



# CIVICS BOWL RULES

2025-26 | SEASON 4

KSPS PBS and the League of Women Voters of the Spokane Area are pleased to announce the return of Civics Bowl. The tournament pits teams representing each participating high school against one another in half-hour contests televised on KSPS PBS and streamed online in spring 2026. Teams answer questions about national, state, tribal, and regional governments and other topics which align with Washington state high school curriculum standards in civics and government.

Season 4 of Civics Bowl is an eight-team, single-elimination bracketed academic tournament comprised of a first round with four matches, a semifinal round with two matches, and a championship match. KSPS PBS will conduct a random drawing to determine each team's bracket placement. To ensure transparency, teams will be invited to watch the drawing live. KSPS PBS will also provide a recording.

## PARTICIPATION

**Team Creation:** Participating schools form teams based on their own criteria and selection process. Teams must consist of four (4) students, at least one (1) alternate (student), and a faculty coach. It is strongly recommended that each team be composed of students with diversity representative of their schools. Each team must designate a captain.

- ✓ **Tip:** Create a club to train for Civics Bowl. Many teams that used this strategy during past seasons performed better than those that used class time to prepare.

**\*\*NEW THIS SEASON\*\* Alternates:** There is no limit to the number of alternates on a team, and alternates are allowed to play in future matches should that team advance. Changing players will ONLY be allowed from match to match and NOT for rounds within a match (except in case of emergency).

**Team Participation and Attendance:** All matches are recorded in advance at the KSPS PBS studios located on Spokane's South Hill. All members from each team (players,

alternates, and coaches) are required to be present for their team's recording session(s) and will appear on camera. Teams will not be allowed to play without a coach present. A staff member from the school or district may step-in as chaperone in case of emergency.

Matches will be recorded over a two-week period between April 13-24, 2026. Not all teams will advance to the second week of play, but each team needs to plan to be available in case they do advance. Recording sessions will be scheduled in two-and-a-half hour blocks. Teams need to plan to be available for that entire time, although we hope to keep each session to around two hours.

If a team does not attend its scheduled match, the team is considered to have forfeit its place in the tournament.

**Transportation:** Each school must coordinate all travel to and from the KSPS PBS studios located at 3911 S. Regal St., Spokane, WA, 99223.

## FORMAT DETAILS

**Match Rounds:** Each Civics Bowl match consists of four (4) distinct rounds of gameplay, with a provision for a tiebreaker round as necessary.

**Buzzer System:** Active players use a hand-held buzzer or a desktop buzzer depending on the round. Players are required to wait until the host completes each question before buzzing in. The buzzer system is activated as the last word of each question is read. Once active, the system automatically recognizes which player is first to buzz in. Players are prohibited from holding down the buzzer button until the host finishes reading the question.

**Answer Timer:** A timer for contestants or a team to give an answer starts as soon as the host finishes reading the question. The time limit varies depending on the round and is outlined below. If a player starts to answer as the timer buzzes, the answer will be accepted.

**Scoring:** Point values are outlined below. The score will be visible to the teams during all rounds.

**Negative Points:** Because points are deducted for wrong answers in some of our rounds, it is possible for a team's score to dip into negative territory. Negative points will be accounted for, but at the end of each round any cumulative game score that is below zero will be adjusted to zero. The subsequent round will begin with zero points for that team.

## ROUND 1: TOSS-UP

**Format:** The Toss-Up Round consists of a toss-up question to all players (on both teams) and a follow-up bonus question to the team that correctly answers the toss-up question. Questions in this round are primarily open-ended with short answers and may also include photo and video questions or multiple-choice questions. Bonus questions may include yes/no, true/false, and this/that style questions.

- **Toss-up Question:** Any player on either team can buzz-in when the host has finished reading the question. The player who buzzes in first has three (3) seconds to answer.
  - If the answer is **correct**, that player's team will get a bonus question.
  - If the answer is **incorrect**, all players on the opposing team are eligible to buzz-in to answer.
    - **Note:** Players on the opposing team cannot collaborate before buzzing in on the toss-up question.
    - **Note:** Only one attempt to answer will be allowed. If a player on the opposing team attempts to answer the question and gets it wrong, the host will give the correct answer, and play will move forward with a new toss-up question.
  - Teammates CANNOT collaborate on toss-up questions.
- **Bonus Question:** When a player correctly answers a toss-up question, that player's team gets one (1) bonus question. The team CAN collaborate for up to five (5) seconds after the full question is read. The team captain gives the answer.
  - If the answer is correct, play moves forward with a new toss-up question.
  - If the answer is incorrect, the host will give the correct answer, and play will move forward with a new toss-up question.

**Time Limit:** 5 to 7 minutes.

**Points:** Any correct answer, whether a toss-up question or a bonus question, is worth 10 points.

**Penalty:** There are no deductions for wrong answers in this round.

**Conferring:** Team members ARE NOT allowed to confer during the toss-up question. Team members ARE encouraged to confer during the bonus questions.

