

Staffer's Guide to Online Tournaments

Welcome to the PACE guide for **staffing** an online tournament as a moderator or scorekeeper. This guide currently only covers staffing a Discord tournament, although a Zoom guide is coming soon. For guides for directing, playing or coaching at an online tournament see [here](#).

This guide assumes that you have staffed at least one in-person quizbowl tournament before. If not, please see **TBD** on quizbowl basics.

General Information

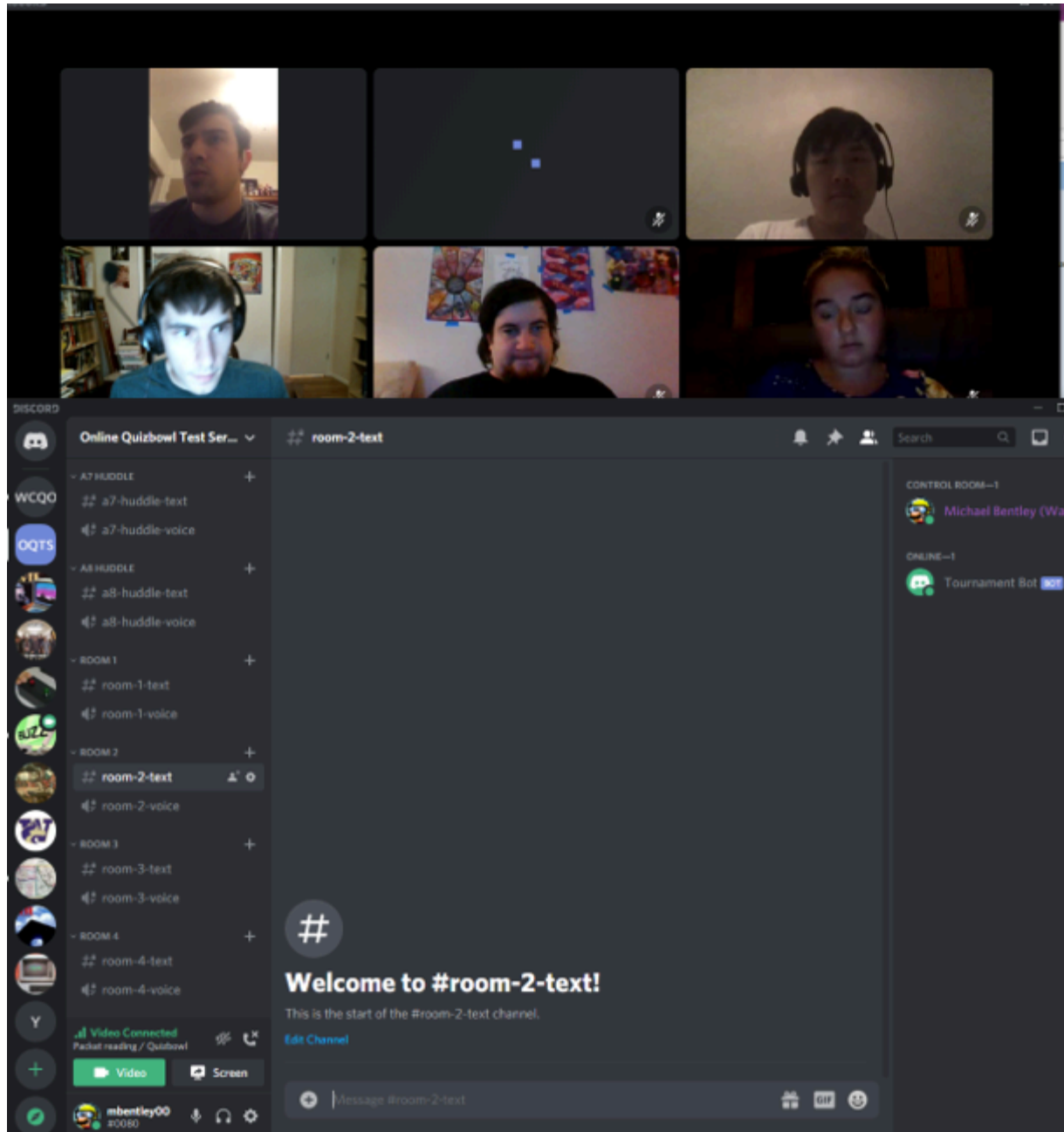
Quick Overview of Online Tournaments

Quizbowl tournaments over Discord or Zoom simulate the in-person quizbowl experience through a combination of audio, video and chat-based buzzing. Anyone with a computer, a headset and passable broadband can play an online tournament. Online tournaments are typically announced on the forums and tournament database at <https://www.hsquizbowl.org>.

Online tournaments will take at least as long as a regular tournament, and probably about 30-40% longer. Everyone attending the tournament should commit to it like an in-person event.

Discord Tournaments

Tournament directors create a Discord server for the tournament, use bots to configure the server for quizbowl, and then invite players, coaches and staff to the server. Each person attending the tournament is generally in a different physical location, although in some cases people may be in the same space.



Discord quizbowl match in progress

Players and coaches are assigned to team roles. Each round in the tournament, the team will be assigned to a room to play a match against one other team. Everyone will join a video call and the moderator will read questions just like in an in-person match. Players use the text chat in place of physical buzzers to buzz in.

Zoom Tournaments

Zoom tournaments take place on Zoom meetings. The tournament director will typically create one or more large meetings and then assign players/coaches to breakout rooms to play games. Players can use the in-meeting chat in Zoom to buzz in, although many Zoom tournaments utilize a buzzing system such as buzzin.live. Like on Discord, moderators will read the questions aloud to teams and teams will either speak or type their answers.

Online Moderating Basics

When you moderate at an online tournament, you'll be reading questions just like you would at an in-person event. Expect to be reading for at least as long as an in-person tournament, and probably longer.

Make sure you're moderating from a quiet environment. If you can't be somewhere without any background noise, please let the TD know this.

Turn off all sound alerts on your computer. Players will be very distracted if they are hearing background pings. See [this page](#) for details.

Like in an in-person tournament, you're expected to be fully present when moderating/scorekeeping. Don't be chatting or browsing the web in between questions.

To repeat from above, you absolutely must have a headset microphone (not your laptop microphone). Always have sound coming from your headset and not your computer's speakers.

Be respectful and professional. If you see anyone violating the tournament's code of conduct, report it to the TD.

Finding Online Tournaments

Online high school quizbowl tournaments are generally announced on the forums at <https://www.hsquizbowl.org> and on the Tournament Database on that same site.

Many NAQT tournaments are also being hosted online in the 2020-2021 school year. As of the writing of this guide, NAQT is still working on their online quizbowl platform. See the [NAQT website](#) for more details.

Pay attention to the tournament's eligibility requirements. While online tournaments make it feasible for teams anywhere in the world to play against each other, PACE generally encourages tournament directors and players to pitch tournaments at existing local circuits.

