



*Introduction to*  
**PUBLIC FORUM**  
**AND CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE**

Jeffrey Hannan, Benjamin Berkman, and Chad Meadows



*Introduction to*  
**PUBLIC FORUM**  
**AND CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE**

Jeffrey Hannan, Benjamin Berkman, and Chad Meadows

**INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC FORUM  
AND CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE**

Copyright © 2012 by International Debate Education Association  
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License:  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>



This edition republished in 2020 with express written permission of the authors.

Published by  
National Speech & Debate Association  
401 Railroad Place,  
West Des Moines, IA 50265-4730 USA  
Phone: (920) 748-6206  
[www.speechanddebate.org](http://www.speechanddebate.org)  
[info@speechanddebate.org](mailto:info@speechanddebate.org)

The National Speech & Debate Association does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, gender identity, gender expression, affectional or sexual orientation, or disability in any of its policies, programs, and services.

Printed and bound in the United States of America

# Contents

<b>CHAPTER 1: Overview of Public Forum Debate . . . . .</b>	<b>01</b>
The Resolution . . . . .	02
Sides . . . . .	02
Speeches . . . . .	03
Preparation Time . . . . .	05
Determining the Winner . . . . .	05
Rounds . . . . .	06
<b>CHAPTER 2: Overview of Congressional Debate . . . . .</b>	<b>07</b>
Preparation . . . . .	08
The Session . . . . .	08
Electing the Presiding Officer and Setting the Agenda . . . . .	08
Debate . . . . .	09
Speaking, Precedence, and Recency . . . . .	10
Ending the Session . . . . .	11
Judges . . . . .	11
<b>CHAPTER 3: Argument Construction . . . . .</b>	<b>13</b>
Elements of an Argument . . . . .	13
Structure of an Argument . . . . .	14
Filling in the Gaps . . . . .	18

<b>CHAPTER 4: Congressional Debate Legislation</b> . . . . .	<b>21</b>
Types of Legislation . . . . .	21
Types of Legislation and their uses . . . . .	22
Structure of a Bill. . . . .	23
Structure of a Resolution . . . . .	24
Structure of a Constitutional Amendment. . . . .	26
Formatting. . . . .	27
Topic Selection . . . . .	28
Constitutionality, Funding, and Enforcement . . . . .	29
<b>CHAPTER 5: Speech Construction in Congressional Debate</b> . . . . .	<b>33</b>
Goals . . . . .	33
Speech Structure. . . . .	34
Speech Structure in Congress . . . . .	35
Sponsorship Speeches. . . . .	40
Role-Playing . . . . .	42
Style in Congressional Debate Speeches . . . . .	43
<b>CHAPTER 6: Resolutinal Analysis in Public Forum Debate</b> . . . . .	<b>47</b>
Understanding Resolutions . . . . .	48
Types of Resolutions. . . . .	49
<b>CHAPTER 7: Constructive Speeches in Public Forum Debate</b> . . . . .	<b>53</b>
Case Construction . . . . .	54
Structure. . . . .	54
Strategic Case Construction . . . . .	57
Practice and Delivery . . . . .	57

**CHAPTER 8: Questioning and Crossfire . . . . . 59**

- Structure of Questioning . . . . . 60
- Goals of Questioning . . . . . 60
- Effective Questioning . . . . . 65
- Open- and Close-ended Questions . . . . . 66
- Asking Questions. . . . . 67
- Effective Answers. . . . . 67
- Congressional Questioning Specifics . . . . . 68
- Public Forum Crossfire Specifics . . . . . 70

**CHAPTER 9: Debate: Refutation, Rebuttal, and Summary . . . . . 73**

- Flowing. . . . . 73
- Flowing in Congressional Debate. . . . . 75
- Flowing in Public Forum Debate . . . . . 79
- Responding: Refutation and Rebuttal . . . . . 80
- Offense and Defense in Debate . . . . . 84
- Responding in Congressional Debate . . . . . 84
- Responding in Public Forum Debate. . . . . 87

**CHAPTER 10: Crystallization and the Final Focus . . . . . 91**

- Crystallization. . . . . 91
- Goals of Crystallization . . . . . 92
- Weighing. . . . . 93
- The Final Focus in Public Forum Debate . . . . . 95
- Crystallization in Congressional Debate . . . . . 96

<b>CHAPTER 11: Congressional Debate Procedure . . . . .</b>	<b>101</b>
Beginning the Session . . . . .	102
During the Session . . . . .	103
Points of Information and Points of Order . . . . .	106
Ending the Session . . . . .	106
Recency and Precedence . . . . .	107
Amendments . . . . .	107
Presiding . . . . .	108
<b>CHAPTER 12: Preparing For Tournaments . . . . .</b>	<b>113</b>
Preparation in Congressional Debate . . . . .	113
Preparation in Public Forum Debate . . . . .	114
Research . . . . .	115
Materials . . . . .	118
<b>CHAPTER 13: Competing at Tournaments . . . . .</b>	<b>121</b>
Tournament Structure . . . . .	122
Professionalism . . . . .	123
Interaction with Judges . . . . .	125
Maintaining Mental Awareness . . . . .	126
<b>Glossary . . . . .</b>	<b>129</b>

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the National Speech & Debate Association (formerly National Forensic League) and the International Debate Education Association for their tireless advocacy and support for forensics around the world. Adam Jacobi and Cherian Koshy of the NSDA have made invaluable contributions, and we are especially grateful for their support.

Eleanora von Dehsen has been a wonderful resource as an editor, and without her impressive dedication this volume would only be a shadow of its current self.

All the authors thank the countless coaches and colleagues who have provided professional and personal support, particularly Lisa Miller of Nova High School.

Chad thanks his lovely girlfriend, Myra Milam, for her support; Jeff thanks his loving and patient wife, Adie.





# CHAPTER 1

## *Overview of Public Forum Debate*

One of the newest forms of academic debate, Public Forum Debate was designed to enable debaters to discuss current events in an accessible, conversational format. Public Forum rounds feature polished delivery, exciting clash, and fast-paced refutations. The format also allows debaters to work together as partners. For these reasons, Public Forum Debate often comes closest to what many beginning debaters imagine debate will look like.

Public Forum Debate features four high school students on teams of two debating a timely issue in highly structured speech times. The teams compete for the vote of a judge or panel of judges, who will decide the round based on which team debated better. Debate in Public

Forum should be conducive to adjudication by citizen judges and should not require outside knowledge of the topic to judge. The debaters will use their common knowledge, reasoning, and evidence from third-party experts to support and substantiate their arguments.

## THE RESOLUTION

---

The central component of Public Forum Debate is the resolution, which is the topic that the students debate. Resolutions are voted on by members of the National Speech & Debate Association and published at [www.speechanddebate.org/topics](http://www.speechanddebate.org/topics). Tournaments, though, may use whichever month's resolution that they deem best. For example, if a tournament is held early in the month, thus leaving students too little time to adequately prepare that month's resolution, the tournament may use the previous month's resolution. The NSDA also chooses a Nationals topic that is used at the NSDA National Tournament.

Resolutions are intended to be “ripped from the headlines” and to reflect prevailing issues about which most well-read individuals would be informed. Previous resolutions have covered a wide array of topics such as 9/11 security measures, cyberbullying, and civil disobedience. Two resolutions have been:

- Resolved: The costs of a college education outweigh the benefits.
- Resolved: The United States federal government should permit the use of financial incentives to encourage organ donation.

The word “Resolved” appears at the beginning of each resolution, which sets up the basic clash of every Public Forum round: the pro team, also called the affirmative or “aff” team,

attempts to prove the resolution true, while the con team, also called the negative or “neg” team, attempts to prove it false. The NSDA guidelines state that Public Forum Debate does not have preestablished burdens of proof for either side of the debate. In other words, neither the pro nor con team is obligated to debate in a certain way to uphold certain arguments; instead, the resolution itself will generate those burdens of proof. Each resolution dictates the substance of debating for both sides. For example, the first resolution posits a fact that the costs of a college education outweigh the benefits. For this resolution, the debaters must prove or disprove this fact to win the debate. The second resolution posits an action that the federal government should take, namely allowing financial incentives to encourage organ donation. For this resolution, the debaters must prove the desirability (or lack thereof) of this action. (*You can find a more thorough exploration of Public Forum Debate resolutions and analysis in Chapter 6.*)

## SIDES

---

In most other forms of debate, the debaters are assigned sides before the round begins. In Public Forum Debate, this is determined with a coin toss. The team that wins the toss may choose which side of the resolution they would like to defend or whether they would like to speak first or second. Depending on which choice the winning team makes, the

team that has lost the coin toss makes the remaining choice. For example, if the winning team selects which side it wants to defend, then the losing team chooses to speak either first or second. Strategies for the coin toss are covered in [Chapter 13](#).

Because debaters cannot always control the side of the resolution they must defend, they must be prepared to debate both sides of every resolution. Strategies for preparation are discussed in greater detail in [Chapter 12](#).

## SPEECHES

The debate itself is broken down into a series of speeches based on the speaking order selected during the coin toss. This makes Public Forum Debate unique among debate events in that the con, or negative, team may begin the debate. Both teams and speakers alternate speeches until the conclusion of the debate.

Public Forum Debate includes four types of speeches: the constructive, the rebuttal, the summary, and the final focus. It also includes three questioning periods, called “crossfires.”

SPEECH/CROSSFIRE PERIOD	TEAM/SPEAKER	TIME
<b>Constructive Speech</b>	Team A: First Speaker	4 minutes
<b>Constructive Speech</b>	Team B: First Speaker	4 minutes
<b>1st Crossfire</b>	Team A: First Speaker and Team B: First Speaker	3 minutes
<b>Rebuttal Speech</b>	Team A: Second Speaker	4 minutes
<b>Rebuttal Speech</b>	Team B: Second Speaker	4 minutes
<b>2nd Crossfire</b>	Team A: Second Speaker and Team B: Second Speaker	3 minutes
<b>Summary Speech</b>	Team A: First Speaker	3 minutes
<b>Summary Speech</b>	Team B: First Speaker	3 minutes
<b>Grand Crossfire</b>	All Speakers	3 minutes
<b>Final Focus</b>	Team A: Second Speaker	2 minutes
<b>Final Focus</b>	Team B: Second Speaker	2 minutes

The order of a PF round is described in the table below.

Note that each debater speaks twice, delivering both a four-minute speech and either a two-minute or three-minute speech. The order of speakers and teams is consistent throughout the round; if Team A gives the first constructive speech, then Team A will give the first rebuttal, summary, and final focus speeches. Also, the debater who delivers the constructive speech will deliver the summary; the student who delivers the rebuttal will deliver the final focus.

### Constructive Speeches

The constructive speeches are the teams' first opportunity to deliver and establish their prepared arguments, also called a "case." These speeches are typically fully scripted. The first speaker from each team will read their case, which will include evidence in support of or in opposition to the resolution depending on the side of the team in any given debate. Once the first speaker has finished, the first speaker from the second team will stand and deliver their case. Typically, no direct clash between ideas occurs at this point in the debate. (*Constructing individual arguments for a Public Forum case is covered more thoroughly in Chapter 3; a more comprehensive exploration of Public Forum cases as a whole is provided in Chapter 7.*)

### Crossfire

Following the two constructive speeches, the first speakers from each team engage in a crossfire, a three-minute period during which either speaker may ask or answer questions. The speaker from the team that speaks first has the right to ask the first question. Following the first question, the flow of questions is left up to the debaters. After answering a question, a speaker will usually interrupt their opponent's questions to indicate that they would now like to ask a question. Both debaters participating in the crossfire position themselves facing the judge and address each other as well as the judge during the crossfire periods. (*More information about crossfire in Public Forum Debate can be found in Chapter 8.*)

### Rebuttal Speeches

After the first crossfire, the second speakers on each team deliver the rebuttal speeches; this is the first opportunity for each team to refute, or answer, the arguments made by their opponents. In this four-minute speech, the speakers are charged with disproving their opponent's cases with their own analysis or with evidence from third-party sources. The first speaking team's rebuttal will focus on refuting their opponent's case; the second speaking team's rebuttal must both refute their opponent's case and also respond to attacks made against their own case. (*The process of refutation and rebuttal is covered in Chapter 9.*) Speakers

address the judge during the rebuttal speeches and speak extemporaneously from notes. After the rebuttal speeches, the second speakers from each team participate in the second crossfire period, which follows the form and style of the first.

## Summary Speeches

Following the second crossfire, the first speakers on each team deliver their summary speeches. These speakers will attempt to summarize the main issues in the debate and continue to persuasively advocate for their position. The speakers address the judge during their summary speeches. *(Summary speeches are also covered in Chapter 9.)*

## Grand Crossfire

Following the summary speeches, debaters participate in the grand crossfire. The grand crossfire is very similar to the other crossfires, except that all four debaters participate. The debaters address one another and the judge but generally remain seated. The grand crossfire is notorious for escalating tension, so all participants need to be mindful of decorum. *(Strategies and guidelines for grand crossfire are provided in Chapter 8.)*

## Final Focus

The last speech of the debate is the final focus, which is delivered by the second speaker. No new arguments may be made in the final

focus; instead, the speaker concentrates on analyzing the arguments that have been made already and detailing for the judge why, on the merit of those arguments, their team should win the debate. *(The final focus is addressed more fully in Chapter 10.)*

## PREPARATION TIME

---

In addition to the eight speeches and three crossfire periods, each team has three minutes of preparation time, usually just called “prep.” Debaters may choose to use prep time at any point of the debate, but only between speeches or crossfires; debaters may not take prep time in the middle of a speech. During prep time, partners may consult with each other over potential arguments to make or questions to raise during upcoming speeches or crossfires. The three minutes of prep time is cumulative for the debate, so participants must manage this time wisely.

