

Guide to Public Forum Debate

Public Forum Debate (PFD) is a team event that advocates or rejects a position posed by the monthly/bi-monthly resolution topic: April Resolved: The United States should remove nearly all of its military presence in the Arab States of the Persian Gulf." The job of a debater is to do the following things:

- ❖ 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 ~ 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 an economics or legal dictionary or encyclopedia would be preferable to a standard dictionary. If the topic, "Resolved: NATO countries should act together on international matters," the more common terms 'act' and 'together' could be appropriately defined by a standard dictionary. Given the limited time of a round, debate should not center on obscure claims of minutia.

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. Having arguments in direct contradiction with each other will enhance **clash** in rebuttals. Organization of speeches through effective communication and clear outlines is important so both judges and the opposing team can follow each of the arguments and their supporting evidence. Effective persuasion requires credible, unbiased, quality supporting evidence, which may include a mix of facts, statistics, expert quotations, studies, polls; but it may also be real-life examples, anecdotes, analogies, and personal experience. Since topics are based on current events, research should be accessible through periodicals, Web search engines and think tanks. Teams should not overwhelm their case with evidence; rather, they should *select* the *best* evidence to represent their claims.

The Coin Flip FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL DCDUL IS DIFFERENT ~

The round starts with a **coin toss**; the winning team selects **either**:

- ❖ TEAMS WILL GO PRO AND CON
- THE COIN FLIP WILL CALL FOR 1st or 2nd speaker

The team that loses the toss will then decide their preference from the option not selected by the winner (*i.e., if the winning team decides to speak last, then the losing team may decide which side they will argue*). The debate, therefore may



begin with the con side, arguing against the topic. Teams might consider: Is one side of the topic more acceptable to citizen judges? On which side is the team stronger? On which side of the topic are the opponents stronger? Is the first speaker position critical to "sell" the case by making a good first impression? Is the final focus speech critical for the last word to the judge(s)? Are the opponents so effective in either the first or last speaker position that our team needs to select speaker position rather than side? The first team sits to the judge's left.

Speeches and Time Limits

Speaker 1 (Team A, 1st speaker)4 min.
Speaker 2 (Team B, 1st speaker).....4 min.

Crossfire (between speakers 1 & 2).....3 min.

Speaker 3 (Team A, 2nd speaker)4 min.

Speaker 4 (Team B, 2nd speaker)4 min.

Crossfire (between speakers 3 & 4).....3 min.

Speaker 1 Summary.....3 min.

Speaker 2 Summary.....3 min.

Grand Crossfire (all speakers)3 min.

Speaker 3 Final Focus.....2 min.

Speaker 4 Final Focus.....2 min.

Each team may use up to three (3) minutes of prep time.

First Pro Speech ~ This speech **constructs** arguments advocating the resolution's worthiness. The key analysis will be to present major reasons why there is a problem.

First Con Speech ~ This speech **constructs** arguments showing disadvantages of the resolution and why it should not be adopted. If the pro speech has the advantage of a changing future, the con speech has a *track record of experience* (status quo) and why change is ill-advised. The rest of the speech elements will be the same as the pro speech.

Third & Fourth Constructive Speeches

Both of these debaters have the primary burden of refuting the other team's arguments by analyzing and explaining flaws in the opponent's position. The debater should identify the opposition's key arguments and attack their legitimacy by: turning the analysis to the other side; presenting evidence that destroys or reduces the opposing position; presenting alternate causes that are not accounted for by the opposition argument; exposing argument inconsistencies between the speakers or between the opponents and their statements during crossfire.

Summary Speeches ~ These are complicated speeches because each debater has to find a way to explain issues in the light of all that has happened so far – in just two minutes – without speaking too rapidly. New evidence, but not new *arguments* may be presented, except responses (refutation). This means that a limited number of issues can be addressed. For example, perhaps develop one to two issues from the debater’s side on the resolution and one from the opponent’s side of the resolution. The speech should have a brief



overview. On each key argument, try to add a short original quotation, anecdote, or fact. Wrap up each argument by stressing its importance in arriving at a fair decision.

The Final Focus ~ This frames, with clarity, why your team has won the debate. Again, no new arguments may be presented, however, new *evidence* may be introduced to support an argument made earlier in the debate. Before the final focus, ask, “If I were judging this

round, what would I be voting on?” Strategies may include:

- ❖ Choose the most important argument you are winning, and summarize the analysis and evidence that make it so important.
- ❖ Turn a major argument from your opponent into the winning analysis and evidence of one of your important arguments; this technique **clinches** two arguments.
- ❖ Answer the *most important* argument you may be losing by summarizing the analysis and evidence that you believe takes out the opponent’s argument.
- ❖ Choose an argument that you believe the community judge will most likely vote on.
- ❖ Expose a major inconsistency made by your opponent—two arguments that contradict each other—at least one of which the opponent is focusing on to win the debate.

Crossfire ~ Questioning periods give debate *interactivity* and a change to build *clash*. In crossfire, both debaters have equal access to the floor, but the first question must be asked to the debater who just finished speaking by a debater from the other team. After the initial question and answer, either debater may question or answer. A debater who attempts to dominate or be rude to his opponent will lose points. Good questions are brief and good answers must meet the

question. In the first two crossfires, only the corresponding speakers may participate, and they stand next to each other.

SCORING IN DCUDL

For scoring, each debater gets up to 30 points
The team may not exceed 60 points
There are no fraction of a point scores, only whole numbers.

If you feel both teams did great, and you can't decide, just tie the scores.

Scores average between 21 to 26 lower than 20 is unusual unless students did not speak or froze up.

30s are rare, so use them sparingly!

FILL OUT THE ENTIRE BALLOT! DO NOT FORGET YOUR REASON FOR DECISION. (RFD) SIGN THE BALLOT.

CIRCLE THE PRO AND CON AFTER THE COIN TOSS

Grand Crossfire ~ Seated, all debaters interact with one another. The first question is asked to the team that just ended its summary by the other team. After the initial question and answer, any debater may question or answer, and *all should participate*. The same guidelines for rudeness and stalling apply to the grand crossfire. Resist rushing questions or answers, or trying to do too much in crossfire; desperation is not persuasive.



Prep Time ~ Each team has two minutes of prep time. For very practical reasons, a team should not use prep time until their summary speech or final focus speech. Being prepared on the arguments is the best way to avoid using prep time until it is vital to select the key arguments and issues.

Evaluation & Judging ~ The judge is the chairperson of the round (facilitating the coin flip and giving time signals if requested), and may halt any crossfire lacking civility. S/he may not *interact* in the crossfire.