Online Tournament Equipment

Generally, each player and moderator is playing from a **computer** with a **webcam** and a dedicated **headset**. It is technically possible to play an online tournament from a smartphone, but we don't recommend this except as a backup.

Computer: Any computer ought to work for a Discord tournament. All videoconferencing apps (including Discord) use a lot of system resources. It's a good idea to close all background apps. If you have multiple different computers available, try to use the most powerful one.

Headset: Headsets are **required** for moderators. TDs, do not make any exceptions for this policy. Laptop microphones rarely work well for quizbowl. Players can get by without headsets but it's still strongly encouraged.

Wired headsets are better than wireless headsets. These come in both USB and 3.5 mm varieties. If you are using a USB headset, ideally use a more recent one. If you need to purchase a headset, consider spending a little more for a gaming headset which is typically optimized to have lower latency. This [headset](#) that costs around \$40 is one option.



A headset like this with a dedicated microphone is a requirement for moderators and a great idea for players and coaches too

If you have a hardware failure and need to fall back to a laptop microphone, ideally plug in any other headphones. **No one on the call will have a good experience if you are using both a microphone and non-headphone speakers.**

Webcam: If your computer does not have a built-in webcam, you'll want to order one. Webcams were hard to come by in the beginning of the pandemic. They may be more available by the time you read this. You don't necessarily need a fancy one for quizbowl purposes. Something like an [Amazon Basic camera](#) will work and costs about \$35.



Example webcam

For the tournament, the webcam should be pointed at your face. The purpose of the webcam is to (a) make the tournament more personable and (b) discourage cheating. Like any video call, try to sit facing a window so you have good lighting.

9/27/20 Camera Update: Some tournaments are requiring stricter camera policies to discourage cheating. For instance, some tournaments require a camera to be pointed at your hands. Some require a camera positioned above and behind you so the moderator can see both your hands and your screen. In this case, a built-in laptop camera won't work. You'll want to purchase a webcam like above and a USB extension cable long enough to be positioned behind you. You shouldn't need any mounting equipment beyond either tape or something heavy to prop up the camera on.

Internet: An ethernet connection is your best bet for an online tournament. This will have the lowest latency and most consistency. If this is not available, see if you can situate yourself close to your wifi router (if you have one).

Online Tournament Rules

This page contains a list of rules to handle cases specific to online quizbowl tournaments. These rules supplement the [Official PACE Ruleset](#).

Tossup Recognition: In online tournaments, players buzz in on tossup questions by typing “buzz” in the text chat. Saying “buzz” via voice is **not** a valid way to buzz in. But a simultaneous text and voice buzz is a good practice to get the moderator attention, especially in Zoom tournaments. **Players must be recognized by the moderator before giving an answer.** The buzz order the moderator sees is the official order. It may be different than what a player sees on their screen. Players who give an answer without being recognized will be penalized for conferring if they were not truly the first player to buzz on the moderator’s screen.

Alternate Tossup Recognition: Some tournaments may choose to use a separate buzzer app such as [buzzin.live](#) for recognizing buzzes. These apps will serve as the “source of truth” for who buzzed in first. The tournament director should make the buzz-in policy clear before the tournament.

Tossup Timing: Players will have 8 seconds to answer a tossup after buzzing in. The timing for tossups going dead does not change. It remains 5 seconds.

Bonus Timing: Teams will have 8 seconds to confer on bonus parts. Tournaments that use bouncebacks should give teams 5 seconds to answer a bounceback. If the team starts the “our” in the phrase “our answer is” within the 8 seconds they will be given an opportunity to complete their answer, so long as they don’t pause.

Withdrawing: Players may not “withdraw” their buzz, e.g., by typing “wd” upon recognition instead of an answer. Any player who is recognized and attempts to withdraw will be considered to have given an incorrect answer. After an incorrect answer, the buzzers are “cleared” and a player on the other team must buzz again if they still wish to answer.

Moderators Failing to Recognize Buzzes: Moderators will make their best effort to see buzzes and stop reading right away. However, it’s common at online tournaments for there to be some delay before this happens.

The official buzz point is when the moderator stopped reading. Consider a tossup like this:

Manne Siegbahn introduced the notation used in spectroscopy based on this radiation, which includes the k alpha transition. ESCA [Player Buzzes] uses this phenomenon to induce the (*) photoelectric effect. Because this radiation has wavelengths on the same scale as interatomic spacing, crystal lattices serve as effective diffraction gratings [Moderator Recognizes Buzz]

Even if a player “knew” the answer at the buzz point after ESCA, they will not be granted power on this question since the moderator didn’t recognize them until after power.

Players should do their best to yell “someone buzzed” if they see this happening.

Moderators Incorrectly Recognizing Someone: If a moderator has determined that they incorrectly recognized the player who buzzed in and the incorrectly recognized player gave an answer, then the tossup will be thrown out and a replacement read that’s open to both teams.

This also applies to situations where the moderator ambiguously recognizes someone. For instance, consider the case where Team A has a player named Mike A. and Team B has a player named Mike B. On a tossup, Mike A buzzes in slightly before Mike B. The moderator only recognizes “Mike.” Mike B then gives an answer. In this case, the tossup will be thrown out. However, if a player not named Mike gives an answer, that will be considered conferring and ruled incorrect.

Giving Answers on Tossups: Players can either say the answer (after unmuting) or type in their answer. When typing out an answer, players must give the full answer. Typing a shorthand like “hf” when the answer is “Huck Finn” is not acceptable.

Spelling: Exact spelling for typed answers is not required. Any plausible spelling that follows the existing rules around vowels and syllables will be accepted.

Giving Answers on Bonuses: For bonuses, teams can either type their answer using ALL CAPS or by saying the phrase “Our Answer Is [Answer]”. Other answers (such as lower case text or other spoken answers without “our answer is”) will be considered conferring and not a directed answer.

Warning: Some potential answers, like NATO, are naturally typed in all caps. Players should take extra care when conferring that they don’t accidentally type these answers in all caps.

Like in an in-person event, what the moderator accepts is not subject to protest.

Equipment Failure and Technical Difficulties: It’s the responsibility of players to immediately let a moderator know if they cannot hear the question. When this happens, moderators should pause and attempt to resolve the issue. Tossups and bonuses that go through the entire cycle without the moderator being alerted of a technical issue will not be replaced. It’s up to the moderator to decide whether to repeat any/all parts of a question a player had difficulty hearing while that question is still being read.

Moderators and tournament directors have the discretion to give up trying to solve a technical issue for player(s) who are having repeated issues. See this [troubleshooting guide](#) for tips on fixing issues.

Discord Tournaments

Discord Basics for Online Tournaments

Discord is a chat and audio/video conferencing app widely used for hosting online quizbowl tournaments.

