*How to Judge – At A Glance*

# An Introduction to Evaluating Public Forum Debate (PF)

**NATIONAL SPEECH & DEBATE ASSOCIATION**
NATIONAL FORENSIC LEAGUE

## Basic Understanding

Public Forum Debate is a two-on-two team debate. Teams debate each other on a predetermined resolution that is based on current events. Designed to be accessible to the public, the goal for each team in Public Forum is to convince the judge that their side of the debate is preferable. The judge is responsible for evaluating each team's arguments and determining which side presented their position more effectively.

## Getting Started

Each round begins with a coin flip to determine sides. The winner of the flip may either choose their team's side (Pro/Con) or speaking position (First/Second). The loser of the flip makes the remaining decision. Once sides and speakers are determined, the judge will fill in this information in the appropriate spaces on the ballot. In order to follow along and evaluate arguments, it is highly recommended that the judge take notes throughout the round. The debate proceeds as follows:

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

*Each team is entitled to 2 min. of prep time during the round.
**Judges are instructed to ignore arguments introduced for the first time in the Final Focus.

## Evaluating the Round

There are three key areas to consider when making a decision in Public Forum. First, *argumentation:* competitors are to be evaluated based upon the soundness of their arguments. To make a complete argument, debaters are to establish a claim, or a response to their opponent's claim, a warrant, explaining why their argument is true, and an impact, explaining why their argument matters. Properly formulated arguments are to be given more weight than those lacking one or more of these aspects. Second, *interactive clash:* clash occurs when a debater explicitly responds to an opponent's argument. It is important to keep the overall goal in mind; the judge is not in the room to evaluate competing speeches, but to preside over an interactive exchange of ideas. When a competitor fails to address one of their opponent's arguments, this point is given more weight when the argument is brought up again in later speeches. By failing to respond to an argument, the team has tacitly agreed to the point. When making a decision, the judge should pay close attention to which side is advancing the most significant arguments in the round. Third, *team balance:* because Public Forum is a team event, it is important that the ideas expressed throughout the round are consistent between partners. Speeches should connect and build upon each other.

## Filling out the Ballot

At the end of the round, the judge records on the ballot which arguments convinced them to vote for a team and evaluates the speaking abilities of each competitor by ranking them. Judges are instructed to base their decisions only upon arguments made in the round; personal opinions are checked at the door. Just as debaters are required to argue both sides of the topic, judges are to remove any personal biases when making their decision. Any issues or questions that the judge feels ought to have been addressed may be written on the ballot along with comments on the style or delivery of speeches. This is an educational activity and feedback is always welcome and encouraged.