

Public Forum Debate Judge's Manual



Massachusetts Forensics League

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Introduction

On behalf of the Massachusetts Forensic League and all member schools, we would like to thank you for judging for us today. Without you, this tournament could not function. We hope that you enjoy the results of the hard work that the competitors have put into preparing their cases and arguments.

This booklet has been written to help you judge high school debates. While debate has many guidelines, it has very few “rules”. There may be times when this booklet does not apply to the debate you are judging. Feel free to use your common sense and judgment. If you have any questions, please ask a tournament official.

Summary

- *What Public Forum Debate is:* Public Forum Debate involves two teams, each with two students, debating an issue of current interest or policy.
- *What happens at the tournament:* There will be a series of rounds. You will judge a different pair of teams during each round. Watch for announcements indicating the next round is about to start and then consult the schedule to see where you are judging.
- *Starting the round:* You will flip a coin to determine which side of the topic each team will advocate for, and which team speaks first.
- *What happens in the debate:* There will be a series of speeches and cross-examinations.
- *Adjudicating the debate:* Based on what is said during the debate and not on what you believe beforehand, you will award the win to the team that best argued their side. You will also award speaker points based on *both* style and argumentation. Finally, you will explain on your ballot what arguments convinced you to vote the way you did.
- *Other judge responsibilities:* This section discusses taking notes during the debate, timing speeches, cross-examination periods, and preparation time, providing optional, brief, oral comments after the debate concludes, taking care of the classroom, and turning in your ballot.

What is Public Forum Debate?

Public Forum Debate (PFD) involves two teams, each with two students, debating an issue of current interest or policy. A judge decides which two-person team wins the debate.

Public Forum debaters across the nation debate the same issue, referred to as the resolution, for one month. One side, the PRO, argues that the resolution is true, while the other side, the CON, argues that it is false.

What happens at the tournament?

The tournament consists of a series of rounds. At a typical tournament, there will be four “preliminary” rounds during the day. At some tournaments, the teams with the best preliminary round records will advance to a semi-final or final round at the end of the day.

During each preliminary round, each team debates another team. For example, if there are 40 two-person teams at a debate tournament, there will be 20 separate debates taking place during each round, each typically in a separate classroom.

A schedule referred to as a “schematic” announces the round. For each debate taking place during that round, the schematic (Figure 1) lists: (1) the two teams debating, (2) the room where the debate will take place, and (3) the judge.

Figure 1. Schematic

THE WASHINGTON SQUARE TOURNAMENT -- RD 1 -- DIV: PUBLIC FORUM DEBATE Start: 9:00 AM

AFFIRMATIVE	NEGATIVE	ROOM	JUDGE
Newton South LS	Shrewsbury HH	220	Anderson, B
Lincoln-Sudbury LL	Newton North EK	214	Bragg, B
Bancroft MP	Newton South SF	103	Burnside, A
Shrewsbury LH	Milton High NR	107	Chamberlain, J
Newton South SS	Bromfield FG	110	Ewell, R
Catholic Memorial BC	Bancroft PT	225	Forest, N
Westford VS	Milton High CC	106	Grant, U
Acton Boxborough CS	Framingham HH	201	Hood, JB
Newton South HH	Catholic Memorial ZT	102	Jackson, T
Acton Boxborough ZT	Newton North RR	105	Johnston, A
Westford YB	Framingham CH	212	Johnston, J
Shrewsbury GK	Lincoln-Sudbury SG	213	Longstreet, J
Acton Boxborough XY	Manchester Essex TD	109	Mosby, J
Bromfield WR	Milton High RJ	108	Picket, G
Bromfield HS	Bancroft MM	227	Sheridan, P
Lincoln-Sudbury HS	Westford KC	101	Sherman, WT
Milton High SG	Lincoln-Sudbury CW	104	Stuart, J

Please be sure that during the tournament, you are someplace where you will hear the announcement for the next round. The tournament directors will explain where announcements will be made, but typically, those announcements will be made in the main tournament gathering area (e.g., the school cafeteria) and in the judges’ lounge.