Download Discord from [here](#). Discord is free for all users. It has a paid option called Nitro, but we've found that this doesn't offer any advantages for quizbowl tournaments.

Note: You must be at least 13 years old to create a Discord account.

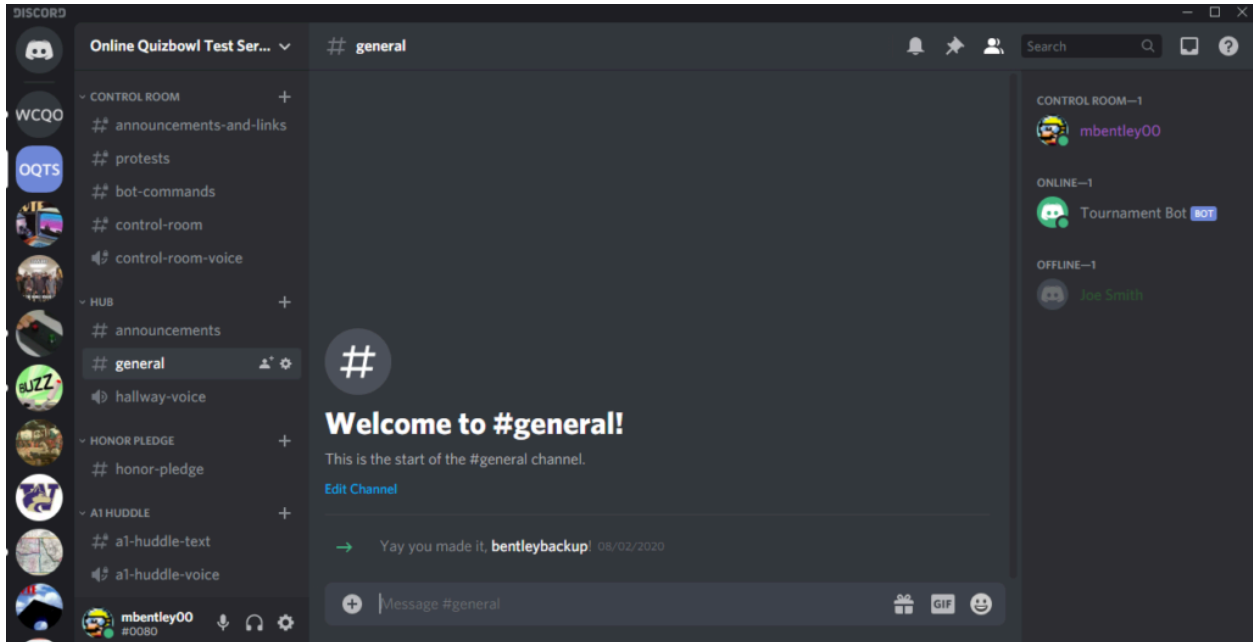
Always use the downloaded desktop app. **Do not use the version of Discord that runs in your browser.** This version has inferior audio and generally leads to more issues.

Discord updates frequently. It's a good idea to boot it before the tournament so you're not stuck waiting for an update.

You'll have one Discord account. However, you'll often be joined to multiple Discord servers (one for each tournament, plus non-tournament servers like the Quizbowl discussion Discord). On each server, you can set a different display name. For tournaments you'll want to set this to your real name and affiliation (i.e. school).

The tournament director will create a server and then send a link to the server to players, coaches and staff via email or some other form of communication.

Discord divides up servers into channels. Channels can be either text or voice + video. A tournament server usually has a combination of text channels for general announcements, staff discussion, and game rooms. Plus a separate set of voice + video channels for game rooms.



Example Discord Quizbowl Server

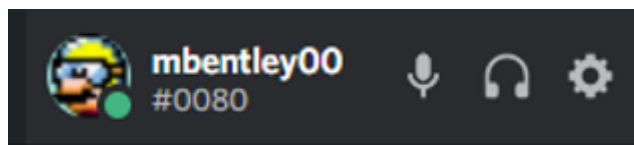
Once you've got Discord installed, you'll want to set up your audio settings to be ready for online quizbowl. Click [here](#) for a guide on how to do that.

Discord Audio Settings

When: After installing the Discord desktop app and (if necessary) purchasing your audio/video equipment.

Once you've installed the Discord desktop app and have your headset plugged in, you'll want to configure the audio settings so they work best for quizbowl.

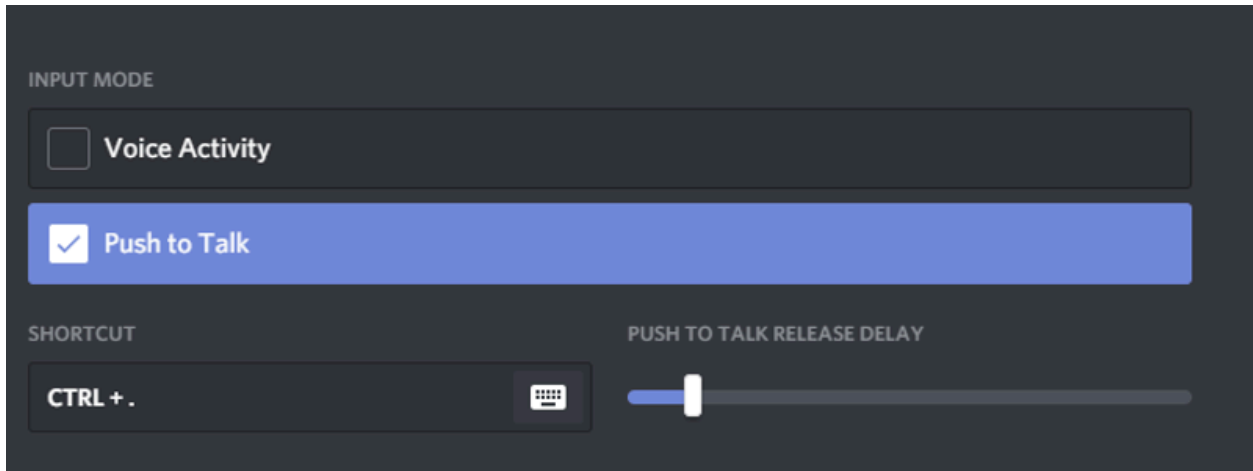
Click on the "User Settings" gear button that should be at the bottom left of your screen:



