



NFHS Policy Debate Topic Selection Handbook

This handbook is designed to assist in the NFHS Policy Debate Topic Selection process. There are chapters for each portion of the topic selection process.

The quality of high school debate depends on well-worded, high quality debate resolutions. The purpose of the topic reports is twofold: to examine potential debate issues to determine which topic areas would be productive for debate, and to provide potential debate resolutions in those areas.

[Chapter 1 – Authors](#)

[Chapter 2 – Topic Report Structure](#)

[Chapter 3 – Topic Paper Outline and Criteria](#)

[Chapter 4 – Process for Selecting the Debate Topic](#)

Chapter 1...Authors

Art. 1...Author Definitions

- A. **New and Emerging Authors:** If this is the first paper you are authoring, then you are considered a new and emerging author. Even if you are partnering with a veteran author(s), you will be considered a new and emerging author until you present your paper at the NFHS Policy Debate Topic Selection Meeting in early August.
- B. **Veteran Authors:** Authors who have successfully completed an NFHS Policy Debate Topic Paper during the previous five (5) year period.

Art. 2...Timeline

Following the timeline is of vital importance for the topic selection process to be successful. The following dates have been updated to reflect the current academic calendar. Below, “New and Emerging Authors” are abbreviated NEA, and “Veteran Authors” are abbreviated VA.

2024-2025

Dec. 6	NEA	Guided Questions Form due
Jan. 24	VA	Draft Bibliography and Outline Due
Jan. 24	NEA	Draft Bibliography Due
Feb. 3	NEA	*Office Hours (8pm EST – via Zoom)
Feb. 21	NEA	Outline of Paper Due
Mar. 10	NEA	*Office Hours (8pm EST – via Zoom)
Apr. 25	all	First Draft Due to NFHS

May	all	Papers shared with Reviewers
May 12	NEA	*Office Hours (8pm EST – via Zoom)
June	all	Authors receive feedback from reviewers
Jun. 27	all	Final draft due to NFHS
Jul. 18	all	Reports posted for Registered Attendees & Wording Committee
Jul. 24	all	Briefing for Topic Authors on Topic Selection Process
Jul. 31-Aug. 3	all	Topic Selection Meeting

***New and Emerging Authors** are expected to attend two of the three available Office Hour sessions. These Office Hours are designed to assist and support authors in a variety of ways as they complete the topic writing process. Veteran Authors are welcome to attend but are not required. If conflicts arise, please communicate in due course with Dr. James Weaver (JWeaver@nfhs.org) and Dr. Kevin Minch (kminch@truman.edu) to make alternative arrangements.

Art. 3...Stipend Structure for Topic Authors

The stipend structure for report topic authors was changed after the 2023 Topic Selection Meeting per the NFHS Speech/Debate/Theatre Advisory Committee’s recommendation. Payment will NOT be made until the paper has gone all the way through the process and the paper is presented at the NFHS Topic Selection Meeting in early August. Authors whose papers are not presented at the Policy Debate Topic Selection Meeting are not eligible for payment.

A. New and Emerging Authors: Total compensation available: \$700

1. Base Pay: \$250
2. Incentives: \$450
 - a. \$50 each (total up to \$200)
 - (1) Guided Questions
 - (2) Bibliography
 - (3) Office Hour 1
 - (4) Office Hour 2
 - b. \$75 each (up to \$150 total)
 - (1) Outline of Paper
 - (2) Final Paper Submission
 - c. \$100 for Draft Paper Submission

B. Veteran Authors: Total compensation available: \$400

1. Base Pay: \$250
2. Incentives: \$150
 - a. \$25 for Outline of Paper
 - b. \$50 for Final Paper Submission
 - c. \$75 for Draft Paper Submission

C. Multiple Authors: If a paper has multiple authors, compensation will be divided based on the number of authors and categorization of author type.

SITUATIONS

SITUATION A: A New and Emerging Author (NEA) and a Veteran Author (VA) collaborate on a paper, and all incentives are met.

- NEA available compensation: \$700, divided by two (number of authors) = \$350 total NEA compensation
- VA available compensation: \$400, divided by two (number of authors) = \$200 total VA compensation

SITUATION B: Two New and Emerging Authors (NEA) coauthor a paper. Neither the Guided Questions nor the Bibliography documents are submitted by the deadline.

