

Hist Girls' Mace Introductory Guide

This document aims to outline the basic structure of the Hist Girls' Schools' Mace competition and give a brief explanation of how the debates work, in order to provide a better understanding of the competition to schools and students who may not have taken part in it before.

Thank you for your interest, and we hope to see your school at Hist competitions this year!

- Marie Bishop (Librarian), Rosie Joyce and Sonny Stenson (Pro-Librarian) for the 252nd Session of the Hist (2021/22)

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Introduction and Background to the Competition

The Hist Girls' Mace is an annual debating competition run by the College Historical Society (also known as the Hist), a student debating society in Trinity College Dublin. The debates in our Mace competition are judged by Hist members, and all the speakers in the debates are female/non-binary secondary school students who are in their senior cycle (TY, 4th, 5th, or 6th year).

This competition is similar to our Hist Schools' Mace, which is a separate competition that we run, and is generally held earlier in the academic year. However, with our Girls' Mace we aim to increase the involvement of girls and women in debating by providing students with an opportunity to gain experience of public speaking in a fun and welcoming environment, as well as spending time with other like-minded young women throughout the duration of the competition. This is done by having all the debates open to female/non-binary speakers only. Additionally, the competition is also primarily run, and the debates judged, by women/non-binary individuals.

The competition takes place over the course of 1 day, and this year will take place online over Zoom.

Any eligible students who would like to take part in the competition, regardless of whether or not they have debated before, are welcome to compete- in fact, we would strongly encourage students who would like to gain more debating/public speaking experience to take part, as over the course of the day students get many opportunities to write and deliver speeches, which they can get feedback on from Hist members who will be judging their debates. There will also be a debating workshop on the morning of the competition to help students understand how these debates work and what criteria judges are looking for.

All students taking part speak in a minimum of 3 debates during the competition. The top 4 teams then progress to the fourth and final round. The final takes place in the GMB Debating Chamber, and any students or teachers who would like to watch it are welcome to attend. This is not the case for the earlier rounds, for which typically only the students speaking in the debate and the people judging the debate are present, although if teachers wish to watch their students debating in these earlier rounds they may also sit in the room and watch.

Registration and Allocation of Teams for the 2019/20 Girls' Mace

All participating schools must register before the specified deadline in order to take part. When registering, we ask that schools indicate their preferred number of teams to send; however, we cannot guarantee that schools will be offered this number of team places once registration has closed. As we aim to have as many schools as possible being able to take part in the competition, we will only offer additional team spots to those who have requested them if there are places remaining once all registered schools have been allocated 1 team place.

If all available places are filled before the registration deadline, any schools that fill out the

registration form after this point will be added to a waiting list, and will only be able to send teams in the event of teams dropping out. To avoid this possibility, we would strongly encourage interested schools to apply as quickly as possible, rather than waiting until closer to the deadline.

Registration will close at 5pm on Wednesday 6th of April, and that evening we will contact all registered schools to confirm that they are registered to take part in the competition and to inform them of the number of team places they have received.

If any registered teams wish to drop out of the competition, they must do so before the dropout deadline, which is Monday 11th of April at 12pm. Any teams that drop out after this point are still required to pay their relevant registration fee; however, teams that drop out before the aforementioned dropout deadline are not expected to pay any fees.

Structure of the Debates

The debates at this competition are “Mace-style”, which means that each debate follows a particular structure as outlined below:

Students speak in teams consisting of 2 people. There are a total of 4 teams (i.e. 8 students) in each room. 2 teams speak in favour of the motion (these are called the proposition teams), and 2 teams speak against the motion (these are called the opposition teams).

As such, there are 4 different positions in which a team can be speaking for each debate:

- First Proposition Team (also called Opening Government, or OG)
- First Opposition Team (also called Opening Opposition, or OO)
- Second Proposition Team (also called Closing Government, or CG)
- Second Opposition Team (also called Closing Opposition, or CO)

As everyone taking part will be speaking in several different debates over the course of the competition, we will try to rotate teams accordingly so that students will get to speak in a number of different team positions for their debates (in other words, it is unlikely that a team would have to be, for example, the Closing Government team for all 3 rounds).

Debates are judged by a panel typically consisting of 3 - 4 people, although panels can also be smaller or larger than this. The people judging the debates are female/non-binary college students who have extensive experience of speaking in and/or judging competitive debates. Once each debate has finished, the judges in the room will ask the students to wait outside, and the judges will then spend approx. 15 - 20 minutes discussing the debate with each other and come to a decision about how each team placed in the debate, i.e. whether they came 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or 4th.

