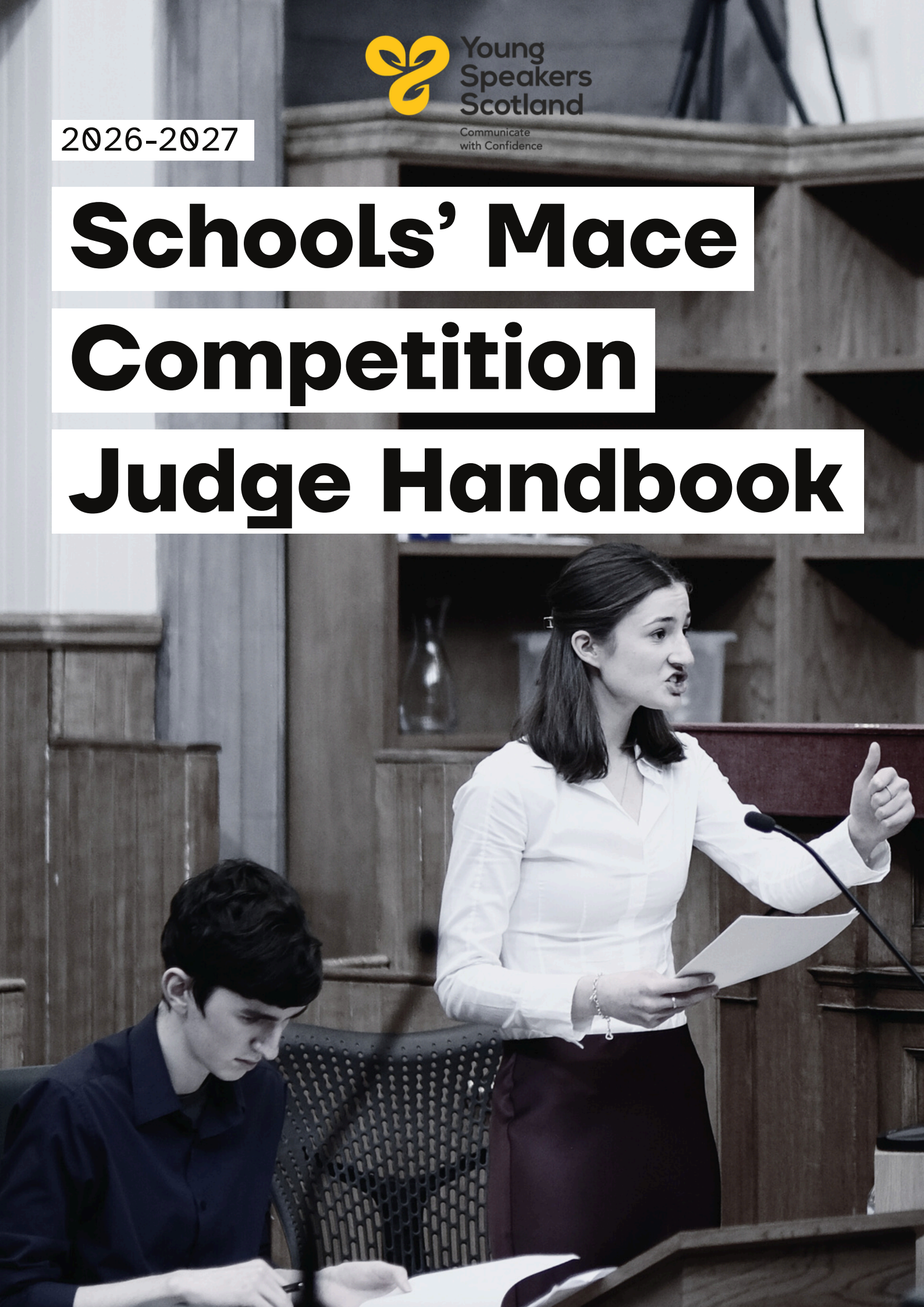
Young Speakers Scotland

Communicate with Confidence

2026-2027

Schools' Mace Competition Judge Handbook



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Format of the Schools' Mace

The Scottish Schools' Mace is a prestigious national debating competition where teams of two students from various schools compete in a series of debates. The 2026-2027 competition consists of three preliminary rounds, after which the top teams "break" to knockout rounds on a separate Finals Day.

Teams debate "motions". Of the three preliminary round motions, one will be released in advance. All the motions on the Finals Day will be released in advance. For unprepared preliminary rounds, teams will be given 15 minutes to prepare after learning what the motion is. Sides for both the prepared and unprepared debates will be announced 15 minutes before the debates begin.

All three preliminary rounds take place on the same day, in a power-paired format. This means that teams that win round 1 face other teams that have won round 1, and so on and so forth.

The Finals Day take place separately, and consists of knockout rounds. **After each knockout round, the top two teams progress until only four teams remain in the Grand Final.**

If a school drops out of the competition at any point, their opponent will be given a "bye" and progress automatically to the next round.

This year, the Mace will be run in the British Parliamentary (BP) format. A BP debate contains 4 teams, each with two speakers. There are two teams on the **Government** side and two teams on the **Opposition** side.

