not see either partner mirrored. If you are up to the challenge or if your blocking plans would not be impacted by the mirroring issue, using two devices is perfectly acceptable. As stated in the Online Duo Rules, the competitor whose name comes first (Last, First) alphabetically will appear in the video box on the left when facing the screen and the partner on the right.
- For Digital Presentation, mirroring impacts the presentation itself.
  - If competitors use a separate screen facing the camera, any words or images will appear reversed to the competitor on the competition screen. However, the words and images will NOT appear reversed for judges and other observers.
  - If a speaker uses the in-room screen sharing feature, the words will appear non-mirrored to both the speaker and judges.

## DIGITAL PRESENTATION: SCREEN SHARING

When screen sharing using “presenter mode” the entire screen on the device will be consumed by the presentation. The competitor will no longer be able to see the tournament room, including the judges. However, judges can see both the competitor and the shared screen.