## DETERMINING THE WINNER

---

At the conclusion of the debate, the judge will decide who has won the round based on the merits of the debate. They will fill out a ballot that is distributed by the tournament, indicating a winner and assigning points for each debater. Judges are asked to decide the round based on the merits of the debate rather than their personal biases about the topic.

Judges typically decide the winner based on the arguments presented and decide speaker points based upon the style and speaking skill

of the speakers. Each tournament has its own rules concerning speaker points, but typically they are given on a scale of 1 to 30.

## ROUNDS

Each tournament is structured differently, but most have both preliminary rounds, sometimes called “prelims,” and elimination rounds, sometimes called “elims” or “break rounds.” Everyone in the tournament debates in the preliminary rounds. At the beginning of the tournament, teams are randomly matched against opponents. As the tournament progresses, teams are typically matched against teams with

the same record of wins and losses. This continues for a set number of preliminary rounds. At the end of the prelims, the tournament staff will announce those teams who, based on their record of wins and losses and sometimes their accumulated speaker points, have “broken” (advanced) to elimination rounds. *(More information about the process of competing at a tournament is found in [Chapter 13](#).)*

## CHAPTER 1 — KEY CONCEPTS

- Public Forum Debate is held at a conversational pace that the average person should understand.
- Public Forum resolutions tend to discuss highly relevant and timely world issues.
- Debates involve two teams — pro and con — composed of two speakers each.
- Public Forum begins with four-minute constructive cases, followed by four-minute rebuttals; each side then gives a three-minute summary and a two-minute final focus.
- After the constructive speeches, the rebuttals, and the summaries, there is a crossfire period where the debaters ask one another questions.

# CHAPTER 2

## *Overview of Congressional Debate*

Congressional Debate is possibly the most well-rounded activity in speech and debate — offering something for everyone. Many students appreciate the opportunity to write their own topics for debate; others appreciate the breadth and depth of research that is required. Many debaters enjoy the political and social aspects of the event; others revel in the order and logic of Congressional procedure. Some debaters enjoy the wide range of debates that occur in a Congressional Debate session; others appreciate the opportunity to showcase their speaking skills. Whatever students are seeking, they are likely to find it in this event.

Congressional Debate, sometimes just called “Congress” in the debate community, involves students emulating members of the U.S. Congress by debating legislation the

participants have prepared ahead of time. Legislation is a one-page bill or resolution that offers a legislative solution to a problem. Topics for legislation include just about



anything that the U.S. Congress might consider domestic social issues (legalization of drugs or prostitution), economic issues (eliminating the capital gains tax), or foreign policy (enacting stricter sanctions against Iran). The legislation is written by participating schools and students,

submitted to the tournament (generally about a month in advance), and then compiled by the tournament staff into a single docket that is distributed to participating schools so they can begin preparation.

## PREPARATION

---

Participants prepare arguments for and against the various bills, resolutions and amendments. Ideally, these arguments take the form of detailed outlines that will allow for extemporaneous delivery. Debaters will use logic, evidence, and rhetoric to support or oppose the various legislation. (*Argument construction is covered in Chapter 3; more information*

*about preparing for a tournament can be found in Chapter 12.*) Depending on the region or league, participants may be assigned to a particular committee and, therefore, have a particular point of emphasis for their preparation (the most common committees are Public Affairs, Economics, and Foreign Affairs).

## THE SESSION

---

Once preparation is complete and participants arrive at the tournament, they will report to their assigned room, or chamber. These chambers are assigned by the tournament, often well in advance of the actual competition, and generally feature an even distribution of students from different schools or regions. Participants compete in these chambers in a

series of sessions that last between two and four hours. During each session, debaters will have the opportunity to speak multiple times on a variety of legislation. (*More information about competing at tournaments can be found in Chapter 13.*) The sessions are largely run by the participants themselves through the use of procedure.

## ELECTING THE PRESIDING OFFICER AND SETTING THE AGENDA

---

At the beginning of each session, the student legislators elect a chairperson, also called

the presiding officer, or P.O., from among their ranks. This individual is charged with running

the session, much like a chairperson might run a business meeting. They will call for motions, recognize speakers, manage the chamber, and moderate the debate. Once the P.O. is elected, the chamber must decide in what order they will discuss the legislative docket. The

members compose, nominate, and then vote on different agendas. A tournament may have as many as 40 or 50 pieces of legislation on the docket, thus this agenda-setting process is very important. Not every bill or resolution will be discussed.

## DEBATE

---

Once the agenda is set, the debate begins. The first bill or resolution is now the focus of the debate. The P.O. calls for the first speech in favor of the legislation; this speech is called either the authorship or the sponsorship speech. It is an authorship if the person who wrote the legislation is delivering the first affirmative speech; if no author is present, or the author declines to give the authorship (which rarely happens), then any participant may sponsor the legislation. Generally, the author has the right to deliver the first affirmative speech; some tournaments may choose to eliminate this privilege though. Additionally, some tournaments ask for legislation from schools, not from particular students, so sometimes the author's name is not included on the legislation. Whether there is an author or not, the P.O. will call for speakers and students who wish to speak will stand (or, in some regions, raise a placard with their name on it); the P.O. will then select a student to deliver the first speech.

The author or sponsor delivers their three-minute speech in support of the

legislation; while they are speaking, the P.O. keeps time and gives the speaker appropriate signals as time remaining. The method the P.O. uses to signal the speaker may vary, but the national norm is to tap with a gavel at specific points during the speech; the speaker knows how much time they have remaining based on the number of gavel taps (*more information on gaveling is found in Chapter 11*). When they are finished speaking, a two-minute question period follows. During this time, any student legislator in the chamber may seek recognition to ask a question of the speaker. The P.O. will call on members, they will ask their question, then the speaker will answer; this process repeats until the question period has elapsed. (*Questioning in Congressional Debate is explored more thoroughly in Chapter 8.*) Then, the P.O. will call for speakers in opposition to the legislation and members who wish to speak will seek recognition.

The first speech in opposition to a bill or resolution (also called a “negative” speech) is also followed by a two-minute question period. Afterward, the P.O. will call for more speeches,

alternating between affirmative and negative. Students typically speak with the assistance of notes (most often written on a legal pad). Each three-minute speech on a bill or resolution after the first affirmative and first negative speeches is followed by a one-minute question period. Members make new arguments, they respond to old arguments, they compare and weigh the different evidence presented by each side, and, eventually, they summarize the debate. *(More information about debate and summary is found in Chapter 9.)*

This process continues until no students wish to speak on the legislation, the chamber

votes to end debate on the legislation, or the tournament rules require an end to the debate on the legislation (some tournaments set a time limit for each debate). At this point, the chamber will vote to pass or defeat the legislation; competitors will indicate support or opposition and may even abstain. The success or failure of legislation is interesting and often compelling: close votes are common; hotly contested issues raise the chamber's interest in the outcome of the vote. Nevertheless, the vote count has no bearing on the results of the competition, so students should not worry if they are on the "losing" side.

## SPEAKING, PRECEDENCE, AND RECENCY

---

No participant is forced to speak on a particular side of a bill or resolution or to speak on a topic at all. This flexibility is one of the aspects of Congressional Debate that appeals to students. The flipside to this is that, with the exception of authorship speeches, participants are not guaranteed the option to speak at any given moment. Although a member may seek recognition during a debate, they may not be called on. This limitation is mitigated, though, through the use of precedence and recency. By rule, participants who have spoken the least number of times have precedence. Imagine that both Allison and Ben stand to give a negative speech; if Allison has already spoken twice during the session, and Ben has only spoken once, the P.O. must call on Ben. Additionally,

members who have spoken least recently have recency. Allison and Ben stand again later in the session, and now both of them have spoken twice. Because Ben delivered their second speech most recently, the P.O. must now call on Allison. Put another way, because it has been longer since Allison last spoke, they have better recency and the right to speak.

The use of these two systems, precedence and then recency, ensures that all competitors have equal opportunity to speak over the course of a session. Not every participant will get to speak exactly when they want, but everyone will get a fair chance to compete. The only exception to these rules is the authorship speech; if the author of a bill or resolution is present when it comes up for debate, they

have the right to give the authorship speech regardless of recency or precedence.

Throughout the session, students will use procedure to take various actions: exit and enter the room, call for recesses, address the

chair or chamber, amend legislation, extend questioning, and so on. (*A more detailed exploration of Congressional Debate procedure is provided in Chapter 11.*)

## ENDING THE SESSION

---

At the end of a session, several events will occur. First, the chamber will vote on any legislation that is currently being debated or that had been tabled earlier in the session. Next, they will take care of any necessary business for the next session, such as amending the agenda or electing a new presiding officer (a different student serves as the presiding officer in each session at a tournament). Finally, depending on

whether or not it is the last session of the day or of the preliminary sessions, the students may vote to determine various awards, such as Best Presiding Officer or Best Legislation. When all business is complete, the chamber will either recess (to reconvene at the beginning of next session) or adjourn (effectively ending the legislative day).

## JUDGES

---

At least one adult judge attends each session of each chamber. Sometimes, a tournament also provides an adult parliamentarian, who will make decisions about procedure and ensure that the P.O. and the chamber are following all rules. The parliamentarian may also act as a judge. The judge(s) and possibly the parliamentarian have three responsibilities: scoring each speech, scoring the presiding officer's performance, and completing a preferential ballot ranking the best legislators in the session. These "prefs" typically determine which students advance to elimination rounds or receive

awards. Judges are generally instructed to rank the students holistically, taking into account not just their speeches but also their poise and presence in chambers, their involvement in questioning, and their use of procedure.

## CHAPTER 2 – KEY CONCEPTS

- In Congressional Debate, students act as though they are legislators making decisions about bills and resolutions on the floor of the House or Senate.
- Students deliver speeches, typically three minutes, in support of or against bills and resolutions.
- After each speech, other members of the chamber ask questions of the speakers.
- Before the first session, students form an agenda to determine the order of the bills and resolutions debated.
- Before each session, the chamber elects a presiding officer to run the chamber.
- The presiding officer must use recency and precedence to determine the speaking order of the chamber.
- Each session is judged by one or more adults, and there may or may not be a parliamentarian who oversees the chamber.

# CHAPTER 3

## *Argument Construction*

Congressional Debate and Public Forum Debate are distinct activities but have much in common. The most fundamental element of each event, and, in fact, all debate events, is the construction of solid arguments. This chapter will explore the process of argument construction.

### ELEMENTS OF AN ARGUMENT

---

Arguments may take many forms, but successful arguments share a specific set of elements. A complete argument contains:

- a **claim**, or the basic idea of the argument;
- a **warrant**, or an explanation why the claim is true;
- **data**, or evidence; and
- an **impact**, or a reason why the argument is important.

These elements should be present in all forms of argumentation. They are especially important in verbal argumentation because the audience must be able to follow the argument.

In written argumentation, readers may absorb and process the argument at their own pace; if they are confused, they can reread a passage or sentence.

## STRUCTURE OF AN ARGUMENT

ELEMENT	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
<b>Claim</b>	The main point of the argument; what the debater seeks to prove true.	<i>Legalizing marijuana will increase government revenues.</i>
<b>Warrant</b>	The logical justification for the claim; why the claim is true.	<i>Governments can place taxes on legalized marijuana.</i>
<b>Data</b>	The information or evidence used to bolster the warrant.	<i>Business Week, March 29, 2009 — Legalized marijuana, if sold in stores at the same prices as sold on the street, would yield \$40 to \$100 billion in new tax revenue.</i>
<b>Impact</b>	The reason the argument should matter to the audience.	<i>In a country where both federal and state governments run massive deficits, and where programs from welfare to education are being cut across the board, we need to do whatever we can to increase revenue streams.</i>

In verbal argumentation, the audience (and the speaker) only have one chance at comprehension. Each of these elements ought to be presented in a very specific way in order to enhance the audience’s understanding (and, by extension, their likelihood of agreeing with the speaker).

### Claims

A claim is the main point of an argument, a statement of what the debater intends to prove. It is sometimes called a “tagline” and

should be contained in the first sentence of an argument. The claim should intuitively resonate with the audience by using powerful and direct language.

In the context of a debate round, a debater must use their claims to accomplish three goals:

1. **Label the argument.** A claim should always include some system of numbering or sequencing to help delineate major ideas. Speakers should label arguments clearly and simply: “The first reason to affirm this legislation”

or “the next argument in favor of the resolution.”

- 2. Relate back to the purpose of the argument.** In Public Forum Debate, debaters should make consistent references to the resolution and their advocacy (to affirm or negate the resolution). In Congressional Debate, speakers should reference the legislation and their advocacy (to pass or defeat the legislation). Using the specific language of the resolution or legislation in place of the generic terms is acceptable. For example, instead of “The first reason to affirm the legislation,” a speaker may opt for the more specific “The first reason to impose sanctions on Iran.”

