



# Guide to Judging Public Forum Debate

## Times and Duties of Speakers

**Public Forum** is a team debate that supports or rejects a position posed by the monthly resolution topic. The clash of ideas must be communicated in a manner persuasive to the non-specialist or “citizen judge,” e.g., a member of the American jury.

**1st Pro Speech**  
4 minutes  
*These speeches **construct** arguments presenting the resolution’s worthiness (Pro) and disadvantages (Con). An underlying concept will always be the risk of change versus the risk of not changing. 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.*

*These speeches are given by **Speakers 1 and 2.***

**Crossfire**  
3 minutes  
***Between Speakers 1 and 2** Questioning periods give debate interactivity and a chance to build clash. The first question is asked by the Pro team member to the Con team debater who just finished speaking.*

**2nd Pro Speech**  
4 minutes  
***Speakers 3 and 4** have the primary burden of **refuting** the other team’s arguments by analyzing and explaining flaws in the opponent’s position. They 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.*

**Crossfire**  
3 minutes  
***Between Speakers 3 and 4** Speaker 3 (Pro) opens with the first question.*

**Pro Summary**  
2 minutes  
*Summary speeches are **rebuttals** from **Speakers 1 and 2** that extend earlier arguments or answer opposing refutations, and may incorporate new evidence, but not new arguments.*

**Grand Crossfire**  
3 minutes  
*All four debaters participate. The first question is asked by the Pro team. After that, any debater may question or answer.*

**Pro Final Focus**  
2 minutes  
*The final focus is a compelling **restatement** from **Speakers 3 and 4** of why the judge should vote Pro or Con. Given the short period, each team must decide what arguments weigh most importantly on the decision. No new arguments are accepted in the final focus speeches.*

## Responsibilities of the Judge

**Arrival:** Notify your coach of your arrival at the tournament and go to the Judges Lounge; you do not need to report to Registration (that is your coach’s responsibility). You are committed to judging all rounds, and we appreciate your availability for the whole day.

**Conflicts:** Rounds may not be judged by high school students. Also, do not judge a round if there is a Conflict, such as, if you are judging a debater you’ve coached, your child, or a team you’ve already judged or watched in the tournament. Do not watch other rounds—this creates Conflicts.

**Rounds / Flights:** Tournaments usually have four rounds, with pairings, judges, and locations announced via texts/emails. Go immediately to your round when notified of the teams you’re judging and location. Do not leave the Judges Lounge if you have a “bye,” as you may be required to fill in for a missing judge.

**Ballots-Start:** Most Public Forum rounds are double-flighted, meaning that each of the four rounds actually consists of two rounds, an “A Flight” and a “B Flight.” A Flight teams should go first; however, the B Flight teams may debate first if an A Flight team is missing (thus avoiding delay or a Forfeit). DO NOT mix teams from different flights. For Forfeits, wait 10 minutes and ask Tab Room to render a decision.

*Begin your online ballot when all competitors for the flight are present (click **START ROUND**)*

**BE OBJECTIVE — DO NOT INTERRUPT THE ROUND — NO LOW-POINT WINS — DO NOT DISCUSS YOUR DECISION WITH THE DEBATERS**

**Side/Speaker Order:** In WACFL, Pro begins the rounds with its First Debater (first speaker), followed by Con’s First Debater (third speaker). *There is no coin flip for sides or for speaker order.* The pairing text/email announces which team has which side (Pro or Con), and each team decides speaking order for their team. (There is a coin flip *only* in Metrofinal tournament Elimination rounds, when teams have not met before.) Ensure the ballot accurately reflects sides and order before submitting.

**Timing:** The Judge is responsible for monitoring and enforcing speech, Crossfire, and Prep time limits, and must have a timing device (the Android app Debate Timer by Chris Higley works well). Ask the debaters if they require hand signals for their speeches, Prep-time, and Crossfires; most debaters will time themselves, but you are responsible for monitoring and enforcing time limits, as well as providing hand signals when requested or necessary.

**Prep Time:** In WACFL, Prep Time is limited to 2 minutes per team. Debaters will track this, but you must do so as well to ensure compliance.

**Ballot-Submit:** Complete your ballot as the round progresses (to prevent tournament delays), and **SUBMIT** your ballot as soon as you complete it (even between flights). Keep in mind that a single judge delaying for 15 minutes, sets the *whole* tournament back 15 minutes.