



WISCONSIN  
ASSOCIATION OF FFA

WISCONSIN  
DEPARTMENT OF  
PUBLIC  
INSTRUCTION

# DISCUSSION MEET LDE

## PURPOSE

The Discussion Meet Leadership Development Event allows participants to exchange ideas and information in an effort to solve a problem. It is an exercise in problem-solving using techniques of letting the participants discuss subjects, with the questions, answers and statements.

## EVENT RULES

- A) An FFA member must be in good standing with the local chapter, the state FFA association and the national organization. The member cannot have graduated from high school at the time of the district event for the given competition year. A State FFA Discussion Meet winner may not compete again in any FFA Discussion Meet event in succeeding years.
- B) An FFA chapter may have **two** entries for the Discussion Meet at the district event in a given year. **Two** district winners will advance to the sectional event. These may be from the same school, if so selected by the judges. One sectional winner per section will advance to the state event.
- C) The Official FFA dress must be worn by all contestants participating. Deductions for deviations from Official FFA dress will be at the discretion of the judges who will consider special situations when presented prior to the contestant's presentation.
- D) Any participant in possession of an electronic device during the competition is subject to disqualification.

## EVENT FORMAT

- A) Three judges, one or two timekeepers and a moderator are needed for the event and it is a good idea to have a door monitor so that no one enters or leaves the room during an event. No one may leave the event room once a round starts, until that round is over. Persons may leave between rounds of the event, in any event where more than one round occurs.
- B) Contestants should be seated at two tables set at approximately a 90-degree angle to another. This allows them to see each other and to see judges and timekeeper. Host school must provide name tents on the tables with names on both sides for identification during discussion.

- C) All event officials and contestants will be in the competition room at the appointed time, as directed by the event manager. Important: Contestants may **not** bring research information into any of the Discussion Meet rooms! They may have only a blank paper and pen/pencil with them for the purpose of making notes during the actual event. The event host will provide paper for each contestant.
- D) The moderator is to introduce contestants and the topic, start the discussion, keep the event on track and see that no one monopolizes the time. This is the first time that the contestants will know the exact topic for the session. They should be given two minutes to gather thoughts after the announcing of the topic. The object of the event is for participants to exchange ideas and information in an effort to solve a problem.
- E) A timekeeper must be provided for this event. Possibly using a state officer who is familiar with timing this event.
- F) There are 3 to 7 contestants in an event session. If more than 7 contestants are present at a district event, the event may be split into two sessions, and the top two from each session will go on to the finals, using the second topic provided. If there are not at least 3 people to conduct Discussion Meet event, the host advisor would be allowed to ask for extra participants with the consent of the discussion meet participants at the event site to just sit in and discuss the topic. These people would not be judged, they would simply be used to enhance the event for those competing and give the contestants some experience in the discussion event before competing at the sectional level. At Sectional and State Events, the maximum number of contestants will be 6 and 5 respectively, so no need for split sessions will occur.
- G) The moderator will call the event session to order and announce the topic to be discussed and introduce the timekeepers(s) and contestants. The FFA member would be able to begin writing on their blank sheet of paper immediately following the announcement of the Discussion Meet topic. No writing is allowed before that time.
- H) The moderator will then call on the contestants to make a 30-second opening statement (Statements will be made in voluntary order of the contestants). The timekeeper will stand at 30 seconds during each contestant's opening remarks and remain standing until that contestant finished their remarks. Judges may subtract points at their discretion for contestants abusing the time limit.
- I) The moderator will then indicate the opportunity for open discussion which will run for a total of 12 minutes for 3 contestants, 15 minutes for 4 contestants, 18 minutes for 5 contestants, 21 minutes for 6 events, or 24 minutes for 7 contestants. The moderator will, at their discretion, give "directed discussion" by encouraging contestants to consider other aspects of the topic under consideration, should they feel that the contestants are missing some aspect of the problem or are stuck on one small facet of the problem. The contestants are encouraged to bring up a point and work on that point until they agree on a solution and a course of action, if one is possible, before moving on to another point. The timekeeper will indicate to the moderator when the total time for the open discussion phase of the event has elapsed.
- J) The moderator will call for a minute of quiet time allowing the contestants to consider a closing statement. The moderator will call upon each contestant (again in voluntary order) to make up to a one- minute closing statement. The timekeeper will stand at one minute into each contestant's closing statements and again remain standing until that contestant is completed. Judges may, at their discretion, penalize contestants for abuse of time limit.
- K) The moderator will recognize the judges and request contestants to leave the room to allow the judges to finalize the tabulation of their score sheets.

## GROUP DISCUSSION TOPICS

Topics for the Discussion Meet will be released for each year's competition by no later than December 1 for the January/February events. Each year there will be 7 topics. Three topics will be indicated for the district competitions and four topics for sectional and state competitions. A specific topic will only be used once during a given competition year.