Click on the gear button next to your username to open the settings

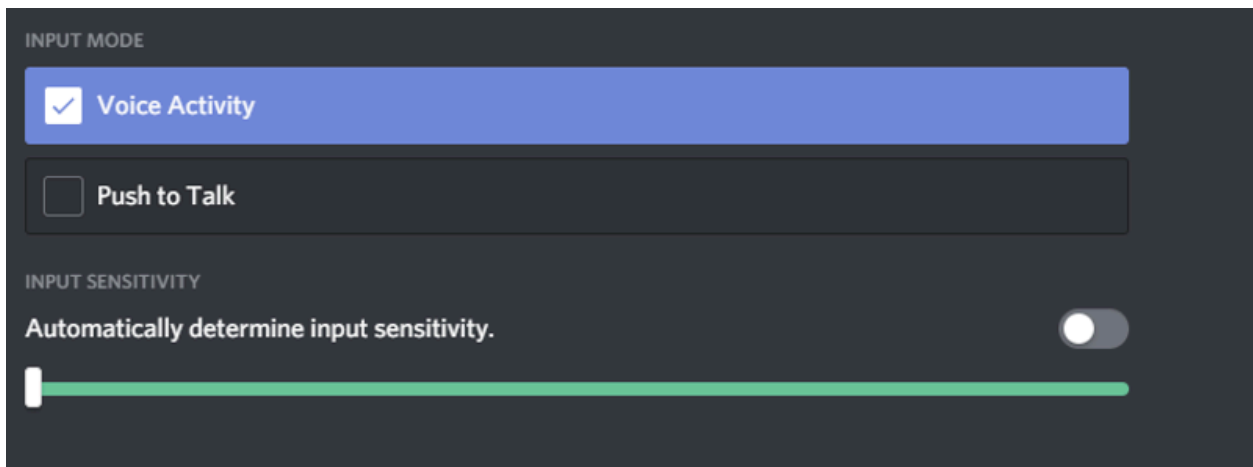
Go to App Settings -> Voice and Video

I personally prefer using Push to Talk. This lets me control when my audio is coming through by pressing a hotkey (in my case, Control + dot). Important: Make sure that the Push to Talk Release Delay to around 200 MS so that it doesn't cut you off at the end of talking.



Increasing the push to talk release delay helps prevent Discord from cutting off your statements. Pay attention to the shortcut key you chose. In this case, it's Control + dot which I need to hold to talk

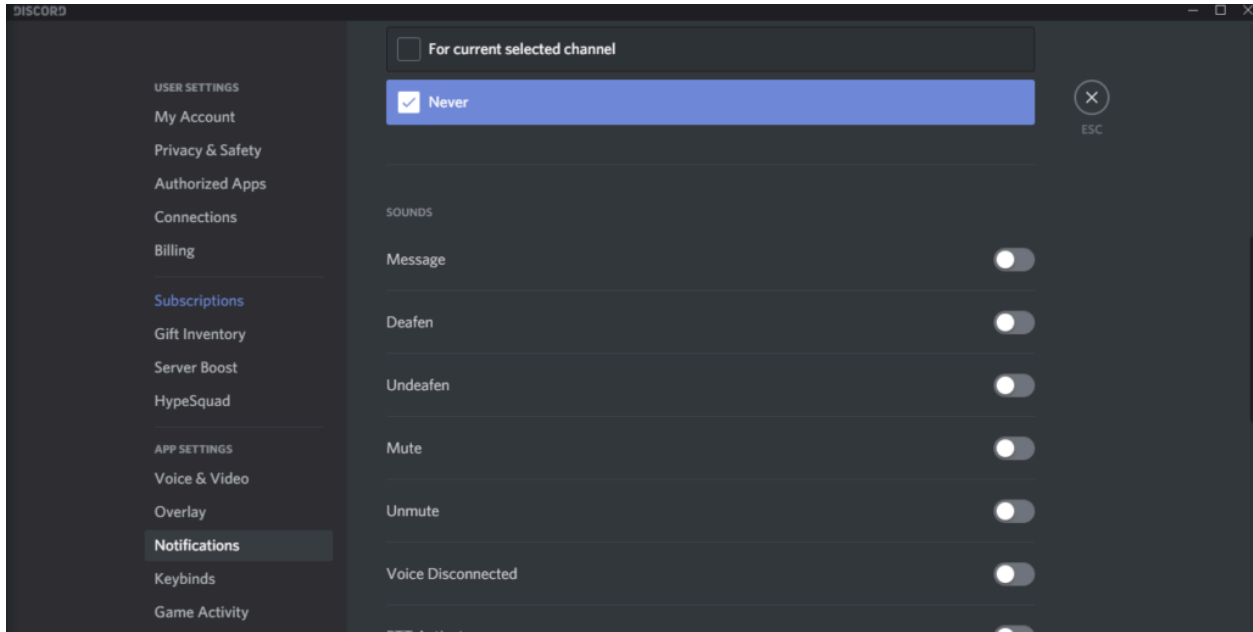
Many people find it easier to use the Voice Activity option. If you do this as a moderator, turn off the “automatically determine input sensitivity” and move the slider all the way to the left:



For moderators, when using “Voice Activity” make sure to set your input sensitivity low. For players, if you set this to a low value make sure you’re vigilant about muting when not speaking

Once you have this configured, use this dialog to test your mic and video to ensure that you’re coming through clearly.

You may also want to change notification sounds, as these can be distracting when you’re playing or moderating a match. You can find these in the “notifications” section below “Voice & Video” and then scrolling down:



Discord notification sound settings

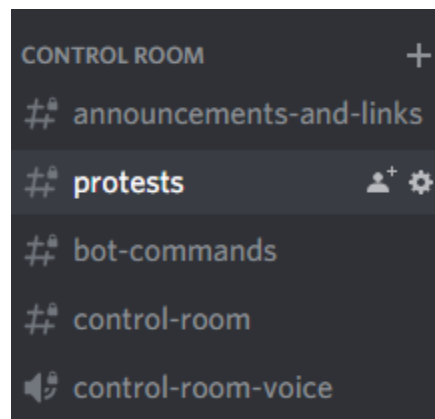
Joining a Discord Server

You should receive an email from the Tournament Director a few days before the tournament is taking place with a link to the Discord server being used for the tournament.

Join the server right away. Once you join, change your username to your real name and indicate that you're a staffer in your name. You can do so by typing a command like this into the Discord chat:

`/nick Mike Bentley (staff)`

Send an @mention or DM to the tournament director to add you as a staffer. Once you've been added to the staffer role, you should see the Control Room set of rooms like below:



Be prepared to do an equipment test call with the tournament director to make sure your sound and video is coming through okay.

Adding Teams to Discord Rooms

When: Before the start of each round.

