



2024-25

DISCUSSION OUTLINE

Workplace, Workforce, and The Nature of Work

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Overview of Discussion

“Problem-solving Discussion is an effort on the part of a small group to reach a solution to a problem through informal interchange of facts, inferences, and judgments. This method of discussion seeks consensus rather than majority rule. The focus of this event should be the encouragement of cooperation and critical thinking to arrive at the collective goal of better understanding and problem solving.”

This statement from the *Minnesota State High School League Speech Rules and Policies Manual* reflects the true spirit of this event. As discussion participants prepare and research, the goal should be to collect information and develop collaborative skills that will maximize their ability to make valuable contributions as members of a variety of contest groups. In rounds, all discussants should cooperate to achieve group consensus through both substantive—adding valuable information, perspectives, and analysis—and procedural—enhancing the group process, full participation, and positive exchange of ideas—contributions to the process. The category is not intended to be adversarial.

Overview of This Year’s Topic

We think, mistakenly, that success is the result of the amount of time we put in at work, instead of the quality of time we put in.

-Arianna Huffington

The Covid-19 pandemic upended many of the traditional expectations and norms surrounding the nature of work, and the relationship between the worker, employer, and the workplace. The last few years has not seen a return to those pre-pandemic norms. Instead, the nature of the workplace, workforce, and work in general is still adjusting to new norms, many of which have not been entirely settled.

This year’s topic asks that we cast a critical eye forward – what does the future hold for the nature of work? Where do the balances reside? How can workers, corporations, and the various levels of government find those balances? What impacts are demographic and generational changes having on this pursuit? All of these elements, and more, will hopefully encourage category participants to try and understand how “work” might look in the years to come.

TASK INFORMATION

Tasks at Invitational Tournaments

While the Minnesota State High School League does not limit the use of topic areas used for Discussion at invitational speech tournaments, the Discussion Committee recommends the following schedule to give students experience with all parts of the outline:

- **Start of Regular Invitational Season – February 16: Areas I & II, Subsection Topics**
- **February 17 – Last Regular Season Invitational: Areas III & IV, Section Topics**
- **State Tournament Tasks – Students should be prepared for tasks from all areas of the outline.**

Tournament Managers Please Note: Whether or not you choose to follow the above schedule, it is vital that you communicate to your participating schools which part(s) of the outline you will use and how you will be organizing your Discussion rounds.

Tasks at Subsection and Section Tournaments

Tasks for subsection and section tournaments will follow the procedure instituted in the 2016 season – Tournaments will no longer receive a full slate of tasks from which to choose. Instead, they will receive a set of four or five tasks for those tournaments. Those tasks will be date specific (unique to one or two sets of tournaments) and will not be repeated at other tournaments.

The tasks themselves **shall not** be shared beforehand with teams competing at subsection or section tournaments.

Rather, the specific outline sub-points used will be sent with the sets and – following procedure established in 2018 – **must** be communicated to all coaches in your sub and/or section within a time frame that affords adequate preparation for participating teams. For example: “Our [subsection/section] tournament will use Area 1, Sub-points A, C, D, J.”

Tasks at State Tournament

State tournament tasks will follow the same procedure as previous seasons. Separate sets will be written for each day and chosen at random for each round of competition. Participants should be prepared for tasks from all four areas of the outline and that some subpoints may be combined for more expansive tasks.

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2024 - 2025 MSHSL Discussion Topic Outline

The sub-points are intended to (hopefully) generate in-depth examinations of the issues relating to the variety of challenges facing workers, companies, and consumers navigating the new realities of work. For questions, email contacts for the Discussion Committee can be found at the bottom of this document.

I. Personal Interests (Subsection Topic)

- A. Impacts of changing trends in work (remote work vs office time, “gig economy” vs traditional employment).
- B. Managing a proper work/life balance - where does the responsibility reside?
- C. Fairness and equity in wages, compensation, and benefits.
- D. The needs/demands of education and training.
- E. Collective bargaining and the impacts of organized labor.

II. Corporate Interests (Subsection Topic)

- A. The “bottom line” (profits/shareholders/investors) vs treatment of employees.
- B. Governmental regulations vs the unfettered right to engage in business.
- C. Impacts of changing trends in work (remote work vs office time, “gig economy” vs traditional employment, growth of AI use).
- D. Impact of changing demographics/attitudes on the workforce (Ex - DEI initiatives)
- E. Major changes in workplace expectations (Ex - consumer/public pressure).

III. Governmental Interests (Section Topic)

- A. What can/should can be mandated (wages, benefits, UBI, retirement age, etc.).
- B. Conflicts between levels of government (preemption of local standards).
- C. Right-to-work vs union-friendly laws.
- D. Governmental regulations vs the unfettered right to engage in commerce.
- E. What is the impact of tax policy (at all levels) on the workplace and workforce?

IV. International Interests (Section Topic)

- A. The impacts of outsourcing.
- B. Migrant/undocumented workers and their treatment.
- C. What can/should the US learn from other nations?
- D. Trade agreements and their impacts on the global workforce.
- E. Global considerations of labor exploitation (Lack of agreed-upon international labor standards, discrimination, conditions, wages, etc.)

Bibliography

The bibliography is a starting point for those desiring direction in researching this topic. This list is not meant to be exhaustive and presents only a small number of the resources that could be used to prepare for Discussion tasks.

Area I – Personal Interests – Subsection Topic

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Area III – Governmental Interests – Section Topic

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