

Tips for Public Forum Debate

Writing Cases

In public forum debate, the process to writing a case begins by determining what the topic is and getting some background information on the topic. The first step to writing your debate case is to determine what the key points are in the resolution. This is done by brainstorming for the reasons why the resolution is both true and false. This is best done by making a list for each side of the resolution and placing arguments as to why it is true and false. It is best to do some light reading on the topic before doing your brainstorming so you can understand what you will be talking about. Once you have gone through the process of brainstorming on the topic, it is best to narrow your list to the top three or four arguments you believe best upholds your side of the resolution.

Next you'll want to think about framework. Framework is a question of prioritization; of which impacts come first. Think of framework as a weighing mechanism; a tool that judges can use to determine which parts of the debate are most important. In other words, framework attempts to tell the judge which impacts matter most and why. When you're writing a case, framework should be one of the first things you think about and the last thing you actually write. The impacts you decide to defend will determine what your framework looks like. You want to force the judge to evaluate your impacts first. In round, you will use your framework interpretation to nullify the other team's impact and force the judge to prioritize your impact.

After framework, you'll now be able to build the meat of your case. Public forum cases are centered around contentions. In writing your contentions; debaters will often use a model for their arguments. In this model, an argument will begin with a claim: the statement of the argument you are making. The claim has no reason why the statement is true, simply that it is. The warrant is the answer to the question, why is your claim true? Claims always need a warrant to why the statement is true. When you support a claim with a warrant, you are telling the judge the reasons why your argument is based on more than just opinion. Warrants are often found during research of a topic and will be a quote or position explaining why a claim is true. These quotes will need to be cited--with the author, date of access, date that the source was written, and author qualifications--to show they are from a credible source.

Finally, you need to impact your argument or explain why the argument is important in the debate round. The impacts link to the rest of the case and explain what could happen in the future due to the other arguments. Being able to explain impacts thoroughly will allow you to have clear arguments in future speeches and give the judge something to weigh the round off of.

Each argument you make would follow this similar process until you have completed your speech. Each speech should last four minutes in length when read aloud. Once you have written your pro speech, a con speech of similar style and length would be written next.

Citation Example

Griswold 05' (Griswold, Daniel. Associate Director of the Cato Institute's Center for Trade Policy Studies. Former Director of the Herbert A. Stiefel Center for Trade Policy Studies at Cato Institute. Author of *Mad about Trade: Why Main Street America Should Embrace Globalization*. Authored Major Studies on globalization, trade, and immigration. Appeared on CNBC, C-SPAN, CNN, PBS, and Fox News. Testified before House and Senate committees. "Four Decades of Failure: The U.S. Embargo against Cuba." Cato Institute. 12 October 2005. DOA 17 February 2017.)

Constructive Speeches

This speech, for both the affirmative and the negative, lays out the case that each of the teams will be going off of for the rest of the round. For the affirmative side, this speech constructs arguments advocating the resolution's worthiness. The key analysis will be to present major reasons why there is a problem. An underlying concept will always be the risk of change versus the risk of not changing. The evidence read in the affirmative constructive speech should outline reasons for adopting the topic should be presented with accompanying evidence. For the negative, this speech constructs arguments showing disadvantages of the resolution and why it should not be adopted. If the pro speech has the advantage of a changing future, the con speech has a track record of experience (status quo) and why change is ill-advised. The rest of the speech elements will be the same as the pro speech.

Rebuttal Speeches

Both of these debaters have the primary burden of refuting the other team's arguments by analyzing and explaining flaws in the opponent's position. The debater should identify the opposition's key arguments and attack their legitimacy by: turning the analysis to the other side; presenting evidence that destroys or reduces the opposing position; presenting alternate causes that are not accounted for by the opposition argument; exposing argument inconsistencies between the speakers or between the opponents and their statements during crossfire. To best accomplish refutation, both members of a team should have a consistent approach and a unified view of what is important and less important. An argument format could be an introduction that links the team's second speech to the first speech, followed by an overview of the issue, which is frequently the opponent's argument, followed by reasons/evidence why the opponent is wrong, followed by what this argument clash now means for your side in the debate. In addition, some time in either of these speeches should be allocated to rebuilding the original case. It is important to have clarity that is seldom attained by an intricate outline. Speeches should conclude with a summary.