These two elements of strong claims, labeling and linking the claim back to the topic, serve the same purpose: helping the audience follow the argument. Without clear labels, arguments have a tendency to blend together; without linking back to the topic, arguments may fail to resonate with the judge and audience. Additionally, and this is especially true in Congressional Debate where speech times are limited and participants are competing for attention with 20 of their peers, repetition of the student’s basic advocacy (affirm or negate the legislation) will help cement the student’s speech in the audience’s mind.

- 3. Include specific language that immediately reinforces the advocacy of the speech.** The claim must immediately and intuitively establish the central premise of the argument to follow. Here is an example of a claim that does **not** immediately reinforce the advocacy of the speech: “The first reason to affirm the resolution is because of the economy.” To explore the ambiguity of the claim a bit more, imagine that the speaker is speaking about a resolution to cut taxes for the very wealthy. They may be about to argue that because the economy is doing poorly, we need to cut taxes to provide a short-term stimulus; alternatively, they may be about to argue that cutting taxes is the best way to ensure long-term economic stability; worse yet, they may be about to argue that cutting taxes will further aggravate existing income disparities, hurting the economy in the long term. Any of these arguments could easily fit under the label “the economy,” and so the audience has no way of predicting what will follow.

With a vague claim such as this, the audience asks themselves, “What does that mean?” and then they immediately and involuntarily begin forming their own answer. This will often clash with what the speaker is saying; the result is that the audience is now working



against the speaker — or at least not with them. This is an example of dissonant communication.

Let's look at the same claim made specific and immediate: "The first reason to affirm the resolution is because it will stimulate economic growth." No audience will wonder if this is positive or negative; the audience will immediately understand that this resolution accomplishes something good and therefore should be passed.

The claim does not clarify **how** the resolution will stimulate economic growth, but this is fine and even encouraged. The question the audience will be asking themselves at this point would only be, "How does the resolution accomplish that?" or "Why is that true?" This sets the stage for the next component of a successful argument, the warrant, which the speaker will immediately provide. This is an example of convergent communication.

## Warrants

A warrant is a reason that a claim is true. A claim without a warrant is merely an assertion; it is a statement of opinion without explanation or justification. If the claim is important because it gets the audience pointed in the right direction, the warrant is important because it helps the audience start moving down the path of the argument. The warrant should immediately

follow the claim and should specify, explain, or justify it.

Like claims, warrants should be structured in a very specific way. They should be introduced with language that indicates the speaker is providing a warrant. The most basic way to do this is with a phrase such as "This is true because . . ." or "This is the case because . . ." This language works **with** the audience, answering the questions they have naturally formed. Using this type of language ensures that speakers remember to provide warrants; it not only reminds the speaker that a warrant is necessary, but also helps them form sentences that actually provide warrants. By beginning warrants in this specific way, speakers are verbally prompting themselves to make clear arguments; this is important because debaters are often speaking extemporaneously from notes and may otherwise stray from the structure of their argument.

Many types of warrants are possible for claims. The sample claim above, "The first reason to affirm the resolution is because it will stimulate economic growth," can be advanced with several different warrants. For example, a warrant may specify **how** the claim will occur: "It will do this by putting more money into the hands of investors, who pass the money along to businesses and boost production." A warrant may also explain **why** a claim will occur: "This is true because tax cuts lead to an increase in investor confidence." Hundreds of variations are possible for this one argument, and dozens of other arguments to be explored;

what is important is that the warrant clarify the claim and provide argumentative momentum. Every sentence in an argument should advance the argument in some way, but this is especially important when first presenting an idea. If the argument stalls in the first two sentences, or if the argument grows less clear in the second sentence, then the audience will lose interest.

Some warrants will require their own warrants; sometimes multiple warrants are required to prove a claim; sometimes a single warrant will need additional exposition. The speaker is largely free to make their own decisions about how to continue with the argument, but can do so only if the initial claim/warrant pair is clear and concise. Once a speaker has explained their initial idea and warrant, the audience will have bought in and will be willing to listen to additional information.

## Data

In Congressional and Public Forum Debate, this additional information should include data, or evidence. Evidence can take many forms: statistics, expert testimony, and specific examples are some of the most common. Because speakers are not established experts, they cannot simply argue for a position; no matter how reasonable their arguments may be, speakers are still merely students. Thus, they must conduct extensive research to prepare for the topics they will debate. *(More detailed information about conducting research can be found in [Chapter 12](#).)*

In an ideal situation, evidence would be provided whenever the speaker makes a claim about the world; in the limited time of a debate speech, however, debaters must make choices about when to provide evidence and when to cite sources. Speakers would cite a source for two reasons. First, and most obviously, they should never present the ideas of any other person as their own; plagiarism is as serious an issue in a debate speech as it is in an essay. If a speaker is using a quotation or argument from a particular source, they must attribute it to that source. Additionally, if information is likely to be challenged, the speaker should provide a citation; for example, probably dozens of estimates of future federal deficits exist, and so the source of the estimate becomes more important.

Source citations are not necessary when ideas or data are so widely available that they are common knowledge. One rule of thumb is that if a piece of data can be found in 10 different sources, a citation is not necessary because no one is likely to challenge the information and because the information can be said to be part of the public domain. In fact, not citing a source in this situation may be to a speaker's benefit: by citing a source, the speaker is suggesting that they did not know the information and had to do research to find it. This may be true, but it does not establish credibility. To establish themselves as well-read, speakers should present commonly available information as accepted fact.

## Impacts

The final piece of any soundly constructed argument is the impact — the reason why the argument should matter to the audience. Without an impact, an argument is meaningless in a debate round; the speaker may be making a true argument, but the audience will not assign it any value.

Like claims, warrants, and data, impacts should be clearly delineated through the use of exact phraseology. A few ways to introduce impacts are “This is important because” and “The impact of this argument is.” Such language lets the audience know that the logical flow of the argument is complete and that the speaker is now performing a distinct task, which is evaluating the weight of the argument in the context of the round.

Impacts should build on the language of the claim and extend the scope of the argument to include large benefits or harms. If the claim established that the resolution will “stimulate the economy,” then the impact should establish the specific and tangible benefits of economic growth. The best impacts involve people. Rising economic indicators may sound good to an economist, but are not clearly related to everyday life; when crafting impacts, tie general statistics to tangible effects on people’s lives. “Rising unemployment” should become “millions of Americans out of work and unable to provide for their families”; “improved American image around the world” should become

“fewer lives lost to violent attacks.” Illustrations and examples are especially effective when describing impacts: where claims and warrants are abstract, impacts should be concrete.

Impacts should begin by focusing on concrete, real-world effects and should always end by relating the argument back to its purpose: affirming or negating a resolution or piece of legislation. To continue with the example of economic stimulus, a complete impact would look like this: “This stimulus is important because it will lift millions of American families out of poverty and affirming this resolution is the only way we can help these people.” In this way, the argument comes full circle, returning to the initial language of the claim.

## FILLING IN THE GAPS

---

The core components of a complete argument — claims, warrants, data, and impacts — can and often do stand on their own. Debaters could make a series of four-sentence arguments, providing each piece of each argument in turn, but this would make for choppy and somewhat superficial debate. More sophisticated speakers will supplement this basic structure with exposition and illustration. Warrants may require two or three sentences to fully explain; data will often need to be illustrated, especially if the data presents abstract or complicated statistics; impacts are strongest when they are illustrated and rhetorically powerful.

The key to developing sophisticated, effective arguments is to maintain the underlying argumentative structure. If the claim/warrant pair is strongly linked and clearly explained, the argument will be able to carry additional exposition; if the basic structure of the argument is unclear to the audience, then additional exposition will only further confuse them. Speakers should always provide the warrant immediately after the claim and should avoid adding more than two or three sentences each between the warrant, data, and impact.

Finally, debaters should remember that arguments may require more than one warrant, piece of data, or impact. If an argument has two distinct impacts, for example, then the speaker should indicate that when introducing the impacts: “This argument is important for two reasons.” Whenever a speaker deviates from the basic argumentative structure in any way, they need to be especially clear about labeling and explaining their choices. This not only helps the speaker stay on track and prevents rambling, it also gives the audience additional support in their effort to follow along with the argument.

## CHAPTER 3 – KEY CONCEPTS

- Each argument has four elements: a claim, a warrant, data, and an impact.
- A claim serves as the title for an argument; it conveys the main idea of the argument while also providing a compelling reason to support one side or the other.
- A warrant is the logical reason why the claim is true; it is the underpinning of the argument.
- Data is the research used to support the argument; it comes from sources found outside the debate round.
- An impact is the reason the argument is important; it establishes a compelling reason why the argument matters in a broad context.
- While arguments should contain each of these elements, strong arguments also contain illustration and in-depth explanation; arguments should not merely be four sentences long.



# CHAPTER 4

## *Congressional Debate Legislation*

Legislation is the heart of Congressional Debate. It is what competitors debate, spending hours on research and writing. The quality of legislation also greatly determines the quality of competition. If the legislation is interesting, the debate will be lively and debaters will want to participate; if the legislation is poorly written or the subject matter is boring, they will be uninterested and the session can stagnate. This chapter will explain how to write interesting, effective, and complete legislation. It will also explore how to analyze legislation for competition.

### TYPES OF LEGISLATION

---

Congressional Debate involves three types of legislation: bills, resolutions, and amendments to the Constitution. The first two are the most popular and, so, are the most debated

in competition. Each of these types of legislation does something distinctly different, thus understanding these differences is critical.

## TYPES OF LEGISLATION AND THEIR USES

TYPE	WHEN TO USE	EXAMPLE TITLE
<b>Bill</b>	Use when proposing something that will become law and that is within the bounds of the powers given to Congress under the Constitution.	<i>A Bill to Increase Federal Income Taxes for the Highest Tax Brackets</i>
<b>Resolution</b>	Use when proposing something that will express Congress's opinion on passage but not carry any binding force. It need not be within Congress's designated powers.	<i>A Resolution to Condemn the Government of Myanmar</i>
<b>Constitutional Amendment</b>	Use when proposing something that will alter the text of the Constitution upon passage and ratification by the states.	<i>A Resolution to Amend the Constitution to Mandate Equal Rights for Women</i>

### Bills

The first type of legislation is a **bill**, or a proposed law. Bills operate under the authority granted Congress in the U.S. Constitution. Put simply, a bill does something that Congress has the power to do. It may impose a restriction, create a new government program or agency, or reallocate money in the federal budget from one program to another. Whatever the bill does, it must provide the appropriate enforcement or funding: if the bill imposes a restriction, it must include a punishment for a violation of that restriction and specify who is responsible for enforcement; if the bill creates a new federal program, it must fund that program and assign or create an agency of government to enact the new program. Writing a bill can be difficult (governing is, after all, a complicated process), but participants, rather than coaches or tournament

officials, should write bills whenever possible. Bills provide the most substance for discussion and most meaningfully engage in the important issues they cover.

### Resolutions

A resolution is an expression of Congress's opinion about a particular subject or issue. A resolution does not carry the force of law; unlike a bill, it does not produce tangible changes in the way government or citizens operate. Consequently, resolutions should be written only when the author wants to tackle an issue over which Congress has no authority. Resolutions allow a broader range of subjects for Congress to discuss, but, because they only express opinions and do not require a plan or implementation, they may not engender substantive debate. Because Congress lacks authority over most foreign policy

issues, resolutions most commonly consider the way the United States should tackle problems in other countries.

## Constitutional Amendments

The final and least common form of legislation is an amendment to the Constitution. The name is self-explanatory: debaters write amendments when they wish to alter the text

of the Constitution to achieve a particular policy goal. Constitutional amendments usually have one of two aims: to alter a constitutional restriction (for example, to lower the voting age to 16) or to make an action constitutional (for example, to give Congress the power to deploy troops) or unconstitutional (for example, to prevent corporations from spending money to influence elections).

## STRUCTURE OF A BILL

Each type of legislation has its own structure. The structure of a bill is the most complicated. The first line of every bill should read the same: “Be it enacted by this Congress here assembled that.” The next line should begin with “**SECTION 1.**” bolded and in caps, followed by the text of the bill that indicates the specific policy being proposed. For example, a bill to abolish the death penalty would begin:

**SECTION 1.** The death penalty, or capital punishment, shall never be assigned as a punishment for a federal crime.

This briefly outlines the main idea of the bill and identifies the central issue that will be debated. All subsequent sections will begin

with the word “Section” and the section number in bold (followed by a period, also in bold) and then the text that signifies what the bill does. Typically, the second section of a bill defines terms or clarifies the meaning of the first section. The subsequent sections identify the source of funding for the legislation (if necessary) and the bureaucratic agency responsible for the enforcement of the legislation. Another section ought to include the date that the law will begin to take effect. Finally, the last section of every bill is the **null and void clause**. It reads: “All laws in conflict with this legislation are hereby declared null and void.” Here is a template to use when writing bills.

### A Bill to Do X

- 1 BE IT ENACTED BY THE CONGRESS HERE ASSEMBLED THAT:
- 2 **SECTION 1.** State the new policy in a brief declarative sentence or in as few sentences
- 3 as possible.
- 4 **SECTION 2.** Define any ambiguous terms in the first section.



- 5 **SECTION 3.** Name the government agency that will oversee the enforcement of the  
 6 bill along with the specific enforcement mechanism.  
 7 **A.** Go into further details, if necessary.  
 8 **B.** Go into still further details, if necessary.  
 9 **SECTION 4.** Explain the funding mechanism for the bill, if necessary.  
 10 **SECTION 5.** List the date when the bill will take effect.  
 11 **SECTION 6.** All laws in conflict with this legislation are hereby declared null and void.

