

## Preparing for Tournaments

Coaches might think about the following items:

1. Decide early in the fall (if not sooner) how many tournaments and which tournaments your team will attend. Consider the size of your team, your budget, travel time, school rules concerning leaving school for a tournament, staying within your district or traveling outside of your district, the competition present at the tournaments, and so forth.
2. Make sure you requisition your busses early. It's best to do this at the beginning of the season so you don't worry about it later. It's a good idea to have the names of the bus drivers and their phone numbers from week to week, especially because tournament schedules may change. It's also a good idea to have the phone number of the transportation director in case there's a problem (such as the bus engine blowing up on the way to a District tournament – which happened to Fairborn's team one year).
3. Make rosters to use to take attendance on the bus.
4. Make a folder with emergency medical forms and a team phone list.
5. Fill out NFL credit point sheets with names, school, and signatures (if you've affiliated with NFL or have a charter). You can now do this online at [www.nflonline.org](http://www.nflonline.org) which makes it easier because there's no paperwork to keep track of.
6. Dress the way you want your competitors to dress. Nothing works better than a good example.
7. Review tournament and bus etiquette with your students.
8. Prepare a packet of information to give to your judges and go through it with them.
9. Make sure you have working stopwatches.
10. Prepare maps for your judges and bus driver so no one gets lost.
11. Have your emergency bag ready – cough drops, duct tape, band aids, needle and thread, extra pair of hose, new toothbrush (for overnight stays) and other necessary items – because somebody will cough, or lose a button, or forget to bring a toothbrush.
12. Prepare an information sheet about each tournament and give to the students. This sheet will include information about the date, round times, lunch plans, format of the tournament, and so forth. It should also include the school's emergency number and/or the coach's emergency number. Each coach needs to decide the procedure if a parent must contact his child because of a home emergency. Should the parent call the school? If so, he should ask for the coach first; after talking with the parent, the coach will then find the student and handle the situation. Should the parent directly call the coach on his cell phone? It is not a good idea to have the parent call the student directly on his cell phone! Besides the issue of students being in a round and cell phones causing noise distractions in the rounds, the coach needs to know the circumstances and help make decisions for the student's subsequent actions.

## VaFL Tournament Registration Procedures

Virginia Forensics League tournament registration was developed along one simple line: make all entries regular and concise. Registrars can, with everything right, key-in everything for a tournament in about a night. Hence, the eRegistration page is a very effective tool.

### **Eight Simple Rules**

1. Make sure that you are on top of the deadlines. Registrations received after the deadline, even by a few minutes, are subject to fees or non-acceptance, depending upon the size of the tournament.
2. Never use ENTER, Tab from one event to the other. Enter causes the form to submit to the Registrar.
3. Select the tournament. All VaFL tournaments are on the same site for registration. Make sure that you register for the right tournament at the right time at the right league.
4. Only have one coach enter all the students. Multiple registrations from one school cause massive headaches.
5. Schools can register up to 30 students in one category. Pretty cool. Public Forum can double-enter in one speech category. CX, LD, and Congress may not double-enter.
6. Make sure that you have all your judges lined up beforehand with the areas they would prefer to judge. We will make every effort to match up judges to their areas of preference. If you cannot find a judge, a limited number of judges are available for \$55/ VaFL tournament. Money must be presented onsite at registration.
7. Print off the confirmation form. This form will have all student competitor numbers and is only lacking the AlphaCode of your school, which you will receive at the Tab Table or in a confirmation email. Make sure that all students know their codes before getting there.
8. If you have a drop, let the Registrar know as soon as possible. Students missing rounds will be fined \$10/ round (\$20/ tournament). Judges missing rounds will be fined \$50/ round (\$100/ tournament). Contrariwise, a reported drop at the Tab Table is \$10/ student and \$60/ judge. Judge obligations are locked-in at the eRegistration deadline, no matter the drops.

**Once at the tournament site, the coach will report to the office or some other specified location.** He will confirm his registration numbers and receive a registration packet that includes the registration numbers/codes for his students, schematics for each tournament category, a time schedule, and maybe even a map of the school. He will give the tournament host his students' names (if he hasn't already done so in pre-registration). He then gathers his students in the cafeteria or auditorium (wherever the host has determined) and gives them their numbers/codes and schematics. Each school receives a school code, and each student receives a number for his category. (So a student in Humorous Interp from School A might be A403, while a student from another school

would be B409 in that same category.) The coach will have to teach his beginners how to read the schematics and how to fill out the IE critique sheets and debate ballots with code numbers, titles, etc. The coach gives any other instructions he wants and then, usually, releases them to walk the building and warm up. He then gives the judges their numbers and instructions and releases them to go to the judges' lounge to wait for further information from the tournament host.

