

Judging Public Forum Debate

The topic for Public Forum is

Resolved: Now is the time to eliminate intercollegiate athletics.

Public Forum is a team debate event that supports or rejects a position posed by the semi-annual resolution topic. The clash of ideas must be communicated in a manner persuasive to the non-specialist or “citizen judge”, i.e. a member of the American jury. The debate should:

- Display solid logic, lucid reasoning, and depth of analysis
- Utilize evidence without being driven by it
- Present a clash of ideas by countering/refuting arguments of the opposing team (rebuttal)
- Communicate ideas with clarity, organization, eloquence, and professional decorum

FORMAT & TIME LIMITS: The round starts with a **coin toss**; the winning team selects *either*:

- ❖ The **side** – Pro (for the resolution) or Con (against the resolution) – they will argue
- ❖ The speaker **order** (begin the debate or give the last speech).

The team that loses the toss will then decide their preference from the option not selected by the winner (*i.e., if the winning team decides to speak last, then the losing team may decide which side they will argue*). The debate, therefore may begin with the con side, arguing against the topic.

Speaker 1 (First team, 1st speaker)	5 min.
Speaker 2 (Second team, 1st speaker)	5 min.
Crossfire (between speakers 1 & 2)	3 min.
Speaker 3 (First team, 2nd speaker)	5 min.
Speaker 4 (Second team, 2nd speaker)	5 min.
Crossfire (between speakers 3 & 4)	3 min.
Speaker 1 Summary	3 min.
Speaker 2 Summary	3 min.
Speaker 3 Final Focus	3 min.
Speaker 4 Final Focus	3 min.

Each team may use up to two minutes of prep time.

During “crossfire,” the two previous speakers stand, asking and answering questions in a polite, but argumentative exchange. Unlike traditional cross-examination, both speakers may question each other, however, the first question of the crossfire period is asked to the speaker who just finished.

Summary speeches are rebuttals that extend earlier arguments made or answering opposing refutations, and may incorporate new evidence, but not new arguments.

The **final focus** is a compelling restatement of why the judge should vote pro or con. Given the short period, the team must decide what arguments weigh most importantly on the decision. **No new** arguments are accepted in the final focus speeches.

JUDGE EVALUATION: The judge facilitates the round (conducting the coin flip and giving time signals if requested), and may halt any crossfire lacking civility. S/he may **not** *interact* in crossfire or any part of the debate. The judge should know what the resolution is, and write it on the top of the ballot.

Judges evaluate teams on the quality of arguments made, not on their own personal beliefs, and not on issues they think a particular side *should have covered*. Judges should write notes throughout the debate, assessing the bearing of each argument on the truth or falsehood of the assigned resolution. The pro should prove that the resolution is true, and the con should prove that the resolution is not true. When deciding the round, judges should ask, "If I had no prior beliefs about this resolution, would the round as a whole have made me more likely to believe the resolution was true or not true?" Teams should strive to provide a straightforward perspective on the resolution; judges should discount unfair, obscure interpretations that only serve to confuse the opposing team. Plans (formalized, comprehensive proposals for implementation), counterplans and kritiks (off-topic arguments) are not allowed. Generalized, practical solutions should support a position of advocacy.

Quality, well-explained arguments should trump a mere quantity thereof. Debaters should use quoted evidence to support their claims, and well-chosen, relevant evidence may strengthen – *but not replace* – arguments.

Clear communication is an important consideration. Judges ***weigh* arguments** to the extent that they are clearly explained, and they will discount arguments that are too fast, too garbled, or too full of technical terminology to be understood by an intelligent high school student or a well-informed citizen. A team should not be penalized for failing to understand his or her opponent's unclear arguments. Speakers should appeal to the widest possible audience through sound reasoning, succinct organization, credible evidence, and clear delivery. Points provide a mechanism for evaluating the relative "quality of debating" by each side. Write constructive suggestions for improvement to debaters on the ballot.

Judges should model professional, respectful behavior and expect the same from debaters. Conflicts of interest (relative, personal friend, past teammate, coach, etc.) should be reported to tournament officials immediately. Dishonesty (fabricating, plagiarizing, misusing research sources, etc.) should be reported to officials immediately after the debate.