*Introduced by X High School*

Any bill can be written using this template (the numbers indicate lines). For example:

### **A Bill to Increase Federal Funding of Education**

- 1 BE IT ENACTED BY THE STUDENT CONGRESS HERE ASSEMBLED THAT:  
 2 **SECTION 1.** The United States federal government shall increase funding to the states  
 3 for education by \$100 billion annually.  
 4 **SECTION 2.** Funding shall be allocated based on the population of each state, as  
 5 determined by the United States Census Bureau.  
 6 **SECTION 3.** The Department of Education is responsible for the enforcement of this  
 7 legislation.  
 8 **SECTION 4.** Funding for this legislation will come from a .5% income tax increase on  
 9 those making above \$1 million annually.  
 10 **SECTION 5.** This legislation shall take effect at the beginning of the fiscal year 2013.  
 11 **SECTION 6.** All laws in conflict with this legislation are hereby declared null and void.

*Introduced by Senator Ben Berkman Northwestern University*

## **STRUCTURE OF A RESOLUTION**

Because a resolution is merely an expression of opinion, it does not require the specifics that a bill does. A resolution has two basic elements: “whereas” clauses and “resolved” clauses. Whereas clauses give reasons for the

resolution’s existence. For example, if there were a resolution condemning the Chinese government, a whereas clause might read, “**WHEREAS**, the Chinese government has committed numerous human rights violations

against its citizens.” Each whereas clause is followed by a semi-colon, and the word “and.” So, the above whereas clause would read: “**WHEREAS**, the Chinese government has committed numerous human rights violations against its citizens; and.” This leads into the next whereas clause. Each resolution should have at least three whereas clauses before moving into the resolved clauses. The resolved clause states the precise opinion that Congress is expressing. In the China example, the resolved clause might read, “**RESOLVED**, by the Congress here

assembled that the Chinese government be condemned.”

If the author wishes to express more than one opinion in the same resolution, they can add an additional resolved clause by writing, on a new line, “**FURTHER RESOLVED**, that (insert additional language here).” Note that the final whereas clause before the resolved clauses ends differently. Instead of the “and” at the end of the whereas clause, the author writes “now, therefore, be it” and then moves into the first resolved clause on the next line.

### A Resolution to Do X

- 1 **WHEREAS**, State the current problem (one brief sentence); and
- 2 **WHEREAS**, Describe the scope of the problem cited in the first whereas clause (this
- 3 clause needs to flow logically from the first) and the inherent need for a
- 4 solution; and
- 5 **WHEREAS**, Explain the impact of and harms perpetuated by the current problem
- 6 (once again, the clause needs to flow in a logical sequence); and
- 7 **WHEREAS**, Use additional “whereas” clauses to elaborate the rationale for the
- 8 solution to the problem; now, therefore, be it
- 9 **RESOLVED**, That the Student Congress here assembled make the following
- 10 recommendation for solution (a call to action); and, be it
- 11 **FURTHER RESOLVED**, that (this is an optional additional recommendation; if not used,
- 12 end the previous “resolved” clause with a period.

*Introduced by X High School*

Here is an example of a resolution using this format (the numbers indicate lines):

### A Resolution to Condemn the Chinese Government

- 1 **WHEREAS**, the Chinese government has committed numerous human rights
- 2 violations; and

3 **WHEREAS,** thousands of Uighurs have had their voices silenced by the authoritarian  
4 Communist Party in China; and  
5 **WHEREAS,** such human rights violations are antithetical to the freedom that the  
6 United States espouses; and  
7 **WHEREAS,** the U.S. has a moral obligation to help people around the world become  
8 free when their government oppresses them; now, therefore, be it  
9 **RESOLVED,** that the Student Congress here assembled condemn the Chinese  
10 government.

*Introduced by Senator Jeffrey Hannan University of Florida*

## STRUCTURE OF A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

The final type of legislation is a resolution to amend the Constitution. It looks like a regular resolution until the final lines. The whereas clauses of an amendment operate in the exact same way as in a normal resolution; it is the resolved clause that is different. The text of an amendment's resolved clause always begins with:

By two-thirds of the Congress here assembled, that the following article is proposed as an amendment to the Con-

stitution of the United States, which shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several states within seven years from the date of its submission by the Congress:

On the next lines, the author writes the article that they wish to add to the Constitution. For example:

### **A Resolution to Amend the Constitution to Eliminate Corporate Personhood**

1 **WHEREAS,** corporate personhood allows companies to unfairly influence elections  
2 in the United States; and  
3 **WHEREAS,** the Supreme Court's decision in the Citizens United case made corporate  
4 personhood a Constitutional reality; and  
5 **WHEREAS,** corporations are donating millions of dollars to political campaigns,  
6 ensuring that elected officials represent their will and not the will of the  
7 people; and

8 **WHEREAS**, this represents a major threat to democracy in the United States; now,  
9 therefore, be it

10 **RESOLVED**, by two-thirds of the Congress here assembled, that the following article is  
11 proposed as an amendment to the Constitution of the United States,  
12 which shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution  
13 when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several states  
14 within seven years from the date of its submission by the Congress:

15 ARTICLE—

16 SECTION 1: Rights granted to persons or people in the Constitution are  
17 not granted to corporations or collections of individuals.

18 SECTION 2: Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by  
19 appropriate legislation.

*Introduced by Senator Chad Meadows Western Kentucky University*

## FORMATTING

Although the structures of the three types of legislation differ, all legislation prepared for tournaments is presented in the same format. Access editable legislation templates at <https://www.speechanddebate.org/legislation-templates/>. All legislation should be typed in 12-point font, double-spaced, and should not exceed one page. All lines of legislation except the title should be numbered; this allows speakers to easily reference different parts of the legislation during speeches. Legislation should be written in formal, professional language. The title of the legislation should indicate exactly what the legislation does. For example, if a bill legalizes marijuana, the title of the bill should be “A Bill to Legalize Marijuana”; a resolution

that rebukes Iran should be titled “A Resolution to Rebuke Iran.” Debaters should avoid vague titles, such as “The Drug Law Reformation Act” or “A Resolution Concerning Iran.” These sorts of titles do not indicate what the legislation does; because some tournaments only release the titles of legislation, students will not be able to adequately prepare for or research these topics, and debate will be poor. All legislation should include, at the bottom of the page, an identification of the author; this usually takes the form of “Respectfully submitted by” followed by a new line containing either the author’s name or the author’s school, or, in some cases, both.

## TOPIC SELECTION

---

An excellent rule of thumb when you are thinking about possible legislation is that if you have ever seen it before, do not submit it again. Debating a diverse array of topics is much more interesting and educational than debating the same topics at every tournament. Topics for legislation should meet three criteria:

**1. Legislation must be debatable.**

Legislation must deal with an interesting or controversial political, social, or economic issue, and must do so in a way that provokes debate. When writing legislation, debaters can use a few techniques to ensure that the result is interesting and debatable. One way is to think of or research at least seven distinct arguments that could be made on each side of the bill or resolution. If those arguments exist, then the legislation is likely to produce good debate; if they don't, the debater should return to the drawing board. Another measure of interest or debatability is topic literature; debaters should make sure that sources are available on the topic. Adequate information is required to make a debate educational and interesting. If topic literature is sparse or lacking, then write legislation on a different topic.

**2. Legislation must be unique.** Certain topics have been debated ad nauseum

in almost every league and region. The legalization of marijuana, the death penalty, and same-sex marriage are a few of the more over-debated topics. Although these issues are interesting and highly contentious, most debaters have probably exhausted the supply of cogent arguments they can make about them. Debaters should explore topics that have not been previously addressed in their league or region. That said, old issues can be tackled in compelling and new ways. Legislation proposing universal health care has been debated over and over again, but that does not mean that a debater should not write a bill on health care; it merely means that they should try to propose a unique solution. Exploring new topics is still advisable, but speakers can write fresh and interesting legislation on even the most debated topic areas.

**3. Legislation should be timely.** Debates will be more exciting if they involve the most current events. For example, as of June 2012, a bill concerning immigration reform, a major issue in the news, would be better suited for a debate than a bill about Iraq, which has not been in the news for some time. Debaters should also ensure that their bills and resolutions are not redundant. For example, writing

a resolution encouraging the United States to pull all troops out of Iraq

would make little sense, given that this has already occurred.

## CONSTITUTIONALITY, FUNDING, AND ENFORCEMENT

---

Competitors must ensure that the bills they write not only present unique solutions to problems, but also that those solutions are tenable. It is difficult to debate bills that are full of holes that would make them unfeasible, regardless of the novelty of the bills' overarching ideas. Bill writers ought to consider three elements of feasibility when they write legislation: whether or not their bill is constitutional, how they plan to fund the bill, and how they plan to enforce the bill. Doing so will ensure that the core issues involved in the bill are actually debated, as the chamber will be less likely to become bogged down on technical questions about the legislation.

### Constitutionality

When writing a bill (not a resolution), competitors must consider whether or not the Supreme Court has already ruled on the constitutionality of its proposal. The U.S. Congress has passed thousands of laws, and the Supreme Court has declared many of them unconstitutional. Hence, determining whether or not the courts have ruled on the bill's idea is important. For example, if a competitor wanted to propose a bill to ban firearms within 100 feet of schools, they would find that Congress had

already passed such a bill and that the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional in *United States v. Lopez* (1995). This would render such a bill unconstitutional and would make debate on the issue extremely one-sided.

A particularly important constitutional issue is states' rights. The 10th Amendment to the Constitution stipulates that all powers not explicitly granted to the federal government are reserved for the states or to the people. Often, competitors will make the argument that bills are unconstitutional because the Constitution does not explicitly grant Congress the power to create such legislation — thus, it is a right of the states. This does not necessarily end the debate on an issue, but students should ensure that their bills conform to the constitutional limits on federal power. They can do this by reading the topic-specific Supreme Court precedent and making sure that the policy they are proposing has not been explicitly ruled unconstitutional by the Court as an undue extension of federal power.

Bill authors can use Congress's power to tax and spend to circumvent some Constitutional issues concerning federal authority. Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution grants Congress the power of the purse. Accordingly, Congress controls all of the federal government's

spending. This allows the Congress to force the states to take specific actions by threatening to withhold funding for particular programs. Bills written in this manner circumvent 10th Amendment issues as they don't mandate that the states do anything; they merely attach conditions to federal funding, which is well within Congress's power. For example, the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act makes the states meet certain federal education requirements by threatening to cut federal education funding if they fail to comply.

Legislation written for Congressional Debate can often function in much the same way. For example, if a student wanted to write a bill mandating that states update their highway infrastructure, they could include a clause that read, "States that fail to comply with this legislation will forfeit 25 percent of their federal highway funding for the year after which they fail to comply." This bill would be more fully in the realm of congressional power because it would not force the states to take an action. Rather, it outlines a specific penalty for noncompliant states that explicitly falls within Congress's authority. The direct coercion that would make the bill potentially unconstitutional does not exist. Congress is merely using its power of the purse to achieve a desired outcome.

Debaters should consider various questions of constitutionality when writing legislation, but should also remember that constitutionality is a constantly changing idea. There are very legitimate disputes about what the Congress has the

power to do (see any split Supreme Court decision for evidence of this), and so competitors should not shy away from an idea just because it may be unconstitutional. While it is not wise to propose a bill that the Court has explicitly ruled unconstitutional, that does not mean competitors should completely avoid all bills that might fall into a constitutional grey area.

## Funding

Bills that require funding will need some mechanism for obtaining that funding. This can be achieved in one of two ways: taxes and budget cuts. Authors in Congressional Debate generally use two types of taxes: excise taxes and income taxes. Excise taxes are taxes imposed on the purchase of particular products, while income taxes are taxes on the amount of money a person earns either via their job (a standard income tax) or from investments (a capital gains tax). A particular type of excise tax called a "sin tax" is especially popular. Sin taxes entail an excise tax on an item (typically cigarettes, alcohol, and firearms). Authors often include these in bills because they think the tax will be uncontroversial. Any of the above funding mechanisms, and many more funding options, are acceptable; students should just be sure to include some sort of funding if the bill requires it.

## Enforcement

Bills require a mechanism to ensure that they have their desired effect. Accordingly, sufficient penalties must be established and the correct enforcement agencies need to be selected. If Congress passes a bill but gives actors no incentive to comply with that bill, then it is unlikely that the bill will have any tangible effect. Hence, bills must contain those incentives.

Penalties for noncompliance with the provisions of a bill ought to be harsh enough to act as a deterrent but not so harsh as to be disproportionate. As a general rule, the punishment should fit the crime, and it should be enough to ensure that people do not commit the crime. For example, if Congress passed a bill preventing corporations from polluting the environment, it would be too harsh to punish all violators, regardless of the severity of the offense, by fining them 100 percent of their total income. On the other hand, if the fine were only \$1,000 regardless of the violation, that would not deter a company from polluting; a balance is needed between deterrence and proportionality.

