

Illinois High School Scholastic Bowl Coaches Association IHSA Rules Summary

This IHSA Scholastic Bowl Rule Summary is intended for the use of new coaches and students to give them an overview. It is recommended that coaches carry with them to matches that use IHSA format copies of the full IHSA Terms & Conditions, Rule Book, and Case Manual (all of which can be found at www.ihsa.org) for reference. Also, it is very important to be familiar with all of those documents before moderating a match.

Each team has five players. Matches are run by a moderator, who reads the questions, judges answer correctness, and enforces rules. Coaches or players can respectfully appeal moderator decisions before the next question is read, but under IHSA rules there is no higher authority to hear appeals for most issues.

At the beginning of each match, the captain and head coach of each team are identified, and the teams introduce themselves and test the buzzer system.

There are two types of questions, tossups and bonuses. The match begins with a tossup, and each time a tossup is answered correctly, the team that answered the tossup is given a bonus.

At the beginning of each tossup question, the moderator announces the category and begins reading. A player may buzz in to answer a tossup at any point once the moderator has begun reading it. The Moderator will stop reading and recognize the player by name as soon as the player has buzzed in. Once recognized, the player has three seconds to start giving an answer. If the answer is correct, that player's team is awarded fifteen points and control of a bonus. If the answer is incorrect, that player's team is not allowed another attempt at that tossup question, and the moderator will read the remainder of the question (beginning at a natural point near and before where the previous team had interrupted) for the other team. Once the moderator is done reading the question, players have up to ten seconds to buzz in (unless the tossup is a computation tossup, in which case the time limit is thirty seconds). If the first team answers after a question is entirely read, the clock runs down while they answer, but the other team is given a minimum of three seconds to buzz if the first team gives an incorrect answer. There are no penalties for incorrect answers.

No written or verbal communication is allowed during a tossup question, though players can write on their own paper. Players should wait until the moderator recognizes them by name before answering—failing to do so will result in the team receiving only ten points instead of fifteen points, though the team will still control the bonus.

At the beginning of a bonus question, the moderator announces the category. The moderator then reads the question, which consists of an introduction plus three parts worth ten points each. Players can write while the question is being read, but they cannot talk. Once the entire Bonus has been read, players have up to thirty seconds to work and confer. The captain of the controlling team can end this time early by saying "Time" to the moderator. Once the conferral time is over, teams have three seconds to quietly pass papers to each other.

The team that controls the bonus (because it correctly answered the preceding tossup) gets the first chance to give its answers. All answers must be given by a single person—either the captain or a player explicitly deferred to by the captain. Once the controlling team gives its answers, the moderator will state which parts were correct and give the other team (without additional conferral time) a chance to answer the other parts.

Teams are allowed up to two timeouts per half, and they can only be called by the head coach. Players may signal the coach a request for a timeout, but they may not call them themselves. Coaches can substitute players during timeouts (including ones that were called by the opposing coach), at halftime, or before tiebreaker questions are read.

To enter the IHSA State Series, teams must register online by the end of October and submit their record online by the end of January. It is recommended that each head coach attend the seeding meeting that is held in February at the sectional host site. The IHSA State Series is divided into two classes based on school enrollment and consists of a single-elimination Regional, a round robin Sectional, and a pool-play State Final with championship and third place matches.

There are several rules that are enforced during the IHSA State Series that are not enforced in some other matches and tournaments. The rules most commonly abrogated by other IHSA-format tournaments state that each team must start the match with five players and must wear respectful matching tops, and that the length of each match is 24 toss-ups and associated bonuses. Tournament and conference directors are responsible for communicating any variations in the rules to participating coaches, and coaches should contact those people if there are any questions. Many invitational tournaments use an entirely different set of rules than the IHSA, such as Masonic rules or any of several rule sets collectively called “national format”: NAQT, ACF, mACF, or variations thereon.

Out of the twenty-four tossups and twenty-four bonuses in an IHSA-format match, five each are in language arts/literature, mathematics, science, and social studies; three are in fine arts; and one is in miscellaneous.

This document is published jointly by the IHSA, the organization responsible for creating and enforcing rules in addition to running its State Series, and the IHSSBCA, a coaches organization dedicated to improving and growing Scholastic Bowl in Illinois. IHSSBCA also recommends that coaches read our Ethics Guidelines, which can be found at www.ihssbca.org/about.php.