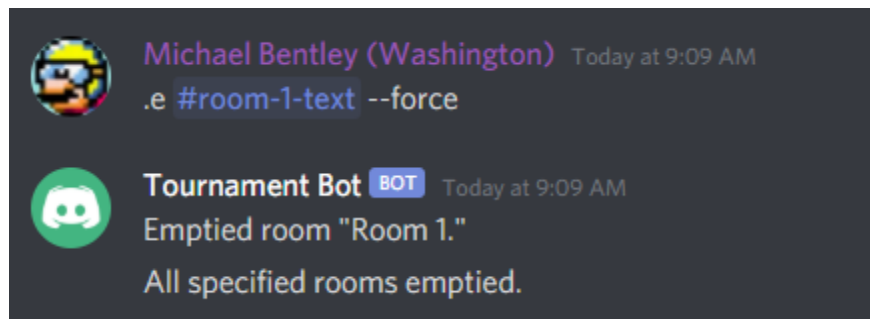
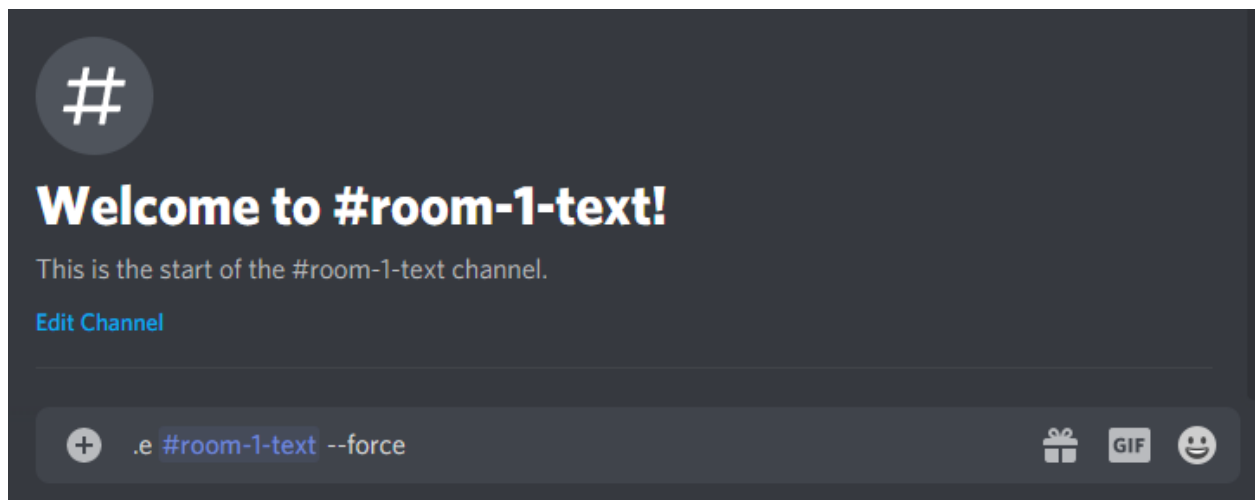
For Discord tournaments, teams only get permissions to the room they're currently playing in. Each round, staff must empty their room of teams and then add the teams that are playing their next match.

Moderators: Get confirmation from your TD that you can start.

Consult the schedule to see which teams are in your room this round.

In your room chat, type the following command to empty out the teams from your room (replacing the room number with your room):

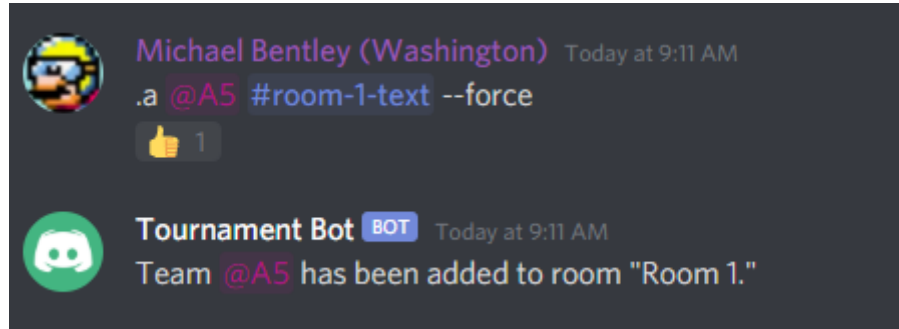
.e #room-1-text --force



Successful emptying of Room 1

Add the first team playing in your room for this round:

.a @A5 #room-1-text -force

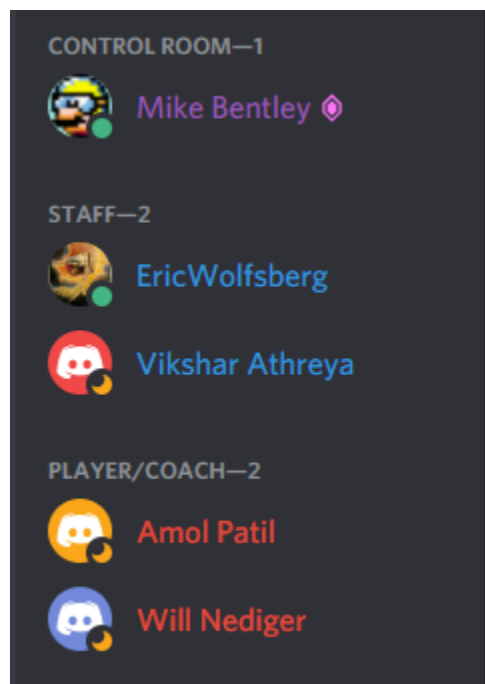


Successful adding of Team A5 to Room 1

Add the second team playing in your room for this round:

.a @A6 #room-1-text -force

You should now see two teams in your room, which you can confirm by seeing players listed in the Player/Coach role for the room chat:



After adding teams to Room 1, you'll see players listed in the Player/Coach role on the right-hand side of the room text channel

Note: Even though the above commands just reference the text chats, they will remove/add players from both the text and voice version of the room.

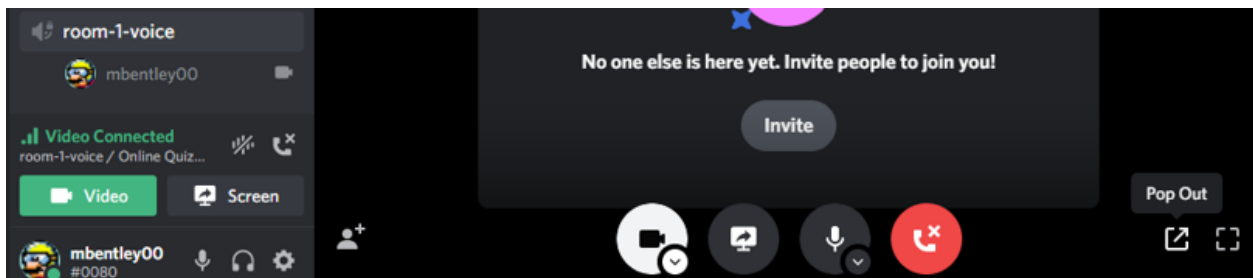
Tournament Directors: You can make this easier for your moderators by giving them a list of commands to run each round ahead of time. This requires that you hand-make the commands

for each room. TDs can also do this step for moderators. And in the future, the tournament bot may be expanded to automatically create these commands for prelim matches.

