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**NORTH AMERICAN  
DEBATE CIRCUIT**

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# **Judge training**

# **Public Forum**

Level 1

1st edition

**“The White Rabbit put on his spectacles.  
'Where shall I begin, please your Majesty?'  
he asked. 'Begin at the beginning,' the King  
said gravely, 'and go on till you come to the  
end: then stop.”**

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# Overview

**Public Forum (PF)** is a category of debate.

Each debate has a team of 2 debaters supporting the topic, called the **Affirmative** or **Pro** team, and a team of 2 debaters opposing the topic, called the **Negative** or **Con** team.

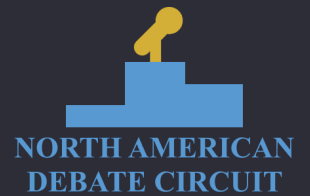


Teams take turns delivering arguments, asking questions, and attacking and defending their arguments. At the end of the round, the **Judge** votes on who won the debate, by voting for the **Affirmative** team or **Negative** team, and awards speaker points to each debater.

Example topic: The costs of a college education outweigh the benefits.



# Format



Every **Public Forum (PF)** round follows an identical structure, with the exception of which team speaks first.

Prior to the debate, a **coin toss** is held. The winning team gets to either choose their **side (Affirmative or Negative)**, or their **speaking order (1st or 2nd)**. The other team then chooses the remaining selection. When online, this is typically handled automatically by the debaters themselves.

Once the sides and order are set, the debate is ready to go. In a debate, there are **4 types of speeches**, and a **few special events in between**. Below, we'll go through each of them.

Example coin toss: Eagle Rock HS wins the coin toss, and chooses the Affirmative side. Their opponent, Central HS, chooses to speak 2nd.

Eagle Rock HS:  
Affirmative 1st  
Central HS:  
Negative 2nd



# The constructive speech



The first speech in a debate is called the **constructive speech**.

In the constructive speech, the 1st speaker of each team presents their arguments in favor of, or opposed to, the topic.

This is a pre-written speech, prepared with formatted structure, reasoning, and evidence. Typically, a team will offer 2 to 3 primary arguments, also called **contentions**. The goal of each argument is to provide a **central claim, reasoning and evidence for the claim, and a justification for why their claim is significant**. Each argument will connect back to why they "affirm" or "negate" the topic.

**Example topic: The costs of a college education outweigh the benefits.**

## **Shortened argument:**

1 - College is too expensive. Students loans costs tens of thousands of dollars, putting students into debt they can't afford. This hurts their economic opportunities.

# The rebuttal speech

The second speech in a debate is called the **rebuttal speech**.

In the rebuttal speech, the 2nd speaker of each team attacks the arguments presented in the opponent's constructive.

Generally, this will be a partially prepared speech, as debaters will have evidence and reasons prepared ahead of time to attack common arguments. The goal of the rebuttal speech is to **refute** what was presented in constructive. The debater will usually do this by:

- Disproving the opponent's argument,
- Showing why the opponent's argument does not matter,
- or Making the case that the opponent's argument actually helps their own side.

**Example refutation:** My opponent's first argument was that college is too expensive, creating burdensome student loans. However, college-educated adults earn significantly more money in their lifetime, allowing them the ability to pay off their loans and improve their life.

# The summary speech

The third speech in a debate is called the **summary speech**.

In the summary speech, the 1st speaker of each team begins to simplify the debate, while juggling a few tasks: defending their own arguments, continuing attacks on their opponent's arguments, and **weighing the most important arguments**.

If done correctly, the summary speech will begin placing what they believe to be the most important parts of the debate at the forefront of your consideration. After defending and attacking, if time remains, teams will typically **compare their arguments against their opponent's, or "weigh" the two sides**. The goal of weighing is to establish what argument matters the most in the debate. As a judge, it's important to listen to what the debaters argue matters most.

**(Affirmative) Meeting  
new friends vs.  
(Negative) Student  
Debt**

**Example weighing:** Student debt is more important than meeting new friends, because the negative effects of being pushed into poverty are far worse than the social benefits at college.



# The final focus speech

The last speech in a debate is called the **final focus speech**.

In the final focus speech, the 2nd speaker of each team concludes the round, with a singular goal of telling the judge why you should vote for their team.

Because speaking times decrease as the round progresses, the final focus will highlight the most important reasons for why the Affirmative or Negative wins the debate. If done correctly, each team will identify the strongest points for affirming or negating the topic, show how they won those arguments, and offer you reasons why they should win overall.

