

Quebec Student Debating Association
The Bracketing System

- For competitive debating tournaments, we often use a "bracketing system" which is also used extensively in university style debating tournaments. It is one in which teams essentially debate other teams with the same win-loss record. The purpose of bracketing is to ensure that teams need to beat the best teams to get to the top of the standings, as opposed to being successful as a result of random luck. One fundamental difference in this system is that win-loss record is used as the primary criteria for determining the standings, and total team points are the secondary criteria.
- In a tournament using bracketing, the first round is randomly paired, so that you do not debate your own school. Then, for the second round teams that have a 1-0 win-loss record debate each other. The top 1-0 team (on total team points) will debate the bottom 1-0 team, etc. All the teams that are 1-0 are said to be in the 1-0 bracket. Then the teams in the 0-1 bracket are paired with the top team facing the bottom team, and so forth.
- After the second round, there will be some teams in a 2-0, a 1-1 and an 0-2 bracket, and they are paired accordingly. This system is followed through the entire tournament. Obviously, all results from a particular round need to be determined and standings produced after each round before proceeding to the next round. When the pairings for each round are announced, teams are not told what bracket they are in.
- When there are an odd number of teams in a bracket, it becomes impossible to match the top team vs. bottom, etc. What will happen is that one team in the bracket with an odd number of teams will debate a team in the bracket below. A typical policy is to use what is called "middle pull-up and reseed".
- Note that in tournaments where there is a prepared topic, it is possible to have the first two rounds being random. Any time there is a prepared topic, schools should debate both sides, and every effort should be made to debate different teams and teams from other schools.
- When there are only impromptu rounds, every effort is made to even out the number of times teams debate on each side, although it cannot be guaranteed to be equal. The only guarantee is that teams will debate once as Proposition and once as Opposition at any tournament.
- It is possible, and happens often, that two teams will debate against each other more than once or against teams from their own school, especially in any impromptu rounds.

DISCLAIMER: No amount of rules written down on paper can anticipate every scenario. There comes a time when some discretion is needed to ensure proper match-ups, especially with a small tournament. Such decisions are made by the tournament tabs director.

At the end of the tournament only, in the unlikely case of a tie in speaker points as well as win-loss records, the following criteria are used to break the ties:

- W/L against team(s) tied with, if any
- points against team(s) tied with, if any
- the two prepared rounds only, using the same above criteria in order
- a coin toss