Moderating and Keeping Score in an Online Match

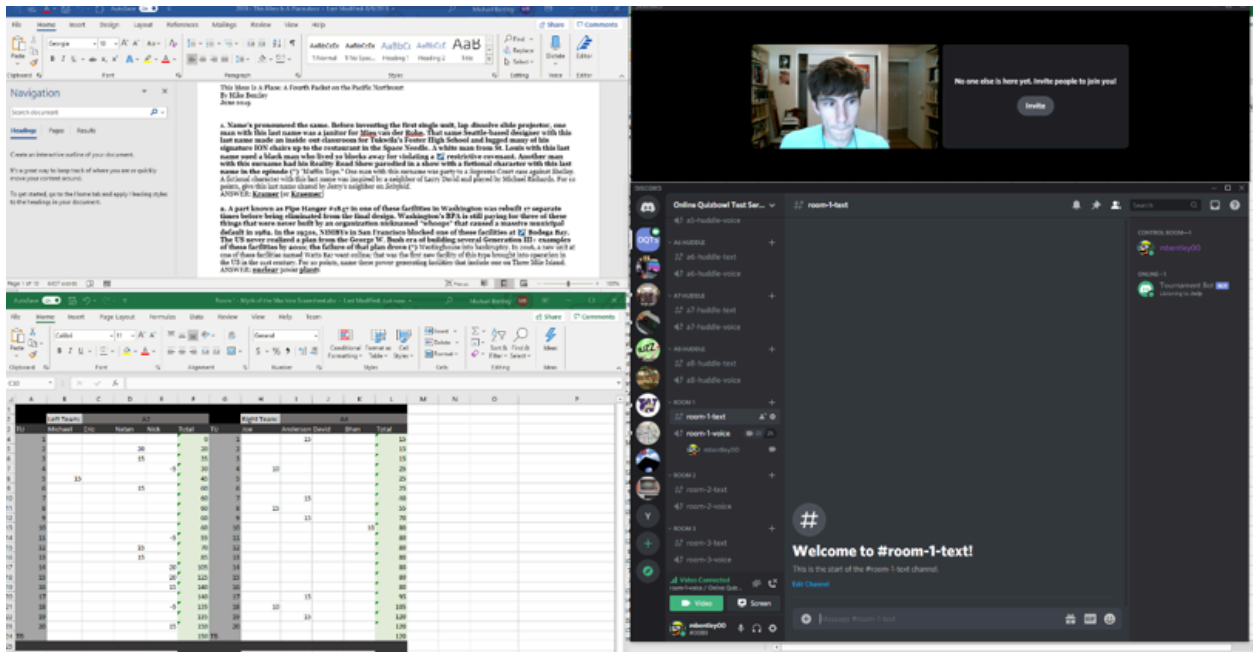
Before the start of each round, moderators should ensure the correct teams have been added to their rooms.

Join the voice channel for the room you're moderating. Then click on the video button to launch the video chat. Then click the Pop Out button (bottom right) to move the video into its own window. This will allow you to have both the video and the text chat open.



A screenshot of what you'll see after joining a Discord video chat but before popping the window out to a second window

Load the packet and/or scoresheet. Ideally position your windows so you have everything open at once like so:



Windows are positioned so that the packet, scoresheet, video and chat are all in one screen. The scoresheet is not necessary to have open if there's a dedicated scorekeeper for the room.

Do a check that everyone can hear you. Remind teams of your policy for accepting bonus answers (saying “our answer is” or typing in ALL CAPS).

Before the start of each tossup, type the tossup number in the chat (e.g. “Tossup 1”). This will help separate buzzes between questions.

Start reading the packet out loud to the teams.

Be alert to any incoming messages in the chat as you’re reading the tossup. You’ll want to stop right away when someone buzzes in. Double check who buzzed in first and then recognize them (saying their name) so they know they can give an answer. Consult with your TD on how long to give players on tossup and bonus questions.

As teams answer questions, enter their stats in the electronic scoresheet (or have the scorekeeper do this if your room has a scorekeeper).

On bonuses, be strict about enforcing the timing rules the TD has set. Long bonus prompts are a big contributor to online tournaments being delayed.

Like in a real tournament, try to move as quickly as possible between questions. By having multiple windows open at once, you shouldn’t need to do a lot of scrolling around.

Once the round is done, report that it’s finished in the #control-room channel and the high-level stats of the round (i.e. “Team 1: 300, Team: 250”).

If there’s a protest that needs to be resolved, report it to the #protest channel.

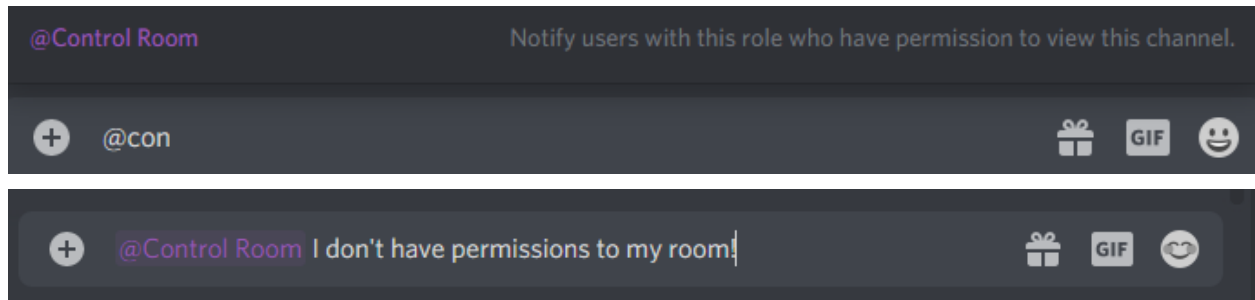
Check the Control Room channels for other announcements.

Once instructed, repeat these steps for the next round.

Getting Help at Online Tournaments

The tournament director should provide directions in the #announcements channel on the Discord server about who to contact if something goes wrong. Generally, you’ll want to do an @mention of that person in the #general chat to get their attention because they may be in another channel.

In extreme cases, you may want to @mention an entire role in the #general if you need help. For instance, an @mention of the @Control Room role.



You should also consult [here](#) for how to troubleshoot common Discord online tournament issues.

Troubleshooting Discord Technical Issues

This section documents some common things that go wrong with Discord tournaments and how to fix them.

If you've gone through this guide and still have a technical issue, PACE Online Quizbowl tech support can help. See [here](#) for details.

The moderator is speaking but can't be heard

First, make sure the moderator is in the correct voice channel.

Next, check if the moderator is lighting up as green in their listing in the voice channel. If not, this means that Discord doesn't think they're talking. The most common reason for this is that the moderator is either muted or has push-to-talk enabled and isn't hitting the push-to-talk keyboard shortcut. Check Discord's audio settings.

Another thing to check is if the moderator is using the web version of Discord (i.e. they're using Discord via their web browser). If so, have them download the desktop app and try there.

Some moderators may be using a microphone with a volume or hardware mute button on it. Check to make sure the volume is turned up on the device and that it's not muted.

