**Format:**

As a team event, students who compete in Public Forum (or PFD) need to be able to work well with a partner. Balanced teams, both in terms of preparation before debates and contributions within a debate, helps provide a competitive advantage during tournaments. PF is the newest form of debate in the Association and looks at current event topics. Students who do Public Forum must be prepared to debate in front of judges without any formal debate training. Being able to persuade a range of judges is a central component to this event. Additionally, PF is focused upon debating varying resolutions that change frequently, which exposes students to a variety of topics during a singular competitive season.

**Debate Structure / Timing and Summary:**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Speech** | **Time Limit** | **Purpose** |
| Team A Speaker 1 – Constructive | 4 minutes | Present the team’s case |
| Team B Speaker 1 – Constructive | 4 minutes | Present the team’s case |
| Crossfire | 3 minutes | Speaker 1 from Team A & B alternate asking and answering questions |
| Team A Speaker 2 – Rebuttal | 4 minutes | Refute the opposing side’s arguments |
| Team B Speaker 2 – Rebuttal | 4 minutes | Refute the opposing side’s arguments |
| Crossfire | 3 minutes | Speaker 2 from Team A & B alternate asking and answering questions |
| Team A Speaker 1 – Summary | 3 minutes | Begin crystallizing the main issues in the round |
| Team B Speaker 1 – Summary | 3 minutes | Begin crystallizing the main issues in the round |
| Grand Crossfire | 3 minutes | All four debaters involved in a crossfire at once |
| Team A Speaker 2 – Final Focus | 2 minutes | Explain reasons that you win the round |
| Team B Speaker 2 – Final Focus | 2 minutes | Explain reasons that you win the round |

\*Each team is entitled to three minutes of prep time during the round.

**Tips / “things” to do:**

1. Verify that the students in the room are the correct students and that they are debating the assigned side of the resolution (check codes and names), recommend having pro sit on the left and con on the right, so they will align themselves with the ballot – **REMEMBER** you may be asked to facilitate, via a coin toss, what side wants Pro or Con or Speak First
2. Bring an open mind to the debate, they do not write the resolutions, they are told what side to debate
3. Keep time, make sure you have a device that accurately can keep time
4. Take notes during the debate (flowing), if using a paper ballot will have both sides to write on
5. Your comments will help the debaters improve and also reinforce what they are doing well
6. Always have a two sentence reason as to why the side one, this will be at the bottom front of the ballot
7. Put speaker points on the ballot and sign your name

**“Things” to look for:**

1. Each side should be offering contentions (usually 3), these contentions need to be supported by evidence, not hypotheticals
2. All evidence should support their contentions and undermine their opponents, which will then impact the judge’s decision
3. **NO** new information can be introduced in the summary and final focus, that is a big no no, and that team should lose points
4. Crossfires are important, if a competitor or team is too passive that could be a deciding factor during a tight debate
5. Respect is important, but during the crossfires it may get a bit heated, that is okay, but not degrading or super rude

**“Things” not to do:**

1. Do not impose upon the debate your particular preferences for how a given side of the resolution should be debated or what the outcome should be, i.e. be objective
2. Do not interact with the students during the debate. Take notes and all comments go on the ballot, they may ask for time signals, but keep interaction to a bare minimum
3. The SPDL League is not a place for oral critiques. This is truly a teaching league and all comments need to go on the ballot.

**Language to use on ballot:**

1. Every ballot should at its essence say something like “I vote (pro or con) because of (key issue #1 or concern), key issue #2, and key issue #3 or concerns
2. Language may focus on how prepared one side was, how well they defended their contentions and attacked their opponents, used really well developed evidence, how well they spoke (poise and confidence that made their side stronger), how well they did during the crossfires or vice versa, they may not have done these
3. Great ballots will recognize something good that each debater did, as well as something each debater could do to improve upon their performance, not always essential to use debate jargon

**Language not to use on ballot:**

1. Do not be silly and comment upon anything that has nothing to do with the debate at hand – all comments should be focused on what you witnessed

**Overall:**

Public Forum is a debate of contentions, the students have cases, engage in rebuttal and refutation, and also participate in a “crossfire” (similar to a cross examination) with the opportunity to question the opposing team. Things to ask yourself, do they reject the evidence? Why? Do they reject the relevance of the evidence to the contention (justification)? Do they reject the impact? This will help guide what you see during the debate.

Because this is a debate event, you should expect the students to offer cases that include arguments that are complete with a claim, warrant, and impact. Their use of sources may be stated “as in the famous court case Plessy vs. Fergusson the ruling stated . . .” the use of evidence should be more concrete and tangible versus hypothetical.

As this is a debate event, while the presentation should be audience appropriate, this is a debate event, and not a poetry reading. The winning side is almost certainly the one who provides the best researched case, defends that case, attacks the opponent’s case, answers and asks important questions, and leaves you with the impression that their side of the resolution was better upheld.

Public Forum Debate (PFD) is a wonderful event where the competitors learn skills that not only benefit them in debate, but for life. Let’s work together to keep this event a great learning opportunity for our students.

Jim Briski  
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