

# Introduction to Public Forum

Guide for Penn for Youth Debate Lesson Plan 1

Public Forum debate is the primary form of debate used in the Philadelphia high school circuit. The National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA) is the United States' largest speech and debate organization. Most circuits (including Philadelphia's) follow the rules set by the NSDA and oftentimes attend the NSDA's National Championship. Public Forum Debate is the shortest of the NSDA's three traditional debates (Lincoln Douglas, Policy, and Public Forum), with rounds that usually end up being around 45 minutes to an hour. Public Forum is sometimes known as the "layman's debate," as it's meant to be easy to understand and focused on topical issues without a lot of the complex jargon that the other debates tend to use.

This lesson plan will focus on

- Topics
- Teams and speaking order
- Basic descriptions of speeches

## Topics

The NSDA releases a new resolution, or topic, each month, which can be found here: <https://www.speechanddebate.org/topics/>. The topic for a given month will be released on the first of the prior month (ex: February topic released January 1). For the 2019-2020 academic year, NSDA is doing a joint September-October topic (released on August 1) and a joint November-December topic (released on October 1).

Resolutions often involve issues that are politically or culturally relevant at the time of debate. Some examples of previous topics include:

- Resolved: Deployment of anti-missile systems is in South Korea's best interest. (September and October, 2017-2018)
- Resolved: The United States should require universal background checks for all gun sales and transfers of ownership. (November, 2017-2018)
- Resolved: The United States federal government should adopt a carbon tax. (February, 2015-2016)

In preparation for a topic, it is expected that each team will prepare a case or "constructive" for each side of the topic. Public Forum often involves students going into

a round and not knowing which side of the topic (affirmative or negative) they will be debating. This is usually decided at the beginning of the round with a coin flip, which determines sides as well as speaking order (see “Teams and Speaking Order”). Lesson Plan 2 will focus on the process of writing cases. It may be helpful when presenting Lesson Plan 1 to pull up the current topic so students can start to familiarize themselves with it.

## Teams and speaking order

There are two teams in a Public Forum debate round, each consisting of two speakers. For each team, there will be a “first speaker” and a “second speaker,” who will trade off in giving their speeches. Each team can decide for themselves who will speak first and who will speak second. Since the first speech in the round involves reading pre-written cases, sometimes speakers who feel more comfortable with reading than with coming up with arguments on the spot may choose to be their team’s first speaker. Sometimes teams decide to trade off depending on which side they are debating. This can often be decided after the teams have written their cases.

In an actual round, the two teams will flip a coin. Whichever team wins can choose either speaking order or side. Within a round, there is also a speaking order for the two teams, where one team will speak first and the other team will speak second. There are different advantages for choosing speaking order or sides. For example, teams who win the coin flip may choose to be second speaker, a strategy that is sometimes preferred because it allows for that team to have the final speech in the round. Alternatively, if the team has a side preference, then they can choose which side they want to debate. The team that lost the coin flip then gets to choose either speaking order or side, depending on what the winning team didn’t choose.

At some tournaments, the sides are “locked,” meaning that they are assigned by the tournament and not determined by the coin flip. Speaking order is still determined by the coin flip.

## Basic descriptions of speeches

There are eight speeches in a PF round. Each debater will make two speeches. The first speech given is called the “First Constructive,” where the first speaker of the round will read their team’s case. The first speaker of the second team will then give their

constructive speech right after. Then there is a brief period for cross-fire, where the first two speakers are able to ask each other questions about each other's cases. The "Rebuttal" speeches come after the first two speeches and the first cross-fire. The second speaker of each team will use this speech to attack their opponent's case point-by-point, using both evidence and logic. There is another cross-fire afterwards between the two second speakers. Afterwards, the first speakers from each team will give their "Summary" speeches. Summary speeches are a time for refocusing the round on key issues that have been brought up and that each team wants to emphasize. While rebuttal is really meant to be a direct attack on each point brought up during the constructive speeches, summary is focused a lot more on broader issues. During the summary speeches, debaters can bring in new evidence but not new arguments.

After the summary speeches, there is the grand cross-fire period, where all four debaters are able to ask each other questions. The last speeches of the round are the "Final Focus" speeches, where the second speakers of each team center the round on the most important issues. This is also where debaters should do a lot of "weighing" for the judge, where they compare different issues and impacts of the arguments that have been brought up. Lesson Plan 3 will have more in-depth descriptions of each speech.

SPEECH	SPEAKER(S)	TIME
<b>Constructive</b>	Team A, Speaker 1	<b>4 minutes</b>
	Team B, Speaker 1	<b>4 minutes</b>
<b>Crossfire 1</b>	Teams A & B 1st Speakers only	<b>3 min.</b>
<b>Rebuttal</b>	Team A, Speaker 2	<b>4 min.</b>
	Team B, Speaker 2	<b>4 min.</b>
<b>Crossfire 2</b>	Teams A & B 2nd Speakers only	<b>3 min.</b>
<b>Summary</b>	Team A, Speaker 1	<b>3 min.</b>
	Team B, Speaker 1	<b>3 min.</b>
<b>Grand Crossfire</b>	Teams A&B All Speakers	<b>3 min.</b>
<b>Final Focus</b>	Team A, Speaker 2	<b>2 min.</b>
	Team B, Speaker 2	<b>2 min.</b>