

PUBLIC FORUM DEBATE JUDGE TRAINING

Thank you for being willing to serve as citizen judges for Public Forum Debate. Without the participation of parents and community judges, we would not be able to offer these opportunities to our young people.

What is Public Forum Debate?

Academic debate is a persuasive speech event where debaters clash on issues. In Public Forum debate, debaters must be prepared both to advocate for and to refute a given statement or assertion, called a proposition, that expresses a judgment or opinion. The goal is to engage in a clash of ideas, persuasively communicated to you as a “citizen judge.” The teams will present their cases (supported by evidence), cross-examine each other, refute each other’s claims, and reiterate their own claims to convince you to cast a ballot in their favor.

Before The Round

A round of Public Forum debate takes place between 2 teams consisting of 2 debaters each. One (the PRO side) is affirming the proposition; the other (the CON side) is negating it.

- Turn off all cell phones
- Judges are to listen only. They should not ask questions during the round or otherwise interrupt the round.
- Before the round begins, you may wish to introduce yourself to the debaters. Debaters should also introduce themselves to you and to their opponents.
- Unlike other forms of debate, the speaking order is determined by a coin toss immediately before each round. Teams will debate based on the choices made during this toss. If a coin toss has not already occurred, please initiate one before the round begins.

The coin toss procedure is as follows:

- Before beginning each round, the students, the judge, or a tournament official 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.

What you will see during the round

The debaters will take turns getting up to speak, first one side and then the other, through 8 speeches. The entire round lasts about 40 minutes.

· Time schedule:

- 4 Minutes = First Speaker - Team A
- 4 Minutes = First Speaker - Team B
- 3 Minutes = Crossfire (between speakers 1 & 2)
- 4 Minutes = Second Speaker - Team A
- 4 Minutes = Second Speaker - Team B
- 3 Minutes = Crossfire (between speakers 3 & 4)
- 2 Minutes = Summary - First Speaker - Team A
- 2 Minutes = - First Speaker - Team B
- 3 Minutes = Grand Crossfire (all speakers)
- 2 Minutes = Final Focus - Second Speaker - Team A
- 2 Minutes = Final Focus - Second Speaker - Team B

Debaters will time themselves during each segment of the round. When the timer goes off, the debater may finish a sentence, but should then stop speaking. Judges are not required to monitor speaking times, though you may wish to make note on the ballot of any excessive overages.

At certain intervals, the debaters will question each other in what is called CROSSFIRE. The only rule is that the first question must be asked of the speaker who just finished speaking. After that, either side may question and/or answer at will.

You will notice that during regular Crossfire, the debaters stand facing the judge and do not look at each other. This is a convention of debate that helps keep the debate focused on the issues being debated. It may seem odd at first, but you will get used to it.

During the GRAND CROSSFIRE, debaters will be seated, and all four debaters will interact with questions and answers. Again, the first question must be asked of the team that just finished speaking. After that, either side may question and/or answer at will.

Debaters should maintain eye contact with the judge (except during the Grand Crossfire when teams will face and direct questions to one another). They may directly question each other only during crossfire segments.

Each team has a total of two minutes of preparation time PER ROUND. Prep time is to be taken by the team that will be speaking next. They may divide it up as they choose, but it may not be taken before any Crossfire. Debaters are responsible for keeping track of their own Prep time.

Visual aids are not allowed at the lectern or to be placed on the teams' tables.

Tag teaming is not allowed. Tag teaming is any kind of interaction by a speaker with his partner or anyone in the audience during his speech.

Guidelines for Judging Public Forum Debate

As a judge, it is important to remember that what you hear is more important than what you see; please prioritize the substance of the argumentation over the students' presentation styles.

The Pro side's goal is to convince you that the proposition should be adopted, while the Con side's goal is to convince you it should be rejected.

Evidence and Argumentation Both sides should support their arguments with credible evidence, such as books, newspapers, or reputable online news sites. However, Public Forum evidence is not strictly limited to hard facts and statistics. "Soft" evidence—such as historical examples, illustrative stories, and sound logic—are also highly acceptable forms of support.

Flowing

To help you follow the arguments in the round, we provide what we call a flow sheet. It is called a flow sheet because it helps you follow the flow of arguments in the round. It is a tool for your use. No one else will see it. Feel free to use an alternate way of taking notes.

What to do with what you hear - Deciding who wins.

- First, remember that debate is a clash of issues or ideas. Your job will be to determine which issues are valid voting points. Hopefully, the debaters will help by telling you in their Final Focus speeches why they believe you should cast your ballot for their side.
- Once you've identified the issues on which you want to vote, you can make a reasonable decision. The bottom line is the Proposition. You could ask yourself, "Based on what I heard, do I want to affirm or negate the proposition?"
- Remember these are young people who do not have the life experiences to understand all of the ramifications of their positions. Try to make your decision based on the quality of the debaters' arguments and not on your own personal beliefs regarding the topic.

Filling out the ballot:

Every effort is made to be sure you are not assigned to judge debaters with whom you have a close relationship. In the rare instance that occurs, please notify the tabulation room immediately.

Please pay close attention when recording the teams' sides and speaking positions on the ballot. It is a good idea to confirm the information with the debaters.

Be sure to:

- √ Include your vote for the win.
- √ Explain the reason for your decision. Try to write constructive ballots by giving reasons for decisions based on the round.
Example: "PRO 's argument about _____ outweighed CON's argument about _____." is more helpful than vague generalities such as... "PRO was the better speaker" or "CON was more persuasive.")
- √ Write encouraging comments and suggestions for improvement for each speaker. The ballot is a valuable educational tool. Debaters, coaches, and parents appreciate your written comments, but please keep them positive. Suggestions for improvement are valued most when made in a positive and grace-filled manner.
- √ Include your signature and the date.
- √ Rank the speakers from 1 to 4 in the room, 1 being the strongest speaker and 4 being the weakest speaker. Use the Speaker Evaluation Form to help determine the total speaker points.

After the round

- Please fill in your ballot as quickly as possible in the judges' area, not in the room where the round took place, as another round may be assigned to that room.
- If you have questions, a judge trainer will be available to answer them. Please do not discuss the round or ballot with anyone else until after the tournament.
- As soon as possible, take your ballot to the ballot table to be checked for accuracy or omissions. Then you are free to head for a much-needed snack in the judge hospitality room.
- If you need to communicate a coaching issue (to explain something on the ballot or stop a potential problem, etc.), please go to the debater's coach rather than talking to the debater directly. If you don't know who that is, go to the Tournament Director.

Final words of advice:

- Remember, this is a debate, not an interpretive event. Sometimes the best speaker really didn't make the best arguments. Yes, you need to be persuaded; yes, you need to take speaking ability into account, but every debater has a different style, and each one deserves a fair hearing. The best argument should win, not necessarily the best-sounding speaker.
- You are the judge. The debaters' job is to persuade you. This activity is specifically designed for presentation to "lay" audiences; if a debater is too esoteric, or too fast, or too complicated, and you cannot follow the arguments, it is the debater who is at fault, not the judge.
- In the final analysis, you are the judge. What you say goes, and no one will question your decision.

Thank you for judging!!!