

Clear Lake High School Speech & Debate Team Student/Parent Handbook

Ryan Nassif, CLHS Speech & Debate Director



About The Team

The Clear Lake High School Speech & Debate Team is one of the top-rated teams in the Houston-area, which coincides with one of the most highly competitive areas in the entire nation. Members of the CLHS team consistently succeed at the local, state, and national level, and the team itself regularly has been recognized as a member of the National Speech & Debate Association's "100 Club" - given to less than 20% of teams across the country each year. The team is coached by Mr. Ryan Nassif, who is in his tenth year at its helm.

Team Member Information

Though our district and school administration is supportive of the mission of speech and debate, competing at the high level that we expect for ourselves is not without cost. For a student first beginning their debate career (i.e. one **in the Debate I class**), each member will be required to pay **\$100**. For all other students (i.e. those in **Debate II, III, and Ind. Study**), the required fee is **\$200**. This fee covers a number of both team and individual fees, including but not limited to: membership fees for the Texas Forensic Association, National Speech & Debate Association/National Forensic League, and the team t-shirt. These fees are payable through your Skyward Family Access account.

To defray these costs, all members of the team are required to participate in any and all fundraisers that the team might partake in. The chief fundraiser will be the annual CLHS-hosted tournament, and students will be expected to work the tournament and provide qualified judges for it.

As a final note, while Mr. Nassif encourages student input and tries to empower his student leaders, all decisions - including but not limited to partnerships, tournament schedules, entries, proper dress, disciplinary matters, etc. - are his and his alone, and are final.

Competition Information

Similar to how being part of the basketball team means you're expected to play in basketball games, being part of the debate team means you're expected to compete at debate tournaments. All **Debate I** students are expected to participate in **two** tournament over the course of the entire regular competition season (which runs from August until the end of January). All **Debate II, III, and Independent Study** students are expected to participate in **six** tournaments throughout the season, with **at least two of those being CCISD-hosted tournaments and at least one being either NSDA or UIL District**. You will receive a major grade for participating in the required tournaments in 4th nine weeks grading period.

Signing up for a tournament is as simple as filling out the online form (link provided in-class). However, **it is assumed when you signed up for a tournament you planned your schedule to attend both Friday and Saturday, potentially all day**. Even if you are no longer in competition on Saturday, there is a lot for you to gain by watching other rounds, and for this reason - as well as the fact that we are a team and will travel as such - all students are expected to attend both days and to stay through the awards ceremony at the conclusion of the tournament. The only exception to this is if you competed on Friday but did not clear into Saturday **at all** or if your event(s) are Saturday only. **Parents: you are strongly urged to keep any and all requests for exception to this requirement to an absolute minimum.**

We understand that things come up or schedules might change, and students are urged to communicate these to Mr. Nassif. However, dropping from any or all events at a tournament past certain deadlines cause additional fees to be levied against the team. **Any fees so accrued will be charged to the student, even if there is a valid reason** as, unfortunately, we are required to pay the fees regardless of the reason. Communication between parent and student, and between student and Mr. Nassif, is absolutely vital to minimize this.

UIL No Pass/No Play rules apply to any and all tournaments that we compete in, **not only for UIL tournaments but also NSDA, TFA, TOC, etc.** All students are expected to stay on top of their grades themselves at all times, as Mr. Nassif will only do eligibility checks when they are regularly scheduled. If a student is at risk of failing, they must do everything they can with that teacher to correct their grade. In the end if a student is failing at a nine weeks period, they will be ineligible to compete or travel with the team again until they regain their eligibility, which is a process that can take time.

Unless otherwise announced, practices are held each week in Mr. Nassif's classroom on Tuesdays and Thursdays after school as well as on Wednesdays during Falcon Lunch. **Debate officers and captains are required to be at practice. Practices factor into all students' grades for Advanced Debate.**

Tournament Expectations

As previously mentioned, CLHS Speech & Debate has a very high reputation as a team and as members of the team you are expected to live up to that reputation, both in and out of round. Inappropriate language, using bogus sources or cases, and poor sportsmanship are absolutely forbidden and you can and will be pulled from competition or barred from further competition for misdeeds. Though Mr. Nassif is not physically present in every round, the debate community is a very tight-knit one and anything you say or do **will** come back to him.

