

CCofSE Public Forum Debate

Rules and Standards

PHILOSOPHY

Academic debate is a persuasive speech event centered on the clash of issues. In Public Forum debate, students must be prepared to both advocate for and refute a specific proposition (a statement expressing a judgment or opinion).

Unlike Team Policy debate, a Public Forum proposition does not pose a problem requiring a policy solution. Furthermore, unlike Lincoln-Douglas debate, Public Forum does not focus on arguing core values.

(Note: Public Forum is designed for debaters ages 10 to 13, assessed as of October 1st. Students who are 9 or 14 on this date may participate with coach approval.)

In Public Forum Debate, there is no prescribed set of burdens that must be met by either team. The goal is to engage in a clash of ideas. Debaters will present their cases (supported by evidence), cross-examine each other, refute each other's claims, and reiterate their own claims to convince judges to cast a ballot in their favor.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

- Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.... 1Peter 3:15.
- Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD... Isaiah 1:18a
- Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. Colossians 4:6

GENERAL STANDARDS

Ethics

Conduct and attire should reflect respect for other participants, the debate activity itself, and the mission of CCofSE. Participants are encouraged to err on the side of caution, to do everything decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40, 1 Corinthians 16:14), and to avoid even the appearance of wrongdoing (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

Violations

Concerns about violations of the Policy Debate Rules and Standards should be handled according to the guidelines specified in the CCofSE Code of Conduct. The tournament director will have the final say in determining any action that may be required.

Rules, Evidence, and Expectations

Debaters will be evaluated on their analysis, use of evidence, and ability to effectively and persuasively organize, deliver, and refute arguments. The Pro side wishes to convince the judge that the proposition should be adopted; the Con side wishes to convince the judge that the proposition should be rejected. A double loss should only be given as a disciplinary measure, and the Tournament Director should be notified if the judge is considering a double loss.

In Public Forum, students are **not** required to use or exchange evidence during a round, so establishing trust and credibility is key. To maintain the conversational nature of Public Forum while encouraging good research habits, students and judges should be guided by the following expectations:

- **"Soft Evidence"**: Evidence is not limited to hard facts and statistics. Logic, common knowledge, historical examples, anecdotes, and analogies are highly valued and perfectly acceptable.
- **Written and Oral Citations**: To make evidence persuasive and credible, debaters should cite their published sources both orally and in writing.
 - **Oral Citations** Students should orally identify the source of any direct quote, paraphrase, or summary. Here are some examples:
 - A research study by Alexander Bartik and colleagues found that "..."
 - Several studies, including this one done by the National Academy of Science proves....
 - **Written Citations** For every piece of evidence used, debaters should provide a written citation. This citation should be placed either directly above or below the quoted, paraphrased, or summarized material. Here is an example of a written citation:
 - Bartik, Alexander et al. "The Impact of COVID-19 on Small Business Outcomes and Expectations." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, vol. 117, no. 30, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2006991117>.
- **Weighing Uncited Evidence**: If a debater fails to cite a source, judges may choose to give the argument less weight but should **not** treat it as a rule violation.
- **Accuracy & Context**: Participants take full responsibility for the accuracy of the evidence they cite. Any evidence quoted or paraphrased must accurately reflect the original author's intent.
- **Biblical References**: References may be made to the Bible, but citing the Bible as evidence is prohibited.

Public Forum Mechanics

- **No Plans**: Public Forum focuses on the big picture. Teams should argue whether the proposition is a good or bad idea generally, rather than offering specific, formalized policy plans.

- **Speech Focus:** New arguments are not permitted in the Summary and Final Focus speeches. These speeches are strictly for summarizing the round and weighing existing arguments for the judge.
- **Dropped Arguments:** There is no automatic penalty for dropping an argument.
- **Visual Aids & Tag Teaming:** To keep the focus on speaking skills, props, visual aids, and handouts are not allowed. Additionally, tag teaming (interacting with a partner or the audience while holding the floor) is not permitted.

Evaluating the Round & Ethical Violations

- **Determining the Winner:** A win shall be given to either the Pro or the Con team based on who did the better job analyzing, supporting, and delivering their arguments.
- **Ethical Violations:** While minor mistakes are normal learning moments, intentional dishonesty is taken seriously. If a winning team is found to have committed a severe ethical violation (such as intentionally altering a quote's meaning, or blatant fabrication of evidence), they will be given a loss for the round. This penalty is reserved for true breaches of integrity, not for minor debate mistakes. The judge is the first line of defense in deciding this. The judge should speak to the Tournament Director with any questions.

THE ROUND

One team (the PRO side) is affirming the proposition; the other team (the CON side) is negating it.

The coin toss procedure is as follows:

Before beginning each round the students, judge, or a tournament official (if applicable) will flip a coin. The team winning the coin toss may then choose which speaking position they would prefer - to speak first or last.

Teams have up to 60 seconds to make their decisions. During that time they may not leave the room or consult with anyone other than their partners.

FORMAT OF THE ROUND

Speeches occur in the following order:

First Speaker - Team A = 4 Minutes

First Speaker - Team B = 4 Minutes

Crossfire (between speakers 1 & 2) = 3 Minutes

Second Speaker - Team A = 4 Minutes

Second Speaker - Team B = 4 Minutes

Crossfire (between speakers 3 & 4) = 3 Minutes

Summary - First Speaker - Team A = 2 Minutes

Summary - First Speaker - Team B = 2 Minutes

Grand Crossfire (all speakers) = 3 Minutes

Final Focus - Second Speaker - Team A = 2 Minutes

Final Focus - Second Speaker - Team B = 2 Minutes

Each team may use up to two (2) minutes of preparation (prep) time.

Prep time is to be taken by the team that will be speaking next.
Prep time may not be used prior to Crossfire or Grand Crossfire.

TIMING

All timing shall be done by the debaters. Each team will provide two countdown timepieces, one of which is to be used to keep track of prep time.

Debaters shall tell the judge/s when they are beginning and ending prep time, and how much time remains.

ELECTRONICS

Debaters may not use electronic devices other than countdown timepieces in a round. Recording or videotaping of any or all of a round may only be done with the permission of all debaters involved.