## ROUND 2: HEAD-TO-HEAD

**Format:** Opposing players from each team go head-to-head. The player in position one (1) goes against the player in position one (1) on the opposing team and so on for positions

two, three, and four. These numbers will be attached to each position on the team podiums. The team captain is located in position two (2) and the rotation for this round will begin at position one (1). Questions in this round are open-ended with short answers.

- Active players have three (3) seconds to buzz-in after the host has read the entire question.
- The player who buzzes in first has three (3) seconds to give an answer.
  - In the case of a **correct** answer, the players move into position for the next question and play moves forward.
  - In the case of an **incorrect** answer, the player on the opposing team has (3) seconds to give an answer (no need to buzz in at this point). No conferring is allowed. If the answer is incorrect, the host gives the correct answer, and play moves forward (no additional chances to answer).

**Time Limit:** The 1-4 sequence will cycle through three times and will allow each team member equal playing time.

**Points:** A correct answer is worth 10 points.

**Penalty:** There are no deductions for wrong answers in this round.

**Conferring:** Team members ARE NOT allowed to confer with teammates during this round.

## ROUND 3: CATEGORY

**Format:** Teams take turns choosing and answering questions from five (5) themed categories. Each category has four (4) questions. Questions in this round include open-ended questions with short answers, multiple-choice questions, and photo/video questions. The buzzer is not used in this round.

- ✓ **Tip:** Make sure your team fully understands the rules in this round. Utilizing a strategy can have a big impact on the score.

**Selection:** The team that is trailing after Round 2 gets to go first choosing a category. In the event of a tie after Round 2, a coin toss is used to determine the team that makes the first category selection. The host will audibly designate the “heads” and “tails” designations to the teams prior to the coin toss.

**Answering:** When the host has finished reading the question, the team has 10 seconds to confer and either give an answer, “decline” to answer (see below), or “toss” the question to the other team (see below). The 10 seconds start after the host has read the entire

question. Teams may answer before the 10 seconds is up. The captain provides the team's response.

- In the event of a **correct** answer, play moves forward with the opposing team picking a category. A correct answer DOES NOT give a team "control" of the board. Play alternates whether a question is correct or incorrect.
- In the event of an **incorrect** answer, the question DOES NOT go to the other team. The host will give the correct answer, and play moves forward with the opposing team picking a category.

**The Captain Can "Defer" an Answer:** The captain provides the team's response for each question in this round. However, if the captain wants to defer to another teammate, they can announce that they would like to defer to a teammate by naming that teammate within the 10 second time limit.

**"Declining" a Question:** Teams have the option of not answering a question (unless the other team has "tossed" it to them). There is no penalty for choosing not to answer. Each team is **allowed to "decline" up to three (3) questions** in this round.

**"Tossing" a Question to the Opposing Team:** Teams may choose to send the question and its associated points to the opposing team. The opposing team then has 10 seconds to confer and answer the question. The question **MUST** be answered. The opposing team cannot choose to decline at that point. For example, if Team A tosses a 25-point question to Team B, Team B must answer the question; if correct, Team B gets 25 points. If incorrect, they lose 25 points. After the opposing team answers the "tossed" question, that team will have control of the board to choose a new question. There is **no limit to the number of times a team may toss a question** to the opposing team.

**Points:** Questions are worth 15, 20, 25, and 30 points as they increase in difficulty in each category. Questions must be answered in order of difficulty, for example a team cannot choose the 30-point question before the 15-point question. However, teams are free to choose any category during their turn.

**Penalty:** The point value associated with the question is deducted for incorrect answers. "Declining" (choosing not to answer) does not impact the score, except for "tossed" questions (details above).

**Conferring:** Team members ARE encouraged to confer in this round.

- ✓ **Tip:** The opposing team, host, and production staff may be able to hear teams conferring. For example, if Team A is conferring, Team B will be able to hear that discussion. In the event Team A decides to toss the question, all information

discussed by Team A during the conference could be used by Team B to produce an answer.

**Time Limit:** 5 to 6 minutes. Each team will select the same number of questions from the category board, though “tossed” questions could alter the total number of questions answered by each team in the round.

## ROUND 4: LIGHTNING

**Format:** In this timed 90-second round, all players (on both teams) are eligible to buzz in and answer all questions. After the host has read the entire question, the player who buzzes in first has three (3) seconds to give an answer. Questions in this round are primarily open-ended with short answers, and may include some yes/no, true/false, and this/that style questions, as well as photo questions.

- In the case of an incorrect answer, the host reads the correct answer, and play moves forward (there is no chance for other players to steal).
- If no one buzzes in during the three-second timer, no player is eligible to answer. The host reads the correct answer and play moves forward.

**Points:** All questions are worth 20 points in this round.

**Penalty:** Incorrect answers result in a 20-point deduction. This includes buzzing in then choosing not to answer. If no one buzzes in, the score is not impacted.

**Time Limit:** 90-seconds. The 90-seconds will start as soon as the host finishes reading the first question. If the host is reading a question or a player is answering a question when the 90-seconds is up, the question will be finished and possible answer accepted.

