



PF Evidence: Finding, Cutting, Citing.

Good evidence wins rounds and honest evidence protects your reputation. This guide covers where to look, how to cut a card, how paraphrasing works, and what an evidence challenge means.

Finding good sources

Evidence is a quote, statistic or finding from a source used to support a claim. Stronger sources make stronger arguments.

SOURCE TYPE	WHY USE IT	WATCH FOR
Peer-reviewed studies	Reviewed by experts	Technical language, small samples
Government and agency reports	Often data-rich	Check the date and purpose
Major news outlets	Easy to read, timely	Opinion pieces are not evidence of facts
Think-tank reports	Detailed analysis	Know the organization's viewpoint
Random blogs or social posts	Rarely worth using	Unknown author, no way to verify

- ♦ Write down author, credentials, publication, date and web address as you find each source.
- ♦ Prefer recent sources for fast-changing issues.
- ♦ Read the whole article, not just the sentence you like. The rest may say something different.

How to cut a card

A card is a piece of evidence prepared for use in a round. Cutting a card means selecting the portion of a source that supports your claim and keeping the citation attached.

- 1 Find the passage.** Choose the paragraph that most directly supports your tagline.
- 2 Copy the exact words.** Include enough surrounding text that the meaning is not changed.
- 3 Write the tagline above it.** One sentence that matches what the text actually says.
- 4 Add the citation.** Author last name, year, credentials, publication, title, date accessed, link, and page numbers.
- 5 Highlight or mark what you will read aloud.** Leave the full text visible so anyone can check context.
- 6 Check for honesty.** Ask: would the author agree with how I am using this?

Never

Never change words inside a quote, add words that are not there, or cut in a way that reverses the author's meaning. That is called misrepresenting evidence.

Paraphrasing and citing aloud

Paraphrasing means summarizing a source in your own words instead of reading the quote exactly. Whether and how it is allowed **varies by league and tournament**. Governing bodies have in recent years tightened expectations, and some leagues require debaters to point to the specific lines in the source. Read your tournament's rules and ask your coach.

- ♦ Whatever the rules, a paraphrase must be accurate to the source. You can be challenged on it just like a direct quote.
- ♦ Say the author's last name and the year aloud when you introduce evidence (the NSDA judge guide requires both).
- ♦ Keep the original source available so you can show it if the other team or judge asks.

Evidence challenges and requests

Teams may ask to see each other's evidence. Many tournaments expect you to produce a cited source within a reasonable amount of time, and some have a posted time limit. Procedures for a formal challenge differ, so read the rules in your tournament packet. For reference, the NSDA judge guide for debate evidence says a debater asked for a source should provide it promptly, paraphrased evidence needs its original source available, internal ellipses in read evidence are prohibited unless they replicate the original, and distortion, clipping or non-existent evidence can cost a debater the round. It describes itself as a guide, not a replacement for the actual rules.

SITUATION	WHAT TO DO
Opponent asks for your card	Share quickly and calmly; have source files ready on a device or printed.
You doubt their evidence	Ask for the source politely and read it yourself. Raise concerns with the judge only if the rules allow.
You cannot find your source	Be honest. Do not guess or substitute. Learn and organize files for next time.
You made a mistake in a quote	Correct it as soon as you notice. Honesty builds trust.

- ☐ Every card has a full citation attached.
- ☐ Files are named by author and year.
- ☐ I know my league's paraphrasing and challenge rules.
- ☐ I can produce any source I read within a minute or two.

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

Built from public guidance: NSDA Debate Evidence Guide for Judges (LD, PF, Policy) · NSDA Public Forum Pilot Rules 2019-2020 · NSDA Public Forum Debate event page (speechanddebate.org) · 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 →