

Speech order and time limits of Public Forum debate

September / October 2024 topic:

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially expand its surveillance infrastructure along its southern border.

A Public Forum debate round lasts approximately 45 minutes. Each team is allowed 3 minutes total preparation time for the round. Judges usually keep time, so they know when a debater has reached their time limit. The judge can call time when the limit is reached. Typically, debaters will also keep time themselves. Pro teams support the resolution. Con teams reject the resolution. At WACFL tournaments, teams will debate twice as PRO and twice as CON.

- First Pro Constructive: 4 minutes.
- First Con Constructive: 4 minutes.
- Crossfire: 3 minutes. The 1st Con speaker asks the first question. Then, either first debater can ask questions. Typically, this is done standing.
- Second Pro Constructive: 4 minutes.
- Second Con Constructive: 4 minutes.
- Crossfire: 3 minutes. The 2nd Pro asks the first question. Thereafter, either second debater can ask questions. Typically, this is done standing.
- First Pro Summary: 3 minutes
- First Con Summary: 3 minutes
- Grand Crossfire: 3 minutes. One member of the Pro team asks the first question. Thereafter, any debater may ask questions. Typically, this is done seated.
- Second Pro Final Focus: 2 minutes
- Second Con Final Focus: 2 minutes

What should happen in each speech?

- 1st Constructive (4 minutes). Prepared in advance. Practice and time this speech to get as close to 4 minutes as possible. These are your “opening arguments.”
- 2nd Constructive (4 minutes). PRO and CON have different goals.
 - 2nd PRO Constructive – Use all your time rebutting (refuting) the 1st CON constructive. Suggested rebuttal structure below.
 - 2nd CON Constructive – Split your time. Start with 2½ to 3 minutes of rebutting your opponents arguments. Finish with 1 – 1½ minutes of defending your case - responding to PRO attacks. If the judge allows, say in advance an off-time roadmap: “Judge, first I will rebut my opponents’ arguments. Then, I will finish by supporting and defending our contentions.”
- Summary (3 minutes). Split your time between rebutting your opponent’s case and defending your own. There is a lot to cover in a short period of time. Organization and clarity are key!
 - Like the 2nd CON Constructive, ask if the judge will allow an offtime roadmap. Same strategy as above. First rebut your opponent’s case, then move to your contentions.
 - First 90 seconds: “In our opponent’s first contention, they stated that _____. However, we refuted this by stating that _____.” Repeat for each contention.
 - Second 90 seconds: Reaffirm each of your contentions. Summarize evidence from 1st constructive. Explain why opponents’ attacks are ineffective. Restate impacts.

- **Final Focus** (2 minutes) Do not respond to every argument in the debate! This is your chance to explain why the judge should vote for you. Make their job easy.
 - Start by saying, "Judge, I will list the primary issues in this debate and why the (PRO/CON) team has won them." Or perhaps, "At this point in the debate, there are only 3 (or 2) key issues remaining. I will explain why the (PRO or CON) team has won each issue."
 - "First, the issue about _____ was won by us because _____." Repeat for each issue.

What is the recommended format for rebuttals?

Skilled debaters use a 4-step process to refute opponents' arguments. During the 2nd Constructive speeches, these steps should be applied to each of your opponent's contentions. If time permits, this is a good format for Summary speeches, but with only 1-2 minutes to refute your opponent's contentions, you will need to be speedy.

1. Signal: Identify the claim (contention) you are answering.
2. State: Make your (counter) claim.
3. Support: Reference evidence or explain the justification.
4. Summarize: Explain the importance of your argument.

What should I do during Cross-fire?

- The goal is to poke holes in your opponent's arguments. Look for weaknesses that you can exploit in your upcoming speeches.
- Plan your questions while your opponent is speaking.
- If your opponent's argument makes no sense, it's OK to ask them to explain it. It's possible they don't understand it either.
- Persistence is OK, but be sure to conduct yourself respectfully. Most judges are parents. They don't like bullying or over-aggressiveness.
- Speak clearly and make eye-contact with the judge, not your opponent. You are trying to convince the judge of your position, not your opponent.
- Try to avoid open-ended questions. Open ended questions are broad questions that allow an opponent to talk forever...at least as long as they want.

How does Prep Time work?

- Prep time is 3 minutes per team, per round. Once a speaker is finished, the next opposing speaker should get up to start speaking soon. If you need more than a few seconds to prepare, say to the judge "I would like to use some prep time." Judges will keep track of time.
- 3 minutes isn't much time. In a round, always be thinking about what you will say during your upcoming speech. Perhaps keep a separate sheet of paper where you are continually outlining your next speech.
- Don't use (much) prep time to prepare for cross-fire. It isn't that important.
- Use all your remaining prep time before the Final Focus speech. Before that speech, ask the judge how much time you have left. Say "I would like to use my remaining prep time."