



Debaters

Association of Victoria

Handbook

Schools Competition 2026

Schools Competition Handbook

Contents

- Competition Overview
- Administrative Details

Competition Overview

With over 200 schools, 1150 teams, four grades, 21 regions, five rounds and a seven-night finals series, the DAV Schools Competition is the largest English-language debating competition in the world.

Who's Who

The Debaters Association of Victoria ('DAV') has the mission of 'facilitating effective debate in Victoria.' It was established in the 1920s and has a long tradition of debating excellence.

The Schools Competition Administrators (Kim Hitchcock and Genevieve Perruzza) are employed to coordinate the day-to-day operations of the Schools Competition and is the first point of call for administrative matters.

The Executive Officer (Charisma Taylor) is responsible for the overall operations of the DAV, including all accounts and payments, as well as general queries about our competitions and services.

The Membership and Training Administrator (Xavier Konynenburg) can organise debating training for your staff or students and helps the DAV identify and develop new programs and opportunities.

The Complaints Committee is responsible for all adjudication and Code of Conduct complaints.

The Office Administrators (Isabella Leach, Michelle Guo, Wendy Xia) will assist you with day to day enquiries where the above administrators are unavailable.

Contact Details

Debaters Association of Victoria

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Web www.dav.com.au

Phone (03) 9348 9477

Office hours: 10AM – 5PM (Messages may be left outside this time)

Website

The website (www.dav.com.au) is the information centre of the DAV Schools Competition. It contains administrative information such as draws, topics, ladders and regional information, as well as news and resources for debaters.

The website will be updated throughout the year, so please check it regularly for changes. You may need to reload the page on your computer to make sure you are viewing the latest information.

Learning Management System (LMS)

The LMS (<https://lms.dav.com.au>) provides adjudicators with comprehensive training modules, access to training resources, and accreditation assessments. It also includes guidance on DAV policies and child safety procedures.

Some schools programs also use the LMS to deliver training materials.

Competition Format

Style Australian Three-On-Three (two teams of three members, affirming/negating a topic)

Draw Draws are published on the DAV Schools website, in the following format:
Affirmative Team vs Negative Team

Draws also specify the topic to be debated (if not secret or advised), and the date, time and location of the debate.

Chair Where possible an audience member will act as a chairperson, who will announce and time speeches (see later). Otherwise, the adjudicator will chair the debate.

Grades A Grade - Year 12 students 6 to 8 minute speeches 1 prepared topic, 4 secret topics

B Grade - Year 11 students 6 to 8 minute speeches 1 prepared topic, 4 secret topics

C Grade - Year 10 students 5 to 6 minute speeches 2 prepared topics, 1 advised topic, 2 secret topics

D Grade - Year 9 students 4 to 5 minute speeches 5 prepared topics

Students from lower year levels can enter a higher grade, but not the other way around.

Please note that the DAV runs a separate intensive training program for students in Years 7 & 8, known as the Junior Secondary Program as well as separate year 8 competition programs. Year 8 students are **NOT** able to be entered into the Schools Competition and should, instead, seek to join these competitions. Details of this competition can be found in the Junior Secondary Program Overview (later in this handbook).

Regions

Schools entering the competition will be allocated to a region, according to the preferences you indicate on your registration form. Over the last few years, it has become clear that some regions are more popular than others. Due to high demand for some regions, schools may be allocated to a region that was not their first preference.

We rely upon the generosity of our host schools, so please encourage your students to behave themselves and treat the occasion and the venue with the utmost respect.

Regional Coordinators are the DAV's representative at regional nights – they will organise adjudicators and respond to any queries you may have. However, Regional Coordinators do not have the authority to make decisions about complaints and will refer these to the DAV office.

Host School Coordinators are the host school's representative on the night and are responsible for allocating debating and preparation rooms on the night. We are enormously grateful for their efforts in helping regional nights run smoothly!

Rounds

There are five rounds in the Schools Competition, followed by a finals series. Please ensure that your school's teams can attend all scheduled debates and that they prepare a case for every debate.

Times

The times for debates will be indicated on the draw. Secret topic preparation commences one hour before the debate time.

Draws

When you view the draw for your region/grade, you will only be able to see the draw for the next scheduled round. Check the website after each round has concluded for your region for the next round's draw. All draws are allocated randomly by the website, with care taken to avoid teams from the same school facing each other, and the same teams facing each other twice.

Round 5 is 'power-paired', meaning that after Round Four, the top two teams on the ladder play off against each other, followed by the next two, and so on. After Round Five, the team(s) with the highest points will go through to the Finals series. At the end of round four, check the website for the Round Five draw. It will be released as soon as possible after the Round Four results are received but may take up to six working days to become available.

Topics

There are three kinds of topics:

1. Prepared – the topic is advised in the draw released at the beginning of the competition.
2. Advised – the general subject area is advised in the draw, and the exact wording of the topic is released ONE HOUR before the start of the debate.
3. Secret – the topic is announced ONE HOUR before the start of the debate (see separate note).

