2027 Debater of the Year: Reviewer Scoring Guide

What the award recognizes. The Debater of the Year is a debater whose life has been changed by being part of their debate team and league, **and** who can clearly articulate that change in their own words. Commitment to the activity, personal growth, academic progress, and leadership within their community show what the debater has built. Their story shows whether they understand what debate did for them.

In this award, **"debate" means participating on a school debate team in an urban debate league, in any format the league offers.**

How scores are used. Scores help reviewers organize the discussion. They don't make the decision: the reviewers' and committee's judgment does. The rubric is published with the application, so applicants know what we value.

The process

1. **Round 1 Review -** Debater of the Year review group made NAUDL staff and select league volunteers score every complete application.
2. **Finalist Selection -** Reviewers meet and choose 8 finalists. A finalist should have a story score of 3 or higher.
3. **Round 2-** The DOY selection committee scores each finalist's full packet, including the transcript, video, and essay.
4. **Decision -** The DOY selection committee meets, discusses, and chooses the Debater of the Year.

The scale. 4 = exceptional, stands out nationally. Expect only a handful of 4s in any area across the whole pool. If you're unsure between 3 and 4, it's a 3. A 3 is a strong applicant.

Area	What we're looking for	Where to look	4 · Stands out nationally	3 · Strong	2 · Developing	1 · Limited	Score
1. Their debate story (counts double)	The debater's own understanding of how their debate team and league changed their path, and how clearly they put it into words	**R1:** short answers 1–3 (the debater's own words); nomination essay as support · **R2:** video, essay	Names specifically what changed, why debate made the difference, and where they're taking it, consistently across the application. The link to debate is unmistakable, and you could retell the story after one read.	A clear story of change with real specifics. The link to debate is stated but not fully explained.	Debate is called valuable, but the change is general ("it taught me confidence"), or the story is mostly about circumstances, with little on debate's role.	No story of change; lists activities or results only	___ × 2
2. Commitment to debate	Sustained investment in their debate team and league	**R1:** activities (debate hours), nomination essay, short answer 2 · **R2:** video, essay	Multi-year effort beyond what's required, **and** articulates why building their team	Consistent multi-year participation, with clear examples of effort	Participation is clear, but depth or consistency is hard to see	Little beyond meeting eligibility	

			or league matters (mentoring, recruiting, strengthening the program), not only their own competitive success. The nominator gives specific examples.				
3. Improvement in debate and in school	Growth from the debater's own starting point, not compared with others	**R1:** activities and honors, nomination essay, academic-growth line · **R2:** transcript, essay	Specific, visible growth in **both** debate (results, roles, skills) and school (grades, coursework), backed by examples	Clear growth in one, some in the other	Growth is described but not specific	No evidence of growth	
4. Academic excellence	A strong record given the courses and opportunities available to them	**R1:** self-reported GPA (with scale), honors, nomination essay · **R2:** transcript	**Either** strong growth from their starting point, **or** an already-strong record taken to a new level through debate-connected work (research, academic competitions, advanced coursework). Stands out against what their school offers.	Solid academic record	Meets the bar; little detail	Little evidence	
5. Leadership and breadth	Leadership in team, school, league, and community, carried beyond debate	**R1:** activities, talents, volunteering, jobs, nomination essay · **R2:** essay, video, college and career plans	Builds or grows their team, mentors newer debaters, and carries what debate built into leadership and work beyond the debate community. Others can name their impact.	Clear leadership in at least two of team, school, league, or community	Some leadership, mostly within their debate team	Involved only on their debate team, with no leadership shown	
Total							**/ 24**

Keep in mind

- **Articulation, not hardship.** We score how well the debater understands and explains what debate changed for them. We never score how hard their circumstances were. Debaters choose how much of their background to share, and a debater who shares nothing personal can still earn a 4.
- **The debater's own words count most.** The nomination essay supports the story; it can't stand in for it.
- **Content, not delivery.** Score what the debater says. Speaking style, accent, and video quality don't count. A phone video in a hallway can earn a 4.
- **Judge results against opportunity.** League results count as fully as national-circuit results. Leagues hold different numbers of tournaments, so use the league baseline NAUDL provides. City, state, and district-level competitions mostly fall after the application deadline.
- **Read academics in context.** Don't compare GPAs across districts. In Round 2, look at the transcript for trend, rigor relative to what the school offers, and consistency.
- **Conflicts.** Skip any applicant from a league where you are staff, board, a contractor, or a coach, and leave their row blank.
- **Flag one.** You may flag one applicant you want discussed regardless of score. Add a one-line reason.