- NEA available compensation: \$700, minus \$100 (missing two \$50 incentives) = \$600 compensation, divided by two (number of authors) = \$300 total compensation, each

SITUATION C: Two New and Emerging Authors (NEA) and two veteran authors (VA) write a paper together. They do not submit an Outline or Draft on time but complete all other incentives.

- NEA available compensation: \$700, minus \$175 (missing Outline [\$75] and Draft [\$100]) = \$525 compensation, divided by four (number of authors) = \$131.25 NEA total compensation, each
- VA available compensation: \$400, minus \$100 (missing Outline [\$25] and Draft [\$75]) = \$300, divided by four (number of authors) = \$75 VA total compensation, each

CHAPTER 2...Topic Report Structure

Art. 1...Required Components

- A. A title page, with the name of the report and author(s), and date.
- B. An introduction to the issues of the topic area. Approximately five to ten pages should generally be sufficient. This section should include an explanation of how the topic area meets the NFHS criteria for debate topics.
- C. A minimum of three to six proposed resolutions, with a discussion of the wording selected. Please organize resolutions in your order of preference.
- D. A thorough definition section. This should include a variety of contextual definitions of **all** the words and phrases used in suggested resolutions, as well as other possibilities. These definitions should come from literature about the topic as well as dictionaries. This section is vitally important, since the Wording Committee will use it extensively to frame the final resolution. However, it is also important that the definitions included be selected carefully. An extensive, separate definition section that includes words and/or terms not pertinent to the proposed resolutions is not useful. Nor is it necessary to define words or terms used in almost all resolutions such as 'federal government,' 'should,' 'substantially' or 'significantly,' etc. since the Wording Committee is provided this information by the NFHS.
- E. A bibliography of the type of literature that exists on the topic, which also includes sources referenced in the paper. Selected annotation is strongly recommended. Search

terms and results and Internet sites should be included. A list of interest/lobby groups, governmental publications or similar material would be useful.

- F. Two-page summary

Art. 2... Formatting Requirements

- A. Electronic submission
- B. Avoid section breaks and double spacing.
- C. 12 point for text and 14 point for subdivisions
- D. Use autowrap text feature. Do NOT use manual returns.
- E. Use Endnotes rather than Footnotes.
- F. Use automatic numbering on the bottom of each page.

Art. 3... Required Separate Two-Page Summary Report

- A. Title of the report
- B. A numbered list, in priority order, of the top four (4) to eight (8) resolutions
- C. A one paragraph description of the types of affirmative cases that would be debated
- D. A one paragraph description of the types of negative approaches that would be utilized
- E. A one paragraph comment on the debatability of the topics, especially including balance between negative and affirmative
- F. In one paragraph, with no more than 200 words, provide a synopsis of the topic area suitable for publication on the topic ballot. This should include a brief justification of the importance of the area, potential affirmative and negative case areas, and balance.

Art. 4... Resolutions

While the wording of the resolutions will be examined by other individuals, careful thought to wording saves time and improves the quality of the final resolution. In addition, the more thought put into potential wordings of resolutions, the easier it will be to defend them or to suggest alternative wording. The author(s) might wish to consider the agent of change in the resolution, the nature of the action to be defended, the direction of the topic, the scope of the topic, balance and other issues. An examination of past resolutions will be useful. It may be effective to devote a section of the report to each proposed resolution, explaining the wording choice, potential affirmative and negative arguments, and a discussion of the debatability of that specific resolution.

Art. 5... Summary Paragraph

Once a topic area has been selected and placed on the ballot, a summary paragraph must be published. This paragraph briefly outlines the justification for the topic area and outlines the types of cases and arguments that are likely to be important to the final resolution. While the exact wording of the paragraph may depend on the final resolution selected, a summary paragraph of 180 to 200 words should be included in your two-page topic report summary.

Art. 6... Publication and Distribution

Although the report of the selected topic is no longer printed in Volume 1 of the *Policy Debate Quarterly*, the reports for the five topic areas on the first national ballot are all posted on the

NFHS website. We encourage you to keep this in mind, and to proofread your final report carefully. All reports are provided to those who attend the TSM.