When writing bills, competitors must also choose an enforcement agency to mandate compliance. They must research which current government agencies oversee the general area that their bill involves, then they must pick the agency that appears to be the most likely to enforce such legislation. This can often be tricky,

especially when several government agencies have similar functions. Alcohol restrictions, for example, would not be enforced by the Food and Drug Administration, as one might expect. Rather, they would be enforced by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, a subsidiary of the Department of the Treasury. If no agency currently exists to enforce the legislation an author is proposing, they may create and fund a new agency in the bill for the purposes of enforcement. The agency should have a name, a clear purpose, and a way to fund its activity.



## CHAPTER 4 – KEY CONCEPTS

- There are three types of legislation: bills, resolutions, and amendments to the Constitution.
- Bills are legislation that might become law.
- Resolutions are legislation that will, on passage, express the opinion of Congress.
- Amendments to the Constitution will change the text of the U.S. Constitution once the ratification process is complete.
- Bills and amendments to the Constitution need to provide comprehensive text about what will happen on passage.
- Resolutions must contain whereas clauses, which provide reasons why the resolution should be passed, and a resolved clause, which establishes the exact opinion Congress is expressing.
- Topics selected for legislation should be debatable, unique, and timely.
- Legislation should contain the appropriate enforcement and funding mechanisms to ensure that it will have the desired effect.

# CHAPTER 5

## *Speech Construction in Congressional Debate*

**W**hile Congressional Debate is dynamic and multifaceted, no single aspect is more important than the speech. The speech is where a competitor conveys their position and answers the positions of others, all while speaking effectively and persuasively. Doing so is no easy task. This chapter will cover the goals of a speech, the proper approach to constructing speeches, and the key elements of delivery and style in Congressional Debate.

### GOALS

---

A Congressional Debate speech has three goals:

1. **Educate.** An effective speech educates the audience in some unique way. Debate

is inherently an educational activity; though winning is nice, students and coaches are also trying to learn as much

as possible about the world around them in a fun and engaging format. As such, each speech in Congress should bring something new to the table: a new argument, a piece of evidence not previously cited, a new spin on an old argument, or a refutation of an opposing argument. The speaker must do at least one of these to avoid repeating what has already been said. When multiple debaters make the same argument with no additional insight, it is called “rehash.” In addition to being uneducational, rehash will likely be frowned on by judges and competitors alike.

- 2. Engage.** An effective speech will engage the audience. Neither judges nor competitors want to listen to a boring speaker, so presenting an interesting speech is important. An interesting speech begins with the introduction, which must grab the attention of the audience in a meaningful way, and continues with the body of the speech, which must effectively employ a variety of tones to keep the audience interested. Finally, it ends with the conclusion, which must compellingly summarize the argument.
- 3. Persuade.** Congressional Debate is, after all, a debate event; accordingly convincing the audience that a position is correct is important. Debaters persuade both through compelling content and

effective style. A persuasive speech makes arguments that are well-delivered and full of well-reasoned content. Key to persuasion is the language used in a speech. Merely saying a bill is “good” is less persuasive than delivering a vivid description of the way in which the bill has a positive impact. Debaters ought to be meticulous in choosing the words they use. In doing so, they will be able to craft arguments that compel the judge and their fellow competitors to believe them.

The rest of this chapter will focus on the ways in which debaters can craft a speech that educates, engages, and persuades.

## SPEECH STRUCTURE

---

While the times for Congressional Debate speeches can vary by tournament and league, the National Speech & Debate Association rules allot three minutes per speech. Most tournaments allow for a grace period, or time allowed above and beyond that allotted for the speech, at the end of each speech and give the presiding officer discretion over enforcement of the grace. Typically, students may have five seconds past their three minutes to finish their speech; beyond that, the presiding officer will begin to gavel them down. To maximize the efficiency of their three minutes, students should follow a fairly common speech

structure: an introduction, followed by a body, ending with a conclusion.

## SPEECH STRUCTURE IN CONGRESS

### Introduction

- Attention-Getting Device (AGD)
- Thesis

### Argument 1

- Claim
- Warrant
- Data
- Impact

### Argument 2

- Claim
- Warrant
- Data
- Impact

### Argument 3

- Claim
- Warrant
- Data
- Impact

### Conclusion

## Introduction

Every speech should begin with an introduction. It is the first thing that the judge hears, and it is often more determinative of scores than most competitors believe. Speakers have brief windows in which they can grab an audience before the audience members tire, lose interest, and stop listening. This makes the introduction perhaps the most important part of the Congressional Debate speech. A speaker must do whatever they can in a very brief period to capture the attention of judges and competitors.

An ideal introduction is between 15 and 30 seconds long and does not merely parrot the arguments that the speaker is about to deliver. Each introduction should begin with an attention-getting device, or AGD, and end with a thesis, which, in Congressional Debate, should always take the form of the speaker encouraging the audience to vote a particular way on the legislation (to affirm or negate). Always place the thesis at the end of the introduction, never at the beginning; an introduction ought to open with as compelling a statement as possible.

Many debaters believe that offering a menu, or a preview, of the speech's arguments is a good introduction. It isn't. These kinds of introductions are predictable and boring. A good speech begins with something more exciting. A menu does not get the audience's and judges' attention and, in fact, can cause judges to

stop listening because they now know what the speech will include. Additionally, because the speech time in Congress is relatively short, a menu both consumes valuable time and is unnecessary for an audience to follow along.

The introduction must compel the judge to continue listening. It begins with the attention-getting device, which ought to be the first thing a competitor says in a speech. Usually the AGD is a vivid, strongly worded statement of a competitor's position on a piece of legislation. It can also be a particularly compelling piece of information or an evocative question. Many competitors use quotations as AGDs, but quotations are often ineffective as they can be generic and overused. AGDs should be unique and fresh; ideally, you should never use an AGD that you've used before. As with the rest of the introduction, AGDs should have a narrow focus, use strong, exciting language, and be specific to the legislation being debated.

Ideally, introductions should focus on only a single issue and stress its importance. An introduction should not contain a complete argument but, rather, highlight the impact of the arguments that the speaker is about to make. It should not include extensive warranting, since warrants are typically the driest part of a Congress speech. Instead, introductions should focus on the tangible effects that the legislation will have on the world, even if the reasoning for those effects will not come until later in the speech. Impacts are ultimately what is going to

compel a judge to believe a position is correct, so they should be what the judge hears first.

The key to an exciting introduction is language. The words selected for an introduction must be powerfully crafted and designed to yield an emotional response from the audience. The more descriptive the introduction, the better. An introduction that posits that the bill will "create millions of jobs for hardworking Americans" will always be superior to one that merely claims that the bill will be "good for the economy." By that same token, an introduction that dictates that the bill will "revive steel mills, revitalize farmers, and create millions of dollars in new infrastructure, putting millions of hardworking Americans back in the workforce" will always be better than the introduction that only talks about jobs. The specificity of an introduction is a key to its success. The more specific an introduction, the more vivid the picture of the world it presents, the better the speech.

Introductions should be narrowly tailored to the legislation being debated. They should not focus on the broad topic area of the bill, but on the action specific to the bill. Introductions that are bill-specific demonstrate that a competitor is engaged with the debate and not merely recycling something that has been said before. For example, consider a bill lifting economic sanctions on Iran. An introduction that focuses on the impact of sanctions will always be superior to one that only discusses the authoritarian nature of the Iranian government. The

former is specific to the bill, the latter could be delivered on any bill or resolution concerning Iran. Never use an introduction twice or reuse an introduction that someone else has used. Be original and construct a powerful, unique introduction every time.

Below are two examples of good introductions and two examples of bad introductions on a bill to fund embryonic stem cell research.

### *Good introductions:*

For years, the world has been searching for an answer to health problems that have decimated our society and torn families apart. Today, we are given the opportunity to come one step closer to solving those problems by embracing a new technology that will allow doctors to heal damaged organs and cure diseases in a way we've never seen before. I implore you to vote affirmative.

Nothing is more paramount than human life. If we pass legislation that funds the destruction of human life merely for the purpose of science, then we have become a tyrannical society. Because I cannot watch this Congress descend into tyranny, I urge a negative ballot.

### *Bad introductions:*

Because this bill will help improve the health of Americans, I urge an affirmative ballot on today's legislation.

For the following three contentions, we should negate this bill: First, this bill destroys embryos, which can lead to human life. Second, stem cell research is still very controversial, and third, we have a massive budget deficit.

Notice that the strong introductions are vivid, descriptive, and use powerful language, whereas the weak introductions are general or use an ineffective menu.

## **Body**

After the introduction, the speaker moves into the body of their speech. This consists of two or three arguments that support their position on an individual bill. All Congressional Debate arguments should follow the Claim/Warrant/Data/Impact (C/W/D/I) format described in [Chapter 3](#). That said, some issues unique to Congressional Debate deserve special attention here.

First, three different constructions are commonly used for the body of a Congress speech; we recommend all three. Each of these constructions is acceptable — which one an individual competitor uses should be based on their comfort level and the research they have available to them. Some topics will lend themselves to some structures, while others will lend themselves to different ones.

The first two structures — two- and three-point speech constructions — are fairly straightforward. A two-point construction consists of

two complete arguments using the C/W/D/I format. The three-point construction is the same, except with three arguments instead of two. While earlier in a speaker's debate career the three-point construction may have seemed easier, the two-point construction is generally more effective. If a debater makes three distinct arguments, they will have difficulty giving appropriate depth to each as there is just not enough time in each speech. The two-point construction allows for more depth because a speaker has more time to devote to each argument. That said, a three-point construction is perfectly acceptable; competitors should just be sure to note its limitations.

The final construction is a two-by-two construction. This consists of two arguments, each of which has two distinct sub-points, i.e., each claim has two distinct warrants. Each of the warrants must link back to the same overarching claim. Let's look at an affirmative speech on a bill to decrease taxes on small business. A debater could make a claim that the bill would improve the economy and that claim could have two distinct warrants: first, the bill will create more jobs, and, second, the bill will increase spending by small businesses. Each of these links back to the overarching issue of economics, yet they are two distinct reasons why the claim is true. Arguments can include multiple impacts or only one if the speaker chooses. The two-by-two structure is often the densest construction as it provides both breadth (the speaker is making four different

arguments) and depth (the speaker is exploring two issues very extensively).

For speeches to remain fluid and cohesive, they must have effective transitions between arguments. Each argument can end in one of two ways: either the last line of the impact can be the end of the argument or the speaker can end with a call for the audience to either affirm or negate. Each new argument should begin with some iteration of the phrase, "the first/next reason to affirm/negate this bill is . . ." This makes clear to the audience that one argument has finished and a new one is beginning. Many speakers do not effectively demarcate their arguments, and so one idea just blends with the next. This lack of clarity can cripple an otherwise effective speech. A judge who does not know where a debater is in a particular speech is unlikely to score them well.

Finally, debaters should always be concerned about time allocation within the body of a speech. Roughly the same amount of time should be devoted to each argument. If using a three-point construction, each argument should last about 45 seconds. If using a two-point or a two-by-two construction, each argument should last between one minute and one minute and fifteen seconds. Spending too much time on one argument makes the others seem comparatively rushed and underdeveloped. An equal distribution of time avoids these problems.

## Conclusion

Conclusions are the grand finale of a Congress speech and should package everything the debater has just explained into one cohesive, passionate statement. The criteria for a good conclusion are largely the same as for a good introduction. Like introductions, conclusions should be 15 to 30 seconds long and should focus more on impacts than warrants. The more specific the description of the impact, the better the conclusion. If anything was particularly noteworthy about the introduction (if a quotation was used or if the language was particularly strong and evocative), then the conclusion should attempt to harken back to the attention-getter. Much like the introduction, the conclusion should end (not begin) with a statement of the debater's position on the legislation.

A key difference between introductions and conclusions is the use of quotations. For a number of reasons, quotations are generally much more effective when used at the end of the speech than at the beginning. First, while using quotations at the outset of a speech has become clichéd from years of overuse, quotations used to conclude speeches have not. Additionally, quotations lack meaning at the beginning of a speech, when the audience has not yet been exposed to the context in which they are being used. On the other hand, at the end of the speech all relevant context has

been explicated. Thus, the audience can fully experience and understand the quotation.

Below are two examples of good conclusions and two examples of poor conclusions on a bill to lift the Cuban embargo:

### *Good conclusions:*

It is time that we once and for all abandon a failed policy. A failed policy that has allowed thousands of innocent Cubans to starve. A failed policy that has only entrenched the Cuban people further into dictatorship. A failed policy that has done absolutely nothing to destroy Castro's regime. We have to affirm this bill.

We, as the United States, have a moral obligation to uphold democracy and destroy autocracy in the world. By abandoning the Cuban embargo, we would only fuel the dictatorial Cuban government that has led the Cuban people into poverty. We would reward a regime that denies basic rights to its people. Because of that, we must negate this bill.

### *Poor conclusions:*

For the aforementioned reasons, we must affirm this bill.

Because Castro's regime is still in power, I urge a negative ballot on this legislation.

Note that the effective conclusions employ strong language that describes specific phenomena, whereas the weaker conclusions are



short and either completely non-specific or excessively broad.

The most common mistake Congressional debaters make is to rush the ending of their speeches; every session is replete with students offering one-sentence conclusions or no conclusion at all. Speakers should also always leave time for a fully developed conclusion.

## SPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

---

The first affirmative, or sponsorship, speech, which is delivered by the author of the bill or a sponsor, differs from other speeches. Unlike regular speeches, a sponsorship must completely introduce the audience to the topic. Additionally, because it is the first speech on a piece of legislation, it is entirely scripted and needs to be completed before the session begins. A sponsorship speech has two goals: to introduce and to advocate. A sponsoring debater must introduce some global or national problem to the audience and explain how their bill or resolution addresses that problem. Then, they must advocate for their plan by explaining to the audience why their proposal is the best possible solution.

The rules for the sponsorship speech vary by league and geographic location. The National Speech & Debate Association rules dictate that the speech be the same length as every other speech, three minutes. One of the chief differences between the sponsorship and other speeches under NSDA rules is that

the sponsorship is followed by two minutes of cross-examination as opposed to only one. This requires the author to be more prepared to defend both their bill and their specific reasons for advocating the bill. Other leagues may require the sponsorship to be a four-minute speech, with varying cross-examination times. Regardless of the specific format, the sponsor must convey a large amount of information in a relatively short time.

On a very basic level, the structure of a sponsorship speech is the same as that of a typical speech: it begins with an introduction, follows with two or three arguments, and then ends with a conclusion. That said, the content of a sponsorship speech and a typical affirmative speech differ in important areas. Differences begin with the introduction. The introduction to a sponsorship must be both informative and persuasive because it introduces the entire topic to the audience. The introduction must include a broad overview of the issues most central to the bill. Consider the way in which an acceptable introduction to a sponsorship on a bill to abolish the death penalty would differ from an acceptable introduction to a regular speech in support of the bill. The regular affirmative introduction could be:

For too long, we have allowed a policy that has killed the innocent, that has been a manifestation of racism in our criminal justice system, and that is abhorrent to justice. We must affirm this bill.

This language is persuasive, but it is not informative. It does not tell the audience the extent of the problem nor does it give them any background information about the death penalty. It would be insufficient as the introduction to a sponsorship speech. The sponsorship introduction might say:

Since the death penalty was reinstated in 1972, at least 130 innocent people have been placed on death row. The courts have ruled that there is a massive racial disparity in the ways in which the death penalty has been applied, with African Americans and Hispanics being given the death penalty far more than whites convicted of the same kinds of crimes. The only way we can solve these problems is by abolishing the death penalty once and for all. That is precisely what my bill does. Therefore, if we wish to rid ourselves of a system that kills the innocent and a system that is remarkably racist, we must affirm this bill.

This statement first offers concrete information that tells us the status quo of the death penalty and then transitions to language aimed at persuading the audience to pass the bill. Hence, it accomplishes the dual function of the sponsorship's introduction: it both informs and advocates. After the introduction, the differences between the sponsorship and other affirmative speeches are less pronounced. A sponsorship should make two or

three arguments that convince the audience of the effectiveness of the bill. Because the sponsorship speech is entirely prepared before the tournament, the expectations in terms of evidence and persuasiveness of argumentation are significantly higher than for the average speech. The arguments in a sponsorship come at the very beginning of the debate, so no adaptation is required. Thus, the sponsorship should contain the most-well-supported arguments in the entire round. To meet this higher standard, competitors need to take more time preparing the sponsorship than they do preparing their other speeches. Each argument should be significantly sourced (ideally, with two or three sources per argument). Speeches later in the round are less dependent on evidence, but rely far more on responsiveness. Judges will understand if arguments do not have perfect sourcing later in a debate when competitors are more concerned with refuting others or weighing the claims made by each side. On the other hand, with the sponsorship, there is no burden to weigh or refute that would make sourcing less necessary. Accordingly, the arguments made in a sponsorship need to be supported by significantly more published evidence than speeches given at other points in the round. Sponsors should also attempt to anticipate the strongest objections to the bill and answer them. This indicates to the judges that the debater is being responsive and is giving a complete view of the topic at hand.

While regular affirmatives must focus on the main issue of the bill, a complete sponsorship ought to defend the bill as a whole. A sponsor should defend specific sections of the bill that others would not normally discuss. While a typical affirmative speaker would not defend the enforcement mechanisms or payment methods of a particular bill (as it would be considered minutia), a sponsor should do so, especially if those sections will have significant impact. For example, consider a bill that seeks to create tax credits for those who purchase hybrid cars. Say the bill attempted to pay for the tax credit by increasing income taxes for those making more than \$1 million per year by 1 percent. It would be fine, and possibly necessary, for a sponsor to defend this taxation system. However, a regular affirmative speaker should not do so as they would be ignoring the key issue in the bill (tax credits for hybrids).

The conclusion to a sponsorship should look exactly the same as a conclusion to a regular speech. It should focus entirely on persuasion and should attempt to evoke an emotional response from the audience. Overall, the sponsorship has the potential to be the most persuasive speech in the round. The best arguments are always available, and the speaker has the opportunity to write, perform, and perfect the sponsorship speech before the session begins. If done properly, sponsorships should stand out from other affirmative speeches.

## ROLE-PLAYING

---

Competitors can remain credible, and even stand out, in Congressional Debate by embracing the role-playing aspects of the activity. Unique to Congressional Debate is students actually filling the roles of U.S. senators and representatives. When in the chamber, the competitors should pretend to be a legislator representing their constituents. Making reference to how their constituents would be affected by a bill is very effective because it demonstrates an understanding of the nuances of the issue at hand. Additionally, attempts at humor based on the role-playing aspect of Congressional Debate are welcome, though debaters should be wary of making jokes that trivialize the issue or their bill. The same rule for introductions applies to humor: never use a joke that has been used before — keep things fresh.

Debaters must never abandon their fictitious roles as members of Congress by breaking the fourth wall. A competitor should never mention that they are a high school student. A debater who breaks the fourth wall instantly loses credibility, reminding the judge that they are young and inexperienced. If debaters are to be taken seriously, they must always embrace their role as a lawmaker.

Finally, as a general rule, avoid personal stories and anecdotes. They remind the judge that the debater is a high school student, leading to the aforementioned credibility issues. Additionally, crafting a personal story in a way

that does not make the speaker seem unprofessional is difficult. Narratives about important political figures are acceptable, but only if they are distinctly tied to the bill at hand.

## STYLE IN CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE SPEECHES

---

Even a brilliantly constructed speech can be ruined by stylistic flaws — while effective style can turn a competent speech into a compelling one. Five elements of style are inherent to Congressional Debate: eye contact, tone and speed, movement, gesturing, and pad orientation. If debaters master each of these, they will encounter few barriers to success in the activity. Please note, these tips are general. There are many valid ways to debate based on a student's abilities.

### Eye Contact

The easiest stylistic element to master is eye contact. Participants in Congressional Debate typically speak with the assistance of notes usually made on a legal pad. Although they have notes with them, a debater is expected to make as much eye contact with the audience as possible. Looking up from the notes not only allows a speaker to form a connection with the audience, it also demonstrates that the speaker understands the material well enough to present and discuss it extemporaneously. Many judges will give otherwise excellent speeches

lower scores merely because the majority of the speech was delivered while the debater was looking down at their notes. Speakers should maintain eye contact with the audience throughout at least 50 percent of their speech. Additionally, debaters should not haphazardly scan the room; constantly shifting eye contact from one person to another prevents the speaker from forming a meaningful connection with the audience. A debater should maintain eye contact with a single person until one complete thought is finished and then move on to another audience member.

### Tone and Speed

Debaters must make effective use of tone and speed. These elements are the most difficult to grasp and use correctly, however, and many speakers unconsciously err when using them. In utilizing tone, debaters need to strike a balance between passivity and anger. Judges will be put off if a debater seems ambivalent about a bill, but they will also be turned off by a speaker who yells their entire speech. An effective speech falls somewhere in the middle: its tone is conversational for the most part, but fiery and passionate when it needs to be.

Effective intonation is difficult to write about because each speech requires something different. That said, speakers should follow two general rules:

1. **Most important, sound natural.** Never put on a fake voice or go into “speech mode.” Altering natural voice or speech

patterns sounds awkward and reminds the judge that they are listening to high school debaters.

- 2. Adapt tone to content.** Sounding fiery or passionate is most appropriate during introductions, conclusions, and impacts. These are the parts of the speech where a speaker really wants the judge to take notice, so the speaker's tone should become more modulated and serious. On the other hand, sounding infuriated while giving an explanation of economic theory would be nonsensical. Thus, warrants should take on a more conversational and didactic tone that listeners find accessible.

Changes in volume can be just as effective as changes in tone. If a speaker suddenly goes from loud to quiet, the audience will inevitably look up and take notice. This maneuver can be just as effective at conveying the importance of an impact as an increase in volume and a more aggressive tone.

Suggesting the appropriate speed of a Congress speech is also difficult because speed varies depending on circumstance. Ideally, a debater will speak no faster than they do in everyday conversation. Speed can also be used for emphasis. While at its fastest, a speech should be delivered at a conversational pace. Debaters can slow down to emphasize particular phrases or sentences that they deem to be extremely important. Such slowing should happen the most during impacts, where a

competitor is really attempting to persuade the judge with the strength of their argument.

One of the most common difficulties debaters face is pausing — some debaters pause far too much, leading to an awkward speech pattern, while others rarely pause, making their arguments difficult to understand. As a rule, debaters should pause only where there would be commas and periods in their speeches. If correct pausing is a problem, one effective drill requires the speaker to say the words “period” and “comma” where periods and commas fall in their speech; this teaches them the appropriate moment to pause.

## Movement

The rule about movement is straightforward: do not move without purpose, do not walk during the introduction, each of the arguments, or the conclusion. During each of these phases of the speech, the speaker should remain in one place with their feet shoulder-width apart. Movement (beyond gestures) is only acceptable between the introduction and the first argument, between any subsequent arguments, and between the final argument and the conclusion. The debater should start in the middle of the room, take about three steps either left or right after the introduction, move in the opposite direction after the first argument (and continue to move between any subsequent arguments), and then eventually conclude in the middle of the room. This transitional movement reinforces the

transitions of the speech and helps the debater fill the space at the front of the room. Speakers who remain frozen to one spot will seem small by comparison.

## **Gesturing**

Gestures are hand motions used for emphasis when delivering a speech. They ought to be used at particularly important points, as a means of stressing their importance to the audience. Gestures can be especially effective when comparisons are being made, or when a particularly shocking fact is being revealed. When used effectively, gestures make a speaker more dynamic and polished.

The majority of debaters have issues with over-gesturing. This happens when a debater constantly moves their hand(s) while they are speaking. Over-gesturing defeats the purpose of the gesture, which is to emphasize a particular point. If everything is emphasized, nothing is emphasized, so speakers should gesture only when necessary.

Additionally, many speakers gesture too low. As a rule, gestures should be about chest high unless a specific part of a speech calls for a low gesture (for example, if a competitor is comparing something high to something low, a low gesture is appropriate when discussing the latter). Keeping gestures at chest height makes them more noticeable and makes the speech feel “bigger” and grander. Debaters should avoid gesturing while their hands are at their side. These gestures are meaningless and distracting.

Finally, speakers should never gesture with the pad; in addition to being distracting, this kind of gesture looks disorganized and sloppy. The speaker should rely on their “off-hand” to do most of their gesturing, keeping the pad still and unassuming.

Remember that every gesture should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Gestures should not be rushed nor should they hang in the air indefinitely. Students should make strong choices about when and how to gesture, and then follow through. They should pick the moments in a speech that they most want to emphasize and make a complete gesture to signal that importance to the audience.

## **Pad Orientation**

During a Congress speech, all notes should be contained on a legal pad. Avoid loose-leaf paper and spiral notebooks; they look unprofessional. While delivering a speech, the speaker should hold the pad at their side, where the arm naturally falls. When they need to refer to the pad, they should raise it to the top of the stomach or the bottom of the chest. If a speaker holds the pad too high, they run the risk of blocking their face and losing the connection with the judge. Moreover, the speaker should avoid switching the hand that the pad is in, which can distract a judge. Try to have all notes for a particular speech on one page to avoid having to turn pages.

## CHAPTER 5 – KEY CONCEPTS

- Each speech should have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.
- The introduction should be specific, and it should get the attention of the audience while also persuading them to vote a particular way.
- The body should contain two or three arguments that support a position on the bill or resolution.
- Conclusions, much like introductions, should be brief but engaging, using specific and strong language to compel the audience.
- Sponsorship speeches must introduce the audience to a topic in addition to persuading the audience.
- Debaters can be creative and engaging by embracing their position as a Congressperson and role-playing at appropriate times.
- Debaters must make effective eye contact, gesture appropriately, and move at opportune times to have the greatest stylistic effectiveness.

# CHAPTER 6

## *Resolutional Analysis in Public Forum Debate*

**E**very Public Forum Debate round begins from the same place: the resolution. To be successful in Public Forum, speakers must effectively evaluate, analyze, and research each resolution. This chapter will demonstrate how best to do this.

In other debate events, resolutions have a specific set of burdens attached to them; affirmative teams often must win a specific set of arguments to prove the resolution true. For example, in Policy Debate, affirmative teams must demonstrate that a problem exists, offer a plan to solve the problem, and prove that their plan actually addresses the harms of the status quo. Each resolution in Policy Debate is open to some degree of interpretation, but

affirmative teams must still meet these basic requirements. Public Forum resolutions, by contrast, do not have a predetermined set of burdens accompanying them. The burdens for the affirmative and negative teams will change with each topic. As a result, Public Forum debaters have to treat each resolution independently to determine its burdens and begin research and case construction.



