

Association for Practical and Professional Ethics  
Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl®

# National Rules 2025



[appeieb.org](http://appeieb.org)



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# **APPE INTERCOLLEGIATE ETHICS BOWL® NATIONAL COMPETITION (2025)**

## **Procedural Rules**

### **Rule: When and How Cases Are Released**

Each Ethics Bowl match begins with the moderator presenting a case to the teams. There are seventeen (17) official cases, each 1 to 2 pages in length, which will be posted on the APPE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl® (IEB) webpage on a weekday between December 19 and 23 each year.

All questions asked during the Ethics Bowl will be based on these seventeen cases. However, teams will not know ahead of time which case they will be asked about in a given match, nor will they know what the specific question will be.

Judges and moderators will also receive the same set of seventeen cases in late December. Like the teams, they will not be given any of the questions in advance and will not be informed ahead of time which cases will be used in each match.

### **Team Size and Substitution Rules**

Teams may be of any size, but only six (6) or fewer members may actively participate in a match. Once these participants are seated and ready to begin, no substitutions may be made for the remainder of the round. Substitutions are also not allowed once the case has been announced.

If a team member leaves the table during the discussion of a case, they may not return until that case is no longer being discussed.

All participating team members must be undergraduates. For full eligibility details, please consult the regional rules. (Add link to regional rules)

### **Use of Notes and Scratch Paper**

During competition, books and notes are not permitted, but teams may use scratch paper to jot down thoughts. Teams will receive a copy of the case and the question at the start of each match. Scratch paper should not be used until the case has been announced and the moderator has officially started the timer.

Team members may pass notes to each other at any time during the match.

At the halfway point of the match, the moderator will instruct teams to clear any notes taken during the first half and place them out of sight.

## **Personal Timers During Matches**

Teams may use personal timers during competition, but the following restrictions apply:

1. Only the moderator's timer is official. Team timers are for reference only.
2. Timers must not be internet-connected or capable of storing data (e.g., no smartphones or smartwatches).
3. Teams may not use timers to track the opposing team's time.
4. Teams are encouraged to use timers discreetly—e.g., by silencing alarms and avoiding distracting features. While this is not a strict rule, teams should be respectful of the match environment.

## **Time Warning Requests**

Teams may request time warnings for each part of the competition. If requested, they will receive two official warnings: one at three minutes remaining and one at one minute remaining. No additional time warnings may be requested.

Moderators will let teams know whether they typically give time warnings visually, verbally, or both, and will ask if the team prefers a different method.

## **Opposing Team Conferral Etiquette**

During a team's conferral period, the opposing team is also permitted to confer. However, they should do so quietly and avoid being a distraction. Moderators have the discretion to intervene if the opposing team is disruptive.

## **Moderator Case and Question Announcement**

The moderator will announce which case Team 1 (determined by coin toss) will address and then read the question associated with that case. The moderator will not read the full case aloud—only the question.

## **Team 1 Conferral and Response Procedure**

After the moderator reads the question, Team 1 will have two (2) minutes to confer. Following the conferral period, Team 1 may use up to ten (10) minutes to present their response.

Multiple team members may contribute to the response, but only one person may speak at a time.



When the ten minutes expire, the moderator will call “time.” This is a hard stop—Team 1 may not finish their sentence once time has been called.

## **Team 2 Commentary Procedure**

After Team 1 finishes their response, Team 2 will have one (1) minute to confer. They will then have up to five (5) minutes to comment on Team 1’s answer to the moderator’s question. In elimination rounds, this commentary period is extended to six (6) minutes.

More than one team member may contribute to the commentary, but only one person may speak at a time.

When time is up, the moderator will call “time.” This is a hard stop—Team 2 may not finish their sentence once time is called.

## **Team 1 Commentary Response Procedure**

After Team 2 gives their commentary, Team 1 will have one (1) minute to confer. They may then use up to five (5) minutes to respond to Team 2’s commentary.

Multiple team members may contribute to the response, but only one person may speak at a time.

When the five minutes expire, the moderator will call “time.” This is a hard stop—Team 1 must stop immediately and may not finish their sentence.

## **Judge Questioning Period**

Following Team 1’s response to team 2’s commentary, the judges will have up to ten (10) minutes to ask questions. Each judge is initially allowed one question and one follow-up until all judges have had a chance to speak. If time remains, judges may then ask additional questions.