**Suggested Sources for Information/Study:** Your local school, college or public library; All FFA publications both state and national; Any agriculture publication; American, Wisconsin and County Farm Bureau Federation ([www.fb.org](http://www.fb.org)); Popular News Media; Legislative personnel; Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection; Department of Public Instruction.

## SCORING

Judges will not be permitted to confer with each other prior to the completion of their tabulation. The moderator, with the assistance of the timekeeper, will supervise the final tabulation by the judges, and report results to the group. Judges will use a point system indicated on the score sheet to assist in selecting their winners. Each judge will be instructed to break all tie scores. The moderator and timekeeper will rank the panel winners, based on the total scoring given by each judge, i.e., 1 point for first, 2 second, etc. The contestant with the lowest ranking score will be judged the winner and announced to the audience. The decision of the judges is final.

## KEYS FOR A SUCCESSFUL FFA DISCUSSION MEET CONTESTANT

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### A) Know how to play the game:

- 1) **Background:** The FFA Discussion Meet event mirrors an FFA Chapter committee meeting. Thus, the FFA Discussion Meet event judges are looking for cooperative and constructive discussion of the topic which leads to workable and actionable solutions – not a debate of the topic. The judges are looking for the person or persons who stand out as the committee chair.
- 2) **Be recognized as the committee chair:** A good committee chair is able to solve problems and implement solutions by being very cooperative. There are seven criteria on the judge's score card: 1) Opening Statement, 2) Analysis of Topic or Problem, 3) Problem Solving and Implementation, 4) Delivery, 5) Cooperative Attitude, 6) FFA Impact, and 7) Closing Statement. Problems Solving and Implementation and Cooperative Attitude are both worth up to 20 points each, while the other five are worth up to 10 points each.

To be successful in this event, you must score as the top 1 or 2 in Problem Solving and Implementation and Cooperative Attitude. You do that by being seen as an effective committee chair. An effective committee chair is the person who cooperatively leads the discussion. The person who endeavors to make sure all sides of the issue are explored, even a side they may not agree with, and all committee members (contestants) have their voices heard. A good committee chair will introduce a point to be discussed, make a strong statement concerning that point (Problem Solving and Implementation) and then hand off the discussion to a fellow contestant by asking that person a question using that person's name. Remember, this is a cooperative and constructive discussion, so the questions you ask a fellow contestant should help move the discussion forward.

A good committee chair works to get the best ideas out of their fellow committee members. A good committee chair makes sure each committee member shares their thoughts and opinions. If a fellow contestant is being quiet or has been left out of the conversation, a good committee chair asks that person a question and gets them involved in the conversation. A good committee chair keeps the discussion on topic. A good committee chair doesn't interrupt or talk over others while they are speaking. A good committee chair will attempt to bring the group to consensus on workable and actionable solutions to the topic being discussed. Do this by stating at least one action you will take to make a difference as it relates to the topic and then ask your fellow contestants what they are going to do to make a difference.

- B) **Understand the event structure:** The event has an opening (opening statement), a body (open discussion), and a closing (closing statement). A good model of logic to follow is: In the opening, tell them what you are going to tell them. In the body, tell them. In the closing, tell them what you told them.

- 1) **Opening statement:** It is critical you grab the attention of the judges in your opening statement. You may do that by using a quote from a famous person that relates to the topic being discussed or by telling a quick personal story that makes an emotional connection with the judges. After your strong opening sentence, tell us what you are going to tell us. Quickly outline the main points you would like to discuss during the open discussion.
- 2) **Discussion:** It is critical to be seen as the committee chair. Lead the discussion using the sub-topics for each event topic. Make your points and hand off the discussion by asking a question using your fellow contestant's name. Try to come at the topic from a unique point of view and make sure many points of view are discussed. At the 5-minute warning, the timekeeper will stand, make sure you try to bring the group to consensus by developing workable and actionable solutions for the topic being discussed.
- 3) **Closing statement:** It is critical you finish strong. Do this by quickly summarizing one main point each of your fellow contestants made during the discussion. Don't use the closing statement to bring up a new point in the discussion that wasn't covered before. State what you believe are the solutions the discussion produced and the action you will take to make a difference in your FFA Chapter and/or Wisconsin, national, or global agriculture. With your closing, you are figuratively putting a bow on the package, the one you began wrapping with your opening statement, for the judges. Make sure your final sentence is powerful and memorable - plant your flag!