The resolution also serves as the focal point of the debate; at the end of the round, the judge will make their decision based on the two teams' effectiveness at debating about the resolution. In other debate events, the resolution may be eclipsed by broader questions of fairness or social advocacy, but in Public Forum, the resolution is the ultimate mechanism for determining the winner. A debater's technical proficiency, eloquence, and poise are all for naught if they do not adequately address the resolution. This is distinct from Congressional Debate, where a speaker may "win" the round simply by being a better debater. Consequently, analyzing the resolution is one of the most powerful tools that Public Forum debaters have to increase their chances of winning.

## UNDERSTANDING RESOLUTIONS

---

At the most basic level, a resolution is a sentence that declares something. Another word for this is a "constative." A sentence is determined to be a constative when it can be clearly demonstrated to be true or false. Understanding the resolution as a constative is applicable to Public Forum because every act in the round, every word and gesture, ought to prompt the judge to determine the truth of the resolution. Thus, the resolution is Public Forum's connection to the overall "truth-seeking" goal of formal debate.

Resolutions tend to follow two general models of truth: positive and normative. A

**positive** model of truth examines empirically verifiable and value-free descriptions of reality. A **normative** model of truth tests the ideal reality given a set of values. The language of the resolution determines if it is normative or positive. Normative and positive statements often address similar content but engage that content in distinctly different ways. The resolution, "Government tax cuts have increased employment," is a positive statement: the value of tax cuts need not be assessed to prove this statement true. The resolution merely questions the causal relationship between two events. The resolution, "The government should cut taxes," is a normative statement: it requires debaters to assess the value of tax cuts and determine whether cutting taxes would be the ideal action for the government to take. Both resolutions prompt an exploration of tax cuts but, ultimately, have very different focuses.

The verb of the sentence usually changes the model of truth of a statement. Verbs like "should" or "ought" are associated with normative statements because they ask about possible courses of action or obligations for agents. Verbs like "is," "will," or "has" are associated with positive statements because they often form resolutions that exclusively describe reality, rather than advocating for a particular course of action or set of values.

## TYPES OF RESOLUTIONS

The distinction between positive and normative resolutions helps to clarify the chief types of resolutions. Resolutions can be broadly divided into three types: resolutions of fact, resolutions of value, and resolutions of policy. Not all resolutions will fit discretely into a particular category, but most every resolution can be understood to be primarily one of these types.

THREE TYPES OF RESOLUTIONS	
<b>Resolutions of Fact</b>	Resolutions that question whether or not a piece of information about the world is true.
<b>Resolutions of Value</b>	Resolutions that question a particular ideal or a set of judgments about the world.
<b>Resolutions of Policy</b>	Resolutions that question a particular course of action.

### Resolutions Of Fact

A fact resolution is a positive constative, or a sentence that posits a fact about the world and prompts the debaters to prove or disprove it. A fact resolution requires that the affirmative team prove that the resolution's premise is true; the negative team must demonstrate that the affirmative team has not done so. Fact resolutions do not require debate about the normative or moral truth of the resolution.

An example fact resolution is “Resolved: U.S. policies established after September 11, 2001, have substantially reduced the risk of terrorist acts against the United States.” This resolution requires that the affirmative prove two things: that the risk of terrorist attacks has been reduced and that the policies established after September 11 caused that reduction. The affirmative team does not have to prove that the new policies are beneficial to the country or that safety is more valuable than civil liberties; in fact, an affirmative team that attempts to prove these larger claims is only making their job more difficult.

### Resolutions Of Value

A value resolution is a broad normative constative, or a sentence that establishes a general ideal or value judgment about the world or a particular set of events or actions in the world. An example of a value resolution is, “Resolved: When the values are in conflict, the United Nations should prioritize global poverty reduction over environmental protection.” A value resolution often tests the normative value of general concepts and may even deal with philosophical topics.

To win, the affirmative team must prove the resolution true through normative evaluation. The introduction of normative evaluations changes the burden of proof for the affirmative team by questioning the values of the resolution rather than just its empirical content. Debates on the resolution above would

introduce arguments about the desirability of prioritizing “global poverty reduction over environmental protection” in situations where the two aims conflict. This would lead to a discussion surrounding why prioritizing global poverty reduction has benefits and, thus, a normative evaluation of global poverty reduction. Normative resolutions require debaters to establish burdens beyond mere empirical truth; they must demonstrate what is valuable and then demonstrate that the resolution accords with that concept of value.

## Resolutions Of Policy

A policy resolution is a narrow normative constative, or a sentence describing an ideal action or event. The policy resolution is distinct from the value resolution because it is typically more specific and deals exclusively with government policy. An example policy resolution is, “Resolved: Direct popular vote should replace Electoral College vote in U.S. presidential elections.” To win, the affirmative team must prove that direct popular vote replacing the Electoral College would be the ideal reality. Debates about the benefits of such an action on voter turnout in presidential elections would be appropriate. Policy resolutions require the affirmative team to propose and defend a specific action — once again within a framework of value.

The type of resolution will dramatically change how the resolution is proved true and the kinds of arguments and research that will

be useful for debates. A resolution of fact will require broad research about the status quo and will focus on empirical data; a resolution of value, by contrast, will require an emphasis on philosophical or theoretical evidence; a resolution of policy will often require a blend of these types of research. Consider a debate about tax policy. A resolution that asks whether a certain tax policy has successfully stimulated the economy (a resolution of fact) will require debaters to research the empirical effects of the policy on economic growth; a resolution that asks whether a certain tax policy is fair (a resolution of value) may require similar research, but will also require research on what constitutes fairness.

Often, researchers will make both positive and normative arguments, so it is important to make sure that the type of resolution does not narrow the focus of the research. Instead, the type of resolution should change how the debaters use research when crafting their arguments. The construction of case positions for any type of resolution is the topic of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 6 – KEY CONCEPTS

- Public Forum resolutions do not have preset burdens; the burdens will change with each resolution.
- In Public Forum Debate, the resolution determines the winner; unlike in Congressional Debate, the winner must win the debate on the resolution rather than merely being the “better debater.”
- There are positive resolutions, which determine something that is empirically verifiable (e.g., “Tax cuts have increased government revenue”), and there are normative resolutions, which ask a question about the value of a course of action (e.g., “The government should increase taxes”).
- There are three types of resolutions: resolutions of fact, resolutions of value, and resolutions of policy.
- Resolutions of fact involve determining whether a particular verifiable statement is true (e.g., “Tax hikes have increased government revenue”).



# CHAPTER 7

## *Constructive Speeches in Public Forum Debate*

**P**ublic Forum Debate begins with the case, the text of the four-minute constructive that initiates the debate round. The case is the only part of the debate that is entirely scripted; the rest of the debate is spent reacting to what the opposition has argued. Case construction provides the opportunity for speakers to contextualize their arguments on their own terms. The cases are also the first opportunity for the judge to determine which team may have the advantage. Accordingly, solid case construction is a fundamental element of successful debate.

Like most components of debate, the case does not have a required format, but convention and common understanding of best practices have led to the development of certain standards. This chapter will build on

the understanding of argument construction established in [Chapter 3](#) by explaining how best to organize your arguments into a Public Forum constructive.

## CASE CONSTRUCTION

---

Case construction is unique in that it heavily emphasizes writing skills. Just like an essay, a case should go through several drafts. Unlike an essay, however, a case construction will not be judged by a reader. The case will be read aloud to an audience, and so a judge has only one opportunity to listen. Consequently, speakers need to pay special attention to ensuring that the case is accessible and easy to understand. The structure of the case is extremely important. The content of a Public Forum case may be difficult to digest in four minutes, but with a good structure, the judge and the debaters are able to understand the case.

## STRUCTURE

---

Every Public Forum case should have an introduction that frames and defines the resolution, then one or more contentions that argue for the team's position, followed by a conclusion.

### Introduction

Every speech needs an introduction or a simple opening to the case. The introduction will define the terms for the debate and establish the burdens for the round. A Public Forum introduction should be brief, between 30 and 45 seconds, but should persuasively accomplish the following:

- **Frame the round.** The first task is to invoke the major issues of the resolution and lay the groundwork for the debate to come. Many debaters utilize a quotation to help with such framing. The quotation should come from a heavily qualified or easily recognizable source and should be primarily rhetorical as opposed to data-driven.
- **State the argument.** After the debater reads the quotation, they should establish their agreement with the quotation and clarify their side of the debate: affirmative or negative. This may be accomplished by simply saying “My partner and I agree with this quotation, so we affirm the resolution.” While this seems obvious, speakers should take every opportunity to reinforce their basic advocacy to the judge.
- **State the resolution.** The first speaking team should state the resolution. Many judges in Public Forum Debate will not have a formal connection to the debate community; they may not even be aware of what the resolution is before judging their first round. Unless the speaker restates the resolution, a judge may be completely confused. The second speaking team does not need to restate the resolution.
- **Define key terms in the resolution.** Debaters should offer definitions both for clarity and for strategy. A

definition offered for clarity will detail, in very simple terms, the meaning of a key but potentially unclear term in the resolution. Given the resolution, “Resolved: The United States should encourage the implementation of a soft partition of Iraq,” a debater would define a “soft partition,” since the judge is unlikely to be familiar with the term. Sometimes a definition is offered to further a strategy. In these instances, the definition will give greater impact to the arguments that will follow it. For example, on the topic, “Resolved: Russia has become a threat to U.S. interests,” how each side defines “threat” could have implications for the rest of the debate. Is the ability to harm U.S. interests enough to constitute a threat or must there also be intent to harm U.S. interests?

When defining terms for strategy, debaters should keep in mind that judges rarely enjoy lengthy discussions about the terms of the resolution. To ensure that the debate does not devolve into clash over definitions, debaters should make certain that their definitions allow a fair division of ground for both sides. “Division of ground” refers to the arguments that each side could make given the definitions of the resolution. On the previous Russian resolution, if the affirmative were to define “threat

to U.S. interests” as having the ability to constrain U.S. behavior in international affairs, that definition would provide the negative with far less ground than if they were to define the phrase as taking actions that harm U.S. national security. During case construction, debaters must strike a balance between strategically defining terms in ways that benefit their case and maintaining a fair division of ground.

- Impact definitions with observations about how definitions will change the debate. Observations are arguments that establish the burdens each side must satisfy to prove their side of the resolution true. An observation makes explicit how a definition has changed the division of ground. For example, on the resolution, “Resolved: In a democracy, civil disobedience is an appropriate weapon in the fight for justice,” an affirmative team might define “appropriate” as proper in some circumstances. They would then impact this definition in an observation, noting that the affirmative’s burden is not to prove the absolute benefit of civil disobedience, but that in some circumstances civil disobedience is one of the tools that could support the fight for justice. This observation would be strategic for the affirmative because



it would reduce the burden needed to prove the resolution true.

In general, observations should be closely related to the definitions so they do not seem arbitrary. However, on certain resolutions, debaters can use scholarly research to establish the burdens for each side. For instance, on the resolution, “Resolved: When the values are in conflict, the United Nations should prioritize global poverty reduction over environmental protection,” a prudent debater might want to outline the goals of the United Nations. The debaters could then have an observation that the contentions made by either side should impact back to those goals; this would clearly establish standards for the round by drawing from the resolitional wording.

## Contentions

Following the observations, the debaters then make their chief arguments. These arguments, often referred to as “contentions,” are independent reasons why the resolution is true or false. After collecting research, analyzing the resolution, and thinking of arguments, debaters should collect the best arguments for each side and attempt to divide them into themes. Those themes will provide the basis for contentions. Arguments can be organized by impact, by chronology, by geography, or by importance; the exact system of organization

is less important than the coherence of each contention.

The key to good contention writing is to ensure that all contentions are self-contained units. This makes the case more difficult to answer and gives the debaters more options when answering their opponents’ case. Typically, a case has two or three contentions. Having more than three makes it difficult for a judge to remember the independent ideas in a case; having only one limits the flexibility of a position. Case construction should never sacrifice quality or depth for breadth, however.

### *Sub-points*

Contentions may have sub-points, arguments or examples that help to organize the contentions. For example, a contention may be something broad, such as “Affirming the resolution will improve the economy.” This contention could then have sub-points, such as “Affirming the resolution will create jobs” and “Affirming the resolution will spur investment.” Unlike a contention, a sub-point does not have to be an independent argument. Sub-points can reinforce or build on one another, or they can serve as independent reasons why the resolution is true. The number of sub-points a debater includes is determined by their research and arguments. Sub-points are often organized by letter (sub-point A, sub-point B, etc.), whereas contentions are organized by number.

Debaters should not include sub-points just for the sake of having them; speakers should

use them to best organize contentions. The contentions and sub-points should include taglines and data. Taglines should be short and digestible; data should be plentiful, persuasively presented, and embedded in the debater's own rhetoric. Many contentions have up to six to seven sources of data. While the contentions have copious structure and data, speakers should remember that they also should be pleasant to listen to — do not sacrifice rhetorical appeal for data.

## Conclusion

Public Forum cases should have very brief conclusions, typically lasting between 10 and 20 seconds. Debaters should summarize the main arguments of their cases and link back to the opening statement used in the introduction.

## STRATEGIC CASE CONSTRUCTION

---

Case construction should be strategic: it should simultaneously prove one side of the resolution while also preparing the rebuttals to disprove the other team's case. Debaters should focus primarily on proving their position, but should always be thinking about how their arguments will play out in rebuttals.