**Conferring:** Players ARE NOT allowed to confer with their teammates in this round.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

**End of a Round:** Rounds will end once the time limit has been reached (Rounds 1 and 4) or the designated number of questions has been asked (Rounds 2 and 3). A bell will announce the end of each round.

**Match Tiebreaker:** In the event the two teams are tied at the end of the match, three toss-up questions (Round 1 format) will be asked and the team with the highest cumulative score will win. Team members are NOT allowed to confer during the tiebreaker.

**Repeating a Question:** Questions may be repeated at the discretion of the host at the request of a player who did not hear the question or misunderstood a word. In this case, the answer timer will start after the host has re-read the question. Requests to repeat a question are not accepted in the Lightning Round.

**Answers:** When naming a specific person, players may give last names only except in cases where there is more than one well-known person with the same last name. The host will ask a player to be more specific as necessary.

In most cases, mispronounced answers will be accepted.

Overall, judges will evaluate answers to determine if a player understands the question, answer, and/or concept well enough to accept the answer.

**Judging:** The judges are selected by KSPS PBS and the League of Women Voters of the Spokane Area (LWVSA) for the duration of the season. KSPS PBS and LWVSA make every effort to ensure a fair game, but the occasional mistake may occur. If the judges become aware of a mistake, every effort will be made to correct it. Disputes or discrepancies should be voiced by the coach(es) only (not by the players) to the judges immediately following the end of the round in which the discrepancy occurred. Coaches may not interrupt a round while in play. If the dispute is determined to be valid by a judge, play stops between rounds and the discrepancy is addressed at the sole discretion of the KSPS PBS staff and judges. Scores may be adjusted, or questions eliminated, if necessary. Play then resumes. Any ambiguity or disputes that may arise concerning the rules of play and their interpretation are clarified or resolved by the staff and judges. Judges' rulings are final. Once an individual round is completed and the next round begins, the completed round becomes final and challenges are not accepted retroactively. If the score changes, an explanation will be announced to the viewing audience before the next round begins. In the event of a tie, the competition is final once the match tiebreaker protocol has been completed and any associated disputes or discrepancies have been addressed. No protests are accepted once teams have left the recording session.

**Technology Policy:** Cell phone, smartwatch, tablet, and laptop use by players, alternates, coaches, and studio audience members during the match is prohibited. All cell phones must be powered off and out of reach. Coaches will be asked to secure all portable technology devices for their team for the duration of each match.

**Public Health Protocols:** Team members, coaches, audience members, judges, volunteers, and staff working and/or attending the Civics Bowl recording sessions will be required to follow any applicable public health protocols.

**Production Note:** Television production involves many KSPS PBS employees, volunteers, and dedicated studio time. For that reason, once the recording and air schedule is determined, changes will not be allowed. Delays due to technical problems are possible

during recording sessions. The KSPS PBS crew works as quickly as possible to limit interruptions and remain on schedule. The recording schedules are purposefully created to accommodate unexpected delays, allow time for the teams to learn the buzzer system, and time between rounds to finalize the score and hear any challenges.

**Editing for Broadcast:** Matches will be edited for television/streaming without impacting the scoring.

**Code of Conduct:** To encourage a positive atmosphere and foster good sportsmanship, all participating schools, teams, and audience members (including coaches, students, and administrators) are presumed to be responsible individuals and will be treated as such and are therefore expected to conduct themselves in a responsible and ethical manner. This includes, but is not limited to, treating all other players, coaches, judges, LWVSA volunteers, and KSPS PBS staff with courtesy, abiding by all decisions of the Civics Bowl staff, promptly reporting violations, and honestly reporting details of game situations to KSPS PBS producers. Coaches and administrators are expected to actively use their influence to enhance sportsmanship in the broadest possible manner and should not engage in conduct that may incite players or the audience during the competitions and recordings. Unsportsmanlike conduct includes using outside resources (including books, computers, third-party assistance, etc.), or engaging in the observation and relaying of signs/signals given by another party to aid in answers, or any actions or comments by coaches or players which are intended to bait, anger, ridicule, or demean others, whether or not the deeds or words are vulgar, or in order to gain an unfair advantage during the competition. Public criticism of KSPS PBS, the League of Women Voters, the crew of Civics Bowl, or any participating team, players, and coaches during the competition or recording will be considered disruptive and unethical. KSPS PBS at its sole discretion reserves the right to decline participation of a school prior to and at any point during the competition, including future competitions, due to unsportsmanlike, disruptive, or unethical behavior.

**Confidentiality:** All participating teams, coaches, and audience members agree to keep and retain in the strictest confidence such confidential information as guest and team member appearances, including identity and information, game results, game questions, references, and any information not publicly known, since such disclosure will affect and/or destroy the surprise, tension, and outcome of the series for the viewing public or may provide an unfair advantage to other participating teams. Confidentiality will be expected until the episodes have aired on KSPS PBS.

Gameplay shall be in the sole discretion of KSPS PBS. Clarification of these rules may be updated by KSPS PBS in its sole discretion.

Each coach will be required to sign an acknowledgement and acceptance of these rules before gameplay begins.

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