

Ethics Bowl Etiquette

Everyone

The Ethics Bowl is primarily an educational experience, with two fundamental purposes, “(a) the development of ethical understanding in connection with complex, ambiguous, and difficult to resolve issues; and (b) the fostering of key virtues associated with democratic deliberation.”* These purposes should shape all of your actions in association with the Ethics Bowl. All behavior during the Ethics Bowl should demonstrate respect toward all participants.

Students

Although the competition may be intense, you should always treat the other team with courtesy. For example, it is inappropriate to whisper loudly during the other team’s presentation, or to use rhetorical ploys designed to belittle the other team.

While you may disagree with the scores that judges assign, keep in mind that judging complex arguments drawing on diverse facts and theories in real-time is a demanding task. You should think of it as part of your task to communicate your reasoning effectively to judges with ethical expertise from a wide range of sources.

Coaches

Your team will follow your example. Take this opportunity to help your students in their moral development. While you should sympathize with unjust (and just) defeats, you play a critical role in helping students to keep everything in perspective and maintain balanced emotions. Pass along concerns you have about particular cases of problematic judging to the Ethics Bowl organizers in a private setting.

Judges

The students have worked hard to gain an understanding of the case. You need to read the cases with due care, and make sure that you have a sound understanding of the issues and facts involved prior to the Ethics Bowl. While the teams might not approach it in the way that you have, it is part of your task to understand what approach they have chosen. The question period is an important part of the learning experience; use it to gain a better understanding of the team’s approach, or to highlight points they failed to address, or just to clarify points that seem significant to you. While you will not be asked to justify each score that you write down, it is a good thought experiment to pretend that you will have to do so. Should you get the opportunity to explain your scores to a team, do so in a positive manner that gives them greater insight into your reasoning about the case.

Moderators

You are uniquely situated to help create a respectful and thoughtful environment. Explain and enforce the rules clearly and consistently, and set a friendly tone by the way you run the session. Where necessary, mediate in a judicious fashion when conflicts arise. Where you observe problematic behavior, touch base with coaches and judges in a private setting to pass along your concerns.

*”The Educational Significance of the Ethics Bowl,” Robert F. Ladenson, in *Teaching Ethics* (1:1: 2001). This article can also be found on the IEB website.