Public Forum Debate
A Guide for New Debaters and Coaches

Public Forum (PF) Debate is a head-to-head team debate with two students on each team. Catered towards citizen judges, PF debate topics change every month and primarily focuses on events in the news. Students focus on affirming or negating the resolution (specific wording of the debate topic) through the use of logic, reasoning, and research but unlike other debate events, do not take steps beyond addressing the basic truth of the resolution. They do not prescribe specific plans for change or improvement.

The event itself is shorter than other debate events, which forces students to encompass their research and arguments into concise speeches, focusing on the most important arguments that address the resolution. In addition, there are three questioning/discussion periods known as Crossfire that make-up close to a quarter of the speech time. These periods are unique because they are bidirectional and serve as an opportunity for both teams to engage in conversation and provide time for clarification. Within this guide are helpful tips to get your PF program started.

In this Guide
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Sample Case Outline
Speech Times
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Crossfire Tips

MORE RESOURCES:
WWW.NFLONLINE.ORG
WWW.NFLTV.ORG
WWW.DEBATECOACHES.ORG
Research Tips:

• First look at the key words of the resolution, try to learn the basics behind the general topic, this will allow more focused research.
• Now that you know the background, try to figure out what the thesis of the resolution is. Knowing what the resolution’s truth is will help you direct your argument research and construction.
• Devise a list of arguments that would support the side of the resolution you are researching. Remember that when doing online research, a change in a single word to a similar word can drastically alter results.
• Write down complete source citations. Even if you don’t think you will quote the article in round, you want to compile your list of sources in case you want to go back and verify something you read. Plus, if you choose to bring up something from that article, now you can include the citation, which both prevents plagiarism and increases your credibility.

PLACES TO FIND RESEARCH

1. Library: Your local librarian can help you find books on your topic area. Books are an excellent way to learn in-depth about the arguments for each side.
2. GoogleBooks: This online resource has many books on the topic that your local library may not have on the shelf.
3. Online Databases: While these are usually a subscription service, many high school and college libraries have access to online databases of academic and popular news articles.
4. ThinkTanks: While these are sometimes privately funded and have a political slant, you can use these sites to find articles written by proponents for one side of the debate.
5. Your Community: Many times you can find people in the community who can give expert talks on the issue. While their talks can’t be cited in round, they can be helpful in gaining background knowledge to help direct your research and argumentation strategy. This can include teachers at your school, parents, and community members at-large.
Speech Times:

- Pro Case: 4 minutes
- Con Case: 4 minutes
- Crossfire: 3 minutes
- Pro Refutation: 4 minutes
- Con Refutation: 4 minutes
- Crossfire: 3 minutes
- Pro Summary: 2 minutes
- Con Summary: 2 minutes
- Grand Crossfire: 3 minutes
- Pro Final Focus: 2 minutes
- Con Final Focus: 2 minutes

SAMPLE CASE

I. Introduction
   a. Resolution
   b. Definitions
   c. Thesis
   d. Evaluation Mechanism

II. Contention One
   a. Claim: What is the Main Argument
   b. Data: Evidence that Supports the Claim
   c. Warrant: Logic and Reasoning linking Data and Claim
   d. Impact: Why it is Important in the round and to the judge

III. Contention Two
   a. Claim
   b. Data
   c. Warrant
   d. Impact

IV. Conclusion
   a. Summarize Contentions and Thesis
   b. Restate Side of Debate
In the Classroom
Public Forum: Not just for competition rounds!

Public Forum Debate is short enough to use as an in-class debate format. You can have teams of two, or even four students participate at a time to debate over who shot JFK or if we should have dropped nuclear bombs in World War Two. In instances where you have teams of four, each student can give one of the speeches for their side, with the summary and final focus speakers participating in the Grand Crossfire.

If you are teaching argumentation skills, students can use components of Public Forum. You can have spar debates where two students read their cases, crossfire, and then give closing statements. You can also run extreme crossfire drills where one student reads their case and then gets questioned by the entire class. Finally, you can have students do final focus drills, summarizing their case in one-minute speeches to figure out what the most important arguments in the round are.

