



PF Rebuttal and Summary: **Line-by-Line, Weighing, Collapsing.**

The middle of a PF round is where rounds are won. This guide shows students how to answer arguments in order, choose what to keep, and start telling the judge why it matters.

What changes after the constructives

Constructives present cases. The rebuttal and summary speeches turn the round into a comparison. The judge no longer asks 'Is this argument good?' but 'Whose argument is better, and why?'

SPEECH	MAIN JOB	ROUGH TIME SPLIT
Rebuttal	Respond to the opposing case; in many rounds, also rebuild your own after attacks	Varies by style; about half attack, half defense is common
Summary	Narrow to your best arguments and begin weighing	Pick 1 or 2 issues
Final focus	Last clear reasons to vote	Mirror the summary

Speech lengths vary by league (in the NSDA schedule the rebuttal is 4 minutes and the summary is 3). Check your tournament.

Line-by-line in four steps

Line-by-line means answering arguments in the order the other side presented them, so the judge can follow on paper.

- 1 Signpost.** Say where you are: 'On their first contention, three responses.'
- 2 Number your responses.** 'One... two... three...' Numbers help the judge flow.
- 3 Name the type.** Is it a denial ('that is not true'), a delink ('that does not cause this'), or an impact turn ('that actually helps us')?
- 4 Cite and move on.** Give the evidence (author, year, key line) and go to the next response.

Sample rebuttal block

'On their contention about cost, two responses. One, their evidence is from before the policy changed, so it is outdated. Two, even if costs rise, our contention shows benefits that are larger. Moving on to their second contention.'

Collapsing: choosing what to keep

Collapsing means dropping weaker arguments to spend the summary on your strongest. A team that tries to defend everything in three minutes ends up defending nothing clearly.

- ♦ Keep the argument you are clearly winning.
 - ♦ Keep the argument with the largest impact.
 - ♦ Drop arguments that need more time than you have.
 - ♦ Do not drop an argument if the opponent's answer to it is still unanswered and damaging. Fix it or turn it into a smaller point.
- ☐ Name the 1 or 2 issues you are going for.
 - ☐ Extend them: restate the claim, warrant and impact.
 - ☐ Answer their best response to each.
 - ☐ Give a one-sentence reason you win each one.

Weighing begins in summary

Weighing is comparing impacts. Starting it in summary gives the other side less chance to react. Common comparisons are magnitude, probability, timeframe and scope (see the weighing guide in this series).

Template: 'Even if they win their point, our impact is more important because it affects more people and happens sooner.'

COMMON MISTAKE	FIX
Reading new evidence in the second summary	Many judges and leagues expect new arguments to stop after rebuttal. Check your league and ask your coach.
Repeating the case word for word	Extend the idea in new words and answer responses.
Not mentioning what the opponent said	Say their argument and then the answer to it.
Talking too fast	Keep points to a clear count: 'two reasons.'

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) · NSDA Public Forum Pilot Rules 2019-2020 · 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?

Book a free consultation. The short intake takes about a minute and opens right away.

BOOK NOW →