

Association for Practical and Professional Ethics
Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl®

National FAQs 2025



appeieb.org



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Frequently Asked Questions for the National Championship of the APPE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl® 2025

PROCEDURAL RULES

Rule: When and How Cases Are Released

Q: Where do the cases for the Ethics Bowl come from?

A: The cases are developed by a national case writing committee and are generally inspired by current events and pressing ethical issues. Seventeen cases are selected and published each December on the APPE IEB® webpage.

Q: When will the cases be available?

A: On a weekday between December 19 and 23 each year.

Q: How long is each case?

A: Each case is 1 to 2 pages in length.

Q: Will teams know which case they'll be asked about during a match?

A: No, teams will not know in advance which case or question will be used in a match.

Q: Do judges and moderators receive the cases before the event?

A: Yes, they receive the same set of seventeen cases in late December.

Q: Do judges and moderators know the questions or match-specific cases in advance?

A: No, they do not receive the questions or know which cases will be used ahead of time.

Q: Are the match questions published with the cases?

A: No, only the cases are published; questions are revealed during the matches.

Rule: Team Size and Substitution Rules

Q: How many students can be on an Ethics Bowl team?

A: A team can have any number of students, but only six or fewer may participate in a match.

Q: Can we substitute a team member during a match?

A: No, substitutions are not allowed once the initial six (or fewer) are seated and ready to begin.

Q: Can substitutions be made after the case is announced?

A: No, substitutions cannot be made after the case is announced.

Q: What happens if a student leaves the table during a match?

A: They may not return until discussion of that case is complete.

Q: Can we switch team members between different rounds?

A: Yes, but not during a round. Once a round begins and participants are seated, no changes can be made to the team's lineup for that round.

Q: Do all team members have to be undergraduates?

A: Yes. See regional rules for specific eligibility criteria.

Rule: Use of Notes and Scratch Paper

Q: Can we bring or use books and pre-written notes during the match?

A: No, books and notes are not allowed during competition.

Q: Can we write notes during the match?

A: Yes, you may use scratch paper to jot down thoughts, but only after the timer has started.

Q: When can we start writing on scratch paper?

A: After the moderator announces the case and starts the timer.

Q: Can we pass notes to our teammates during the match?

A: Yes, passing notes between teammates is permitted at any time.

Q: What happens to notes we take in the first half of the match?

A: The moderator will ask you to clear them from the table and put them out of sight at the halfway point.

Rule: Personal Timers During Matches

Q: Can we use our own timer during the match?

A: Yes, but it is only for your reference. The moderator's timer is the official one.

Q: Can we use our phone or smartwatch as a timer?

A: No, timers must not be devices that connect to the internet or store data.

Q: Can we time the other team's speaking time?

A: No, teams are not allowed to time the opposing team.

Q: Are there any rules about how we use our timers?

A: Yes. You should use timers as unobtrusively as possible—silence alarms, keep volumes low, and avoid disruptive behavior. This is a strong recommendation to maintain a respectful environment.

Rule: Time Warning Requests

Q: Can our team request time warnings during a match?

A: Yes, but only two are allowed: one at the 3-minute mark and one at the 1-minute mark.

Q: Can we request additional or custom time warnings?

A: No, only the 3-minute and 1-minute warnings are permitted.

Q: How are time warnings given?

A: Moderators may give visual warnings (e.g., holding up fingers), verbal warnings, or both.

Q: Can we ask for a different style of time warning?

A: Yes, after the moderator explains their usual method, teams may request a different one (e.g., verbal instead of visual).

Rule: Opposing Team Conferral Etiquette

Q: Can both teams talk during a conferral period?

A: Yes, both teams may confer during any conferral period.

Q: Are there any restrictions on how we confer while the other team is talking?

A: Yes, teams should be quiet and respectful to avoid creating a distraction.

Q: What happens if the other team is being too loud or disruptive?

A: The moderator can step in and ask the team to lower their volume or stop conferring.

Rule: Moderator Case and Question Announcement

Q: How is it determined which team goes first (Team 1) and which goes second (Team 2)?

