

Public Forum Debate Judging Instructions



Thank you for judging! We're so glad that you're making this commitment to the students' education. Prepare for an entertaining, informative, and uplifting experience as you watch students with a broad range of experience practice their communication skills.

- WHY AM I NEEDED?

Each school is obligated to provide a certain number of judges for the tournament based upon the total number of entries from that school. Every school's judges are placed within a "judging pool." You will be asked to judge competitors from *other* schools, although occasionally, you might be sent to a room that contains a competitor from your school.

WHAT DO I NEED TO BRING?

In order to judge, you need just a few basic supplies:

- Two or three pens or pencils (just in case one breaks!) for filling out your *Ballots* and writing comments.
- A timepiece for timing the debates—either a digital watch with a stopwatch function OR any other timepiece or timer that you can easily track.
- A book, newspaper, project, or any other material of your choice to fill any waiting time between rounds

WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN I GET TO THE TOURNAMENT?

1. At the entrance to the tournament school, look for a sign to direct you toward The Judges' Room.
2. Register at the Judges' Registration Table. You will be asked:
 - Your name, ☺
 - The school for which you are judging
3. Please wait in the Judges' Room until you are called to judge a particular event.
 - Due to the number of contestants and judges that we must accommodate, we are unable to assign judges to their preferred events.
 - If you leave the Judges' Room and are not present when called, your school may face consequences, such as speakers not advancing in the tournament.
4. When you are called, **take the *Ballot* with you to your assigned room.** If more than one judge is assigned to your room, you should walk together to your room and return together.

Please be on time! Competitors from your school may not be able to compete if you are late or absent.

WHAT IF I'VE NEVER JUDGED BEFORE?

Don't worry! We want the students to learn to communicate with all sorts of audiences. Review this packet,, observe the debate, pick which team you think debated better, and...ta da!...you're a judge!

You will have the opportunity to give each competitor feedback on the ballot, which they will receive after the awards ceremony. As we all know, students are most receptive to feedback when suggestions for improvement are balanced with praise, and we hope your recommendations will encourage them to continue their hard work. You will never have to orally explain or justify your rankings or comments to the students.

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HOW DO TOURNAMENTS WORK?

At SDIVSL Tournaments, all debaters compete in a set number of rounds and awards are based on record. However, at the State Qualifier Tournament and many invitational tournaments, debaters are eliminated as the tournament progresses.

Preliminary Rounds: Debate teams are randomly assigned to the first few rounds, and at a specified time they will be instructed to go to a classroom to compete. One judge will be sent to the room to judge the round. The judge will listen to the debate and decide who they think did the better job debating.

Out Rounds/Elimination Rounds: After the preliminary rounds, wins/losses are tabulated to determine the top teams. Those with the best win/loss records will advance to "out rounds", and the others are eliminated from the competition. This continues until there are only two teams left to compete for the win.

WHAT IS PUBLIC FORUM DEBATE?

This event is designed to bring citizen judges and high school debaters together in an educational and productive encounter. The pro team tries to convince you that the resolution is true while the con team tries to convince you that the resolution is not true. This activity was designed to teach excellent critical thinking and public presentation skills, so debaters typically communicate an air of professionalism in their dress, demeanor, and delivery. The debate topic changes monthly.

IN GENERAL, HOW SHOULD I JUDGE PUBLIC FORUM?

1. **Tell the students to wait while you take a few moments to get ready to judge.** As soon as the following items are done, you are ready:
 - Allow the competitors who are assigned to your room to enter and find seats.
 - Find a seat that gives you a clear view of the front of the room where the competitors will speak. Some judges like to sit near the front; others like to sit toward the back.
 - Double-check that you are not *closely* or *personally* acquainted with any of the debaters in the room. (*If so, please return to the Judges' Room for reassignment.*)
 - Check that all assigned judges have arrived.
 - Test your timepiece.
 - Place your pen/pencil and scratch paper on your desk along with the *Ballot*.
2. **Take "attendance".** Check to make sure the teams in the room are the ones you are supposed to judge. If you are in error—alert the students and get the right kids into your room or go to the right room.
3. **Fill out the top portion of the ballot.** At the beginning of the round, write the code, team school and initials, your name, round number and the names of the students on the ballot. Again, make sure you have the right debaters.
4. **Tell the debaters what type of debate you prefer.** Consider discussing what arguments you like most or any other preferences you have that the debaters can adapt to. **IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN A DEBATE BEFORE--TELL THEM.** Do not take more than 5 minutes to explain judging philosophy, answer questions, or engage the participants prior to the debate
5. **Begin the debate.** The team that speaks first in the debate should be listed on the left side of the ballot and

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sit on the left side of the room as you, the judge, look at the debaters. Please pay close attention when recording the team code and side. You can ask teams for this information again if you are uncertain.