When you hear the announcement for a round:

- Carefully check the schematic. If you are not listed, please remain in the main tournament gathering area or in the judges' lounge unless you verify with a tournament official that you are not needed for that round.
- If you are listed, pick up your ballot, typically from the *ballot table* (where you will also return your ballot). Your name should appear in the ballot's upper right corner. The ballot also lists the room where the debate will take place.
- Proceed to the room where you will judge.

Double flighted tournaments

In a *double-flighted* round at a tournament with 40 teams, 20 teams debate during the *A flight* and another 20 debate during the *B flight*. Each judge watches one pair of teams during the *A flight* and a second pair of teams during the *B flight*. Generally, you will turn in both ballots together at the ballot table after the *B Flight* debate concludes.

Tournaments use double flighting to reduce the number of classrooms and judges needed. For example, at a tournament with 40 teams, double flighting reduces the number of rooms and judges needed from 20 to 10. The "cost" of double-flighting is that it takes roughly twice as long for each round to be completed.

Starting the debate

When you enter the room, you may, if you want, introduce yourself. Try not to show favoritism toward either side, however. If you know any of the debaters personally, contact the tab room or ballot table before starting the round.

First, **conduct a coin toss**. The team that wins the toss may either (1) choose to defend the PRO or CON, or (2) choose to speak first or second. The other team makes the remaining choice.

Second, **fill out the ballot** (see Figure 2). Unless the team name (e.g., “Newton South LS”) and individual names are pre-printed, have the debaters fill in this information. *Make sure you get the ballot back from them before the round starts.*

- If the ballot does have pre-printed individual names, find out which speaker on each team will be speaking first and make a notation to yourself on the ballot. As explained below, you will need to know which speaker is which on each team in order to award speaker points.
- If the ballot does not have pre-printed names, you may find it helpful to have the team speaking first put their names on the ballot’s left side.

Third, **circle “PRO” or “CON” next to each team’s name**.

Finally, **read aloud the information you have recorded** so the debaters can correct any errors. For example, “*I have Newton South speaking first on the PRO, with Thomas speaking before Jonathan. And I have Shrewsbury speaking second on the CON with Susan speaking before Justin.*”

Figure 2. Debate Ballot

Room: 220
Start: 9:00 AM
Public Forum Debate (Newton South LS vs. Shrewsbury HH)

1

Anderson, B

THE WASHINGTON SQUARE TOURNAMENT

Before EVERY round, flip a coin to determine the side and speaking order of the debate. The winner of the flip has the option of choosing either the side (Pro or Con) or the speaking order (1st or 2nd) in the round. The team that loses the flip makes the remaining choice, either side or speaking order. After this is determined, record the names of the competitors. Please note that new arguments in the final focus are to be ignored. The Final Focus must be based on arguments and issues previously addressed in the debate.

PLEASE DO NOT FILL OUT THIS BALLOT UNTIL AFTER THE COIN TOSS HAS BEEN COMPLETED AND THE DEBATERS HAVE DETERMINED SIDE/SPEAKING ORDER

Team: <u>Newton LS</u> Circle Side: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Pro <input type="radio"/> Con	Team: <u>Shrewsbury HH</u> Circle Side: Pro <input checked="" type="radio"/> Con
Speaker 1: <u>Thomas Lee</u>	Speaker 2: <u>Susan Higgins</u>
Speaker 3: <u>Jonathan Smith</u>	Speaker 4: <u>Justin Holland</u>

What happens in a debate?

The debate consists of a series of speeches delivered by each side. The debaters also engage in “cross-fire”, during which debaters from the opposing teams question each other.

Figure 3 summarizes the sequence of speeches and cross-fire periods during the round. This information also appears on the ballot. Figure 3 also summarizes the guidelines on when new evidence and new arguments can be made in the round – more on this issue, below.