A: The moderator flips a coin and asks one of the teams to call it. The team that wins the coin toss chooses whether they want to present first or second. This choice determines which team is designated as Team 1 and which as Team 2.

Q: How is the case for Team 1 announced?

A: The moderator will state which case Team 1 will be responding to at the start of the match.

Q: Will the entire case be read aloud during a match?

A: No, only the question will be read aloud. Teams are expected to have read the cases in advance.

Q: Do teams get a copy of the case and the question?

A: Yes, the team will receive a copy of the case and the question when the moderator begins the match, but the content of the case itself will not be read aloud.

Q: How many cases are used in each round?

A: Two, the moderator will use one case for the first half of the round and a 2nd case for the 2nd part of the round.

Q: Once a case has been used in a round can it be used again in a different round?

A: No, once a case has been used it cannot be used again in a later round.

Rule: Team 1 Conferral and Response Procedure

Q: How long does Team 1 have to prepare before responding?

A: They have two minutes to confer as a group.

Q: How long can Team 1 speak during their response?

A: Up to ten minutes.

Q: Can more than one team member speak during the response?

A: Yes, but only one person may speak at any given time.

Q: What happens when time runs out?

A: The moderator will call “time,” and Team 1 must stop immediately—even mid-sentence.

Rule: Team 2 Commentary Procedure

Q: How long does Team 2 have to confer before commenting?

A: One minute.

Q: How long does Team 2 have to deliver their commentary?

A: Five minutes in regular rounds, six minutes in elimination rounds.

Q: Can more than one team member speak during the commentary?

A: Yes, but only one person may speak at a time.

Q: What happens when the time runs out?

A: The moderator will call “time,” and the team must stop immediately, even mid-sentence.

Rule: Team 1 Commentary Response Procedure

Q: How long does Team 1 have to confer before their response to commentary?

A: One minute.

Q: How long does Team 1 have to respond to Team 2’s commentary?

A: Up to five minutes.

Q: Can more than one member speak during the rebuttal?

A: Yes, but only one person may speak at a time.

Q: What happens when the time runs out?

A: The moderator will call “time,” and Team 1 must stop speaking immediately—even if mid-sentence.

Rule: Judge Questioning Period

Q: How many questions can each judge ask?

A: Each judge may ask one question and one follow-up before other judges have had a turn. Additional questions are allowed only if time remains.

Q: Can judges discuss their questions before the session starts?

A: Yes, judges get one minute to confer before questioning begins.

Q: Can team members huddle before answering?

A: Yes, teams may briefly confer before responding to a judge's question, however, this does not stop the timer.

Q: Can different team members answer different questions?

A: Yes, different team members may respond to different judges.

Q: Will teams receive time warnings during the Q&A?

A: Yes, moderators will give five-minute and three-minute warnings.

Q: What happens when time is up?

A: The moderator will call "time," and the team must stop speaking immediately—even if they're mid-sentence.

Q: What are judges permitted to confer about during their conferral period?

A: Judges are not permitted to discuss anything evaluative about the team's presentations. Conferral should be limited to which questions they will ask and in what order.

Rule: Scoring

Q: When do judges score the teams?

A: Immediately following each section of the match.

Q: Do teams find out their scores right away?

A: No, scores are not announced until the end of the match.

Q: What scoring criteria do judges use?

A: Judges use the official score sheet and scoring guidelines (see scoring rules section).

Rule: Switching Sides for Second Case

Q: Do teams switch roles during the match?

A: Yes, after the first half of the round, the teams reverse roles.

Q: Will a new case be used for the second round?

A: Yes, a different case will be introduced for the second half of the round.

Q: Does each team get a chance to both present and comment?

A: Yes, every team presents once and comments once per match.

Rule: Announcing Scores at the End of the Match

Q: When are scores shared with the teams?

A: After the second half of the round has ended.

Q: Who announces the scores?

A: The judges announce the scores at the moderator's prompt.

Q: What scoring system is used?

A: Judges use the official score sheets based on criteria outlined in the scoring rules.