**An important note about registration: It is important to be as accurate as possible in registering students for a tournament. The tournament host needs to have an accurate idea on how many students will be competing from each school in each category and how many judges are coming from each school. These numbers from each school are used to schedule the students in each category and the judges. This scheduling has been completed by the day of the tournament. If it is necessary to drop students on the day of the tournament, do so BUT be aware that this causes serious scheduling problems and sometimes even delays the start of the tournament if categories must be re-scheduled. Coaches should make a strong effort to instill in the students the idea of responsibility. If students commit to attending the tournament, it is their responsibility to attend.**

**Illness is understandable; a student deciding not to show up to compete is inexcusable. Coaches handle this in different ways: the student who commits and then doesn't show up, must reimburse the team for the registration fee and the judge fee, for example. Or he is barred from attending the next tournament.**

Sometimes the coach will have an additional student (one not already pre-registered) to bring to the tournament. In some cases, the coach may be able to pick-up another school's drop in that category. Ask the tournament host if a pick-up is possible.

**Once at the tournament site, the student should do the following:**

1. Once the student has received his schedule and any other information from the coach, he should (if there's time before the opening assembly) walk the halls to find the rooms in which he will be performing. He should look at the layout of the room, figure out where he will be standing to perform, see if there will be distractions (such as a noise heater or clear windows to the hall) he'll have to overcome when performing, decide where he will sit as an audience member, and so forth.
2. The student should find a quiet place to rehearse his performance (coaches call that "talking to the walls"). It would be good practice if he can do it in one of his performance rooms, but he might need to be closer to the area of the opening assembly.
3. The student should mentally "gear up" and focus for each round. He needs to show a lot of energy when he performs.
4. Students in extemp, impromptu, and debate need to know where they can store their boxes of materials prior to Round I.
5. Students in extemp and impromptu need to have a stop watch (or at least a watch with a second hand) to use to time themselves as they're putting their speech together and practicing before they step into the room with the judge.

**Behavior/Etiquette: Coaches may want to consider implementing the following rules.**

1. Rudeness to fellow team members, competitors, coaches, judges and bus drivers should not be tolerated. Students are expected to conduct themselves with decorum at all times.
2. All team members will stand to recognize first place winners in all categories.
3. Whining, criticizing, complaining – i.e. being a “sour grape” – has no place at a tournament. Save it for the bus ride home.
4. When in a round, it is imperative that students not do anything to distract the speaker.
5. Stress that the students should be courteous no matter how boring the other presentations are or how often they’ve seen and heard the same other competitors.
6. Competitors should NOT congregate in the hallways when their rounds are completed. Other rounds are still running; thus, congregating creates noise in the hallways. This is quite distracting for others whose rounds are still in session.

**Tournament Dress**

Once upon a time, coaches would tell their students to wear “church clothes” to the tournaments. In today’s casual atmosphere, however, that is no longer a good description. Students need to dress for success in their categories. Some coaches even develop an official dress code for their students.

1. Because debate, extemp and oratory are seen as more formal and professional, the students need to look more formal and professional. That means suits, sports coats and nice slacks, and ties for the guys and pants suits and dresses for the girls.
2. In the interpretation categories, students can dress more informally to match the emotions presented in their literature. Girls who move around a lot might be more secure in a pants outfit and lower-heeled shoes. Just remember that costuming is not permitted.
3. It is never a good idea, however, for students to wear clothes that will create comments from the judges. Beware of too-short skirts, bra straps that show, boxer shorts that show above the waistband of the pants, blouses or shirts that ride up and expose the ribs or stomach area, and so forth. Some coaches have rules that state, for example, skirts must be knee-length or hose are mandatory.
4. It’s a good idea for the student to wear his competition clothes to school or church or on a date before the actual competition. That way he will know how the clothes feel, how he moves in them, whether or not a hem or button needs to be repaired, etc. The same is true for shoes, as well; they should be worn before the day of the tournament. Higher heels, especially, can be a problem for some girls’ performances – or shoes that have slick soles.
5. Be sensitive, however, to the income level of the student. Many fine contestants have not had the money to buy a variety of tournament clothes. Some students wear the same outfit every tournament. Some coaches have purchased clothes (especially sports coats and ties) at consignment shops or Goodwill stores.

6. Some coaches carry an “emergency bag” to tournaments – extra pair of hose, a little sewing kit, duct tape (good for a variety of “fixes”), extra buttons, band aids, aspirin (check with school officials and medical release forms first), etc.
7. Make sure the student’s hairstyle does not hide facial features. The coach may also want a student to remove any body piercing that gets in the way of his performance – such as a tongue ring that could inhibit clear speech.