Each speaker gives a speech in the order outlined on the next page.

Speeches are 7 minutes. Points of information are permitted outside of the first and last minute of speeches.

After the speeches are concluded, the judge(s) will deliberate and rank the 4 teams from 1st-4th..

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Format of the Schools' Mace

This is a diagram showing the order of the 8 speeches in a BP debate.

Opening Government

Prime Minister

Deputy Prime Minister

Opening Opposition

Leader of the Opposition

Deputy Leader of the Opposition

Closing Government

Member of Government

Government Whip

Closing Oppisition

Member of Opposition

Opposition Whip

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Opening Government

Opening Government

Prime Minister

Deputy Prime Minister

The **Opening Government** must defend and support the motion. Because OG goes first, it is their job to set up the debate - defining key terms and, if necessary, explaining how the debate will work in practice through using their fiat.

When speaking in OG it is important to deliver strong arguments that will not be forgotten as the debate progresses, and cover the essential ground so the Closing Government can't say you missed anything essential. You can stay relevant by asking consistent points of information.

It is also important to consider the fact that your second speaker is the only speaker on your team who will be able to deliver rebuttal.

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Opening Opposition

Opening Opposition

Leader of the Opposition

Deputy Leader of the Opposition

The **Opening Opposition** must oppose the motion. If any of the set-up from OG is wrong, OO should disagree with it and ensure the debate is clear from the beginning.

Like OG speakers, OO speakers should ensure their arguments are strong and stay relevant throughout the debate, and cover enough ground that the closing opposition team won't have much to extend on.

A good strategy for OO is to make sure that, by the end of the opening half of the debate, you have rebutted everything brought up by the OG team.

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Closing Government

The **Closing Government** must support and defend the motion. The key difference between opening and closing government is that CG teams must always extend on what their opening teams have said.

An extension is any relevant new material in the debate - this can take the form of entirely new arguments, entirely new rebuttal or new ways of framing the debate strategically.

2nd speakers on closing teams are in the unique position to look back on the whole debate, and should use this opportunity to comprehensively summarise why their team is the best of the four.

Closing Government

Member of Government

Government Whip

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Closing Opposition

The **Closing Opposition** must oppose the motion. The key difference between opening and closing opposition is that CO teams must always extend on what their opening teams have said.

An extension is any relevant new material in the debate - this can take the form of entirely new arguments, entirely new rebuttal or new ways of framing the debate strategically.

2nd speakers on closing teams are in the unique position to look back on the whole debate, and should use this opportunity to comprehensively summarise why their team is the best of the four.

Closing Oppisition

Member of Opposition

Opposition Whip

Glossary of Terms

Motion

The topic of the debate.

Substantive Matter

Arguments prepared before the debate begins.

Point of Information (POI)

A short question or statement offered to the other team during one of their speeches. A speaker can choose to accept or deny a POI, and POIs should not last longer than 15 seconds.

Protected Time

The first and last minute of a main speech, where no POIs may be offered. The start and end of protected time is indicated with a bell.

Case

The entire set of arguments made by a team.

Principle

An argument that does not rely on any practical element. E.g.: “eating meat is morally wrong”

Mechanism

Why a claim leads to a certain result.

Impact

The effect of an argument in the real world. Good arguments tend to have powerful impacts.

Weighing

Comparing arguments to one another, rather than analysing whether they are true in and of themselves. Teams can weigh in various ways - e.g.: is this argument more impactful than another? Is it more likely?

Style

The way an argument is made, as opposed to the content of the argument.

Fiat

Government teams have “fiat” to make the motion possible. For example, in the motion “this house would introduce Scots-language schools”, government has fiat to say they would have the money to create these schools. Opposition has equal fiat - they could use this money to do something else.

Judging Guidelines

How do I decide who won the debate?

The most important thing to do when choosing a winner is to compare all four teams. For a team to win, they must be comparatively better than the teams they have placed above.

Arguments and rebuttal should also be considered comparatively - ask how they interact with each other?

Must all the judges come to a collective decision?

After the debate, the judges will have time to discuss the result before coming to a final call. We would recommend working together to come to a call that all the judges on the panel agree with, but understand there will be times when this is not possible.

When judges cannot agree on a decision, it is the job the chair judge to take things to a vote. In the event of a tie, the chair judge's vote will be decisive.

Can a team win a debate on style alone?

No. However, style can make arguments more persuasive. A good team must have both style and content.

If a team wins a debate because they have better content, this may be in part due to the fact that the way they presented their content was more stylistically compelling. But a team cannot win a debate solely by speaking in a rhetorically pleasing way.

Do I need to justify my decision to the debaters?

Yes. After announcing the result, the chair judge is expected to give an "oral adjudication" or "OA". This is a brief (roughly 5 minute) explanation for the call. The aim of the OA should be to explain to debaters why the debate was awarded in the way it was.

Focus on the big picture of the debate rather than individual feedback for speakers - which should only be given if speakers ask you for it individually after the debate. Make sure your OA covers the contributions of all four teams rather than, for example, just focusing on the winning team.