

VI. RULES OF PUBLIC FORUM DEBATE

A. General

1. Public Forum Debate is a form of two-on-two debate which ask debaters to discuss a current events issue.

2. Public Forum Debate seeks to encourage the development of the following skills in the debaters:

- a. Use of logic in reasoning;
- b. Presentation skills;
- c. Moderate rate of delivery;
- d. Reasonable demeanor and style of presentation
- e. Professionalism in demeanor and delivery.

3. The resolution is a statement about a topic in current events. One team shall defend the proposition on the pro; one student shall attack it on the con.

4. All debates must be based upon a resolution selected by the Tournament Director. All levels of Public Forum Debate will debate the same resolution for all rounds of the Tournament. Debaters must be prepared on both sides of the resolution.

6. The format of the debate shall be as follows:

- 1st Pro Speaker: 4 Minutes
- 1st Con Speaker: 4 Minutes
- Crossfire for the 1st Speakers: 3 Minutes
- 2nd Pro Speaker: 4 Minutes
- 2nd Con Speaker: 4 Minutes
- Crossfire for the 2nd Speakers: 3 Minutes
- 1st Pro Speaker Summary: 2 Minutes
- 1st Con Speaker Summary: 2 Minutes
- Grand Crossfire: 3 Minutes
- 2nd Pro Speaker Final Focus: 2 Minutes
- 2nd Con Speaker Final Focus: 2 Minutes

7. A judge's decision should be based upon:

a. **Skill in analysis.** This includes not only the analysis of the resolution but also analysis of the debate argumentation as it progresses. The analytical debater is able to get quickly to the essence of the question.

b. **Use of evidence.** In Public Forum Debate, arguments should be supported with appropriate evidence such as examples, facts, analogies, and/or references to authorities. Logical reasoning may also be used to defend arguments. There is no need for overwhelming statistical support of values positions.

c. **Validity of evidence.** If a debater falsifies evidence in support of a point, he/she shall lose the point. If the falsification is obviously deliberate, the judge shall impose an additional penalty according to the seriousness of the falsification.

d. **Validity of argument.** This includes reasoning and conclusions drawn from the evidence presented.

e. **Clarity of organization.** This includes clear outlining of constructive arguments and easily followed handling of refutation.

f. **Effectiveness of delivery.** This includes all matters pertaining to oral presentation, with special emphasis upon the ability to speak in an extemporaneous manner.

g. **Strength and conviction.** In the final analysis, the debate should be decided on the strength and convincingness of the debater's arguments.

8. A judge's decision in Public Forum Debate should not be based upon:

a. **The merits of the debate resolution.** The judge should not be influenced by prejudices in favor of or against the resolution.

b. **Partiality.** The judge should not be influenced by the reputation of either debater, his/her school or coach.

c. **Preconceived notions or arguments.** The judge should not allow an idea of what the best affirmative or negative arguments or cases may be to influence the decision.

d. Personal preferences on debating style. A judge should not penalize a debater if his/her style, either in delivery or case construction, differs from that which the judge personally prefers. All styles should be evaluated on the basis of effectiveness in winning conviction.

9. Once a debater has stated a position, he/she should not change it during the debate.
10. Any restatement or quotation of an opponent's argument should be accurate. A speaker who misconstrues an argument unintentionally should not be penalized more than the time wasted. If it is intentional, the debater should, in addition, forfeit the argument.
11. A judge should not discredit an argument as fallacious unless the fallacy is exposed by the opposition or the argument contradicts common sense or generally accepted knowledge, except in the last affirmative rebuttal, when the judge should discredit upon discovering the fallacy.
12. All debaters should be courteous to their opponents and their judges. Discourtesy should be penalized according to the seriousness of the offense.
13. Visual aids are permissible in a debate. Once introduced, they become available to the opponent's use.
14. A debater is entitled to see a copy of any evidence read by the opponent during the round. However, judges are prohibited from reading evidence unless falsification is suspected and raised by the opposition and the original source in question is available in the round.
15. Each team shall be entitled to two minutes of preparation time during each debate.
16. When a speaker's time has expired, the judge shall disregard anything beyond a closing statement.
17. In the absence of a timekeeper, the judge shall keep speaking time. The judge shall keep all preparation time.
18. The judge should not give oral critique during the tournament nor reveal any debate decisions. After the tournament, the judge may give an oral critique to any debater.