6. **During the debate:** Judges need to monitor speaking times during the round. Each team has two minutes of preparation time total) in each round to use before their speeches.

First Speaker - Team A = 4 Minutes

First Speaker - Team B = 4 Minutes

Crossfire = 3 Minutes

Second Speaker - Team A = 4 Minutes

Second Speaker - Team B = 4 Minutes

Crossfire = 3 Minutes

Summary - First Speaker - Team A = 2 Minutes

Summary - First Speaker - Team B = 2 Minutes

Grand Crossfire = 3 Minutes

Final Focus - Second Speaker - Team A = 1 Minute

Final Focus - Second Speaker - Team B = 1 Minute

Prep Time (per team) = 2 Minutes

Judges should not ask questions or otherwise interrupt the round. Debaters directly question each other only during the Crossfire segments, with the team that spoke first asking the first question. Debaters should not expect any response from the judge. Judges are advised that plans and counterplans by either team are not allowed and that the Final Focus must deal only with issues previously raised in the debate. Judges should be objective and judge the debate on the quality of the arguments made, not on personal beliefs or on the arguments you wish they had made.

7. **After the debate:** DO NOT GIVE ORAL CRITIQUES. DO NOT DISCLOSE THE WINNER OF THE DEBATE TO THE COMPETITORS. Please pay close attention to the side that each team chose in the debate and which spoke first and last. Check your codes carefully. This is especially important when marking the winner of the debate. Judges should not reveal their decision at the end of the round. In your written comments, please be as encouraging and educational as possible.

The judge should circle the winning team on the ballot. In addition, the judge should assign speaker points for each individual debater. Speaker points represent individual achievement in the debate. For example, how effectively did each of the individual speakers present her/his ideas? Was the speech well organized? Were arguments logical and consistent? Did the arguments make a convincing case? Was the speech delivered in a persuasive manner?

Although speaker points are on a 30-point scale (the score of 30 represents a perfect score), the range of points, in practical terms, is generally 30-22 points. Here is a model scale:

- 30 points Magnificent speech; the judge will not be likely to ever hear this sort of speech again
- 29 points Outstanding speech; a rare presentation akin to the finest public speeches in politics
- 28 points An extraordinary achievement in interscholastic debate; an impressive performance
- 27 points Consistently strong performance; superior delivery and content
- 26 points Well above average; only subtly flawed performance
- 25 points A solid speech but, perhaps, an uninspiring or unspectacular one
- 24 points An average speech; flawed in at least one major way
- 23 points Below average presentation with several major flaws but some well made points
- 22 An inexperienced speaker; the speech is flawed in several major ways
- 21 and lower Any points below this ranking ought to be reserved for exceptional circumstances, for

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example, thoroughly obnoxious, offensive or unethical conduct by a debater

8. **Include the reason for decision on your ballot.** Explain in, at least, a paragraph, which issues convinced you to vote the way that you did. If you need more room, ask the ballot table for an additional ballot
9. **Check your ballot carefully before you turn it in.** Did you:
 - declare a winner
 - assign team speaker points
 - provide useful suggestions for improvement
 - justify your decision thoroughly
 - sign the ballot
10. **Return your ballot to the judges room IMMEDIATELY.** Then, please wait in the Judge's Room for your next judging assignment. If you leave the Judges' Room and are not present when called, your school may face consequences.