Art. 7... International Topic Requirement

At the 2022 Topic Selection Business Meeting, the issue of the international topic rotation was raised and following discussion, the issue was referred to the NFHS Speech/Debate/Theatre Advisory Committee. The committee then revised the international requirement for the policy debate topic as follows:

<u>Meeting Date</u>	<u>Year Debated</u>	<u>Topic Selected</u>
2021	2022-2023	international (Emerging Technologies)
2022	2023-2024	mixed (Economic Inequality)
2023	2024-2025	domestic (Intellectual Property Rights)
2024	2025-2026	international (TBD)
2025	2026-2027	domestic (TBD)
2026	2027-2028	international (TBD)
2027	2028-2029	domestic (TBD)
2028	2029-2030	international (TBD)

The topics will continue this rotation for future years. Please [click here](#) for the history of the previous debate resolutions and international year rotation.

CHAPTER 3... Topic Paper Outline and Criteria

Art. 1...Sections of the paper

The paper should be a rhetorical defense of the topic area with a clear analysis of issues, not merely a set of briefs.

- A. History/Background
 1. Important/relevant issues
 2. SQ–state of current law/legislation, etc.
 3. Solutions currently being proposed
 - a. Pros and cons
 - b. Probability of passage
- B. Affirmative cases/ground: articulate a variety of arguments for different styles and levels
- C. Negative arguments/ground: articulate a variety of arguments for different styles and levels.

Art. 2... Criteria

The criteria below should be used to evaluate the appropriateness of an area for high school debate. Please refer to the guidelines for report authors for additional details and specific report requirements.

- A. **Resolutions in priority order** - The topic area should have an appropriate number of potential resolutions that can be debated. These resolutions should be neither too broad nor too narrow.
- B. **Timeliness** - A good topic should be timely. It will be a topic that is being debated both in academic debate rounds, among the general population, and perhaps within government. Thus, topics that are likely to appear frequently in the media are generally good topics. However, it is important to note that the report will be written two years before the final debate on the topic takes place; it is important to choose a topic that will not be rendered meaningless (for example, by the passage of new laws) by the time the debates occur. New issues should arise as the topic is debated.
- C. **Scope** - A good topic will address a problem that is significant in all sectors of the country, not merely in a single area or group of people.
- D. **Range** - A wide range of skill levels exists among debaters who will use a topic. A good topic is one that can be understood and debated by novice debaters yet will also challenge advanced debaters.
- E. **Quality** - The topic should be one that enables high quality debates to take place. The issues involved in the topic should be ones that we want our high school students to be debating. It should be one that can be debated for a full year without producing repetitive debates. A good debate topic is one that will be of value to debaters, providing exposure to divergent points of view, experience in analyzing significant current issues and problems, and the opportunity to develop analytical and problem-solving skills.
- F. **Material** - There should be a wealth of material available on the topic. It should help encourage debaters to utilize a wide range of reference materials. This material should be available to all debaters, not simply those with access to a large library or access to special Internet databases.
- G. **Interest** -The topic should be one that can generate the interest of high school debaters, judges and community members.
- H. **Balance** - There should be issues and arguments supporting both sides of the topic under consideration. Ideally, neither side of the controversy should have a significant advantage over the other side. Balanced affirmative and negative ground should exist. Examples of possible affirmative cases and negative positions inherent in the resolutions should be taken into consideration.

Art. 3... Appendix Requirements

- A. Definitions
 - 1. Multiple definitions from a variety of sources for keywords
 - 2. Definitions of topic specific terms in the proposed resolutions
 - 3. Definitions of terms rejected for the proposed resolutions
- B. Bibliography
 - 1. Include the works cited in the paper
 - 2. Include an additional cross section of what is readily available
- C. NFHS Criteria—1-2 pages (this should be the last item in the paper, for easy reference). The topic report should provide an introduction to the issues of the problem area.

