



Virtual Congress 2020-2021

Due to a global pandemic, UIL has granted regions the option of hosting their 2020 meet virtually or in-person. Regions choosing to go virtual should adapt the contest implementing the rule waivers and altered procedures provided by the League. Rule waivers and altered procedures are temporary and are only effective for virtual meets held during the 2020-21 UIL season. The adaptations included in this document should be followed only when administering a virtual UIL Congressional meet. If hosting an in-person meet, the existing contest rules and procedures are to be followed.

Temporary Waivers

<https://www.uil texas.org/policy/covid-19/2020-academic-fall-update>

Procedures

Synchronous

Congress competitions will happen live with other students present.

Size of Chamber

The size of the chamber should be reduced. Twelve (12) is the optimum number of representatives in a chamber because of the limitations of a virtual gallery as well as efficient recognition of speakers and debate flow.

Electronic Retrieval Devices

Use of the Internet is allowed in a virtual tournament format. Wireless capabilities do not have to be disconnected. Cell phones and smart phones are not prohibited. However, the intent of the waiver is so students can access the competitive virtual platform, not to gain an advantage or skirt existing rules and procedures. Using electronic retrieval devices for research or to otherwise circumvent UIL rules is a violation of the UIL Academic Ethics Code.

Pre-Precedence

Tab contest officials may provide the Parliamentarian an online “Pre-Precedence chart” randomly-created that will be used by the Presiding Officer to determine the geography of the room. The Parliamentarian will provide a link to this chart to the chamber’s elected Presiding Officer. This chart will be used to set initial precedence when multiple speakers seek to speak at the same time. This is not meant to indicate a required order of speaking, but instead will allow Presiding Officers to determine how to fairly call upon speakers.



Direct Questioning

Each virtual questioning period shall be divided into 30-second increments, with each student being able to utilize the entirety of the 30 seconds. When a student fails to use the entire 30 seconds, the remaining time will be absorbed. Questions shall be recognized on recency. Precedence will be tracked for questioning in the same way as it is kept for speeches. Review this in advance of the competition to become familiar with the procedure.

Microphones

Students should be muted for the duration of the contest except when recognized by the Presiding Office or Parliamentarian, or when serving in the role of Presiding Officer.

Camera

Students are expected to have their camera on at all times during the round. They may ask for personal privilege, but their camera should remain on for the duration of the competition. In addition, all judges in the round will have the same expectation.

Presiding Officers

Presiding Officers have been encouraged to avoid gaveling, and instead to use visual signals to indicate passing speech time. Presiding Officers are encouraged to use printed timecards and a second count-down with identifiable finger signals. iPad timers are allowed but printed timecards are most effective. Verbal stops are encouraged when speakers have exhausted their time.

Chat Box

The Chat Box should be used for submitting amendments and point of privilege, if the platform allows.

Scoring

Judges will score speeches during chamber debate. Parliamentarians will not be scoring speeches individually but will rank all competitors in the chamber at the end of the day.

Verification

Following tabulation, student scores and ranks will become available during the required verification period. Procedure will be determined by the region committee and announced prior to the beginning of the contest.

Observers

No one, other than coaches who are employed by the school, will be allowed to observe virtual rounds. *When technology allows*, coaches may be allowed to observe rounds of their students if they are not judging or otherwise helping the tournament to function. When observing, coaches should have their camera off.

No outside observers are allowed in virtual rounds.



Best Practices: Congress

Preparation

Prepare to enter the new world of online Congress before the start of actual competition rounds by holding online practice rounds. Purchasing an ethernet cable to hardwire to the router is recommended to improve connectivity.

Technology Set-Up

Technical set-up is critical to consider. Competitors should enter the chamber early to test microphone and technology in advance. Check the wi-fi connection. Turn off unnecessary devices. Try to minimize simultaneous connections to the router to improve video quality.

Location

Try to secure a separate room away from noise and other people. If using a wireless connection is necessary, be as close as possible to the router. Inform others of the tournament schedule and required privacy to compete. Be aware of when to be online and show up early to the contest.

Competitor Positioning

Students are encouraged to sit while competing because of the “virtual box”.

Speaker Tips

Sitting heightens the need for verbal transitions when speaking since traditional speaker movement used as nonverbal transitions is hampered. Main point previews at the end of introductions are critical.

Placards

Representatives should prepare a placard professional in appearance that includes their name (i.e. **REP. RODSON**) and, when appropriate, should hold it so it can be visually seen within the frame of the camera (the “virtual box”). Check the virtual mirror setting to be certain the placard can be read correctly.

Cameras

Students should adjust to the web camera considering what can be seen in the “virtual box”, adjust to the room and adjust the side lighting so as not to be a dark shadow on the screen. Have a visual background free from distractions, to the extent that is possible. Simple adjustments can be made such as turning on a desk lamp for back lighting, turning off a ceiling fan to eliminate distraction, removing pets that might make noise and making sure what shows in the background is organized and uncluttered.



Coach Notifications

Online Procedures

Familiarize yourself and your students with the tournament management software. Get any necessary accounts set up ahead of time.

Be sure online registration includes your current cell phone number.

Plan in advance how to keep in contact with your students. There are apps available that do not require sharing cell phone numbers, a practice some school districts prohibit. Discuss protocols with the team regarding pre-round meetings, check-in and during the tournament.

Know how to access the specific tournament online video conferencing being used.

Be available at all times that your students are competing. Make sure you are aware of your judging obligations. Be sure you have contact information for tournament personnel.

Technical Difficulties

Have a plan in place should you or your students have technical difficulties. Know what procedures to follow if the tournament video platform crashes or has a glitch.

Judge Notifications

Preparation

Judges should prepare to enter the world of online judging before the start of actual competition rounds. In order to maximize social distancing, any pre-tournament adjudication training should be digital or presented via video.

Technical set-up is important to consider. Become familiar with the tournament software. Review all instructions provided by the tournament host and ask questions well in advance of the competition. Enter the chamber early to test technology in advance. Purchasing an ethernet cable and hardwiring to the router is recommended to improve connectivity.

Technology

Keep your video on but your microphone off during the contest.

Know what the tournament procedure is should there be tournament-wide tech issues.

Common tech issues:

- Lagging audio – have participant turn off video briefly to improve bandwidth
- Noise in the audio – have participant mute themselves if they are not speaking
- Video quality – have participant readjust lighting or screen angle
- Disconnection – wait a reasonable amount of time for participant to reconnect

Contact Info

Be certain the tournament officials have your current cell phone number and that you know how to reach them, should problems arise.

Ballots

Congress ballots will be accessed through the online platform selected by the region committee. UIL also will provide interactive ballots to Region Clerks who request them.

Environment and Disruptions

Judges are being encouraged to remember that participants come from diverse backgrounds and should not be penalized for things beyond their control. This may include unanticipated interruptions, technical issues and the visual background students have available to them.