



# How a Public Forum Round Works.

For first-time PF debaters and their parents. Learn who speaks when, how long each part lasts, what crossfire is, and how prep time and the coin flip work, so nothing about round day feels like a surprise.

## The big picture

Public Forum (PF) is a team debate. Two students per side argue a resolution, which is a single statement about a real-world issue (for example, whether a policy should be adopted). One side is **Pro** (supports the resolution) and the other is **Con** (opposes it). Many PF judges are volunteers with no debate background, so clear speaking matters as much as strong arguments.

A full round has **eight speeches** and **three crossfires** (short question-and-answer periods). Both teammates speak in each round, and each partner has a job in every part of the debate.

## Speech order and times

This is the order and timing in the NSDA schedule used for its district and national tournaments. Other leagues and local circuits can adjust lengths, so always check the rules for your own tournament. Some older rulebooks and guides still list 2-minute summaries, so confirm yours.

| ORDER | PART            | WHO                    | NSDA TIME |
|-------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------|
| 1     | Constructive    | Team A, first speaker  | 4 min     |
| 2     | Constructive    | Team B, first speaker  | 4 min     |
| 3     | Crossfire       | Both first speakers    | 3 min     |
| 4     | Rebuttal        | Team A, second speaker | 4 min     |
| 5     | Rebuttal        | Team B, second speaker | 4 min     |
| 6     | Crossfire       | Both second speakers   | 3 min     |
| 7     | Summary         | Team A, first speaker  | 3 min     |
| 8     | Summary         | Team B, first speaker  | 3 min     |
| 9     | Grand crossfire | All four debaters      | 3 min     |
| 10    | Final focus     | Team A, second speaker | 2 min     |
| 11    | Final focus     | Team B, second speaker | 2 min     |

Notice the pattern: the **first speaker** gives the constructive and the summary. The **second speaker** gives the rebuttal and the final focus. Each partner also takes part in a crossfire.

## What each part is for

### Constructive

Build your case: 2 or 3 main arguments (contentions), each with evidence and a reason it matters. You are laying the foundation.

### Rebuttal

Attack the other side's case and, in many rounds, rebuild your own against their attacks. Be organized and quick.

### Summary

Pick your strongest arguments, explain why you are winning them, and begin to explain which issues matter most.

### Final focus

Your last word to the judge. Give two or three clear reasons to vote for you. No brand new arguments.

### Crossfire

Both debaters stand or sit and trade questions and answers. Use it to expose weak points and set up later speeches.

### Grand crossfire

All four debaters take part together. Everyone gets to ask, and a good team shares the time fairly.

## Prep time and the coin flip

- ♦ **Prep time** is a bank of time each team can use between speeches to organize thoughts and pull evidence. Three minutes per team is the NSDA amount and the most common, but some tournaments give more or less, and rules can limit when prep may be used. Check your tournament.
- ♦ **The coin flip** usually decides who chooses what. The NSDA rule: the winner of the flip chooses either the side (Pro or Con) or the speaking position (first or second), and the other team gets the remaining choice. Some leagues set sides or speaking order differently, so confirm locally.
- ♦ **Speaking first** means you present your case first; **speaking second** means you answer their case in your rebuttal after hearing it. Neither is automatically better. Many coaches prefer to be flexible and prepared for both.

## Round-day timeline for a beginner

- 1 **Check in.** Find your room on the posting. Arrive 15 minutes early.
- 2 **Meet the other team.** Shake hands, confirm names, and do the coin flip.
- 3 **Tell the judge your choices.** Say which side and speaking position each team has, and ask whether the judge has questions.
- 4 **Debate.** Follow the order in the table. A timekeeper (often a competitor, sometimes the judge) tracks time.
- 5 **Listen to the decision.** Many tournaments give a written ballot or oral feedback. Thank the judge either way.

### Parent tip

Ask your student to say the speech order aloud once a night for a week. When they know who speaks when, nerves drop quickly. Want a plan built around your debater? Book a free consultation at the link below.

**Built from public guidance:** NSDA Public Forum Debate event page ([speechanddebate.org](http://speechanddebate.org)) · NSDA Public Forum Pilot Rules 2019-2020 · NSDA District Tournament Manual PF rules (as posted by Oregon School Activities Association) · Wikipedia: Public forum debate. Rules change by league and tournament, so always confirm against your tournament invitation and current league rules.

### NOTES

Want a plan built around **your** debater?

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