Q: Are scores announced after both teams have presented and commented?

A: Yes, scores are announced only after both halves of the match are completed.

Rule: Determining the Winner of a Match

Q: How is the winner of a match determined?

A: The team that wins on the greatest number of judges' score sheets is the winner."

Q: What if a team wins on two out of three score sheets?

A: They win the match.

Q: What if a team wins on one score sheet and ties on the other two?

A: They still win the match.

Q: Can a team lose even if they have more total points?

A: Yes. The match is judged by individual score sheet results, not total point accumulation.

Q: When is a match considered a tie?

A: If neither team wins on more judges' score sheets, the match is ruled a tie.

CASE MATERIALS & CASE PRODUCTION

Rule on the Number of Cases and the Timing of the Release of Cases for the National Competition

Q: How many cases are included in the national case packet?

A: Seventeen total cases.

Q: Can previously used cases be included?

A: Yes, up to two cases that are at least five years old, provided they are updated.

Q: Does the IEB ever use cases written for the NHSEB?

A: Yes, sometimes the IEB and the NHSEB swapped cases.

Q: When are the cases released?

A: On a weekday between December 19 and 23.

Q: Why are old cases sometimes reused?

A: To revisit strong cases with lasting ethical relevance, updated to reflect current issues.

Case Production Rule

Q: Who decides which cases appear in the case packet?

A: The National and Regional Case Writing Committees. However, the IEB Chair has vetting responsibilities and can remove cases at their discretion.

Q: Can outside individuals or sponsors submit case ideas?

A: Yes, but final selection and wording are up to the committee.

Q: How can I submit case ideas and or inquire about becoming a member of the committee?

A: Contact the IEB Chair who will put you in contact with the Chair of the case writing committee.

Q: Does being an APPE sponsor give special case submission privileges?

A: No. Sponsorship has no influence on whether a submitted case is used

Q: What happens if a case needs to be removed from the packet?

A: The IEB Chair, in consultation with the committee, will create a replacement case.

ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR & CONDUCT

Rule: Moderator Authority and Handling of Disruptions

Q: Who is responsible for maintaining order during a match?

A: The moderator is responsible for the room and addressing behavioral issues.

Q: What happens if the moderator cannot resolve the issue?

A: The Disputes Official is called in, and a time-out is initiated.

Q: Can a match be paused to address behavioral concerns?

A: Yes, a time-out will begin if the issue is serious or escalates beyond the moderator's control.

Rule: Role of the Disputes Official

Q: Who serves as the Disputes Official at the national competition?

A: The role may be filled by the IEB Chair, Chair-Elect, Chair of the Rules Committee, or another designated member of the IEB council.

Q: What is the responsibility of the Disputes Official?

A: To resolve formal disputes and serious issues that arise during matches and cannot be handled by the moderator.

Q: Is there always a Disputes Official present during matches?

A: Yes, at the national competition, there is always a designated Disputes Official available to handle issues as needed.

Rule: Examples of Unacceptable Behavior

Q: Can coaches communicate with students during matches?

A: Only minimally. A smile or nod is fine, but anything more can be considered excessive and inappropriate.

Q: What if a coach distracts the opposing team?

A: Demonstrative behavior like eye-rolling or head-shaking is considered unacceptable.

Q: How should judges treat students during matches?

A: Judges must remain respectful at all times; berating students is prohibited

Q: Are audience members held to the same standard as team members?

A: Yes, all students—including audience members—must avoid disrupting the match.

Q: What behavior is never tolerated under any circumstance?

A: Foul language, insulting comments, and anything that could be reasonably interpreted as sexual harassment.

TEAM SPONSORSHIP & REPRESENTATION

Sponsor Rule

Q: Who can serve as a team sponsor?

A: A regular faculty member, or an adjunct instructor or graduate student officially authorized by the school.

Q: Does the sponsor have to attend the competition in person?

A: No, sponsors are not required to travel with the team.

Q: What if our team cannot find a sponsor at our school?

A: You may petition the IEB board/council, explaining why sponsorship was not possible.