Summary Speeches

These are complicated speeches because each debater has to find a way to explain issues in the light of all that has happened so far – in just two minutes – without speaking too rapidly. New evidence, but not new arguments may be presented, except responses (refutation). This means that a limited number of issues can be addressed. For example, perhaps develop one to two issues from the debater's side on the resolution and one from the opponent's side of the resolution. The speech should have a brief overview. On each key argument, try to add a short

original quotation, anecdote, or fact. Wrap up each argument by stressing its importance in arriving at a fair decision.

The Final Focus

This frames, with clarity, why your team has won the debate. Again, no new arguments may be presented, however, new evidence may be introduced to support an argument made earlier in the debate. Before the final focus, ask, "If I were judging this round, what would I be voting on?"

Strategies may include:

- Choose the most important argument you are winning, and summarize the analysis and evidence that make it so important.
- Turn a major argument from your opponent into the winning analysis and evidence of one of your important arguments; this technique clinches two arguments.
- Answer the most important argument you may be losing by summarizing the analysis and evidence that you believe takes out the opponent's argument.
- Choose an argument that you believe the community judge will most likely vote on.
- Expose a major inconsistency made by your opponent—two arguments that contradict each other—at least one of which the opponent is focusing on to win the debate.

Crossfire

Questioning periods give debate interactivity and a change to build clash. In crossfire, both debaters have equal access to the floor, but the first question must be asked to the debater who just finished speaking by a debater from the other team. After the initial question and answer, either debater may question or answer. A debater who attempts to dominate or be rude to his opponent will lose points. Good questions are brief and good answers must meet the question. In the first two crossfires, only the corresponding speakers (the debater of each team that just spoke) may participate, and they stand next to each other. Both participants face the judge rather than each other. This is because the questions are intended for the audience.

The keys to an effective cross-fire are good questions and a professional demeanor.

Specifically:

1. Ask specific questions that get to the heart of the issue.
2. Be polite, professional, and respectful during the cross-fire.
3. Never personalize the cross-fire —the focus should always be on issues.

Grand Crossfire

Seated, all debaters interact with one another. The first question is asked to the team that just ended its summary by the other team. After the initial question and answer, any debater may question or answer, and all should participate. The same guidelines for rudeness and stalling apply to the grand crossfire. Resist rushing questions or answers, or trying to do too much in crossfire.

Argumentation

Quality, well-explained arguments should trump a mere quantity thereof. Debaters should use quoted evidence to support their claims, and well-chosen, relevant evidence may strengthen – but not replace – arguments. Clear communication is a major consideration.

The quantity of arguments is less important than the quality of arguments, just as the quantity of evidence is less important than the quality of evidence. Thus we come to three important components of an argument: claim, evidence, and warrant.

A claim is a major argument made on either side of the resolution. On the resolution, “Resolved that NATO countries should have acted together in Iraq,” a claim could be that animosities would be reduced because one nation would not bear the brunt of the responsibility for the invasion. To prove this to be true, a debate must provide evidence, proving that the claim is valid. The debater chooses at least one type of evidence that will support the claim even when challenged. In the above example, much credible evidence exists that resistance is high because the United States for the most part acted alone. Perhaps the most crucial component of argumentation is the warrant.

Warrants connect the claim and its support, sometime obviously, sometime subtly. Warrants emerge from the total sum of our experiences and personal observations. Thus it is entirely possible that the debater and the judge have a different set of experiences. The warrant for the claim used in the NATO example should connect the judge to the thesis, perhaps by making anecdotal comments about how everyone is much better satisfied when cooperation exists, whether among people or nations. On the other hand, the opposing team can counter that forcing nations to cooperate with each other when that is not their wish alienates allies and ruins alliances.

Turn the evidence against the team and make the logical warrant that such a NATO policy for Iraq would have destroyed NATO, would have kept us operating in Iraq by ourselves, and would have destroyed the unity for future NATO missions. Warrants provide believable reasons why a claim and evidence are true. That is why evidence without analysis can result in an assertion without substance and an argument lost. Arguments and evidence without warrants are seldom persuasive.

Public Forum Debate stresses that speakers must appeal to the widest possible audience through sound reasoning, succinct organization, credible evidence, and clear delivery. Points provide a mechanism for evaluating the relative “quality of debating.”

Judges

Judges weigh arguments only to the extent that they are clearly explained, and they will 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. A team should not be penalized for failing to understand his or her opponent’s unclear arguments.

<http://old.mta.org/cgi-bin/mdta/File/Public%20Forum%20Guide.pdf>