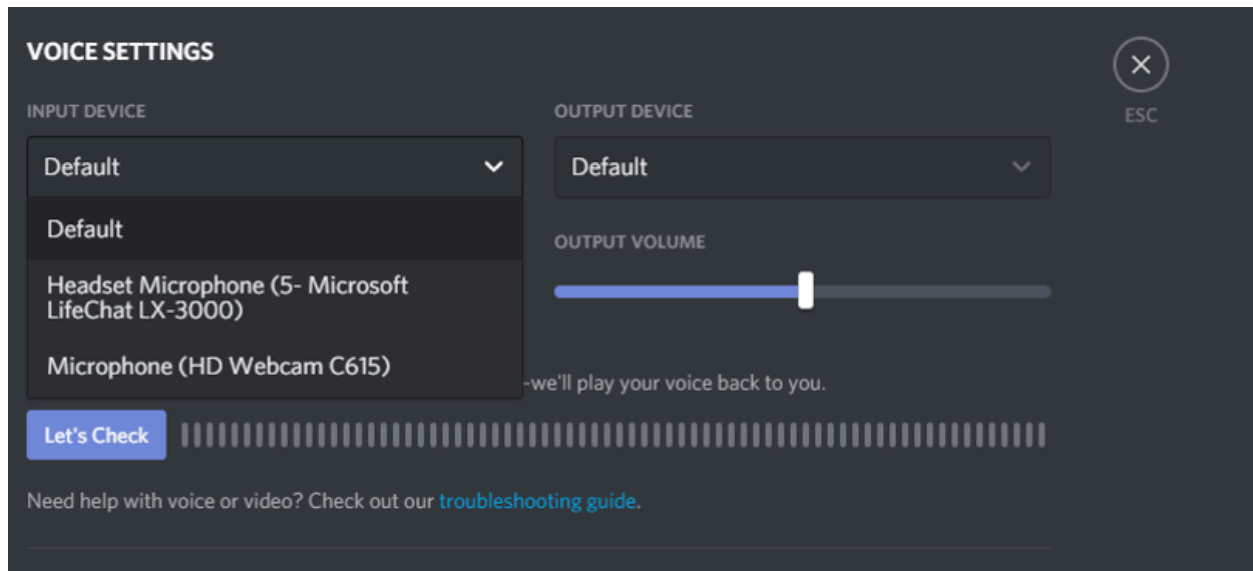
Tournaments can continue without the player being heard (so long as they can hear the moderator). It's not ideal, but players can communicate solely via text.

Moderator or player is on slow internet connection and video is lagging

It's important for players to keep their video feed on to prevent cheating. However, if they're having bandwidth issues they can try disabling the video of other people in the call. You can do this by right clicking on someone's video in the Discord video window.

The moderator is speaking but can't be heard well

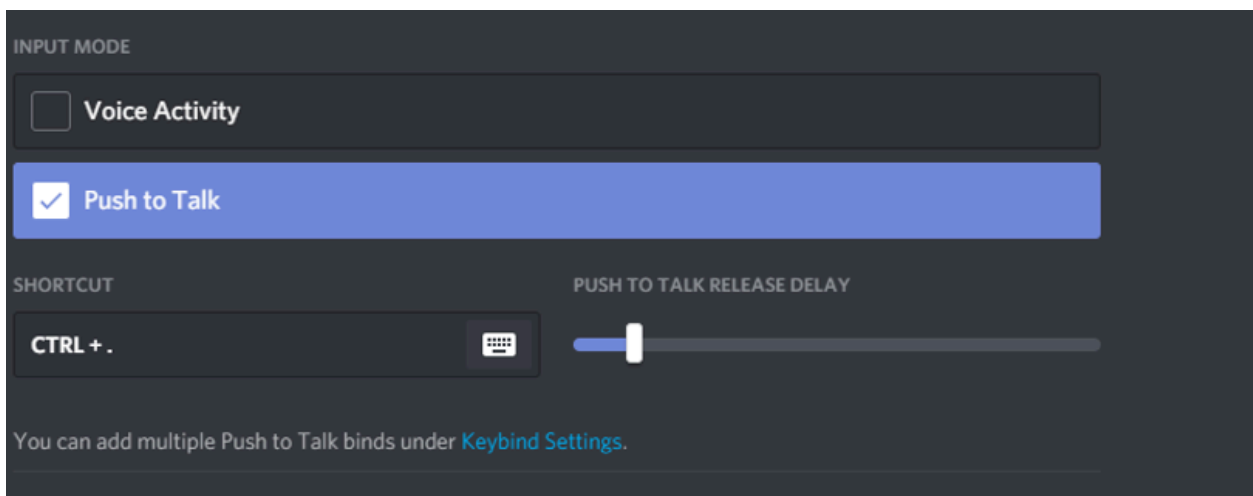
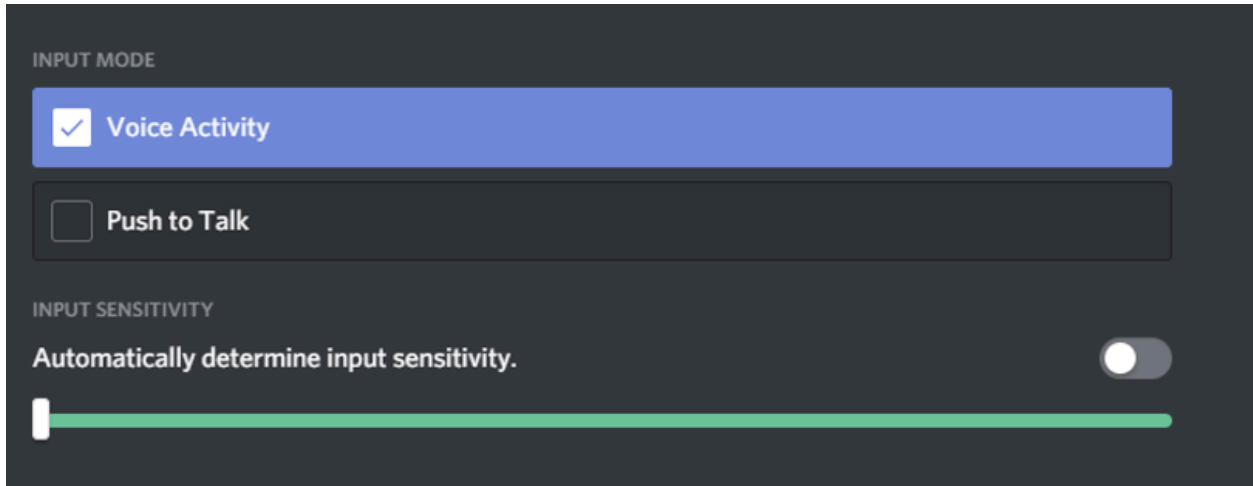
The most common source of this problem is that Discord isn't using the correct microphone as input. Have the moderator load their audio settings and make sure that they've set the input device to the correct value. Chances are it's set to use their laptop microphone instead which will be of lower quality.