During a tournament, students are expected to report to their competition rooms on time and remain in the room until the last contestant has performed, even if you are just observing. If you are entered in multiple events in the same section, you may politely ask to be excused due to your cross-entered status; at no time should you claim to be cross-entered simply to leave. As previously mentioned, students who do not advance are required to observe elimination rounds and will fill out round reports on the ones they observe. Failure to observe elimination rounds will result in a deduction to your tournament grade and can result in suspension from future tournaments.

This should go without saying, but just in case: **there will be absolutely no alcohol or drugs at tournaments, end of story.** These items are illegal for all members of our team, and anyone found in possession or under the influence of either will be immediately suspended from the team and will face disciplinary action from the school administration. If the student is participating in an out of town tournament, the parents/guardians of the student will be expected to make immediate travel arrangements for the student to return home at their own expense. Additionally, **tobacco products (including vapes or e-cigs) are prohibited by CLHS students at tournaments.** Use and/or possession of these products will result in both team and campus punishment.

Students must remain on the host school campus at all times. Any student who leaves the campus without a CLHS coach or prior coach-approved substitute (parent/guardian, coach from another

CCISD school, etc.) will be suspended from tournaments for the remainder of the year. Additionally, students must always remember we are guests at someone else's campus, and they should behave themselves accordingly. Trespassing in unauthorized areas, vandalism, and theft are among the list of things that are absolutely forbidden, and punishment will be swift and severe both from a team and school perspective but, potentially, with law enforcement as well.

On a final note for tournament expectations, there are additional rules for out of town tournaments. Boys are not to be in girls' rooms at any time, and vice versa. Students from other schools are not permitted in any CLHS room, and you are not to be in another school's rooms either (without CLHS coach permission). There will be a curfew each night that students are to follow; coaches and/or chaperones will verify that each student is in the proper room and students are then not allowed to leave the room for any reason (except if instructed by hotel security or management) until the curfew is lifted the next morning. Students are never to leave the hotel or tournament site without a CLHS coach or another adult that he approves. Incidental charges will be turned off at the hotel for all students, but any charges made anyway will be the responsibility of **all** of those in the offending room. Finally, violation of team or school rules may result in the student being ineligible to compete the next day, removal from the tournament at the parent/guardian's expense, suspension from the squad, and/or school discipline.

Out of town tournaments are generally limited to varsity team members only, with possible exceptions for novice debaters that have had prior success. The minimum requirements to attend an out of town tournament, for novice and varsity alike, are: student commitment and practice habits, student success at previous tournaments, student behavior at tournaments, and conforming to the rules and expectations of a member of this team. Mr. Nassif reserves the right to make decisions about who will or will not be allowed to compete at out of town tournaments with these guidelines in mind. The one thing to remember, however, is this: **Travelling with the team is a privilege, not a right.**

Debate Officers

To assist with the running of our team, each spring team members will elect various debate officers in accordance with the By-Laws of the Clear Lake HS Chapter of the National Speech & Debate Association. It is important to understand that, much like travelling with the team, holding an office is a privilege to be earned, not a right. As such, there is a heightened level of expectations for team officers and captains, above and beyond that of a "regular" member. Unless otherwise excused, they are expected to be at each practice and should be "leading from the front" by regularly competing at tournaments. Failure to uphold the standards we expect of leaders on the team can lead to an officer's removal as outlined in the Chapter By-Laws at a Chapter meeting or at the decision of the Chapter sponsor (i.e. Mr. Nassif).

Transportation

Transportation to and from tournaments is provided by the school district. Unless an alternate travel form is on file with Mr. Nassif prior and Mr. Nassif has given permission, **no students will be allowed to drive themselves to any tournament.** If you drive to the tournament without the proper permission and form on file anyway, you will be instructed to leave campus - this includes those who come to observe rounds. This rule is for your safety and protection. The single exception to this rule will be in-district tournaments. In this case, students may drive themselves and only themselves as long as written permission from the parent/guardians is received prior to the tournament. If the school

administration revokes this exception at any time for any reason, all students will be required to use district transportation.

