

Glossary of Basic Debate Jargon

probably PF-centric

Affirmative / Aff: Synonymous with 'pro' – the side that argues in favor of a **resolution**.

Analytic: A **block** or point that a debater comes up with during a round. Often analytics are stated without evidence "on the fly".

Ballot: The judge's decision, along with their **RFD**. Ballots are usually released via **Speechwire** (for local tournaments) or **Tabroom** (for national tournaments).

Block: A response, usually pre-written, to a common argument on a topic.

Blockfile: A document that lists out **blocks** for various arguments on a topic. Usually, teams will collaborate amongst themselves to construct a blockfile.

Break: To advance to elimination rounds at a tournament.

Bubble Round / 'On the Bubble': A bubble round occurs when if a debater wins this round, they will **break**; if they lose, they will not. When debaters are preparing for rounds like this, they are 'on the bubble'.

Bye: A round in which a team does not compete or debate. Byes are usually given when there is an odd number of teams at a tournament. Tournament policies regarding byes vary, but they are commonly counted as a win on a team's **record**.

Card: A source or piece of evidence that is used in a debate. Usually, 'card' refers to a card that has been **cut**.

Case: A debater's pre-written constructive arguments, containing one or more **contentions**.

Clash: Occurs when two debaters' **cases**, **contentions** or arguments interact, overlap, or directly contradict each other. Logic and **weighing** are used to 'win' clash – i.e. to prove why the judge should believe your statement instead of your opponent's.

Collapse: To **drop** some of your arguments and choose to focus on one or more specific arguments for the remainder of a round. Collapsing simplifies the round and allows debaters to crystallize their most important points.

Contention: One specific argument that comprises a debater's **case**. A contention is usually focused on a specific aspect of the topic. It contains **uniqueness**, **link(s)** and **impacts**, and occasionally contains multiple subpoints.

Cross / Crossfire: Also known as a cross-examination, any of multiple parts of a round during which opposing sides or teams ask each other questions directly.

Cutting Cards: To highlight, annotate, and reformat text from a piece of evidence you are using. The resulting “cut card” condenses the evidence into the most key details that you will read in your case.

Defense: Defense refers to reasons your opponent is not winning their arguments, but unlike **offense**, doesn't allow you to win independently. Defense consists of **delinks** and **non-uniques**. *Defense is why your opponent is losing; offense is why you are winning.*

Delink: A type of response that proves why one of the ‘steps’ of your opponent’s logic is untrue.

Doc Bot: Most commonly, “doc botting” refers to when a debater’s coach or teammate writes content on a live document for them to read during a round – essentially, when someone else is writing their speeches for them. This is a form of dishonesty that is against the rules of most tournaments.

Drop: To “drop” a **contention** or point is to concede it by not bringing it up in a speech. Dropping can be done accidentally. It can also be an intentional strategic choice (see **collapsing**) in order to narrow down the round. To “drop” a round, or “drop to” an opponent means to lose.

Elims: Short for elimination rounds. Not everyone qualifies or **breaks** to elims. Once a debater loses an elim, they are no longer competing in the tournament.

Empirics: Past historical examples that prove a point or argument.

Extend: To continue arguing one of your **contentions**, **responses** or points by summarizing it in later speeches. Extending an argument is the opposite of **dropping** it.

Flay: Used to refer to judges who are a combination of “**flow**” and “**lay**”. They may have a moderate amount of experience with debate, but are not as technically proficient as **flow** judges.

Flight / Flighted: Tournament schedules may be flighted, which means that rounds are staggered into two categories – one early and one later. This usually occurs when there are not enough judges or rooms to have everyone debate at once.

Flow: To flow a round is to take notes in a special, shorthand way, allowing you to keep track of the arguments and points of each speech. The resulting document or page is your flow for that round. Alternatively, a flow judge refers to a judge who has a lot of debate experience and is knowledgeable about the technical rules of debate.

Frontline: To defend your own arguments or **contentions** against your opponent's responses. A frontline is essentially a 'response to a response'.

Impact: Every **contention** has an impact, which answers the question, "Why is this important?" Impacts are usually quantifiable, involving numbers and statistics, and refer to who or what is affected by the argument.

