

Public Forum debate

Two teams of two debate a current-events topic, with crossfire question periods. Built so any adult can judge it.

2 vs 2

Pro and Con

8

speeches + 3
crossfires

4 min

constructive, rebuttal

3 min

prep per team

13 min

talk time per team

Speech order

- 1 Team A Constructive 4 min
- 2 Team B Constructive 4 min
- 3 Crossfire (1st speakers) 3 min
- 4 Team A Rebuttal 4 min
- 5 Team B Rebuttal 4 min
- 6 Crossfire (2nd speakers) 3 min
- 7 Team A Summary 3 min
- 8 Team B Summary 3 min
- 9 Grand Crossfire (all four) 3 min
- 10 Team A Final Focus 2 min
- 11 Team B Final Focus 2 min

Crossfire

- Both debaters hold the floor and can ask or answer.
- The speaker who spoke first asks the first question.
- In Grand Crossfire, the 1st Summary speaker asks first; teams take turns.
- Questions and answers only: no reading evidence or mini speeches.

Topics and evidence

Topics: set by the NSDA for Sept/Oct, Nov/Dec, Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr and Nationals. Example: "Resolved: The United Kingdom should rejoin the European Union." (Sept/Oct 2025)

No plans or counterplans: argue the resolution as a whole; general, practical solutions are fine.

Evidence: cite at least author's last name and year out loud. Paraphrasing is held to the same accuracy standard as quoting.

Coin toss before every round: the winner picks the side or the speaking order, and the other team gets the other choice. Team A speaks first.

Tips and common mistakes

- Talk to a person.** Your judge may be a parent; skip the jargon.
- Collapse** to your one or two best arguments by Summary.
- Weigh** size, probability and timing out loud.
- Final Focus** covers only what was in Summary. No new arguments.

Before the round

- ☐ Pro and Con cases both ready
- ☐ Evidence cited and easy to find
- ☐ Answers to the likely arguments on each side
- ☐ Who gives Summary and Final Focus decided
- ☐ Crossfire questions written
- ☐ Prep time plan: 3 minutes for the whole round

What each speaker does

TEAM A

Constructive

Reads the prepared case: two or three contentions with evidence and clear impacts.

TEAM A

Rebuttal

Attacks the other team's case, contention by contention.

BOTH TEAMS

Summary

Narrows the debate, extends the best argument, answers attacks on it and starts weighing.

TEAM B

Constructive

Reads the other side's prepared case. No need to answer Team A yet.

TEAM B

Rebuttal

Attacks the other case and defends its own against the attacks it just heard (frontlining).

BOTH TEAMS

Final Focus

Two minutes on why your team wins. Only what was in Summary; compare the biggest impacts.

How judges decide

Judges decide the round as it was debated, not on their own beliefs, and reward arguments a non-specialist "citizen judge" can follow. Each judge picks a winning team and gives every debater speaker points.

POINTS	MEANING ON THE NSDA BALLOT
29 to 30	Outstanding
27 to 28	Above average
24 to 26	Average
20 to 23	Below average
Below 20	Unethical or inappropriate behavior

The win and the points are separate (a "low-point win" is possible). Panels decide by majority. Invitationals may use their own scales.

Key terms

Resolution

The topic, a statement starting "Resolved:".

Card

A piece of quoted evidence with its citation.

Frontline

Answering the attacks on your own case.

Contention

One main argument in a case.

Impact

The real-world result that makes an argument matter.

Weighing

Comparing impacts to show which matters more.

Flow sheet

Note each argument as it is made, and the other side's answer next to it. Print as many copies as you need.

PRO ARGUMENTS	CON RESPONSES	WHO IS WINNING IT?