

Lesson 1: Intro to PF Debate

What is Public Forum Debate?

Public Forum Debate, or PF Debate, is a competitive debate format that aims to engage participants in discussing relevant and contentious topics of public concern. It provides a platform for debaters to present and defend their viewpoints while considering various perspectives. PF Debate involves two teams, each consisting of two debaters (a first speaker and a second speaker), who present arguments and counterarguments based on research and analysis.

PF debate is unique in that it's meant for a layperson (a random person picked off the street should be able to understand your argument). There's a myriad of benefits to the Public forum style including developing analytical thinking, good communication, and research skills. Participants can use it as a platform to test their own opinions, gain an in-depth understanding of complex problems, and have informed conversations.

History of Public Forum

The billionaire and founder of CNN, Ted Turner, played a significant role in creating PF debate. He drew inspiration from the TV show "Crossfire" and sought to create a debate format that was accessible and allowed for a wider range of acceptable argumentative approaches compared to other formats like LD or Policy. In fact, the event was almost named "Ted Turner Debate" in his honor.¹

¹<https://acepeak.org/the-acepeak-blog/the-odd-history-of-public-forum-debate>

Speech Times

Case/Constructive (4 mins): The constructive speech is the first speech given in a debate round by the first speaker. It's a four-minute speech outlining your arguments to your opponents and the judge. It's read directly off your laptop or a piece of paper so it's not memorized or extemporaneous. It's usually around 650-800 words depending on how fast you want your case to be read.

First Crossfire (3 mins): The first speakers from each team take turns asking each other questions regarding the constructive speeches.

Rebuttal (4 mins): The rebuttal is given by the second speaker in the team and is used to argue AGAINST your opponent's speech. In this speech, the speaker should point out flaws or inconsistencies in their opponent's argument. This speech is semi-prepared as the speaker usually has access to a block file (prepared responses to common arguments) but could also be extemporaneous if an uncommon argument comes up.

Second crossfire (3 mins): Same as first crossfire but with the second speakers

Summary (3 mins): Often regarded as the most difficult speech in the round, the summary speech consists of responding to points your opponent brought up in their rebuttal and also reemphasizing your own case.

Grand crossfire (3 mins): All four participants of the debate round take turns asking each other questions.

Final Focus (2 mins): The final speech in the round summarizes the key points brought up from both sides.