Sometimes this problem can be a bandwidth issue. Have the moderator turn off their video feed (but not audio feed) and see if that improves things.

Moderator is cutting out, especially at the beginning/end of questions

This is commonly due to moderators not having their audio settings configured correctly. Moderators should check in Discord's Voice & Video settings that they have their input mode configured in one of the two ways:



Sometimes, though, this is due to a bad connection on the moderator and/or players and cannot be easily fixed. If it keeps recurring the TD may need to replace the moderator.

As an extreme backup, moderators may try joining the call on the Discord app on their phone. Moderators should still do the rest of the tournament from their computer, but using just the audio on the phone sometimes produces better results than relying on desktop audio.

A player or moderator can't see the rounds they need to join

Staffers, make sure that you've assigned this person the correct Discord role. Right click on their name in the chat and assign them to either Staff or the appropriate team role.

Room role.

server's settings. Make
the Player/Coach role, do
e.

Room role. Specify a prefix
t... End? The bot will
ed r

- Control Room
- Staff
- Spectator
- A1
- A2
- A3
- A4
- A5
- A6
- A7
- A8
- Player/Coach

Profile

Mention

Mute

Deafen

Change Nickname

Roles [>](#)

Sometimes this can also happen if the team hasn't been added to the room where they're playing their next match. Staffers, use the Discord tournament bot to run a command like this (by typing it into the #bot-commands chat channel and hitting enter):

```
.a @A2 #room-1
```

Moderator can't open the packet

This is best prevented by having the moderators check ahead of time that they can open the packets. Have them try other apps. If possible, send them the packets in another format.

"Checking ICE" or "No Route" error when joining a video chat

This usually indicates that the player can't join a video chat for some reason. The player should restart Discord and try again. And/or use another internet connection if possible. If this problem persists, it can sometimes be resolved by changing the match to be audio only (everyone will have to leave the video chat first).

Chat messages are delayed

Chat messages sometimes take a long time to be delivered on busy Discord servers. This can be a big problem for getting buzzing timing correct.

The most immediate remedy is for players to yell "buzz" when this is happening if they're trying to buzz in.

This problem often goes away on its own. If it persists, tournament directors may want to create a new temporary server for handling chat messages.

Zoom Tournaments

Staffing a Match on Zoom (Buzzin.live Method)

This page covers how to moderate (and scorekeep) a match on Zoom using the website BuzzIn.Live. [This page](#) covers the other accepted method, which uses Zoom's built-in chat. PACE recommends using BuzzIn.Live, but both will work effectively. Check with your tournament director to see which method will be in use at your tournament.

Making and configuring your BuzzIn.Live room:

- In a browser window, go to BuzzIn.Live and click on "Create Game."
 - Make this window small and scroll to the bottom. The window should now only show the red clear button and the list of players.

- Using a second device or a friend, join the room using the game code (scrolling back to the top of the window) and attempt to buzz. If you hear the buzzer sound, you're all set.
- If you are able to do so, you may try creating the BuzzIn.Live room on your phone, which frees space on your computer window (and is a better simulation of a physical buzzer control box by your elbow).
 - Make sure to still test the buzzer noise using this method.
 - Keep your phone plugged into its charger throughout the day.

Setting up your screen:

While moderating for your tournament, you will need to keep track of several windows or tabs: the questions that you'll be reading, the video of the participants, the buzzer interface, and, if you are scorekeeping as well, a scoresheet. Proper setup of your screen(s) is critical.

- Typically, moderators for online tournaments will have Zoom videos at the top of the screen, questions in a window on the left, and the buzzer control window on the right.
 - Alternatively, the questions can be placed in a screen-wide window at the bottom, while the Zoom video and buzzer control windows are above.
- If you are reading the questions in Microsoft Word, consider using the "Split" tool under "Window" to view both tossups and bonuses simultaneously.

Scorekeeping:

Moderators who are also scorekeeping have an additional layer of complexity to handle.

- The scoresheet is typically in a browser window. If you are also reading questions from another browser window, either put them in the same window and use a keyboard shortcut to switch between tabs, or put the windows in the same space and use a keyboard shortcut to switch windows rapidly. Using keyboard shortcuts to switch back and forth is considerably more efficient than clicking.

Miscellaneous:

- Between rounds, it is very easy to miss new players arriving to the waiting room, since Zoom's notification for new entrants in the waiting room is unfortunately subtle. Check every few seconds while waiting for new teams to arrive.

Staffing a Match on Zoom (Built-in Chat Method)

This page covers how to moderate (and scorekeep) a match on Zoom using Zoom's built-in chat. [This page](#) covers the other accepted method, which uses the website BuzzIn.Live. PACE recommends using BuzzIn.Live, but both will work effectively. Check with your tournament director to see which method will be in use at your tournament.

Setting up your screen:

While moderating for your tournament, you will need to keep track of several windows or tabs: the questions that you'll be reading, the video of the participants, the buzzer interface, and, if you are scorekeeping as well, a scoresheet. Proper setup of your screen(s) is critical.

- Open the Zoom chat. If your chat window is not already in pop-out mode, there is a drop-down menu at the top of the window (to the left of the word **Chat**) where you should do so.
- Unfortunately, the Zoom client does not play a sound when messages are sent in the chat. Position your chat window in a way that maximizes the likelihood that you will not miss a new message.
 - The strongest arrangement places the chat window in the upper right corner (since new messages appear in the bottom left of the chat window and closer to the center of the computer screen, your eyes are more likely to detect the text movement).
- Typically, moderators for online tournaments will place the questions in a screen-wide window at the bottom, while the Zoom video is above to the left (and the chat window is placed as mentioned previously)
 - Alternatively, the questions can be placed in a tall window on the left, the Zoom video in the bottom right, and the chat window in the upper right.
- If you are reading the questions in Microsoft Word, consider using the “Split” tool under “Window” to view both tossups and bonuses simultaneously.

Scorekeeping:

Moderators who are also scorekeeping have an additional layer of complexity to handle.

- The scoresheet is typically in a browser window. If you are also reading questions from another browser window, either put them in the same window and use a keyboard shortcut to switch between tabs, or put the windows in the same space and use a keyboard shortcut to switch windows rapidly. Using keyboard shortcuts to switch back and forth is considerably more efficient than clicking.

Miscellaneous:

- Between rounds, it is very easy to miss new players arriving to the waiting room, since Zoom's notification for new entrants in the waiting room is unfortunately subtle. Check every few seconds while waiting for new teams to arrive.
- If you have trouble noticing buzzes throughout the day, you can request that players follow-up buzzes by unmuting their microphones and saying “buzz.”
 - Alternatively, you can designate a player per round (with an extremely quiet environment) to remain unmuted during tossups and ask them to audibly say “buzz” when a buzz is made.