Resource Guide

The Resource Guide provides briefs for prepared topics, to facilitate student research for debates. If feedback from a regional night held early in a round indicates that a topic is causing difficulties, additional detail will be added to the Resource Guide entry for that topic (but this is the only intervention we will undertake).

🔗 http://www.dav.com.au/resources/sc_resource_guide.php

Secret Topic Preparation

Preparation time is one hour, beginning with the topic release, an hour before the debate. Students will meet at a central location in the host school, and a roll will be taken five minutes before the topic is released. Teams will be allocated a room in which to prepare their debate.

The rules for secret topic preparation are:

- only five registered team members may be present
- no teachers, parents, coaches or anyone else may enter the room or communicate with the team members
- students may take any printed material into the room to use in preparation
- laptop computers, mobile phones, and other electronic equipment must not be used, except for keeping track of time

Please make sure students are aware of these rules. Contravention of the rules will be dealt with severely (teams violating these rules will be at risk of forfeit) and may affect the relevant school as well as that team.

Ladders

Teams are awarded points for each round, and these are used to determine the ladder. The ladder is used to create the power-paired Round 5 draw, and after Round 5, to determine finals qualifiers. Ladders are posted on the DAV Schools website between rounds.

Points are awarded as follows:

4 points for a win or 'genuine non-debate'

2 points for a loss

0 points for a forfeit

Finals

After Round Five, teams on (equal) top of the ladder for each region will qualify for the Finals series, and a draw made up of qualifying teams will be posted on the website.

If more than 16 teams in a Grade qualify for the finals, three playoff rounds will be held to reduce the number of teams to 16. There are four finals: Octo (16 teams), Quarter (8), Semi (4) and Grand Finals.

Speaker eligibility is closely monitored. To be eligible to debate in the finals, speakers must:

- be registered as a member of that team, and
- have debated more often for that team than for any other during the year.

If there is a problem concerning speaker eligibility, the finals committee has the discretion to allow a debater to participate, and you should make a written request for special consideration.

Chair

Where possible an audience or surplus team member will act as a chairperson, who will introduce speakers and time speeches (see later). Otherwise, the adjudicator will chair the debate:

Beginning:

- 1) Welcome audience and participants;
- 2) State the topic of the debate;

3) Advise speaking times (e.g. 4-5 minutes/5-6 minutes/6-8 minutes) and that there will be one knock for warning (when the speaker reaches the start of the allotted time, e.g. the 4-, 5- or 6-minute mark), two knocks at the end of the allotted time and continuous knocking from 30 seconds past the allotted time; and

4) Introduce the teams.

For each speaker:

- 1) At the adjudicator's nod, introduce the next speaker;
- 2) Time each speech (and at the end of the speech, tell the adjudicator the speech's length);
- 3) Follow the timing pattern and announce by knocking once in warning, twice at the end and continuously knocking from 30 seconds past the allotted time.

🔗 Look at the DAV Schools Website for a [Chairperson's Instruction Sheet](#).

Adjudicators

The DAV trains its adjudicators rigorously. All adjudicators are accredited according to the Australian Debating Federation (ADF) Rules. Adjudicators are ranked from Beginner through to Senior, and A Grade debates are adjudicated by our most experienced adjudicators wherever possible.

Adjudicators are frequently university students, teachers or young professionals who have themselves participated in DAV competitions, so they have plenty of advice and experience to share with students.

The adjudicator's role is to:

- decide the winner of the debate;
- explain their reasons for the result; and
- provide constructive advice and criticism to debaters.

Participants are asked to show respect for their adjudicators, and a Code of Conduct complaint may be made if this request is not observed. We ask that you accept an adjudicator's decision in good faith and in the spirit of fair play, even if you disagree with it. Debates are frequently evenly matched, and there may be valid reasons on either side to prefer one team to win.

However, if you are seriously and reasonably aggrieved by an adjudication, you can lodge a written complaint (see Conduct & Complaints).

Adjudications

Each team will receive a copy of the official score sheet, with a mark per speaker out of 100.

In a 'perfect' 100 score, 40 marks each go to Manner and Matter, and 20 to Method.

However, the deemed average is 75, and the scoring range is between 70 and 80.

Winning margins:

- | | |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 – 4 points | A very close debate, with only minor differences separating the two teams |
| 5 – 9 points | A relatively clear decision with one team having an obvious advantage |
| 10+ points | A very clear win, with the losing team probably having failed in one or more fundamental aspects of its argument or presentation |

Best Speaker

The adjudicator has the discretion to name a Best Speaker, who will be the debater with the highest score. If several speakers each scored the same highest score, the adjudicator may give the award to one speaker, all speakers or none.

Best Speaker awards do not influence the calculation of Swannie Award recipients.

Swannies

Swannie Awards recognise debating excellence in Schools Competition debaters and are named after Alan Swanwick, a world-renowned Victorian debater and adjudicator.

Regional Swannie Awards are given to the speaker(s) with the highest average mark in each Grade for each Region. Competition Swannie Awards are given to the speaker(s) with the highest average mark in each Grade across all regions in the competition.

Swannies are presented at a special Awards night, complete with a photographer and guest speaker. Awards are announced after the end of Round Five. Schools with students eligible to receive Swannies will be notified directly.

