

Public Forum Debate Judging Instructions

Event Description:

After the National Forensic League felt that both policy debate and Lincoln-Douglas debate were getting overly specialized, it determined that there ought to be an event that the everyday person (without debate experience) could enjoy—an event that a passerby could walk into off the street and be entertained and understand what is going on. It was under this mindset that Public Forum debate (originally called controversy) was born. Public Forum debate is a form of debate that is debated in teams of two without jargon; it is debate in its purest form.

The Resolutions

Given that the original name for this event was “controversy,” it may not surprise you that the topics are always of a controversial nature. In the past, resolutions on the death penalty and universal health care have graced the debating chambers of Public Forum debate. The resolutions change every month.

Speakers & Timing

One of the innovative touches of this format is that there is *no* set speaking order prior to the round. Instead, each round starts with one team tossing a coin and the other team calling it in the air. The team that wins the coin toss can determine either whether it wants to go pro or con *or* it can determine whether it wants to speak first or last. The remaining option is the choice of the team that lost the coin toss.

For example: Timmy and Tommy flip the coin. Susan and Sally call HEADS. The coin lands on HEADS. Susan and Sally can choose pro/con or first/last. Susan and Sally choose to go con. Timmy and Tommy now get to choose first/last. Timmy and Tommy choose last. Thus, Susan and Sally will be delivering the first speech opposing the resolution (on the con side).

The speaking order goes like this (remember that we do not know if “pro” is Team A or “con” is Team A until after the coin flip):

Team A – Speaker 1: 4 minutes
Team B – Speaker 1: 4 minutes
Crossfire – 3 minutes
Team A – Speaker 2: 4 minutes
Team B – Speaker 2: 4 minutes
Crossfire – 3 minutes
Team A – Speaker 1: 2 minutes

Team B – Speaker 1: 2 minutes
Grand crossfire – 3 minutes
Final focus – Team A – Speaker 2: 1 minute
Final focus – Team B – Speaker 2: 1 minute
(NB: Each team is allowed 2 minutes of prep time)

Each team receives two minutes of preparation time. This means that after any speech, the team can stop time in order to prepare arguments for their next speech. They can use this two divide this two minutes however they choose. (For example: one team may choose to take 1 minute before the first speech, 30 seconds before the second speech, and 30 seconds before the final speech. Another team may choose to take no preparation time until the end and then use the entire two minutes. It’s entirely their prerogative.)

DO NOT DISCLOSE YOUR DECISION IN THE ROUND TO ANYONE UNTIL AFTER THE AWARDS CEREMONY!!!!

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Crossfire/Grand Crossfire

Another uniqueness of public forum debate is its use of a crossfire period rather than a formalized cross-examination period. After the first two speeches, the two speakers of those speeches engage in crossfire. Whoever spoke first gets to ask the first question. But after that first question, either of the debaters can ask or answer questions at will.

After the next two speeches, the two debaters who just spoke engage in crossfire. Once again, whoever spoke first asks the first question, but after that either one can ask or answer questions at will.

After the next two speeches is the *grand crossfire* *cheesy thunder and lightning special effects*. The first question is asked by the person who spoke first in the debate round. After that, any of the four debaters can ask or answer questions at will.

Constructive Speeches vs. Summary Speeches

The constructive speeches are a time in which debaters are allowed to “construct” new arguments. These are the first four speeches in the debate. Afterwards are the “summary” speeches. During the summary speeches, debaters are not permitted to bring up new arguments. They should instead be telling you which arguments they are winning on and why you should vote for them. They are allowed to give new examples to support old arguments, but new arguments are strictly forbidden.

Final Focuses

The final focuses are the last two speeches of the debate. As with the other summary speeches, no new arguments are allowed in these speeches. In fact, you might notice that these speeches are only 1 minute long each. For this reason, debaters are expected to narrow it down to the one single argument that is going to clinch their team the debate round.

Completing the Ballot

There are two things you need to rank on the ballot and they are not necessarily intertwined. First, you must decide who won the round. Who was more persuasive? Who was more believable? This should *not* be a measurement of who you most agreed with. Some of the debaters in the room did not get to decide which side of the resolution to uphold and may not be arguing what they believe in! You should not vote against them just because they had the tougher side to argue. Vote for whoever was more persuasive in their side of the resolution.

Second, though, you must decide how each speaker was individually. This is separate from who may have won the round and you *can* give higher speaker points to the losers than you gave to the winners (such a scenario is called a “low-point win” or an LPW). For example, if two are not very good speakers but they are still making all the right, intelligent points, they may win with low speaker points. Similarly, there may be very polished, articulate, and engaging speakers who just aren’t making very good arguments; these debaters may receive high speaker points and the loss. You are to rank debaters on a scale of A through D (with A being the best) in six different categories (Analysis, Evidence, Reasoning, Crossfire, Rebuttal, and Delivery).

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