**Importantly, the final focus does not make brand new arguments; instead, it assess the debate round, and makes it clear which side is right.**

**Shortened Affirmative Final Focus example:** We proved that college students earn more money over their lifetime. Their only attack was that they have to take on loans, but we defended this by showing that a higher income means they can pay off these loans. Because the economic benefits of a college education lifts millions out of poverty, you should vote for the Affirmative.

# Crossfire



Throughout the debate, a special **question and answer period** takes place in between the speeches, called a **crossfire**.

In a crossfire, debaters from each team take turns asking each other questions about points made in speeches.

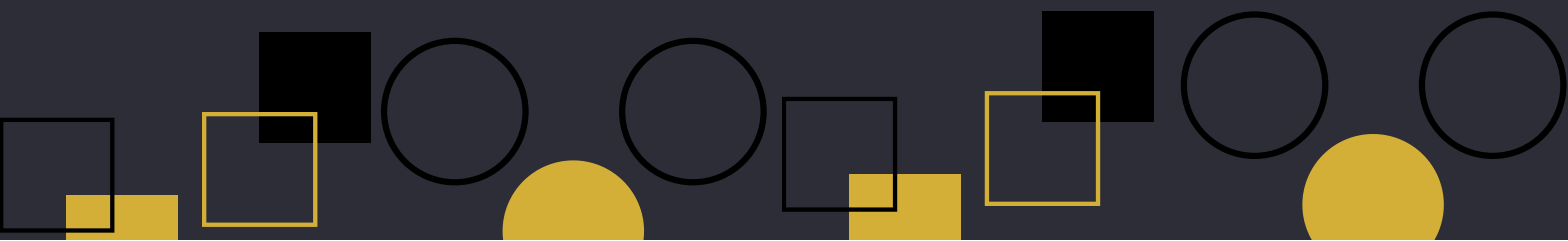
There is only rule: **whichever team spoke first gets to ask the first question**. From there, the debaters engage in a back-and-forth, which may turn into responding to each other, but is centered around questions.

Crossfires occur after each of the first three speeches.

**1st crossfire - After constructive, between the 1st speakers.**

**2nd crossfire - After rebuttal, between the 2nd speakers.**

**Grand crossfire - After summary, between all speakers.**



# Prep time



Throughout the debate, both teams have **prep time, 3 minutes of allocated time to prepare as they wish between various speeches.**

Both sides have their own 3 minutes of prep time. Prep time can be used in any amount **between, but not during, any speech.**

If one team is using part of their prep time, the other team is also allowed to prepare, but it does not subtract from their time.

Debaters are expected to inform the judge when they are using prep time, and judges are expected to keep track and hold debaters accountable.

If a team runs out of prep time, they are expected to deliver their next speech near-immediately.

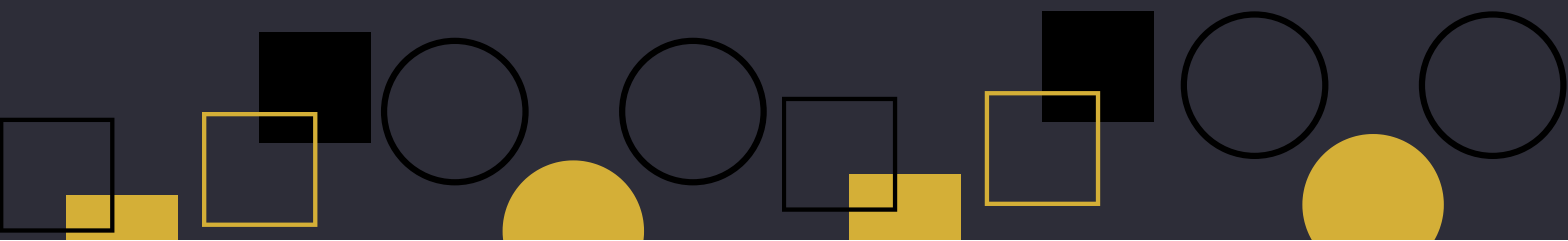


# Speech times



1st speaker of 1st team	Constructive	4
1st speaker of 2nd team	Constructive	4
1st speakers	1st Crossfire	3
2nd speaker of 1st team	Rebuttal	4
2nd speaker of 2nd team	Rebuttal	4
2nd speakers	2nd Crossfire	3
1st speaker of 1st team	Summary	3
1st speaker of 2nd team	Summary	3
All speakers	Grand Crossfire	3
2nd speaker of 1st team	Final Focus	2
2nd speaker of 2nd team	Final Focus	2

Prep time per team: 3 minutes



# Role of a judge



Before talking about how to judge a round, it's important to cover your role.



During the debate, you should think of yourself as a **referee**.