Junior Varsity / JV: A division that usually consists of sophomore or second-year debaters (but not exclusively – a wide range of debaters may compete in JV). Considered a transition between the **novice** and **varsity** levels.

Lay: A lay judge is a judge who doesn't have much experience with debate or isn't knowledgeable about its rules and technicalities – usually a parent. To debate in a "lay" style usually means to speak in a slow, clear and compelling manner that is easy to understand.

Link: A "link" is a step in a logical process, or the route by which an argument reaches its impact.

Linkchain: A linkchain is comprised of several links. It refers to the logical process or route by which an argument operates.

Link-in: A link **weighing** mechanism stating that one's own arguments also result in one's opponent's impacts.

Local: A local tournament takes place in New Jersey and only involves debaters and schools within the state. Locals tend to have more **lay** judges and fewer teams. They typically only last one day, as opposed to multiple-day **nationals**.

Low-speaks win: Refers to when the winning team has lower **speaker points** than the losing team. This is relatively uncommon.

Magnitude: An impact **weighing** mechanism that evaluates how large an impact is, usually based on how many people or lives it impacts. Some consider it to encompass **scope** and **timeframe** weighing, as well as occasionally **probability**.

Mitigate: A type of non-**terminal** response that doesn't entirely defeat an opponent's argument, but argues that its **impact** is smaller or less important than the opponent claims.

National: A tournament that can take place anywhere in the country, and involves debaters and schools from all over the nation (or sometimes from other countries!). Nationals typically have more **flow** and **tech** judges than locals (though not always!). They tend to last multiple days and are longer and more involved than **locals**.

Negative / Neg: Synonymous with 'con' – the side that argues against a **resolution**.

Non-Unique: A type of response that argues that an opponent's **impacts** will trigger no matter what, or that voting for them does not change the **status quo**.

Novice: The novice division of a tournament consists of freshmen or first-year debaters.

Offense: Offense refers to the independent reasons why a team wins a round. Offense consists of **contentions/cases** as well as **turns**.

Off-Time Roadmap: Given before a debater begins their speech and timer, an off-time roadmap is an outline or "table of contents" for the speech. It gives the judge an idea of which points the speaker will address, and in what order they'll address them.

Open-Division / Open: Refers to when a tournament has no divisions – **varsity**, **JV** and **novice** debaters all compete together.

Paradigm: A judge's paradigm tells debaters who they are as a judge, and often lists their preferences. Paradigms are great resources that allow you to adapt your style to the judge.

Pick Up: A colloquial term for winning a round and/or getting a judge's vote.

Power Pairing: Refers to when debaters in a tournament are paired up based on the debater's win-loss **record**. Power pairing may be *high-low* – meaning that teams with the best records are put against ones with the worst records. It may also be *high-high* – where teams are put against opponents with similar records to them. Typically, the first two rounds of a tournament are randomly assigned and the remaining ones are power-paired.

Prelims: Refers to preliminary, non-elimination rounds. All debaters participate in prelim rounds before advancing to **elims**.

Prep Time: The time that debaters get to during a round brainstorm, talk to their partner if applicable, and plan their speeches.

Prerequisite: A link **weighing** mechanism that states that in order for one's opponent's impact to happen, one's own impact has to happen first.

Probability: An impact **weighing** mechanism that evaluates impacts based on how likely they are. Some believe it to be an invalid weighing mechanism because anything that is not contested in a round has to be assumed true by the judge.

RFD: Stands for "reason for decision". A judge's RFD is included in their **ballot** and explains why they voted the way they did.

Record: A debater or team's record refers to how many rounds they have won and lost. It is usually listed in "win-loss" format. For instance, a team that is "3-2" has won three rounds and lost two.

Resolution: The topic of a debate, mandated by the NSDA (National Speech and Debate Association).

Response: A counterargument offered to an opponent's **contention** or argument. **Delinks**, **non-uniques** and **turns** are all examples of types of responses.

Round: Refers to one debate in a tournament.

Scope: An impact **weighing** mechanism that examines how wide-reaching an impact is (e.g. global vs domestic).