B. First Speeches

1. The pro may define the terms of the resolution in any reasonable manner. The com may dispute the affirmative definitions. In case of dispute, the pro definitions should be accepted if they are supported by recognized authorities or logical argumentation.
2. The pro should state the importance of the resolution.
3. The pro should present reasonable arguments to support the values in the resolution, showing how these meet the proposed criterion or criteria of judgment in the debate.
4. Appropriate evidence to support arguments should be presented.
5. The con first speech will go against the resolution. It need not clash with the points just raised by the pro.

C. Crossfire

1. The purposes of cross fire include clarifying an obscure point in an opponent's case, exposing factual errors or unsupported assertions, and obtaining damaging admissions. It should not be used (as it is in law) to attack the personal integrity of the witness. Questions should add substance to the debate.
2. The attitudes of both the questioner and the witness should appear to be reasonable, cooperative, and eager to please. Neither one should practice unpalatable sarcasm, obvious "stalling," or brow-beating of the opponent.
3. The value of any crossfire decreases unless the results are tied to later speeches. Admissions or information gained through cross examination must be used in subsequent speeches in order to count in determining the winning debater. The crossfire should be an integral part of the debate and not a "side-show."
4. Both questions and answers should be of a reasonable length.
5. Both speakers must talk to the audience and/or judge(s).
6. During crossfire, the pro shall ask the first question. After that question is answered, either side may ask the next question. Unlike in other forms of debate, either side may ask a question during the crossfire. The one who asks a question

- a. Controls the time and may interrupt the witness to request shorter or more direct answers, or to indicate that the answer he/she has given is sufficient.
- b. Must ask fair and relevant questions. The debater should use this time for questioning alone, not for either constructive argument or summary. In fact, a conclusion is all the more effective if the audience reaches it without the questioner's help.
- c. Should have sufficient scope in the questions asked. Since the time is his/her's, he/she may waste time if he/she wishes. The witness should answer even if the significance or relevance of the question is not immediately apparent to him/her.
- d. May not insist on a simple "yes" or "no" answer unless his/her question is simple, direct and factual. Questions about why something is true are necessarily complicated, and the questioner cannot expect the witness to answer them briefly.
- e. Should phrase questions with the verb first, then the subject, and finally the object or modifying phrases and/or clauses: e.g. "Do you admit that Joseph R. McCarthy was the Junior Senator from Wisconsin?" He/she should avoid negative questions or any phrasing with "not": e.g. "Do you not know that there have been 37 violations of the Korean Truce by the Red Chinese?" The answers to questions of this sort can only be confusing.
- f. May remind the audience and the witness of a relevant fact by beginning the question "are you aware that..." or "are you familiar with..." However, the questioner's motive in putting such questions should be to put the witness on record concerning the statement involved and not to present material of his/her own.
- g. Since during crossfire both sides may ask questions, there should be a fair balance between asking and answering questions. One side should not dominate the questioning. However, if one side remains passive during questioning, the other side should feel free to continue asking questions. The judge should determine whether or not one side is being overly aggressive or if the other side is being too passive.

7. During the crossfire, the witness:

- a. Must answer directly and briefly any legitimate question susceptible to a simple answer.
- b. May refuse to answer any tricky, unfair or irrelevant question if the witness has a good reason for doing so. The judge will be the final determiner of whether or not a question is permissible.
- c. May ask questions to clarify a question or may ask the questioner to stop giving speeches or to continue questioning.
- d. Must confine responses to answers and not make arguments or ask questions, except to clarify.
- e. Must answer questions without consulting anyone or offering the excuse that the question will be answered in a later speech.
- f. May clarify a question if to do so is appropriate. The witness cannot be restricted to a “yes” or “no” answer if a longer response is appropriate.
- g. Should not be penalized for ignorance of obscure information but should be expected to know the answers to questions directly related to information presented by him or her during the debate.

8. When time expires,

- a. A question that has not been fully asked must be dropped.
- b. A question that has been fully asked must be answered.
- c. The questioner may pursue, and the witness must answer, a line of questioning that was legitimately begun prior to the expiration of time.

9. Speakers shall stand during Crossfire. Speakers shall remain seated during Grand Crossfire.

D. Summaries

- 1. The judge(s) shall disregard new arguments introduced in Summaries, unless the rebuttal is the first opportunity to respond to a question or a new argument.
- 2. New evidence to support old arguments may be introduced.

3. In each of the rebuttals, it is the responsibility of the speaker both to defend his/her own case from the attacks thus far made by the opponent and to attack the case of the opponent itself. In general, clash is an essential feature. An argument left untouched by the opponent must stand.

E. Final Focus

1. Final Focus shall only deal with ideas that have previously been introduced into the round.

2. During Final Focus, debaters should give a short statement on which ideas were important and why their side should win the round. Judges should not expect a debater to give a full summary of the entire round in two minutes.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)