Like a referee in a sport, you are **not interfering in the debate in any way**. You cannot argue, ask your own questions, or participate in debating.

Also like a referee, you **are responsible for ensuring everyone follows the rules**. You should keep track of speaking order, speaking time, and prep time. If a team is speaking past their time or out of turn, it's your job to step in.

Generally, debaters are good about keeping track of their own time. Judges usually allow debaters to finish their sentence when time is up.



# How to judge a round



At the end of a debate, it is your job to evaluate the arguments, and decide who won.



Judging a round is both simple and complicated. Although you will hear a lot of arguments, evidence, and reasoning, following simple guidelines will make you an accurate and fair judge in every debate.

## Be a blank slate.

You are deciding which team won the debate, not which side you believe is actually correct.

Do not let personal opinions or facts not discussed in the round influence the decision. Try to judge only on the arguments made by the teams, not other things that you think you know. Minimize your own arguments.

## Be fair.

Treat everyone with respect and judge them fairly.

Be aware of implicit biases, including appearances, accents, age, pitch, gender, etc. There can be many different styles of debate that are persuasive and valid. You are judging arguments, not kids!

## Be specific.

Your decision should identify the arguments that were either critically persuasive or lackluster.

Don't just say: "Affirmative proved its points better." That is not a reason. Instead, reference which arguments were effective and why they were the most effective. Take into account all points made.

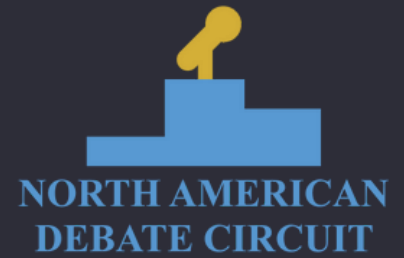
## Be clear.

Your goal is simply to explain why you are making your decision.

You owe them only fairness and a clear explanation. Sometimes, there will be legitimate ways vote for either team, and teams may disagree with you. That's okay: everyone learns from judging and debating.

# Speaker points

In addition to voting for who won, a judge will also evaluate the speaking of each debater.



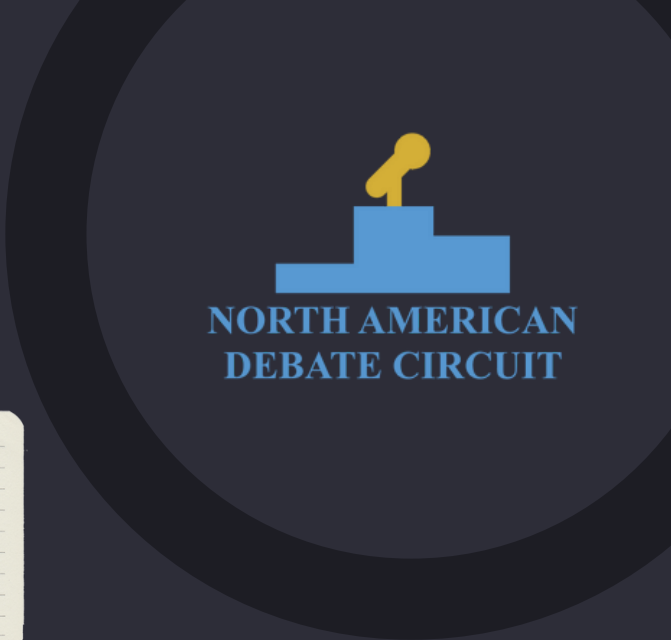
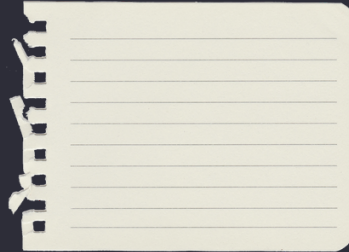
This is **separate from who won the round**. In other words, it is possible for a team to win the debate, but have worse speaker points. Perhaps, for example, they were less confident and articulate, but presented stronger arguments with better evidence.

Debaters are scored individually on a scale of 25-30 points. Depending on the tournament, you might be able to score in increments of .5s or .1s.

30	Flawless/near-perfect speaking.
29	Fantastic speaking.
28	Good to great speaking.
27	Decent to good speaking.
26	Poor or decent speaking.
25	Bad to poor speaking.
<b>Less than 25</b>	Egregiously bad speaking, such as rudely insulting an opponent, or speaking substantially less than their time allows, such as 1 out of 4 minutes.

# Taking notes

Taking notes on the debate, or **flowing**, is critical to deciding who won. We strongly recommend a *specific* way of taking notes.