Administrative Details

Postponements

Postponements will be granted only in exceptional circumstances. We recommend that you prioritise the convenience of dates over geographic proximity when selecting a region for your school.

Exceptional Circumstances

The following are generally **not** reasonable grounds to request an exceptional circumstances postponement:

- Clashes with other extra-curricular activities such as camps, sports, theatre or musical occasions;
- VCE or other schoolwork commitments;
- Illness or family problems for individual team members (teams have 5 members for this reason); or
- Transport problems.

To arrange a postponement, School Coordinators must contact the staff member at their opposition school to request that a debate be rescheduled. The opposition school may accept or deny this request. If the request is denied, the team unavailable at the originally scheduled time will forfeit. If a postponement is acceptable to both teams, the coordinators must email the DAV office with the agreed date and time one week in advance.

In 2026, schools that request a postponement will be charged a \$30.00 administration fee per debate. During the finals season, this fee will increase to \$40.00. This will be strictly enforced this year.

Forfeits

If your team does not debate on the night or does not debate according to the rules, it will be deemed to have forfeited the debate.

Even if you provide notice, unless you have been granted a postponement, a non-debate will constitute a forfeit.

Avoiding Forfeits

The easiest way to avoid a forfeit is to ensure that all five (or more) registered team members are involved in preparation for debates and attend regional nights. Some other suggestions are below:

1. Appoint team captains and have them work out what other school and non-school activities their team members are likely to be involved in; coordinate dates with the school calendar and check with Year Level Coordinators and Subject Teachers.
2. Ensure that you have enough interested students to sustain the team or teams you will be entering in the competition. It's important to be realistic about students dropping out due to increased workload or (gasp!) losing interest.
3. Do not be afraid to have Year 11 students debating in A Grade – if, for example, you have only four interested students in Year 12, register Year 11 participants in A Grade or have a single A Grade team with students from both Year 11 and 12.

We appreciate that continuous assessment in the VCE can affect the availability of students for debating. We have tried to ensure that few regional nights occur during mid-year exams, but the size of the competition means that whichever dates we choose will always affect somebody, somewhere.

Forfeits Policy

The DAV revised its forfeit policy in 2006. This revision was approved by the Schools Advisory Board. The forfeit policy is as follows:

Notification

Schools that forfeit must inform the DAV, the opposing team and the host school. They can do so by sending an email notifying of the forfeit to the DAV, opposing school coordinator and host school coordinator. This email must be sent to all parties by 5:00 pm the day before the debate to be eligible for a 'forfeit with notice'. If the email is sent to all parties by 3:00 pm on the day of the debate they will be eligible for a 'same-day forfeit' instead of a 'no-notice forfeit'.

Fines

Forfeit type	Notice given <i>to all parties</i>	Fine
Forfeit with notice	Before 5:00pm the day prior to the debate	\$30
Same-day forfeit	Before 3:00pm the day of the debate	\$50
Forfeit without notice	After 3:00pm the day of the debate OR no notice given OR all parties not informed	\$80

Forfeiting schools must inform the opposing school, the host school, and the DAV office, otherwise a forfeit will be considered 'without notice'.

Escalation

Where a school forfeits three times in one season, the DAV will enter into correspondence with the Debating Co-ordinator and the school principal to inform them that the forfeits have taken place and that fines will be levied. The letter will also explain the process for withdrawing teams.

Where a school then forfeits an additional two debates in that season, a total of five, the school will be put on probation. The probation period will last until the end of the season.

Where the school breaks probation, by forfeiting another debate in that season, a total of six, its teams will only be permitted to debate in the subsequent rounds and finals with the permission of Complaints Committee.

A forfeit will be deemed to have taken place when:

- a team has not arrived at the debate room 20 minutes after the scheduled starting time; or if a team is present but not ready to debate within 20 minutes after the scheduled starting time;
- in an advised or secret topic debate, the team members are not present in the debating room and ready to debate within 5 minutes of the scheduled starting time.

As soon as you realise your team cannot debate, you must **send an email to the DAV office, the opponent school and the host school.**

Complaints Committee has the discretion to waive forfeit fees. To apply for a waiver, please send reasons in writing why the team was unable to debate.

Training Services

The DAV offers a comprehensive range of debating services, including:

- adjudication of debates, including intra-school and external competitions;
- student coaching and training in debating and related skills;
- teacher and adjudicator training;
- debating information, handbooks and resources; and
- competition management.

If you wish to take advantage of the services we offer, please contact the Membership and Training Administrator (or speak to someone in the DAV Office).

Resources and Publications

Your first stop for debating information should be the DAV Schools website at www.dav.com.au/schools.

The debating 'bible' is the Australia-Asia Debating Guide. It is written in a generally accessible style and is recommended for anyone wanting to better understand the mechanics of debating and adjudication. More information about the AADG and downloadable chapters are available online at our website [here](#).

Resource guides, published by the DAV, gives some pointers as to the subject area covered by a particular topic. However, students should not confine their research solely to the resources listed (and adjudicators will not have read the material, so students should not treat the Resource Guide as though it were a study design for an exam). These can be found on our website [here](#).