JUDGING TIPS

- Model professional, respectful behavior at all times. Treat all students, coaches, and other tournament participants with civility and kindness. Do not tolerate rude or disrespectful behavior from contestants, and report any such behavior to the student's coach and the tab room. Follow all announced tournament policies and instructions.
- Recuse yourself from any possible conflicts of interest. The following are examples of relationships to students that constitute conflicts of interest: past teammate, present or past coach, paid assistant, parent or other relative, personal friend. Notify the tab room immediately if you have a possible conflict of interest.
- Judge the debaters on the quality of the arguments they make, not on your own personal beliefs or on the arguments you wish they had made. Set aside personal biases as much as possible. Remember that the debaters must prepare to debate both sides and that they cannot read your mind. They can respond only to the arguments their opponents actually make.
- Prefer balanced, straightforward interpretations of the resolution to unfair or obscure interpretations. If the debaters offer different interpretations of the resolution, make your decision on the basis of whichever interpretation better fits ordinary English usage and provides more equal grounds for reasonable public debate.
- Assess the bearing of each argument on the truth or falsehood of the assigned resolution. The pro should prove that the resolution is true, and the con should prove that the resolution is not true. Arguments unrelated to the truth or falsehood of the resolution should not influence your decision. A good question to ask as you decide each round is, "If I had no prior beliefs about this resolution, would the round as a whole have made me more likely to believe the resolution was true or not true?"
- Prefer quality and depth to mere quantity of arguments. Reward students who present well-explained arguments. Judge the quality of arguments presented in the round as a whole. To promote quality debate, do not penalize students for failing to address frivolous or minor points due to time constraints.
- Consider quoted evidence only as support for arguments explained by the debaters. Well-chosen

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evidence may strengthen arguments. However, quoted evidence should not replace arguments by the debaters, and all evidence should be relevant.

- Treat clear communication as a major consideration. Remember that PFD is a speech communication event. Weigh arguments only to the extent that they are clearly explained. It is acceptable to discount arguments that are too fast, too garbled, or too jargon-laden to be understood by an intelligent high school student or a well-informed citizen. Do not penalize a debater for failing to understand his or her opponent's unclear arguments.
- Write constructive suggestions for each team and a thorough reason for decision. Students and coaches appreciate your comments. The ballot is a valuable educational tool for students and their coaches long after the tournament is over.
- Pursue suspected dishonesty with tournament officials after the round. If you believe a student is plagiarizing, fabricating, or otherwise misusing research sources, notify the tournament director after the debate and let him/her take the appropriate steps.

PUBLIC FORUM FOR THE DETAIL-ORIENTED

CROSSFIRE

Q. What is crossfire?

A. Both debaters "hold the floor." But the first question must be asked by an opponent to the speaker who just finished speaking. After that question and answer, either debater may question and/or answer at will. Debaters should stand during regular Crossfire.

Q. Won't this create confusion?

A. As students practice the format, they will learn valuable lessons: that an advocate may be more effective with good answers than asking questions; that good questions must be brief; that filibuster answers will be exposed; that rudeness will be penalized by judges.

Q. Public Forum Debate sounds like TV debate shows?

A. Right! Capital Gang, Crossfire, McLaughlin Group et al do this each week. Crossfire adds excitement to the debate process which attracts audiences and the media. Your principal will love to see a Public Forum Debate!

Q. Won't debaters abuse this format?

A. Not if they want to be successful! Adult judges from the community will be using a ballot which calls for questions to be "brief" and answers to be "on point". Contestants will be penalized for rudeness and poor communication.

Q. What is the Grand Crossfire?

A. All four debaters have the floor to interact with questions and answers. This is a real test of teamwork. The first question is asked by the team that had the first summary to the team which had the last summary. After that, any debater may question or answer. Debaters should be seated for Grand Crossfire.

Q. Does the judge ever ask questions?

A. This is not a common practice.

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Q. I'm still worried that the crossfire periods will be "Towers of Babel"

A. The judge is chairperson of the round and may halt any crossfire out of control. Most debaters will learn that interrupting, shouting, filibustering (all of which may also occur in Policy and LD cross examination periods) are counter productive.

FINAL FOCUS

Q. What is "Final Focus"?

A. The "Final Focus" is a persuasive final restatement of why your team has won the debate. This speech might begin "Judge this is why you should vote (pro or con). "Final Focus" trains students to choose what is vital to decision-making. "Final Focus" must be based on arguments and issues previously addressed in the debate. New arguments in the Final Focus are to be ignored by the judge.