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The easiest way to keep track of everything is to follow 3 simple rules:

- 1) Have two pieces of paper, one for each side of the debate.
- 2) Orient your paper *horizontally* (not the normal way).
- 3) Use lots of abbreviations, avoid complete sentences.

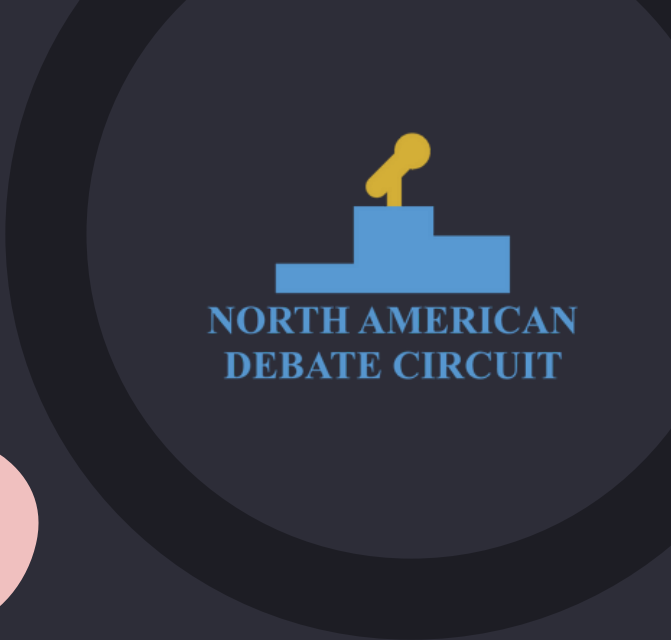
Then, you can keep track of a round in a way like this:

<u>Negative</u>	<u>Affirmative</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Negative</u>
<u>1 - wages</u>	<u>Rebuttal</u>	Summary	<u>Final focus</u>
college edu = more \$ 23% more	many people are rich w/o college, and edu = debt	on average, college = more \$ pay off debt	\$ matters the most
<u>2 - friends</u>			more \$ = no poverty
college -> social life = happier	friends can be made at a job too		can pay off debt



# Best practices

To make everything run as smooth as possible for everyone, there's a few best practices to follow and know about.



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Be prepared to **disclose**. Disclosing is explaining your vote, out loud, to the teams at the end of the round. While not required, it's highly appreciated by debaters. You are more than welcome to spend a few minutes deciding who to vote for.



Debaters are allowed to ask to see their opponent's **evidence**. In fact, it's required if a team asks to see it. It's expected that a debater can produce the source and the quote, and will typically email it or place it in chat if online.



Confirm your **ballot** is correct. Your ballot is where you vote, and where the teams are assigned their speaking order and side. It's wise to double check with the debaters that your ballot matches what they're debating, so that you don't vote wrong.



Pay attention in the round. Debaters benefit by seeing your reaction to arguments. If you're debating online, please keep your camera on.





# Debate Glossary

Debaters love their jargon. Here's a cheat sheet so you're not lost.



**Aff** - affirmative. Supporting the topic.

**Card** - another word for evidence.

**Case** - the arguments read in the first speech.

"Aff case"

**Claim** - an assertion.

**Cross-examination/CX** - another name for Crossfire.

**De-link** - to disprove part of an argument.

**Drop** - when a debater does not address or respond to a subpoint or argument. As a judge, this means they conceded the argument.

**Extend** - to keep an argument in play for the judge to consider

**Flow** - a piece of paper where notes on the debate are taken.

**Going down the flow** - indicates a debater will respond to arguments in the order they were presented.

**Impact** - the significance of a claim. Typically quantified ("1 million lives")

**Lay judge** - a judge with minimal experience in debate.

**Link** - a connection between two parts of an argument.

**Neg** - negative. Opposing the topic.

**Non-unique** - used to indicate that a particular point is true no matter what, and therefore doesn't matter.

**Paradigm** - the preferences and experience of a judge.

**Resolution** - the topic being debated.

**Roadmap** - an outline of the order a debater will present their speech.

**Signpost** - to indicate where one is on the flow.

**Spreading** - "speed reading" (talking fast)

**Turn** - to flip someone's argument against them. Used to indicate the opposite of what someone said is true, or that the argument benefits the other side.

**Warrant** - a reason why an assertion is true.

RFD - reason for decision.

**Voting issue** - an issue that a debater wishes to signal is worthy of being the reason you vote for them to win.

**Weigh** - to compare the importance of arguments, especially their impacts.



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# Have fun judging!

This judge training packet was made by the North American Debate Circuit. We offer low-cost, monthly, online tournaments accessible for all.

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