Q: Why is the sponsor's responsiveness important?

A: The sponsor is the primary point of contact for IEB. Failing to communicate in a timely manner may cause the team to lose its competition spot.

Rule Regarding Official College Representatives for Teams

Q: Who is considered the official representative of the team?

A: The individual listed as the "sponsor" on the registration form.

Q: What responsibilities does the sponsor have?

A: Confirming team member eligibility, responding to official communications, and making decisions on behalf of the team.

Q: Can someone else represent the team instead of the sponsor?

A: Not unless the registration is formally updated to reflect a different sponsor.

Q: Does the sponsor have to attend the competition?

A: Attendance is not required, but the sponsor must remain available for official communication and team responsibilities.

COMPETITION ROOM PROCEDURES

Taping Rule

Q: Can we record our match at the national competition?

A: Yes, teams may record any round except the final, provided they get permission from the opposing team and record non-disruptively.

Q: Can we record the final round ourselves?

A: No, only the competition organizers are allowed to record the final round.

Q: What qualifies as a “non-disruptive” recording?

A: Recording should not cause distractions or interfere with teams, judges, or moderators (e.g., no loud equipment, obstructive tripods, or flashing lights).

Q: What if the opposing team does not give permission?

A: Then recording is not permitted for that round.

Feedback and Spirit Points

Q: Are judges required to provide written feedback?

A: No, feedback is optional and subject to time constraints.

Q: What are Spirit Points?

A: Points awarded by each judge to reflect how well a team demonstrated civility and the spirit of the Ethics Bowl.

Q: Do Spirit Points affect the match outcome?

A: No, they are not included in the total score and do not influence the match result.

Q: Who decides the Spirit Point score?

A: Each judge assigns Spirit Points independently on a five-point scale.

Q: Can students ask judges for feedback after a match?

A: Yes, if time allows, students may ask questions and request constructive criticism.

Q: Can students dispute their scores with the judges?

A: No, students are not allowed to argue or challenge the judges' scoring decisions.

SCORING & JUDGING

Scoring Rules

Q: What criteria do judges use to evaluate team performance?

A: Clarity and intelligibility, identification of ethical dimensions, and deliberative thoughtfulness.

Q: Do judges need to agree with the team's position to give a high score?

A: No, scoring is based on how well the team defends its position, not on whether the judge agrees with it.

Q: How is the team's initial response scored?

A: Out of 30 points—10 points for each of the three evaluation criteria.

Q: How are commentary and response to commentary scored?

A: Each is scored out of 10 points based on an overall assessment using the same three criteria.

Q: Are scores for commentary and responses broken down into categories like the main presentation?

A: No, those are scored holistically, not by individual criteria.

Q: How many points are possible in total?

A: Each judge can award a maximum of 60 points per team: 30 for the main response and 10 each for commentary, and response to commentary and Q&A.

RANKINGS & ADVANCEMENT

Rule for Determining the Top Four Teams

Q: What is the primary factor used to rank teams after prelims?

A: The number of wins.

Q: What if teams have the same number of wins?

A: The number of ties is used as the next ranking criterion.

Q: What happens if teams are tied in both wins and ties?

A: Point differential is used to break the tie.

Q: What is the point differential?

A: The difference between the total points a team earned and the total points their opponents earned.

Q: Does a higher point differential ever outweigh fewer wins?

A: No. Wins take precedence, followed by ties, then point differential.

Q: How many teams advance after preliminaries?

A: The top eight ranked teams.

Point Differential and Tie-Breaking Rules

Q: How is a point differential calculated?

A: By subtracting the opposing team's score from your team's score for each match.

Q: Can a losing team have a positive point differential?

A: Yes, it depends on the relative scores across all rounds

Q: How is a team's overall point differential determined?

A: By summing the point differentials from all four preliminary matches.

Q: What happens if two or more teams are tied in rankings?

A: The tie is broken in this order: head-to-head result, transitive outcomes, total raw points, then random selection.

Q: How is a three-way tie resolved?