Before the questioning period begins, judges will have one (1) minute to confer.

Teams may huddle briefly to discuss their answers before responding, and different team members may respond to different judges. Moderators will remind teams to manage their time wisely during this portion of the match.

The moderator will provide time warnings at the five-minute and three-minute marks. When ten minutes are up, the moderator will call “time.” This is a hard stop—teams may not finish their sentence once time is called.

## **Reversal of Roles**

After the first case is completed, Team 1 and Team 2 will switch roles for the second case. The team that presented first will now comment second, and the team that commented will now present. This switch happens within the same round and uses a new case

## **Scoring and Withholding of Results**

Judges should complete their scoring after each portion of the match using the official score sheet provided (see scoring rules for details). However, judges must not reveal any scores to the teams until the entire match is completed.

## **Announcing Scores at the End of the Match**

At the conclusion of the second half of the round, the moderator will ask the judges to announce the scores they have given each team for the match. (See scoring rules for details.)

## **Determining the Winner of a Match**

The winner of the match is the team that is declared the winner by a majority of the judges.

- A team that wins on two or more judges' score sheets wins the match.
- If a team wins on one score sheet and ties on the other two, that team is also declared the winner.
- If neither team wins on more score sheets, the match is considered a tie, even if one team has more total points.

## **Case Materials and Case Production**

### **Case Packet and Release Date**

The National Competition case packet will include seventeen (17) cases. The Case Writing Committee may include up to two previously used cases, provided those cases are at least five years old and have been updated to ensure relevance and timeliness.

The full case packet will be released on a weekday between December 19 and 23 each year.

### **Case Production Rule**

The National and Regional Case Writing Committees are responsible for selecting and producing cases for the APPE IEB® competitions. These committees may solicit case ideas and draft submissions from various sources, including APPE sponsors.

However, final authority over selection, editing, and wording of cases rests solely with the relevant committee. APPE sponsorship does not influence which cases are selected, and the use of submitted cases is not a condition of sponsorship.

If a case submitted by a case writing committee must be removed from the final packet, the Chair of the APPE IEB® will work with the committee to craft a suitable replacement case.

## Rules for Acceptable Behavior

### Moderator Authority and Handling of Disruptions

The moderator is in charge of the competition room. If any issue involving unacceptable behavior arises, the moderator should attempt to address it immediately. If the issue is serious or cannot be resolved by the moderator, the designated Disputes Official must be called in, and a time-out will begin until the matter is resolved.

### Role of the Disputes Official

At the national competition, the person responsible for handling formal disputes is known as the **Disputes Official**. This individual may be:

- The IEB Chair,
- The IEB Chair-Elect,
- The Chair of the Rules Committee, or
- A designated member of the IEB Executive Committee.

This official is empowered to resolve serious behavioral or procedural issues that cannot be handled by the moderator alone.

### Examples of Unacceptable Behavior

The following are examples of unacceptable behavior during Ethics Bowl matches:

- a. Coaches communicating excessively with students during a match. (A smile or nod is acceptable; persistent signaling is not.)
- b. Coaches acting in ways that could distract the opposing team, such as rolling eyes or shaking heads. The intensity of the behavior should be considered.
- c. Judges berating or speaking harshly to students.
- d. Students (whether audience or team members) being loud or disruptive while the opposing team is speaking.



- e. Use of foul, graphic, or insulting language by any participant.
- f. Any behavior that could reasonably be construed as sexual harassment.

## Team Sponsorship and Representation

### Sponsor Rule

Every team competing in a regional or national Ethics Bowl must have a sponsor from their school who is either:

1. A regular faculty member, or
2. An adjunct instructor or graduate student authorized by the school to sponsor a team.

Sponsors are not required to travel with the team to competitions.

Teams without an eligible sponsor may petition the APPE IEB® Subcommittee for permission to compete. The petition must explain why school sponsorship could not be secured.

The faculty sponsor must serve as the team's main point of contact and respond to APPE communications in a timely manner. Failure to do so may result in the team forfeiting its spot in the APPE IEB®.

### Rule Regarding Official College Representatives for Teams

The person listed as the sponsor on a team's registration for the APPE IEB® Championship is considered the official representative of the team's college or university. This individual is responsible for:

- All decisions related to the team,
- Verifying that all team members meet eligibility requirements, and
- Accepting or declining the team's invitation to the national competition.