CHAPTER 4... Process for Selecting the Debate Topic

Art. 1... Sources for Topic Reports

- A. Volunteers from the previous year's Topic Selection Meeting
- B. Individuals or groups contacted to prepare topic reports on subjects of demonstrated interest
- C. Individuals or groups who have a special interest in a particular topic area

Art. 2... Procedures for Preparation of Topic Reports

- A. A confirmation of commitment to complete a report is due to the NFHS in November
- B. A preliminary outline of the direction of the report is due to the NFHS in December
- C. Report authors may contact others for assistance in developing the report and wording the resolutions.
- D. Copies of the reports are sent to groups or individuals for review, and the reactions are provided to each topic report author. While authors are not required to incorporate the reviewers' comments, they are strongly encouraged to consider the comments in future revisions.
- E. Topic report authors have the opportunity to revise their reports prior to the final submission deadline.
- F. Copies of the revised reports are distributed to Topic Selection Meeting delegates and Wording Committee members prior to the NFHS Policy Debate Topic Selection Meeting.
- G. Copies of the final topic reports will be provided to all meeting attendees.

Art. 3... Procedures at the Topic Selection Meeting

- A. Topic report authors briefly introduce their reports to the general assembly. Wording Committee members chair Marshall subcommittees which meet the first day of the Topic Selection Meeting. All delegates are assigned to Marshall subcommittees. During these subcommittee meetings, topic report authors have an opportunity to thoroughly explain and discuss their reports.
- B. Debatability Roundtables are an important part of the process. These roundtables are designed to allow the attendees the opportunity to discuss the topic with the authors. These discussions should be constructive about the ability to debate each topic.
- C. Delegates have an opportunity to ask questions and discuss strengths and weaknesses. Wording Committee co-chairpersons have the responsibility of conducting these subcommittee meetings and reporting the results.
- D. In a second general session, Wording Committee members report on the discussions from the Marshall subcommittees, and topic report authors have an opportunity to answer questions. A straw vote is taken; topics receiving the support of over 25% of those present and voting are retained for further discussion and debate.
- E. On the second day, Wording Committee members assemble to meet with all topic report authors. A schedule is posted which allows approximately 20-30 minutes per topic. Additional sessions with any author may be scheduled as needed. All delegates are *urged* to participate in these meetings.
- F. All delegates reassemble to review the results of the Wording Committee meetings. The

chairperson of the Wording Committee conducts a short, preliminary exposition of the topic reports. Discussion and proposed amendments to revise the resolutions are in order.

- G. The proposed topic areas and resolutions will be presented to meeting attendees. A straw vote is taken of all participants. Each person may vote for as many topic areas as he or she chooses. Those topic areas receiving at least a one-third vote are retained for further discussion. Those areas receiving less than a one-third vote are dropped from consideration. If no more than seven areas initially receive a one-third vote, state delegates will proceed to selection of the five problem areas in the final general session.
- H. On the morning of the third day, participants discuss each area which received at least a one-third vote. No vote is taken to accept or reject any problem area until all areas have been discussed.

Art. 4... Voting Procedure

- A. Upon completion of discussion, the voting procedure is as follows:
 - 1. If fewer than 10 topic papers: Three votes would occur: Top 7, Top 6, Final 5
 - 2. If 12 to 13 topic papers: Four votes would occur: Top 10, Top 7, Top 6, Final 5
 - 3. If 15 or more topic papers: Five votes would occur: Top 12, Top 10, Top 7, Top 6, Final 5
 - 4. Each state has a single voting delegate. Each delegate will vote for five areas.
 - 5. A brief caucus period will be allowed before each state delegate vote.
 - 6. The five areas receiving the greatest number of votes will be placed on the ballot to be sent to the states.
- B. The tie breaking procedure is as follows:
 - 1. The tie will be broken by the greatest number of first place votes in first round balloting.
 - 2. If the vote remains tied, the tie will be broken by the lowest preference vote in first round balloting.
 - 3. If the vote remains tied, the tie will be broken by a vote of the Wording Committee.
 - 4. If a tie remains, the tie will be broken by a blind draw conducted by the Director of Speech, Debate, and Theatre.
- C. The final five (5) topics will be forwarded to NFHS member state associations and national debate organizations for a rank order vote to determine the final two (2) topics
- D. Following the final two (2) received by rank order to the NFHS, the NFHS will distribute another rank order ballot to the NFHS member state associations and national debate organizations to determine the final topic to be debated during the next academic year.