A: If all teams played each other and a clear hierarchy emerges, then the team at the top of the hierarchy has the higher ranking.

Q: What is used as a last resort to break a tie?

A: A coin toss (for two teams) or high card draw (for three or more teams).

Rule for Determining the Winner of the Ethics Bowl

Q: How many teams advance to the elimination rounds?

A: The top 8 ranked teams.

Q: Is scoring in the elimination rounds different from prelims?

A: No, judges use the same scoring criteria and point values as in preliminary rounds.

Q: How is a winner determined in a tied quarterfinal or semifinal match?

A: There is a 7-step tiebreak hierarchy: points in the match, head-to-head result, prelim wins, prelim ties, point differential, total prelim points, and finally a coin toss

Q: Can there be co-winners in the Ethics Bowl?

A: Yes, but only if the final match ends in a tie and the teams are also tied on total points in that round.

CONTINGENCY PLANS

"No Show" Rule

Q: What happens if one or more teams don't show up for Nationals?

A: If the number is odd, organizers try to create a stand-in team. If that's not possible, a bye system is used. If the number is even, divisions are reshuffled and no bye is needed.

Q: Who can be part of a stand-in team?

A: Students from other teams with more than six members, provided at least three are available and willing

Q: Do the results of a stand-in or additional team count?

A: No, their results do not count for them, but they do count for the team they play against

Q: How is the additional team selected if no one volunteers?

A: By evaluating which team is not already scheduled to play all bye teams and has the largest number of participants. Ties are resolved randomly.

Q: Why is a bye make-up round scheduled during lunch?

A: To ensure fairness, allowing all teams that had a bye to complete an equal number of rounds.

Q: Can a team be required to play an extra match?

A: Yes, if selected through the outlined process when no team volunteers.

Rule Regarding Disqualified Teams

Q: Can a team be disqualified after a match has ended?

A: Yes, if a rule violation is discovered after the match, disqualification can still be applied retroactively.

Q: Who decides whether a rule violation merits disqualification?

A: The competition organizer (typically the IEB Chair or Disputes Official) makes that determination.

Q: What happens to the team that was supposed to face the disqualified team?

A: They are awarded a win by default, with a 2–1 judge majority and a point differential of 0.

Q: Why is the point differential set at zero?

A: To ensure fairness in overall rankings and prevent teams from gaining an advantage due to a disqualification

Q: Does the disqualified team receive any points for the match?

A: No, the disqualified team forfeits the match entirely.

ADMINISTRATIVE RULES

Registration Fee Refund Rule

Q: Can our team get a full refund if we withdraw a month before the competition?

A: Yes, if the refund request is made at least one month prior to the event, you are eligible for a full refund.

Q: What if we need to withdraw less than a month before the competition?

A: A full refund will only be granted if another team is available to fill your spot.

Q: Is a partial refund available if no replacement team is found?

A: No, the rule only allows for a full refund under the specified conditions; it does not mention partial refunds.

Q: Who should we contact to request a refund?

A: To request a refund, contact the IEB Chair. The IEB Chair will alert the APPE office, which will process the refund if granted.

Rule Regarding Fees for Extra Large Teams

Q: Who counts toward the eight-person limit?

A: All team members, including both students and coaches.

Q: What is the fee for additional members beyond the first eight?

A: A nominal fee will be charged beyond 8 members to help cover costs.

Q: Can we bring more than eight people?

A: Yes, but you must pay the additional per-person fee for anyone over that number.

Q: Does the fee apply to alternates or assistant coaches?

A: Yes, any individual listed as part of the team (competitor or coach) is included in the count.

Rule Regarding Duties of Regional Organizers

Q: Who is responsible for organizing regional competitions?

A: The designated regional organizer.

Q: What is the organizer's main responsibility?

A: Coordinating the logistics and execution of the regional qualifying event.

Q: What is the role of the APPE IEB® Chair?

A: The Chair provides a preparation timeline and checks in on the organizer's progress.

Q: Are regional organizers required to respond to the Chair?

A: Yes, the IEB Chair sets deadlines for information such as dates/location for regional competitions.