

## DEBATE FORMAT AND RULES NEMSA vs. MMR

### **Background**

Events like the NEMSA/MMR debate are what Freeley & Steinberg (2000) refer to as a “special debate,” where rules are drafted for a specific occasion. These authors state:

While the formats of these debates may leave much to be desired, they at least bring the candidates together and give voters a better opportunity to compare the candidates than they would otherwise have. Although this type of debate is most often associated with political figures and campaign issues, it may be used by anyone on any proposition. Opposing advocates merely have to agree to come together under the provisions of a special set of rules drafted for the occasion. (p. 16)

### **Rules and Format**

Drawing on the traditions of fair debate procedures, the following rules will be adopted for the NEMSA/MMR debate:

**Room Arrangements.** The “stage” for the debate will consist of two tables—set apart—with each table having two chairs that face the audience. The debaters will occupy these seats. Between the two tables should either be a space for the debaters to walk through OR—preferably—a lectern for the debaters to stand behind. Off to one side will be a third table which will have one chair facing the audience. This seat will be occupied by the debate moderator who will be enforcing the rules. Microphones should be provided for the debaters and the moderator.

**Time Limit.** The debate will last no longer than 90 minutes beginning after the moderator reviews the rules of the debate and through to the completion of the final closing remarks by both debate sides.

**Debate Moderator.** The debate moderator should be an individual capable of stopping or interrupting the debate if violations of the rules or debate format have occurred. Individuals who are uncomfortable speaking in public, interrupting speakers, or strictly enforcing the debate rules should not be permitted to act as the debate moderator.

The debate moderator should be familiar with ALL of the rules in this debate. ONLY the debate moderator can (1) determine if a violation has occurred and (2) stop the debate to enforce the rules. Violations CANNOT be presented or argued by EITHER debate side to the moderator. In short, the enforcement of the rules will be to the discretion of the debate moderator.

If the moderator has determined that a rule in this debate has been violated, the moderator will: (1) stop the debate and record how much time has been used during the debater’s speech; (2) publicly announce to the audience what rule has been violated; (3) instruct the debater not to violate the rule again; and (4) deduct the amount of time taken to complete these three steps away from the balance of the debater’s speaking time for that particular speech. Debaters MAY NOT argue the moderator’s decision or interpretation of the rule and should be reminded that such statements will continue in the deduction of speaking time.

The debate moderator will be \_\_\_\_\_.

**Debaters.** There will be four debaters permitted to participate; two debaters will represent NEMSA and two debaters will represent MMR. *Participation* is defined as taking part or being involved in the debate. Consequently, debaters are not permitted to use or have any assistance

from anyone other than their debate partners seated at the tables. The debate partners are permitted to hand notes to their debate partner who is speaking, but cannot do a “tag-team” speech. (i.e., where both partners talk to the audience during the same speech). Debate partners may alternate—if desired—speaking responsibilities between themselves OR may have one partner as the primary speaker and have the other partner speak toward specific questions only (e.g., legal questions). Debate partners are welcome to help each other in note-taking and other speech preparation during the debate round. In short, once the debate has begun, only the debaters seated at the tables may participate.

**Evidence.** Debaters may bring—and use—printed material to assist in preparing statements. Evidence may be read during the debate round for preparing responses and statements. Evidence may also be read out loud by debaters as part of their presentation to the audience.

Requests for evidence used in the round may also be made by the opposing debate side. Upon completion of reading a piece of evidence out loud during a speech, the opposing debate side may—immediately—request to read the evidence in preparation for a response. Debaters will comply with all requests for evidence. As a suggestion, debaters may wish to make photocopies of any (or all) evidence so that they may continue to use the evidence during their speech while the opposing debater reviews the evidence.

### **Format.**

**Introduction.** The debate moderator will introduce both debate sides to the audience and ask them to sit down at their tables. The moderator will then go over the rules with the audience.

**Opening Remarks.** Each debate side will choose one speaker to offer an opening statement. The opening statement can be no more than five minutes in length. No interruptions will be permitted from the audience, the moderator, or the other debate side. (Therefore, no printed evidence should be presented during opening remarks; instead, opening remarks are for presenting an overview of general arguments and/or philosophy statements). The moderator will time the opening remarks, give time signals regarding the remaining time, and enforce the five minute maximum limit.

NEMSA will begin with its opening remarks, followed by MMR. As is customary in debates, any group which advocates a change in the *status quo* always speaks first. NEMSA represents a change, therefore, NEMSA will give the opening remarks first.

**Issue Debates.** The remainder of the debate will center around issues generated from the audience and submitted on cards. Each audience member submitting a question will: (1) write down one specific question or issue to be addressed; (2) write down his/her name and what group s/he represents; and (3) identify if the question is directed primarily toward NEMSA, MMR, or both. All cards will be sent forward by ushers to the debate moderator. The debate moderator will discard any card submitted which does not comply with ALL THREE ITEMS listed above. In short, no questions or issues will be submitted anonymously or which focus on more than one question or issue. (An exception to the one-question per card rule WILL BE extended for follow-up questions such as “why” or “how.” The exception DOES NOT apply, however, to cards that clearly focus on more than one issue. An example of this would be a card that asks a “benefits question” and a “salary question” on the same card.) The moderator may also edit the question for clarity, provided that the intent and the meaning of the question are unchanged.

The debate moderator will rotate questions. For example, a question primarily asked to NEMSA will be followed by a question primarily asked to MMR, followed by a question primarily asked towards both debate sides. The moderator will keep track of questions and the order of the questions. In the event that a disproportionate number of

questions are addressed toward one debate side over another, then the moderator will pause the debate until questions are submitted. In short, by the end of the debate, the amount of questions addressed primarily toward NEMSA will equal the number of questions addressed primarily toward MMR. Questions that are addressed EQUALLY toward both groups are unlimited.

The debates surrounding questions and issues will follow a 3-4-1 format. Each question will be answered by the debate side to whom it was addressed for no more than three minutes; the other debate side will respond for no more than four minutes; then the initial debate side will be permitted a rebuttal of no more than one minute. The time will begin when (a) a debater begins speaking OR (b) 20 seconds after the question has been read by the moderator to a debater (whichever comes first). For follow-up and rebuttal speeches, a debater has no more than 20 seconds before the moderator will start the time.

Time limits will be strictly enforced by the moderator; debaters who do not use all of their time on one speech may not carryover their remaining time toward another speech. The moderator will provide time signals to the debaters.

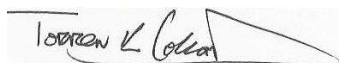
**Closing Remarks.** Each debate side will be allowed no more than five minutes for closing remarks. No interruptions will be permitted from the audience, the moderator, or the other debate side. (Therefore, no printed evidence should be presented during closing remarks; instead, closing remarks are for summarizing and crystallizing the arguments and issues presented throughout the debate). The moderator will time the closing remarks, give time signals regarding the remaining time, and enforce the five minute maximum limit.

MMR will provide closing remarks first, followed by NEMSA. As is customary in debates, any group which advocates a change in the *status quo* always begins and ends the debate. NEMSA represents a change, therefore, NEMSA will give the final closing remarks.

#### **References**

Freeley, A. J., & Steinberg, D. L. (2000). Argumentation and debate: Critical thinking for reasoned decision making (10<sup>th</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

The parties hereby adopt and agree to abide by these rules in their entirety.




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NEMSA  
Torren Colcord, President

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MMR  
Mark Thompson, CEO