One drill that serves especially useful in PF debate is the “why do I care?” drill. A student states their argument and then explains why the audience should be compelled to care about the argument. This can include data and warrant but could also include stories and analogies. The art of story-telling but also the use of source citation are incredibly important in public persuasion. After the student gives their brief speech, the teacher or another student can ask questions to help develop more of the impact level of the argument.

A great delivery drill is to have a student read their case expressing different emotions while other students attempt to guess the emotions. Delivery is a key component of public persuasion and this drill teaches students how to utilize their voice while showing other students the difference in emotional versus flat delivery.
Speech Responsibilities

Cases: In These First Two Speeches, The First Speakers For Each Team Present Their Cases.
Crossfire: The First Two Speakers Can Utilize This Time To Clarify Arguments Made In Case, Request Additional Support, And Set Up Arguments For The Second Speakers From Their Team.
Pro Refutation: The Second Speaker For Pro Should Spend Their Four Minutes Articulating Why The Con Case Is Wrong And Why Their Pro Case Is Correct. This Is Best Done By Reviewing The Con Case Piece By Piece And Articulating Arguments And Citing Supporting Evidence Against The Con Case. Remember This Isn’T A Race So Arguments Should Be Well Thought Out And Not Rushed Through.

CON Refutation: The Second Speaker From The Con Team Has Four Minutes To Defend Their Case And Punch Holes In The Pro Case. It Is Often A Good Idea To First Attack The Pro Case And Then Use Some Of These Attacks To Help Rebuild The Con Case However Strategies Vary In What Order To Address The Cases.

CROSSFIRE: The Second Speaker From Each Team Uses This Time To Clarify And Punch Holes In Cases While Advancing Arguments
AND SETTING UP THE SUMMARY SPEECHES. THIS IS A GOOD TIME TO ENSURE THE STRENGTH OF YOUR ARGUMENTS WHILE ARTICULATING HOLES IN YOUR OPPONENTS CASE.

SUMMARY SPEECHES: THE FIRST SPEAKERS FROM EACH SIDE SUMMARIZE WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE DEBATE. LIKE A FUNNEL, THE ARGUMENTS HAVE BEEN NARROWED DOWN IN THESE TWO-MINUTE SPEECHS TO THE KEY ISSUES, AND TEAMS SHOULD BEGIN TO WEIGH THEIR ARGUMENTS AGAINST THEIR OPPONENTS IF THEY HAVEN’T ALREADY BEGUN THIS PROCESS IN EARLIER SPEECHES.

GRAND CROSSFIRE: CONDUCTED BY ALL FOUR SPEAKERS, THIS THREE MINUTE PERIOD IS USED TO CLOSE UP THE LINGERING QUESTIONS AND SET THE STAGE FOR THE FINAL SPEECHES.

FINAL FOCUSES: THE SECOND SPEAKERS GIVE THESE SPEECHES. THIS IS THE FINAL PLEA OR CONCLUDING REMARKS. NO NEW ARGUMENTS CAN BE MADE AT THIS POINT AND TIME SHOULD BE SPENT FOCUSING ON WHY YOUR SIDE IS WINNING, MAKING SURE TO WEIGH AGAINST YOUR OPPONENTS.

**CROSSFIRE TIPS**

* Prepare strategies ahead of time. What do you want your opponent to admit in the CF period? Knowing what your partner plans to address in the next speech can help guide your line of questions.
* Have a couple of questions ready before the round so you don’t have awkward silences or leave opportunities for the opponent to control the CF period.
* Be nice, but not too nice. It is important to ensure your opponents get opportunities to speak and ask questions, but if they are hogging the stage, use verbal and nonverbal cues to try to interrupt and ask a question. Keep the interruptions civil and use them sparingly.
* In Grand Crossfire, have a plan with your partner. Alternate questions and answers or develop secret signals to each other when you want to take over speaking. You should both participate.