C) General pointers:

- 1) **This is a FFA event:** As an FFA member, **YOU are FFA!** So, when mentioning FFA, make sure you personalize your statements. "We as FFA members should..." or "As an FFA member, I suggest..." Make sure you know how the topic relates to your FFA Chapter, the Wisconsin FFA Association, and National FFA. Visit the Wisconsin FFA website at [www.wisconsinffa.org](http://www.wisconsinffa.org) and the National FFA website at [www.ffa.org](http://www.ffa.org). Check them out on Facebook. How can you work within FFA to help solve the challenges arising from the topic being discussed?
- 2) **Speaking style:** The opening and closing statements are given standing and directed to the audience. Make sure you stand up with confidence and move behind your chair, push your chair in under the table, pause a beat to prepare yourself and the audience and then start your statement. Make good eye contact with members of the audience. Finish your statement, pause a beat, pull out your chair and be seated. Do not talk yourself out of your chair as you begin to speak or talk yourself down into your chair as you finish.

Most people talk faster than they think they do. This is especially true when nerves kick in during a speaking event. Concentrate on slowing down and speaking clearly. Use a strong, clear, confident voice. Be aware of your facial expressions and body language. Always keep a smile on your face and maintain a confident body posture.

During open discussion, sit confidently in your chair – not too stiff but not a relaxed slouch either, make good eye contact with your fellow contestants, actually listen to what they have to say – don't get focused in on the next point you want to make, think "yes, and..." to build on their points and the discussion.

- 3) **Opening and closing statement strategy:** The opening and closing statements are given in voluntary order determined by the contestants. Most people believe the judges best remember the first person to speak and the last person to speak. Those speaking in the middle may get lost in the shuffle.

Going first shows you are very confident. Just make sure you are mentally prepared to deliver a strong opening statement.

Sometimes there is gamesmanship among experienced contestants in an attempt to be the last person to speak. Remember, Cooperative Attitude is critical, so be careful not to be seen as uncooperative in an effort to secure the final speaking position. If you go last for the opening and/or closing statement, you better nail it because your statement will be remembered!

- 4) **Use of personal stories and facts:** Everyone loves a story. Tell personal stories that relate to the topic and make an emotional connection to your audience (the judges). Tell us about your home farm or your experience as a high school student and FFA member, a lesson learned from your grandfather, your greatest challenge working with family...etc. Make it personal and make sure it relates to the topic.

Do a good job of researching the topic. Find some facts and figures you can cite to bring credibility to your thoughts. Don't go overboard on facts and figures – a few sprinkled into the discussion go a long way. Using too many facts and figures will bore your audience (the judges).

- 5) **Stay on topic:** You will only get 4-6 times to speak during open discussion. When you speak, you must make strong points directly related to the topic. Don't get off topic and don't allow another contestant to lead the group off topic. A good committee chair keeps the discussion on topic!
- 6) **Think outside the box and propose unique solutions:** Research the topics from all points of view. Really think about all sides and perspectives of the topic. Can you tackle this challenge from a direction no one else will consider? Having a unique perspective on solving the challenge will serve you well. Don't just take the farmer, ag professional, or FFA point of view. How will this affect consumers, suppliers, senior citizens, young people, ag educators, land grant universities, those who don't understand farming and ag, those trying to vilify farming and ag...etc?

Avoid the “education” trap. Almost every topic lends itself to the solution of “We just need to educate...”. Most judges roll their eyes when they hear, “more education” for the 99<sup>th</sup> time. If you are going to suggest, “We need to educate...”, you better come up with a very unique way of delivering that education because the judges have heard all the usual ways, and they are not going to be excited to hear it again.

- 7) **Be very careful about using acronyms or farm/ag terms your audience (the judges) may not know or understand:** If you mention HSUS and PETA, you must first say, “The Humane Society of the United States, known as HSUS.” or “The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, known as PETA.” Once you've said the complete name, then you may use the acronym from that point forward. Don't expect all judges will know what a gilt or a gelding is. If you use ag terms such as those, you need to give a brief explanation of what you are talking about.
- 8) **Use proper English:** Watch your use of “umm”, “like”, “you know”, “ya”, “nope”, “cuz”, “ta”, “I think” (if you are speaking, we know you think that. Stating the obvious weakens what you are saying.)

## PROPER OFFICIAL DRESS

Participants are expected to observe the National FFA Code of Ethics and the proper use of the FFA jacket during career and leadership development events. (Please reference the latest edition of the Official FFA Manual.) Proper Official Dress is required for this competition.

### Proper Official Dress for an FFA member includes:

- Official FFA Jacket zipped to the top
- Black slacks and black socks/nylons or black skirt and black nylons
- White collared blouse or white collared shirt
- Official FFA tie or official FFA scarf
- Black dress shoes with closed heel and toe
- Note: Official garb of recognized religions may be worn with Official Dress.

*(Taken from the FFA Official Manual)*

# ROOM DIAGRAM FOR DISCUSSION MEET

Contestants should be seated at two tables set at angle to one another. This allows them to see each other and to see the judges and timekeepers. Each contestant should have a card visible in front of them on the discussion table that includes their name and is visible by judges and fellow contestants. The contestants will also have a name badge on their jacket in order that their name is clearly seen. A podium should be placed between these two tables for the moderator.