## Competition Room Procedures

### Taping Rule

At the national competition, teams are permitted to record (audio or video) any round except for the final round. However, two conditions must be met:

1. The team must obtain permission from the opposing team prior to the start of the round.
2. Recording must be done in a non-disruptive manner that does not interfere with any participants.

The final round will be recorded by the competition organizers.

## **Feedback and Spirit Points**

On the back of the judges' score sheet, there is space for judges to provide written feedback to the teams. Completing this section is optional and depends on time availability.

Judges will also assign Spirit Points, which reflect how well each team embodied the spirit of Ethics Bowl—particularly with respect to civility, respect, and constructive dialogue. Each judge awards Spirit Points individually on a five-point scale.

Spirit Points are displayed at the end of the round along with the other scores, but they do not count toward a team's total score and do not affect the outcome of the match.

Time permitting (for up to five minutes after a match), students may ask judges clarifying questions or request constructive feedback. However, students may not argue about scores or challenge the judges.

## **Scoring Rules**

### **Evaluation Criteria**

1. Judges shall evaluate the responses of teams solely in terms of the following criteria:

A. Clarity and Intelligibility: Was the presentation clear and systematic, and did the team answer the moderator's question? Regardless of whether or not you agree with the conclusion, did the team give a coherent argument in a clear and succinct manner?

B. Identification and Discussion of Central Ethical Dimensions: Did the team's presentation clearly identify and thoroughly discuss the central ethical dimensions of the case?

C. Deliberative Thoughtfulness: Did the team's presentation indicate both awareness and thoughtful consideration of different viewpoints, including especially those that would loom large in the reasoning of individuals who disagree with the team's position?

### **Scoring Breakdown**

2. The judges will score each team as follows:

0-30 for a team's answer to the Moderator's question (30 best); in evaluating a team's answer the judges will give the team a score of 0-10 relative to each of the three evaluation criteria indicated above and total the sum.

0-10 for the opposing team's commentary (10 best).

0-10 for the response to the opposing team's commentary (10 best).

0-10 for the response to the judges' questions, by the team that answered the Moderator's question (10 best).

In evaluating a team's commentary, the other team's response to the commentary, and a team's response to the judges' questions the judges will consider the three evaluation criteria indicated above, but give the teams an overall score, rather than a separate point score relative to each of the criteria.

## Ranking and Advancement

### Rule for Determining the Top Eight Teams

At the end of the four preliminary rounds, teams will be ranked according to the following criteria, in order:

1. **Number of Wins** – Teams with more wins rank higher.
2. **Number of Ties** – Among teams with the same number of wins, those with more ties rank higher.
3. **Point Differential** – If teams are tied in both wins and ties, the team with the higher point differential ranks higher.

Point differential is calculated as the total number of points a team scored across all rounds minus the total number of points their opponents scored.

Example Ranking:

School	Wins	Ties	Point Differential	Final Rank
School M	4	0	+12	1st
School R	4	0	+10	2nd
School B	3	1	+15	3rd
School S	3	0	-8	4th
School H	2	2	-6	5th

**Notes:**

- Although School B had a higher point differential than School M, M ranks higher due to having more wins.
- Likewise, School S ranks above School H, despite a worse point differential, because S had more wins.

**Point Differentials**

Point Differentials: A team's point differential for a match is calculated by subtracting the opposing team's total score from their own total score:

Point Differential = Team's Total Points – Opponent's Total Points

- Point differentials may still be positive, even in a loss.
- A team's overall point differential at the end of the preliminary rounds is the sum of its point differentials from all four preliminary matches.

**Advancement to Elimination Rounds:**

The eight teams with the highest rankings after the preliminary rounds will advance to the elimination rounds.