SUMMARY SPEECHES

Q. Are the summary speeches the same as rebuttals?

A. Yes. Each team should summarize key arguments it is winning and refute the important arguments it is losing.

Q. Can new information be presented in the summary and Final Focus speeches?

A. Yes. Facts, opinions, statistics -- evidence of all kinds are legal and welcome to advance the debate. New arguments in summary and Final Focus speeches are forbidden. An answer in response to an argument originally presented by the opposition is not a new argument.

TOPICS AND RESEARCH

Q. When are topics announced?

A. A new topic will be announced the first day of each preceding month at www.nflonline.org. The National Tournament topic is released on May 15th.

Q. Who chooses the topics?

A. A topic committee has been set up to make topic selections.

Q. How should topics be researched?

A. Newspapers, news magazines, online news sites, books.

Q. Is evidence necessary?

A. Yes. This is a debate event. Arguments must be supported by evidence.

Q. How much evidence should be presented?

A. Public Forum Debate is audience debate. Present enough evidence to prove your arguments but not so much as to destroy good communication with a community judge.

ARGUMENTATION

Q. Are Plans and Counterplans allowed?

A. No. In Public Forum Debate, a plan or counterplan is defined by the NFL as a formalized, comprehensive proposal for implementation. Neither the pro or con side is permitted to offer a plan or counterplan; rather, they should offer reasoning to support a position of advocacy. Debaters may offer generalized, practical solutions.

Q. Are kritiks banned?

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- A. Yes. Kritiks, which are off topic arguments, are not allowed. Public Forum Debate should stick to issues within the proposition -- not outside issues.

JUDGES

Q. Who judges?

- A. Almost any adult in the community: salesmen, librarians, retired teachers, business people -- a typical American jury. The use of community judges is strongly encouraged. However, any adult can judge.

Q. How should a judge evaluate the Final Focus?

- A. Each debater will select what s/he believes is the voting issue(s); the judge should vote on one of these unless the judge feels the debaters have ignored the critical issue.

Q. Why are judges required to identify their voting issue?

- A. In order to make sure arguments play a part in the decision. Although superior communication must be rewarded, Public Forum Debate is debate, not just public speaking.

BALLOT

Q. Why are there team speaker points?

- A. Points are awarded to facilitate tie breaking in regular invitationals and to create a reasonable and consistent standard. Team speaker points recognize team excellence rather than individual speaker excellence.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I've been waiting for a long time and I still have not been called to judge. Why?

Gee, only 25 minutes? Tournament administrators do the best they can to avoid long waits for judges, but it takes time to tabulate results, assign match-ups and prepare ballots, especially at large tournament. They also need to be sure that judges are not assigned to rounds containing their own school's participants. Complications sometimes arise. Students and judges are sometimes late to rounds, and judges sometimes forget to return in their *Ballots*.

Make sure that you report to the Judges' Room when you complete a round. Feel free to do personal work or read while you wait and enjoy the refreshments and company of other parents. Chances are you will see them again at the next tournament!

Give me some idea of what I am I supposed to write on the Comment Sheets?

Thanks for asking this question! Students can't wait to read judges' comments. What you say to them will have an impact on how they refine their piece for the next tournament. Be specific, be constructive, and give pluses and minuses. Remember, speaking in public is a lot harder than these kids make it look!

What do I do if I know one of the contestants in the room to which I'm assigned?

You should come back to the Judges' Room to report the situation and be reassigned.

What if a topic, message, or language personally offends me?

For the most part, do your best to remain unbiased and don't let your personal opinions affect your evaluation of a student's debate. Judge their arguments, clash and speaking ability. Let the student know via your written comments on the *ballot*. If the speech is extremely offensive, you may wish to make a note of the student's code, come to the judge's desk after the round, and ask to speak to the student's coach.

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How about lunch?

Judges are usually, at a minimum, provided with meals – generally breakfast, lunch and dinner, with snacks in between. Please note this food is provided for the judges only; please do not share the food with the students.

This is fun! When can I do it again?

If you enjoy your judging experience, we'll be happy to have you return to judge! We have tournaments throughout the year and we're always in need of judges! Know a friend or a neighbor who you think would like to do this? Please let the coach at your school know. And, again, thank you! We could not have a tournament if it weren't for people like you!