They will then bring the students back into the room and give the students the “call” (i.e. tell them what position in the debate each team came in) and then give general feedback. This

involves them speaking for approx. 10 minutes to all the students in the room about how the debate went, and why they came to the call that was decided on.

When this is finished, students can leave the room or they can stay for another few minutes and ask for individual feedback from any of the judges, where the judge will talk to them about their speech in particular (rather than just the debate in general) and what they did well, or what areas they could potentially improve on.

Style of Debating

The debates are in British Parliamentary (BP) format, which is a type of debating that focuses primarily on content, analysis, engagement, and persuasion, rather than speaking style or research on the topic being debated. Students do not prepare their speeches in advance of the competition, as they are told what topics they will be debating (“motions”) on the day of the competition.

Students are told the motion for each debate 15 minutes before the debate starts, and must plan their speeches during those 15 minutes. When students are told the motion, they are also told what position in the debate they will be speaking in, i.e. if they are in proposition or opposition, and if they are the first or second prop/opp team.

Speeches are a maximum of 5 minutes in length. It is not necessary for speakers to speak for the full 5 minutes, as it’s really about “quality” rather than “quantity”, but we would encourage speakers to make the most of the time they are given to speak. Speeches cannot be longer than 5 minutes, and speakers will be informed when they have reached the end of their 5 minutes.

During their speeches, speakers can also accept what are called “Points of Information” (POIs). This is a point, usually phrased as a question, from another speaker in the room who is on the opposite side of the motion as the speaker who is being given the POI. The purpose of a POI is usually to highlight a flaw in the speaker’s arguments, or ask them to address a problem that is brought about by what they are proposing in their speech.

Students do not have to take a POI during their speech (if they are offered a POI while they are speaking, they can choose to accept or reject it) but it is usually beneficial to take a POI as it demonstrates engagement with the other speakers in the debate; it is not advised to take more than 1 or 2 POIs during your speech, however. Furthermore, students do not have to offer POIs to other speakers at any point, but we would encourage students to offer POIs if they feel comfortable doing so.

Motions

The topics that students will have to debate (usually referred to as “motions”) can be about

politics, education, feminism, religion, science/technology, democracy, or any other areas of discussion that students will likely have some background knowledge on. We generally aim to have motions that are accessible and can be debated by students without having done any research on the topic in advance, while also being sufficiently challenging to encourage students to think outside the box and make for an interesting debate.

That said, the format of this competition only gives students 15 minutes to prepare for their debates, so we will do our best to ensure that students won't have to debate a motion that they cannot adequately prepare for during these 15 minutes.

Since these debates are in British Parliamentary (BP) format, motions are always phrased as "This House Would/Should/Believes/Prefers/Regrets/etc ...", where "This House" refers to the person speaking. For instance, if the motion was "This House Would Ban Fast Food", the proposition speakers would talk about why fast food should be banned and opposition speakers would talk about why fast food should not be banned.

Progressing to Later Rounds

All students take part in Rounds 1 - 3 (these rounds are called "in-rounds"). There is then 1 "out-round" (i.e. the final) after the in-rounds have finished. The top 4 teams from the 3 in-rounds progress to the final (progressing to the next round is usually called "breaking", e.g. the top 4 teams break to the final).

At the end of every debate, teams are given a certain number of team points based on how well they did in the debate. The teams that "break" are the teams with the highest number of team points after the 3 in-rounds. A team is given 1 team point for each team that they were ranked higher than in their room, as outlined below:

- The team that gets 1st place in a debate receives 3 team points (as they beat 3 other teams in their room)
- The team in second place gets 2 team points
- The team in third place gets 1 team point
- The team that comes fourth gets 0 team points.

For the first 2 rounds, students are given the call (told what position in the debate they came in), but the third round is a "closed" round, meaning that the speakers are not given the call. This is so that students don't know which teams will break to the final before it is officially announced.

Once it has been announced which students have broken to the final, students who did not break are not obliged to stay for the rest of the competition, but they can stay to watch the final if they would like to do so.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do teachers need to accompany their students to the competition?

We do not require participating students to be accompanied by a teacher or school staff member to the competition; it's up to the policy/preferences of the individual schools taking part if they wish to also send teachers or not.

Do students need to wear a uniform?

We have no preferences for whether or not students wear their school uniform; this is again up to the schools and students themselves. Essentially, students should wear whatever they're comfortable wearing, whether or not this is their school uniform.