Tournaments *generally* run on time, or something closely approximating on time. Some events that are beyond the control of the CLHS squad or coach can cause tournaments to run later than expected, however. As a general rule of thumb - and noting that specific circumstances can differ - the squad will return to CLHS on Friday night between 10:30 pm and midnight. We will leave, depending on the distance to the tournament, anywhere between 5:30 am and 7:00 am. **We will leave as soon as Mr. Nassif has boarded the bus and called roll, and we cannot wait for students.** Failure to report to the bus on time can and will result in your removal from the tournament with any applicable fees. On Saturday evenings, times vary widely, but may be anytime between 5:00 pm and midnight - the later we are, the better we're doing!

If a student misses the bus, his or her parent or legal guardian must bring the student to the tournament and the student must check in with a CLHS coach. Students who are frequently late for the bus may be suspended from the team, as this is not fair to others who are on time and **our tardiness to a tournament may jeopardize your fellow teammates.** Returning to campus, Mr. Nassif or the CLHS sponsor will make an effort to remind students to notify their parents or guardians when they are 10-15 minutes away from CLHS; however, please be at CLHS at the earliest time your student tells you we will return. While we understand it is frustrating to wait for the bus at a late hour, it is even more inconvenient and frustrating when parents are late picking up their students. As Mr. Nassif and other CCISD employees cannot take students home themselves, we cannot and will not leave until all students are picked up... and your coaches need sleep as much or more than the students do.

If there is a valid reason for squad members to leave the tournament separately, prior to the team departing on the bus, Mr. Nassif must be notified in advance in order to give his permission. Only the parent or legal guardian of the student in question may pick up the student, and they are expected to check out with Mr. Nassif or the CLHS sponsor prior to leaving. Failure to do these things, or consistently leaving tournaments early, may result in immediate suspension from tournaments. Again, **this is a team activity and the expectation is that we will travel to and from tournaments as a team!**

Tournament Attire

Speech and debate competitions call for a more formal dress code than most high school students have experienced before. This section of the handbook will endeavor to outline the expectations of students for what they will wear while competing. It should be noted that students are to be dressed before they board the bus to head to a competition site and must remain in competition attire until they are completed eliminated from the tournament; at this point, they may change into anything that would be considered "school appropriate." If they are receiving any sort of award at the awards ceremony, they are expected to remain in competition attire the entire tournament. If there is any doubt about the appropriateness of a particular outfit or item, students must check with Mr. Nassif prior to the tournament, as students not properly attired will not be allowed to even board the bus, let alone compete.

- Business professional is the name of the game. Traditionally, that includes items such as slacks and dress shirts, ties, etc. Mr. Nassif strives to give students extensive freedom of expression, but when it comes to dress you are strongly encouraged to lean more toward the "conservative" side of fashion. Students should feel welcome to discuss this with Mr. Nassif individually if necessary.
- Students are encouraged to wear "power colors," which include black, navy blue, gray, pin stripes, and some reds. However, they should refrain from wearing loud or distracting colors. When in doubt, ask your coach.
- All students should wear their hair in such a way that it is out of their face. It is recommended that it is a natural-appearing color and should be styled appropriately.
- Students should wear their dress shoes at all times while competing. It seems silly to say this, but it has come up: you may not compete in just your socks, barefoot, in house slippers, in tennis shoes, etc.
- Students should not have any visible tattoos.
- Absolutely no hats will be worn at tournaments at any time.
- In addition to these guidelines, it's important to note that CCISD/CLHS Dress Code largely applies as well, including but not limited to: no clothing displaying violent/suggestive themes, no ripped clothing, etc.
- Clothes should fit properly, being neither too tight nor too baggy. The questions you should continually ask yourself are: Is this professional? Is this in good taste?

*Written in July, 2014
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