Short-circuit: A link **weighing** mechanism stating that one's own impacts prevent one's opponent's impacts from happening.

Signposting: Organizing your speeches — letting the judge know what specific argument or point you are discussing, and where they should **flow** your points. Signposting consists of transition words and numbering your **responses** or points, as well as other methods. It is an essential technique for making your speeches clearer and more structured.

Speaks / Speaker Points: Speaker points, or "speaks" for short, are awarded based on your speaking style, presentation, strategy, and how you carry yourself. They are typically given on a 30-point scale, but tend to range between 25 and 30. 25 is considered very poor, while receiving 30 speaker points is a rare and outstanding achievement.

Speechwire: A website used to organize tournaments. Speechwire is used almost exclusively for **locals** and provides information about your opponents and judges.

Spreading: Short for "speed-reading", spreading is when an opponent talks extremely fast to fit more content into their speech. Spreading is fairly rare in **novice** divisions.

Squirrel: When a round (usually an **elim**) is judged by a multi-judge panel, a squirrel is a judge who votes against the majority. For instance, if the vote is 2-1 for the pro, the one judge who voted con is said to have 'squirreled'.

Squirrely: A 'squirrely' argument is a rare, unique or little-known argument – the opposite of a **stock** argument. Squirrely arguments can be powerful since opponents may be unfamiliar with them. However, they are squirrely for a reason – usually because they have major weaknesses or because it's hard to find evidence for them,

Status Quo: Refers to the current state of affairs as it relates to the resolution. The **aff** argues for changing the status quo, while the **neg** argues for maintaining the status quo.

Stock: A 'stock' argument is a common argument that is well-known and heard frequently. Even if they are common, stock arguments are stock for a reason – usually because they are logically sound or have lots of evidence to back them up.

Tabroom / Tab: Like **Speechwire**, Tabroom ('Tab' for short) is a website used to organize tournaments. It is typically used for **nationals**. It provides more information than **Speechwire**, including **paradigms**.

Tech: A tech judge, like a **flow** judge, is knowledgeable about the rules and technicalities of debate and is usually very experienced. A tech style of debate usually involves more jargon, more complex techniques, and sometimes a faster speed.

Terminal: Defense is said to be 'terminal' when it entirely defeats an opponent's argument. **Delinks** and **non-uniques** are terminal **defense**, whereas **mitigations** are non-terminal **defense**.

Timeframe: An **impact** weighing mechanism that typically refers to one of two pieces of analysis: firstly, that long-term, long-lasting impacts should be prioritized; or secondly, that urgent, imminent impacts should be prioritized.

Turn: A **response** stating that your opponent's argument is actually a reason to vote for you. Turns are a powerful type of **offense**. A *link turn* states that voting for your opponents would actually worsen the issue they discuss. An *impact turn* states that the result they argue is bad is actually good.

Uniqueness: Uniqueness is the first part of a **case** that characterizes the **status quo**. Uniqueness on the **aff** argues that a problem or negative trend exists, which the **resolution** solves. Uniqueness on the **neg** argues that the **status quo** is positive, and the **resolution** would make it worse.

Utilitarianism / Util: The default framework of PF debate. Essentially, util states that the side that achieves the greatest good for the greatest number wins the round.

Varsity: A division consisting of debaters with at least 1-2 years of experience. Usually, varsity includes more advanced techniques and a wider range of skills than **novice** or **JV**.

Warrant: To warrant is to explain why and how a **link** occurs. Warranting is essential for backing up your claims, especially for **lay** judges!

Wash: An argument or point is a wash when neither side clearly wins. A washed argument doesn't clearly provide a voting issue for either side.

Weigh: To weigh is to explain why your **impacts** are more important than your opponent's. Weighing answers the question, "*Even if their impact is true, why should the judge still vote for you?*" It is one of the most essential debate skills. A wise man once said "weighing equals winning". There are several *mechanisms* of weighing. *Impact weighing* weighs your **impacts** against those of your opponent, whereas *link weighing* thinks about how your **linkchains** interact with those of your opponent.

Win: What we do on the Summit debate team