

# What is Public Forum Debate?

Public Forum Debate (PFD) is a team event that advocates or rejects a position posed by the monthly resolution topic (announced online at [www.nflonline.org](http://www.nflonline.org)). The clash of ideas must be communicated in a manner persuasive to the non-specialist or "citizen judge", i.e. a member of the American jury. The debate should:

- ❖ Display solid logic, lucid reasoning, and depth of analysis
- ❖ Utilize evidence without being driven by it
- ❖ Present a clash of ideas by countering/refuting arguments of the opposing team (rebuttal)
- ❖ Communicate ideas with clarity, organization, eloquence, and professional decorum



## The Topic

Public Forum topics are based on current events. Topics are worded as resolutions, meaning they advocate solving a problem by establishing a position. Teams must understand the meaning of terminology in a consistent manner so debates have a clash of ideas. If the topic were "Resolved: Free trade benefits all nations," it would be vital to understand the concept of *free trade*. An expert definition from a legal dictionary or an encyclopedia would be preferable to a standard dictionary. A new topic is released each month, so you might be debating one topic while researching next month's topic.

## Case Development & Evidence

A team must develop both a pro and con case, persuasively supported by evidence and reasoning. Given the short nature of a Public Forum round, cases should center on a few quality arguments. A team, however, should research several arguments on both sides of the issue, so it can adapt its case to the opposing team's claims as necessary.



## The Coin Flip



The round starts with a coin toss. The winning team selects either

- The side (pro or con) they will argue
- The speaker order (begin the debate or give the last speech)

The team that loses the toss will then decide their preference from the option not selected by the winner. When considering these choices, teams might consider: Is one side of the topic more acceptable to citizen judges? On which side is the team stronger? Is the first speech or the final speech more critical to "selling" the case.



## Speeches and Time Limit

Speech	Time	Responsibility of Debater
Team A Speaker 1 - Constructive	4 min	Present the team's case
Team B Speaker 1 - Constructive	4 min	Present the team's case
Crossfire	3 min	Speaker 1 from Team A & B alternate asking and answering questions
Team A Speaker 2 - Rebuttal	4 min	Refute the opposing side's argument
Team B Speaker 2 - Rebuttal	4 min	Refute the opposing side's argument
Crossfire	3 min	Speaker 2 from Team A & B alternate asking and answering questions
Team A Speaker 1 - Summary	3 min	Begin crystallizing the main issues in the round
Team B Speaker 1 - Summary	3 min	Begin crystallizing the main issues in the round
Grand Crossfire	3 min	All four debaters involved in a crossfire at once
Team A Speaker 2 - Final Focus	2 min	Explain reasons that you win the round
Team B Speaker 2 - Final Focus	2 min	Explain reasons that you win the round
★ Each team is entitled to 2 minutes of prep time during the round.		

## The First Speeches

The first two speeches construct arguments *advocating* the resolution's worthiness or showing the *disadvantages* of the resolution and explaining why it should not be adopted. These speeches should contain a brief introduction to the team's case and define important terminology regarding the resolution or case. Each team will present a few reasons that defend their claim. These reasons should be accompanied by evidence. Before ending, the speaker should conclude with a summary of the arguments covered.



## Crossfire

Crossfires are questioning periods that allow both debaters equal access to the floor. During this time, the debaters work to strengthen their own argument and/or weaken their opponent's argument. A debater who attempts to dominate or be rude to his opponent will lose points.

## Third & Fourth Constructive Speeches

These debaters must work to refute the other team's arguments by analyzing and explaining flaws in the opponent's position. Some time should also be allocated to rebuilding the original case made by the first speaker on the team.

## Summary Speeches

In these speeches, the debater has to find a way to explain issues in light of all that has happened so far – in just two minutes – without speaking too rapidly. This is not the time to make new arguments. Instead, debaters should strengthen previous arguments with new evidence or clarity.

## The Final Focus

This frames, with clarity, why your team has won the debate. Again, no new arguments are presented. Before the final focus, ask, "If I were judging this round, what would I be voting on?"

## The Art of Argument

The *quantity* of arguments is less important than the *quality* of arguments, just as the quantity of evidence is less important than the quality of evidence. Thus we came to three important components of an argument: claim, evidence, and warrant.

- ❖ A **claim** is a major argument made on either side of the resolution.
- ❖ A **warrant** is the reasoning behind the claim. It explains why your point is important.
- ❖ **Evidence** includes the facts that you will use to support your claim and warrant. You must make the connection between your claim and your evidence clear. Don't assume that the always judge understands what you are saying.

**Public Forum Meetings**

TBA

**Public Forum Coach**

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*Although this document explains PF Debate for both HS and Middle School,  
Eric Belcik serves as HIGH SCHOOL COACH.  
His varsity debaters coach our middle school program with help from Mrs. Neidhard.*