

2026 Middle School Ethics Bowl Information and Rules

About

The Janet Prindle Institute for Ethics is proud to host the 2026 Indiana Middle School Ethics Bowl (MSEB). The event will take place on **Saturday, March 14th, 2026** at the Prindle Institute for Ethics on the campus of DePauw University (Greencastle, IN). All teams will participate in one preliminary round and one final round, followed by a lunch (provided for all coaches and team members by the Prindle Institute) and closing award ceremony.

How Ethics Bowl Works

Ethics Bowl matches feature two teams meeting head-to-head to collaboratively discuss tricky moral questions or dilemmas, on topics relevant and suitable to young people, from a shared set of case studies. The cases are created by Hillman interns, under guidance of staff at the Prindle Institute. The students work with coaches through the winter to prepare their responses to four case studies: two for the preliminary rounds, and two for the final rounds. Team members and coaches do not have advance knowledge of which cases will be used at the event. Each match has three judges from DePauw and the local community, and one moderator. Spectators are welcome and encouraged to come and see the students put their knowledge and skills at productive ethical conversation to work.

This program is designed to promote thoughtful, civil dialogue over tough questions which yields well-reasoned and constructive resolutions to those questions. Teams should score highly when they demonstrate good ethical reasoning, clarity in expression of their ideas, consistency in their views, and a willingness to engage thoughtfully with multiple ethical perspectives, especially those made by the other team. Ethics bowl is about constructive collaboration, and so is unlike mock-trial and debate competitions where students press one side of an issue without consideration for furthering a dialogue over it.

Structure and Rules

The Middle School Ethics Bowl will consist of one preliminary round and one final round. For each round, there will be two rooms, each including two teams of students, three judges, a moderator, and any spectators (coaches, family and friends). In the final round, the two highest-scoring teams and the two lowest-scoring teams from the preliminary round will compete against each other.

Round Structure:

1. Team Conferral Time (2 minutes)
2. Team A Presents (3 minutes)
3. Team B Presents (3 minutes)
4. Team Conferral Time (2 minutes)
5. Open Dialogue (10 minutes with Team A starting)
6. Judges' Conferral Time (2 minutes)
7. Judges Questions to Both Teams (10 minutes)
8. Team Conferral Time (2 minutes)
9. Final Question for Team A & Team B (1 minute each with Team B starting)
10. Scoring Time (5 minutes)

Team members must be selected and seated at the table before the round begins. Each team member is allowed one 3x5 notecard, in order to help support and guide the conversation, but all other outside notes and materials are prohibited.

When a team is conferring or speaking, all others in attendance (the other team, judges, and spectators) must remain silent, although teams are allowed to pass notes so long as they do so discretely.

All teams will receive time notifications from the moderator at their request. When judges are asking questions, the moderator will notify them when there are 2 minutes remaining.

The round begins with the moderator flipping a coin. The team that wins the toss decides if it wants to go first (becoming Team A on the score sheets) or second (becoming Team B on the score sheets). The moderator then distributes copies of the first case to the team members and judges, and reads the case aloud. After the moderator finishes reading the case aloud, the round is structured as follows:

1. **Presentations.** Both teams have up to 2 minutes to confer. After this, any member(s) of Team A may speak for up to 3 minutes. Team A can earn up to 10 points from each judge for its presentation. After this, any member(s) of Team B may speak for up to 3 minutes. Team B can earn up to 10 points from each judge for its presentation.
2. **Open dialogue.** Both teams have up to 2 minutes to confer after the presentations. Then the two teams engage in a self-moderated open dialogue for up to 10 minutes. The idea is for the teams to think together about the issues that emerged in the presentations. The open dialogue begins with Team A speaking. Teams are evaluated on the extent to which they listen to and consider the other team's analysis and questions and on the civility and depth with which the teams discuss the case. Each team can earn up to 10 points from each judge for open dialogue.
3. **Judges' Questions to Both Teams.** Judges have 2 minutes to confer, and then have up to 10 minutes for this portion of the round (total, for questions and answers). Each judge may ask team members a question related to the case. If time remains, judges may ask additional questions. Team members should not confer for more than 30 seconds after a question has been asked. Each team can earn up to 10 points from each judge for their responses to the judges' questions.
4. **Final Question.** Both teams will have 2 minutes to confer, and then each will respond to the following question: What point or points did the other team make that really made you think? Team B will respond to the question first, for up to 1 minute, and then Team A will respond to the question for up to 1 minute. Each team can earn up to 5 points from each judge for their response to the final question.
5. **Scoring and Decision.** At this point, the judges complete their score sheets and provide written feedback to the teams. Judges do so individually, without conferring with one another. The moderator then checks the math of each score sheet and make sure the winner is circled on each judge's score sheet. In the event of a tie, the judge will be asked to revise their scores to give a winner. Finally, the moderator announces the round's winner, which is the team that receives the higher score from the majority of judges.