



Weighing in PF: Magnitude, Probability, Timeframe, Scope.

When both teams have good arguments, the judge needs a reason to prefer one. Weighing gives them that reason. Learn the four most common weighing tools, with plain-language examples and practice.

Why weighing wins rounds

Imagine both teams prove their impacts are real. The judge still has to choose. Weighing compares the impacts directly. Without it, the judge decides alone, and may choose in a way you did not expect.

Remember

Weighing is not repeating how important your impact is. It is comparing your impact to theirs, side by side.

The four common mechanisms

MECHANISM	QUESTION	SENTENCE STARTER
Magnitude	How big or severe is the impact?	Our impact is larger because it is more severe...
Probability	How likely is it to actually happen?	Our impact is more likely because we have evidence it is already happening...
Timeframe	How soon does it happen, and how long does it last?	Our impact happens first, before theirs can matter...
Scope	How many people are affected?	Our impact affects far more people...

These four are commonly taught, but lists differ by coach and source (one public reference lists scope, magnitude and prerequisite). Other tools exist too, such as reversibility (can the harm be undone?) and strength of evidence. Your coach or your league may use different names for these. The skill is the same: compare, explain why, and say it clearly.

Worked example

Practice topic: **Should schools ban phones in class?** Pro says it improves focus for every student. Con says it hurts emergency communication for a few students.

TOOL	PRO WEIGHS	CON WEIGHS
Scope	Every student in every class is affected daily.	Only a small group needs urgent contact.
Probability	Distraction happens daily; evidence shows it.	Emergencies are rare, and schools have other ways to reach families.
Magnitude	Lost learning is moderate for each student.	A real emergency could be severe for the one affected.

TOOL	PRO WEIGHS	CON WEIGHS
Timeframe	Focus benefits are immediate and ongoing.	Emergencies are sudden but occasional.

A good weighing statement: 'Even if emergencies matter, they are rare, but the loss of focus happens to every student every day. That makes our impact more likely and larger in scope.'

Weighing practice

- 1

Pick two impacts. Write one from each side of any practice topic.
- 2

Pick one mechanism. Say a one-sentence comparison using it.
- 3

Pick a second mechanism. Say another sentence. Notice which one is stronger for your side.
- 4

Answer the other team's weighing. Say why your mechanism matters more than theirs. This is called meta-weighing.

MY WEIGHING SENTENCES

- ☐ I can name all four mechanisms without notes.
- ☐ I always compare my impact to theirs by name.
- ☐ I choose the mechanism where my side is strongest.
- ☐ I start weighing in the summary, not only in final focus.

Want a plan built around your debater? Book a free consultation at the link below.

Built from public guidance: Wikipedia: Public forum debate · NSDA Public Forum Debate event page (speechanddebate.org). Rules change by league and tournament, so always confirm against your tournament invitation and current league rules.

NOTES

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

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