Ranking is based on:

1. Number of wins
2. Number of ties
3. Point differential (as described above)

**Tie-Breaking Procedures**

If teams are tied in wins, ties, and point differential at the end of the preliminary rounds, the following procedures will apply in order:

- a. Head-to-Head Result
  - If the tied teams played each other during the preliminary rounds, the winner of that match will be ranked higher.
- b. Three-Way (or More) Tie and Transitivity
  - If three or more tied teams all played each other and transitivity holds (e.g., A beat B, B beat C, and C did not beat A), rankings will follow the transitive outcomes.
- c. Total Raw Points
  - If head-to-head results do not resolve the tie, the team with the highest total raw points scored across all matches will be ranked higher.

d. Impartial Random Process

– If a tie remains after applying the above methods, a random process will be used:

- For two teams, a coin toss will determine the outcome.
- For three or more teams, the team drawing the highest card from a standard deck of playing cards will be ranked higher. The process will be repeated until a full ranking is determined.

## **Rule for Determining the Winner of the Ethics Bowl**

### **Elimination Rounds**

The top 8 teams will advance to the elimination rounds. These teams will face off in single-elimination matches.

- Judges will continue to use the same scoring criteria and point system as in the preliminary rounds.
- The winner of the APPE IEB® will be the team that wins all their elimination matches.

### **Ties During Quarterfinal and Semifinal Matches**

If a quarterfinal or semifinal match ends in a tie, the winner will be determined using the following tie-break hierarchy:

1. Most points in the match
2. Head-to-head result from the preliminary rounds (if applicable)
3. Most wins in the preliminary rounds
4. Most ties in the preliminary rounds
5. Highest point differential in the preliminary rounds
6. Highest total points in the preliminary rounds
7. Coin toss (if all else fails)

### **Ties During the Final Match**

If the final round ends in a tie:

1. The team with more points in the final match will be declared the winner, or else
2. If still tied, both teams will be declared co-winners of the APPE IEB®.

## **Contingency Plans**

### **No Show Rule**

#### **A. If an Odd Number of Teams Fail to Show Up for Nationals**

If an odd number of teams are present at the start of Nationals, the IEB organizing committee will first attempt to form a stand-in team using surplus students from teams that have more than the six active participants normally allowed per match. If a stand-in team can be formed with at least three students, it will compete in place of the missing team.

If no stand-in team can be formed, a bye round structure will be implemented. In each round, one team will have a bye. A special "bye make-up round" will occur during the lunch break, allowing all teams with a bye to compete in an additional match.

Since there are an odd number of preliminary rounds, an "additional team" will be required to participate in each bye make-up round. The process for selecting this additional team is as follows:

1. Preference is given to volunteer teams willing to play an extra match.
2. If no team volunteers and more than one team has failed to show, divisions will be shuffled randomly to group all the bye teams into the same division.
3. The additional team is then chosen from within that division using these criteria:
  - The team is not already scheduled to play all of the bye teams.
  - The team has the greatest number of team members present.
  - If multiple teams are tied for the greatest number of members, a random process will determine the additional team.
4. If no qualifying team exists within the division, the process is repeated with teams outside the division.
5. If multiple additional teams are needed, the same process is used to select the second or third additional team(s).

Important Note: The additional team's match results do not count for them, but they do count for the bye teams they play against.

## **B. If an Even Number of Teams Fail to Show Up for Nationals**

If an even number of teams fail to show up, no bye round is necessary. Instead, the organizing committee will use a random process to reshuffle the divisions so that each division has an even number of teams.

## **Rule Regarding Disqualified Teams**

If a team is found to have violated a rule that, in the judgment of the competition organizers, warrants disqualification from a match, that team will be disqualified from the round—even if the violation is discovered after the match has concluded.

In such cases, the opposing team will be awarded a win for that match. The result will be recorded as a 2–1 judge majority in favor of the opposing team, with a point differential of 0.

## Administrative Rules

### **Registration Fee Refund Rule**

A full refund of national competition registration fees is available if the request is made at least one month before the competition date. After that point, a full refund will only be issued if another team is available to take the vacated spot.

### **Rule Regarding Fees for Extra Large Teams**

The registration fee for the APPE IEB® Championship covers the first eight team members, including both competitors and coaches. For each additional member beyond the eighth, a nominal per person fee will be charged.

### **Rule Regarding Duties of Regional Organizers**

A regional organizer is responsible for coordinating a regional qualifying event for the APPE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl® (IEB). To ensure a successful event, organizers must maintain regular communication with the APPE IEB® Chair and follow the preparation timeline provided by the Chair.

The APPE IEB® Chair will reach out periodically to check on planning progress. Organizers are expected to respond to all correspondence from the Chair in a timely manner.