**Opening Assembly:** Most tournament hosts will have some kind of opening assembly to give students and judges necessary information: schedule changes, code numbers of dropped students, room locations, room changes, special instructions, and time schedule changes. Judges may assemble at the same time in another location or may be held until after the students leave for a meeting. They will be given their first-round ballots in this meeting, receive information about how to fill out critique sheets and/or debate ballots, where to return the ballots and pick up the next round ballots, and receive any other special instructions.

**Awards Ceremony:** At the end of the tournament, the host holds an awards program. Students are brought “on stage” to receive awards in each category. This is the time for team members to display good sportsmanship and the makings of a good audience. Forensics should be a “cut above” an activity like a ball game. Students should be on their best behavior (and still dressed in tournament clothes); there should not be rude noises like cat calls or whistles or boos or anything else of a negative nature. Many coaches have their entire team stand when a student from their school is recognized with an award. It is good tournament protocol for the entire audience to stand for each first-place winner. Students, of course, may stand to acknowledge anyone else’s awards in any category.

After the Awards program, the students should return to the bus (making sure first that they have all their belongings and have “policed” the area where they were sitting) while the coach receives the packet of information that contains the individual student critique sheets, the debate ballots, and the TAB sheets that record all of the rankings for the tournament. Pass these out on the bus for the students to read; some discussion will occur, of course, but the coach should collect the TAB sheets and the critique sheets and ballots before the students leave the bus. The coach can then read over everything himself and decide what will happen or be said at the student’s next practice session. (If the school is a member of NFL, the coach will also use these sheets to record all points earned at the tournament.) There should be valuable information the coach can use to help the student’s performance improve.

**Follow-Up Activities:** Alert your principal to the results of your competition and to any problems that may have occurred. Notify the school newspaper and make sure a reporter is assigned to do an article on the team’s success. Notify the city newspaper for the same reason. Turn in invoices or signed purchase orders and keep the activity account records up to date. Record NFL points. At his next practice, discuss with the student the judges’ comments and rankings on the critique sheets; discuss what the student saw other competitors do in his rounds; decide what needs to be done to improve his performance.

**Note:** It is rarely appropriate to criticize to a student the judge's comments. Sometimes there are legitimate gripes to be made about the judging, but keep those comments away from the students; they are quick to pick up on these as an excuse for poor performance. If there are serious concerns about a judge's ability, take these up with the coach who brought him to the tournament. Remember, in the final analysis, the student failed to impress that judge for whatever reason, and that should be the focus of the discussion. Somebody has to lose the tournament. Some coaches stress to their students that they have to impress good judges as well as bad judges.

**Two-Day Tournaments** create extra problems to solve. Besides reserving hotel rooms and making sure the bus and driver can stay throughout the tournament, a coach must remember to request professional leave for the day he'll be leaving to attend the tournament. Make sure the students have alerted their teachers of their absence and have gotten their assignments; give a list of students to the attendance office so their absence will be excused. Give the students a list of items to pack, including an extra pair of hose or a second shirt or tie; include a suggestion of restaurants in the area of the hotel and approximate costs of meals.

**Hotel reservations** need to be made in advance; most hotels will want a list of names of students for each room. Remember to call the hotel the day before arrival to make sure there's no problem with the reservations. Ask about check-in time; students will want to freshen up and change into their tournament clothes after a long bus ride. If the hotel provides a continental breakfast of some kind, that makes it much easier for the students – and coaches! – the next morning. Ask the hotel if it will accept a school check and a tax exempt form; be aware that some hotels will not accept a school check. If the coach has to put the hotel bill on his credit card (to be reimbursed later with a purchase order), the hotel may not allow tax exemption. If the hotel won't accept a school check, it may be better to have the school treasurer write a check to the coach, who can then cash it on the way out of town to the tournament, so that the coach can pay cash. However the payment is made, the coach needs to make sure the hotel bill is turned in to the treasurer the next week. Remember to take a tax exempt form to the hotel. The tournament host will have arranged a curfew for the hotels; students violating the curfew may be disqualified from competing the next day. Other things to consider: coaches should make arrangements for the students to get wake-up calls the next morning; after the coach gets his call, he should call all the rooms to make sure the students are up; the hotel should block the phones and pay-to-view channels on the TVs in each room; parents should be stationed in the hallways during the night to supervise the students; make sure everyone knows to be packed for checkout the next morning and that everyone knows what time to meet the bus.

**Bus transportation** may become a problem for an overnight tournament. Some school districts will not permit the bus and driver to spend all those hours at the tournament. The driver may have to return home after dropping off the team, return later that evening to take the team to the hotel and then return home again, and then repeat the process the next day. This can be very inconvenient.