Figure 3. Speeches and cross-fire periods

Speech	Duration (minutes)	New Arguments OK?	New Evidence OK?
1 st constructive: Team 1	4 mins	Yes	Yes
1 st constructive: Team 2	4 mins		
1 st Cross-fire	3 mins		
Rebuttal: Team 1	4 mins	Yes	Yes
Rebuttal: Team 2	4 mins		
2 nd Cross-fire	3 mins		
Summary: Team 1	2 mins	No	Yes
Summary: Team 2	2 mins		
Grand cross-fire	3 mins		
Final focus: Team 1	2 mins	No	No
Final focus: Team 2	2 mins		

Each team also has 2 minutes of preparation time to use throughout the entire round. For example, Team 1 may choose to confer for 20 seconds after the first cross-fire prior to starting their rebuttal. In this case, Team 1 would have 1 minute and 40 seconds of remaining prep time.

More on cross-fire and each speech

What happens during each speech and each cross-fire can vary from round to round, but in a typical round, you might hear the following:

Constructives: These speeches, which are typically prepared before the round, stake out the basic position for each side. Debaters will advance two or three reasons why you should support their side of the resolution. They may also define critical words in the resolution to help frame the debate.

1st Cross-fire: The speakers who delivered the 1st constructives take turns questioning each other. The purpose of cross-examination is clarification, not argument; the questioner should always question and avoid statements.

Rebuttals: These speeches, delivered by the debaters who have not yet spoken, typically attack the case presented in first constructive by their opponent. The Team 2 rebuttal may also respond to attacks made in the Team 1 rebuttal.

2nd Cross-fire: The speakers who delivered the rebuttals question each other.

Summaries: Each side identifies and defends key points in the debate. The summary speech *can* introduce new *evidence* but *cannot* introduce new *arguments* unless they are in response to opponent arguments introduced in rebuttal. Restricting the introduction of new arguments in summary helps ensure that the opposing team has sufficient opportunity to respond. Use your judgment to determine if arguments in summary are new, and if so, if their introduction is valid – i.e., has the

argument been introduced in response to a new argument in the opponent's rebuttal. If the argument is new and *not* validly introduced, *disregard it*.

Grand Cross-fire: All debaters engage in a four-way question-and-answer session.

Final Focus: Each side explains why they have won specific arguments *and* why winning those arguments implies that they have won the debate. Final Focus should introduce neither new arguments nor new evidence. The new evidence prohibition can be relaxed if the new material is presented in response to a *first* request for that evidence made in the opposing team's summary speech or during grand cross-fire.

Adjudicating the debate

You have three jobs as a judge: (1) choosing the team that won the debate, (2) awarding speaker points, and (3) writing the reason for your decision on the ballot.

1. Choosing the winner:

Based on *your* judgment and *what you heard during the debate*, vote for the team that presented the most convincing arguments and supporting evidence. In deciding the winner, think of which side a previously undecided person would most likely come down on.

Your own personal beliefs about the topic should NOT enter into your decision: Based on your prior knowledge, you may feel strongly that one side is correct, and you may also be able to think of strong arguments. Please do not let these arguments influence your decision; instead decide based on what happens during the debate. Debaters are responsible only for arguments their opponents present, not those in the minds of the judge.

You can disregard arguments you did not understand: It is the job of the debaters to communicate to you and to explain which issues are the most important and on what basis you should sort out conflicting claims and evidence.

What about speaking style and aesthetics? While style and aesthetic factors (e.g., eye contact and charisma) may *implicitly* make arguments more convincing, you need not *explicitly* consider such factors when deciding who won. A less “polished” debate team can defeat a more polished team if their arguments are more convincing. That being said, aesthetic factors can *implicitly* influence your impression of which team delivered the more convincing arguments. (As discussed below, however, speaker points *do* explicitly reflect style and aesthetics).

Arguments not responded to (dropped arguments): The debaters may claim that the other team has “dropped” an argument. A drop happens when one team presents an argument and the other team fails to respond. It is accepted in debate that dropping an argument amounts to conceding it. Moreover, if a team drops an argument in one speech, they cannot pick it up again later in the debate. By taking notes during the debate (referred to as “flowing” – see below), you will better be able to keep track of what arguments have really been dropped.