Do students have to attend for the full day, or can they arrive late/leave early? As students' participation in later rounds is dependent on their performances in earlier rounds, any rounds missed by students would make them ineligible to progress to the later rounds. For instance, a team could not compete in Round 2 if they did not take part in Round 1, etc., so it's vital that teams compete in all 3 in-rounds.

With regard to the final round on Saturday evening, students who did not progress to the final are not obliged to stay once this round has begun (although all students are very welcome to stay and watch the final). However, we ask that students ensure in advance that they will be available to stay for the final, should they be competing in it. Once the breaking teams have been announced, the teams that did not break can then decide if they wish to stay and watch the final or not.

In summary, we ask that all students taking part in the competition aim to be available for the entirety of the day. If students are unable to stay for when the out-round (the final) is happening, they may still be able to take part in the competition and compete only in the earlier rounds if there are sufficient places available; however, students who can attend for the full day will be prioritised when team places are allocated.

Who is eligible to take part in this competition?

The competition is open to female/non-binary secondary school students in Ireland who are in their senior cycle (i.e. Transition Year, 4th, 5th, or 6th year).

Can students register for this competition if they haven't debated before? Absolutely, students can take part regardless of their previous level of experience, or lack thereof. Schools that register will be sent further information in advance of the competition about BP debating and what the different "roles" entail (i.e. what speakers are expected to say in their debates depending on what position they are speaking in- OG, OO, CG, or CO). The debating workshop on the morning of the competition will also cover the basics of debating that should help ensure novice debaters (people who haven't debated before) feel comfortable taking part.

Is it necessary for students to be registered in teams of 2, or can a student take part on their own?

With the structure of these debates, it is necessary for teams to consist of 2 people for the debates to function properly. As such, if a student who registers does not have a partner, we will then try to pair them up with a student from another school without a partner if possible. If there are no other students without a partner, we will then assign one of our volunteers to speak with the student as their debating partner (these volunteers are called “swing speakers”). However, if a student speaks with a swing speaker they would not be eligible to progress to the final, so we would strongly encourage schools to try to ensure that they have an even number of students to send to the competition.

Can students watch the debates without taking part themselves?

For most of the debates that take place, the only people who will see the debate are the 8 participating students and the judges, and occasionally 1 or 2 teachers, if any teachers would like to watch their students debate. However, we generally don't have an audience for the debates, as this can be off-putting to many of the speakers, especially if they haven't debated before. Additionally, meals provided on the day are paid for by the registration fees from participating students, so it wouldn't be possible to have more students present than those who have registered to take part.

The exception to this is the final round; this is held in the GMB debating chamber, which allows for a relatively large audience to watch the debate. Students who do not progress to the final are not obliged to stay while it is taking place; however, all teams are welcome to stay and watch the final, along with teachers and friends/supporters of the finalists.

Do students need to speak for the full 5 minutes?

5 minutes is the maximum length of time for a speech, not the required amount of time; students can speak for as long as 5 minutes or as little as 30 seconds, it's entirely up to them. However, we would encourage students to try to speak for at least 3 or 4 minutes when they are giving their speeches.

What happens if a student is feeling unwell / is unable to speak in one of the rounds for any reason?

A student is allowed to give both speeches for themselves and their teammate for a maximum of 1 round if their teammate cannot speak in that round for any reason. However, if a student gives both speeches for their team for more than 1 round, or if a swing speaker (one of our volunteers) must fill in for one of the team members for any of the rounds, that team will not be eligible to break to the final.

Will students have to speak in a debate with other students from their school?

Most of the time, this is quite unlikely, given that there are several different rooms for the debates and the majority of schools usually send no more than 2 or 3 teams. However, it may not always be possible to avoid such situations, especially if a school has a large number of teams taking part.

How many teams is a school allowed to send to the competition?

There isn't a strict limit on how many teams a school can send; when schools register, we ask that they indicate the maximum number of teams they would like to send. If schools

request several team places, we cannot guarantee that they will receive all of these places as this is dependent on the number of places available and how many schools apply, but we will do our best to accommodate as many schools and teams as we can.

How can schools register students for this competition?

Schools should register for this competition by filling out the online registration form, which is sent to schools via email. If schools do not receive a link to this form they should contact the Hist Librarian department. Schools must register before the deadline indicated in the form.

Child Protection and Safeguarding

All volunteers at the Hist Girls' Schools' Mace who will be judging the debates and providing feedback to students must read and sign our Child Protection Policy before they can take part.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about the competition, you can contact the convenors at **schoolshist@gmail.com**. For further information about schools' competitions run by the Hist, or for more information about the society in general, you can visit our website, www.tcdhist.com.