2. Awarding speaker points

Speaker points should reflect *both* quality of argumentation and style. In general, the losing team should not be awarded more speaker points than the winning team.

Award *each debater* up to 30 points. Write the points awarded on the ballot next to each debater’s name. General guidelines are as follows: 30 points – unusually outstanding (for a high school student); 27 to 29 points – good or great; 24 to 26 – relatively unskilled; 20 to 23 – extremely poor. Judges should not award fewer than 20 points unless a debater is disrespectful or offensive; in these cases, please notify the Tab room. Please remain consistent throughout the day in how you award points (i.e., do not “recalibrate”).

3. Documenting your reason for decision

Debaters can only improve their skills by understanding which arguments were compelling and which arguments were not. Your ballot need not cover every aspect of the debate, but it should most importantly explain specifically what argument(s) convinced you to vote the way you did, why you thought these arguments were sufficient to carry the debate, and why the arguments emphasized by the losing team failed to convince you. See the Appendix for an example.

Other judge responsibilities

1. Taking notes (flowing)

Although not required, “flowing” is often an invaluable aid to help you track arguments in a debate and more reliably come to a decision based on what was said by the debaters. Virtually all experienced judges flow debates.

Flowing is usually done with a sheet or sheets of paper divided into columns for each speech. Sometimes debaters and judges will flow in two pen colors, one for each team. Write shorthand notes summarizing arguments presented by one team in a column, and then summarize the other team’s responses in the next column. The third column will summarize the next speech, and so on until you have constructed a picture of the entire debate. After the debate, you will best be able to see how each debater addressed the points presented by the other side.

A flow is often hard to understand for anyone except the person who wrote it, but ask an experienced judge to see an example if you want a better picture.

2. Timing

You should time speeches and cross-fire to ensure the debaters do not exceed the allotted time. Please provide time signals. Debaters often time themselves as well, but you should maintain an “official” time. A brief grace period is permitted for debaters to finish their sentences at the time limit. The judge typically also keeps a running tally of preparation time remaining.

3. Oral comments after the debate

Any oral comments should be made only after the debate concludes. At that time, you may (but do not have to) give brief oral comments. If you do, please *do not indicate or even hint at whom you voted for.* The ballot is the main instrument for communicating comments to the debaters and their coach.

4. Taking care of the classroom

Neither debaters nor judges should touch anything in or on a teacher’s desk. Please also make sure that debaters do not touch anything in a classroom that might become damaged. After the last preliminary round of the day, please return desks and other furniture back to their original positions if it is reasonably clear where they belong (e.g., return desks to rows). If you notice anything amiss, please report it to the TAB room so the tournament staff can address the problem.

5. Turning in the ballot

Please be sure to clearly specify the winner on your ballot and hand the ballot in to the tournament staff, as instructed (e.g., at the ballot table). *Double check to be sure you correctly indicated the team that won the debate.*

Appendix – What to write on the ballot

In a debate on the topic, “*Resolved: North Korea poses a greater national security threat to the U.S. than Iran*”, a judge might write the following reason for decision.

Both teams agreed that “national security” means keeping both a country (including its military) and its allies safe from physical attack. I therefore considered the threat of nuclear war and the threat of terrorism in my decision.

The PRO argued that North Korea is a greater threat than Iran because only North Korea currently possesses nuclear weapons. But CON convinced me that North Korea will never use those weapons against the U.S. (too far away, anyway), South Korea, or Japan because doing so would assure an overwhelming response by the U.S. military.

CON concedes that Iran’s nuclear program is years from producing a weapon, but they point out that Iran has connections with terrorist organizations that are currently attacking Israel and U.S. troops in Afghanistan. CON convinces me that this ongoing terrorist threat is of greater importance than the unlikely prospect of North Korea launching a nuclear weapon.

I also disregarded PRO’s argument that North Korea is undermining U.S. national security by counterfeiting \$100 bills because this economic threat does not fit within the definition of “national security” agreed to by both teams in the debate.

Other comments: First PRO speaker should speak a little slower in constructive (shorten your speech if necessary). Both teams asked great questions in cross fire.