The optimal case construction may actually be unknown until a round has begun; as a result, many teams have started to write flex cases to create a hidden clash in their case construction. A flex case is a case that is not fully formed

until the round has begun. For example, if a team is using a flex case, they might have prepared more contentions than they could read during their four-minute speech. If they are the team speaking second, they would wait to see what contentions their opponent presented and then choose the contentions that best clashed with the opposing side. A flex case requires additional research and organization and should only be developed by teams with significant experience.

## PRACTICE AND DELIVERY

---

An entire case should be between 725 and 775 words, depending on the natural speaking rate of the first speaker. A case with 750 words can be delivered at 187.5 words per minute, which is somewhat faster than a conversational rate for most people. If the case is organized effectively, a slightly elevated rate of speech should not be a problem.

Debaters should spend much time practicing delivering their cases so that its presentation is more comprehensible and powerful in the round. Practice speeches should always be timed; if the speaker feels rushed when delivering the case, the number of words should be cut. Advanced tactics for delivery include bolding key words to be emphasized and italicizing the names of sources that do not need to be emphasized. The first few words of the case should be delivered very slowly. The first

time a debater speaks, a judge will need time to adjust to the speaker's individual voice.

Given the time constraints of the first constructive speech, every word must count. Teams must make difficult decisions about what to prioritize in a case: Should the case create clash? Prove a narrow point? Provide strategic options? The answer to each of these questions is, to some degree, "yes." But each team must decide what style of case serves them best.

Additionally, the second-speaking team could opt to include or exclude observations or contentions based on the definitions and

observations offered by the first-speaking team. The first-speaking team, though, must have a fully formed case with the greatest variety in contentions and observations, thus providing the most strategic division of ground.

Although debate rounds are rarely won during the constructive speeches, they can certainly be lost. To gain an advantage over the competition, debaters must pay careful attention to both the form and substance of the case. Effective case writing will help keep the debate organized and make for an excellent round.

## CHAPTER 7 – KEY CONCEPTS

- A constructive speech in Public Forum Debate is four minutes long.
- Each constructive speech should begin with an introduction that presents and defines key terms in the resolution; it may also establish a framework for the round.
- The introduction should be followed by one or more contentions that support one side of the resolution.
- Contentions may have sub-points if they are used to clarify arguments for the judge.
- Ideally, constructive speeches should be between 725 and 775 words long.

# CHAPTER 8

## *Questioning and Crossfire*

Clash is fundamental to all forms of academic debate. Constructive speeches and cases are an opportunity for debaters to offer prepared arguments under relatively benign circumstances; they often simply read what they have previously prepared. If the debate were to end after the initial speeches, however, it would not be much of a debate; it would be more akin to “dueling oratories.” Instead, to better seek truth and enable the audience and judge to make an informed decision about an issue, debaters must engage one another’s arguments. They must clash. This process begins with the most pointed exchange of ideas in a debate round: the exchange of questions and answers. The structure of this exchange is different in each event, but the goals, standards, and techniques of the exchange remain the same.

## STRUCTURE OF QUESTIONING

---

In Congressional Debate, every speech is followed by a Congressional questioning period, during which members of the chamber may ask questions of the speaker. Following the first affirmative and first negative speech is a questioning period of two minutes; after every subsequent speech, the questioning period lasts one minute.

The questioning period is initiated by the presiding officer (P.O.); at the conclusion of the speech, the P.O. will call for questions. Members of the chamber who have questions for the speaker will seek recognition, and the P.O. will call on them one at a time. Once recognized, a member may ask a single question of the speaker. The speaker answers the question, then the P.O. will recognize another questioner. This continues until the time for the questioning period has elapsed.

Public Forum Debate has three crossfire periods, each lasting three minutes. In crossfire, no one controls the time; all participants may both ask and answer questions. The first two crossfire periods involve one speaker from each team; the third crossfire period, also called “grand crossfire,” involves all four debaters.

The team that speaks first in a Public Forum round has the right to ask the first question in crossfire. After the first question is answered, any of the participants in the crossfire may ask questions or provide answers. This exchange of

ideas continues until the crossfire period has elapsed.

These differences in structure do produce some event-specific issues in questioning, but, for the most part, the principles and approaches are the same. Therefore, this chapter will refer to both the Congressional questioning period and the Public Forum crossfire as simply “questioning” from this point on; where event-specific points must be made, the terms “Congressional questioning” and “crossfire” will be used.

## GOALS OF QUESTIONING

---

Despite differing structures, Congressional and Public Forum debaters pursue similar goals during questioning. The structure of a debate round divides these goals into two broad areas: communicative goals and argumentative goals. Communicative goals are what a debater is trying to communicate to their judge; argumentative goals are what a debater is trying to accomplish in the debate. This duality arises from the debater’s obligation to argue with their opponent while simultaneously persuading or impressing their judge. This struggle can be aggravated during questioning because, unlike during speeches, students are directly addressing their opponents. By clearly outlining the distinct goals of questioning, a debater can effectively balance these obligations.

## Communicative Goals

Whenever students are participating in a debate, they are attempting to communicate certain ideas to their audience and judges; questioning is no exception. During this time, they hope to achieve several communicative goals: demonstrate poise; establish perceptual control of the room, or appear to be dominant in the debate; and, get face time with the judges.

### *Demonstrate Poise, or A Mature Presence in the Room.*

Because questioning involves direct exchanges between high school students, it can easily devolve into a less than-appealing shouting match. This is mitigated during speeches, when debaters direct and tailor their comments to an adult judge; when debaters lose this adult filter, they may slip into more colloquial and combative forms of expression. It is especially important, then, for debaters to maintain their poise during questioning.

In Congressional Debate questioning, questioners can accomplish this in three ways:

1. Move to be recognized in a controlled way. Because there are often more questions than there is time for in a questioning period, participants often feel the need to compete with one another to be recognized. As a result, they may literally leap out of their seats when the P.O. calls for questions, often scattering papers or even upsetting

their desk. A good P.O. should address this and make efforts to curtail it, but members should take the initiative and maintain their poise, keeping their roles as members of the United States Congress in mind.

2. Directly address questions to the speaker. When recognized by the P.O., a speaker should not immediately launch into their question; instead, they should first thank the P.O. (a simple “Thank you” will suffice) and then directly address their question to the speaker, beginning their question with a title, such as “Senator . . .” or “Representative Smith . . .” This helps participants remain calm and appear professional.
3. Remain in position until the speaker has completed their answer. Many questioners immediately sit down or relax their posture, without waiting for a reply; this suggests a lack of interest in the answer and is a sign of disrespect to the chamber.

### *Establish Perceptual Control of the Room*

An old debate maxim is that to win a debate, one must merely look like one is winning the debate. Projecting confidence throughout a debate, no matter how badly the debate may be going, is fundamental to success. Questioning offers debaters an excellent chance to accomplish this. During a speech, the speaker has sole control over the judge’s

perception as no direct comparison can be made with other speakers in the room. Judges may indirectly compare a speech to others given during the debate, but the speaker is the only person to whom the judge is listening at the moment. During questioning, however, speakers are sharing time, and so questioning presents a unique opportunity to benefit (or suffer) by comparison.

In all forms of questioning, competitors must take care to project confidence. Frequently, a speaker will appear to be an entirely different person when delivering a speech and when asking a question; debaters often forget that judges consider their entire performance during a debate round, and so their delivery during questioning lacks the polish and care dedicated to their speaking. Additionally, Congressional Debate chambers are often set up with the judge in the back of the room and the seated members of the chamber facing the front; this arrangement makes asking questions in a confident voice very important since the judge is behind the speaker.

Competitors must also maintain confidence when answering questions; all too often, a speaker will conclude a powerful and passionate speech, only to deliver meek and barely audible answers during questioning. In Congressional Debate, although other members are asking questions, the floor still belongs to the speaker, and the speaker must act accordingly. One excellent way to truly control questioning is to utilize movement.

Depending on the layout of the chamber, a speaker may benefit from moving toward each questioner; the goal is not to confront or otherwise make the questioner uncomfortable, but rather to better fill the empty space at the front of the room. Congressional questioning can be an imposing scene: one speaker at the front of the chamber with as many as 23 other students seeking recognition as one, eager to ask questions and attack the speech just delivered. Using movement helps the sole speaker counter the weight of so many bodies against them, leveling the playing field and communicating to the judges that, though they must yield to and answer the questions of others, the floor is still definitively theirs.

In Public Forum crossfire, establishing perceptual control of the room is more difficult, primarily because students cannot control or predict what their opponents will do or say. In Congressional Debate, questions and answers are controlled by the rules of the event and the P.O.; in crossfire, the flow of questions and answers is much less predictable. Debaters may be faced with opponents who monopolize the crossfire period, who refuse to answer questions, or rapidly jump from one topic to another. The quickest way for a student to lose perceptual control of a crossfire is to let their emotions get the better of them; they may roll their eyes at an answer, grow angry at an answer they disagree with, snap at their opponent for interrupting them, or whine and prevaricate when pressed on an issue. All



of these behaviors communicate to the judge that the debater is an immature high school student, not a policy expert; this undermines the debater's efforts elsewhere in the round to persuade the judge of their position. Instead, speakers should be calm with angry opponents, forgiving of ignorant opponents, and resolute with aggressive opponents. These qualities demonstrate maturity and confidence and resonate with judges.

### *Get Face Time with the Judges*

In Congressional questioning, this is difficult because the judge will often be sitting behind the chamber members. Using the techniques mentioned above to project poise and confidence, however, will help establish the speaker in the judge's mind as a mature and engaged member of the chamber. For speakers answering questions in Congressional questioning, using movement is important to remain visible to judges.

Speakers can employ an additional technique to increase their face time with the judge: when answering a question. They can begin by addressing the answer to the questioner, but finish the answer by addressing the chamber as a whole. This subtle shift in focus can pay big dividends. It communicates that the speaker appreciates the particular question asked and gives the questioner that recognition; at the same time, it demonstrates that the speaker is not subject to the questioner and will continue to be an advocate for their position to the entire chamber.

In Public Forum crossfire, participants should always remember that their primary goal is to persuade the judge to vote for them. Whenever possible, they should address both questions and answers to the judge. Doing so is very uncomfortable because a person's natural instinct is to look at the person they are addressing, and, in this case, they believe they are talking to their opponents. But it cannot be stressed enough that debaters do not win rounds by persuading their opponents — they win rounds by persuading judges. Some exceptions to this rule are covered later, but the overwhelming majority of crossfire ought to be directed toward judges.

### **Argumentative Goals**

In a debate round, debaters are invested in their arguments; they are attempting to advance a particular position or set of ideas against any opposition. Questioning is an important way to advance their arguments. Questioning has several argumentative goals, but the three primary ones are to:

1. **Clarify an idea, argument, or piece of evidence.** If something in a speech is not clear, either because the speaker is difficult to understand or the argument is just oddly phrased, a questioner may ask for a clearer explanation. These questions should be used when necessary and can often help expose a weak or poorly constructed



argument. Here are some examples of clarification questions:

Representative Hannan, could you explain exactly how the Office of Management and Budget reached the conclusion you cited in your speech?

What was the second impact of your argument about poverty?”

In Public Forum crossfire, clarification questions can be especially important because speakers must answer their opponents’ arguments. If a team misunderstands or misses an argument entirely, they will have difficulty responding to it later in the debate. Clarification questions are somewhat less important in Congressional questioning, because there is no burden to respond to the individual arguments of each speaker. Actually, as question time is at a premium, competitors should avoid clarification questions because they take time away from questions that engender clash and may actually frustrate fellow competitors.

2. **Challenge an idea, argument, or piece of evidence.** If a competitor disagrees with an argument made in a speech, their first opportunity to attack that argument will generally come during questioning. Challenges made during questioning go a long way toward establishing control of the debate, and

they put the speaker (who, presumably, was on the attack during their speech) on the defensive. Here are some examples of challenging questions:

Senator Berkman, given the number of jobs generated by these tax cuts, how will you explain the jump in unemployment to your constituents if we repeal the cuts?

If poverty is such a central concern for you, how can you justify cutting welfare?

In Congressional questioning, it can be particularly difficult to formulate effective and challenging questions that can operate independently of follow-up questions or contextualizing comments because questioners only get one chance to challenge the speaker. In Public Forum, crafting lines of questioning that effectively challenge arguments is easier because debaters can adapt and respond to the answers they receive.

3. **Establish an idea or argument before it has been explained in a speech.** While challenging questions are often confrontational, establishing questions tend to be more collaborative. They explore an idea, and they use the speaker’s own words to advance that idea. For example:

Representative Meadows, do you believe that America has an obligation to advocate for freedom in the world?

What do you believe is the most important way to evaluate impacts in this round?

Establishing questions may not pay off right away, but are designed to make later speeches easier or more meaningful.

Let's look at the sample questions more closely. Assuming that Representative Meadows answered it affirmatively, the first question would help establish a later speech detailing the ways in which the United States could or should advocate for freedom in the world. Depending on the answer, the second question would help later speeches focus on an agreed-upon standard for evaluating the round. This could help debaters avoid wasting time discussing impacts that may not factor into the judge's decision.

In Congressional Debate, questions establishing an idea can be hit or miss; participants may not get the chance to speak on a topic, and so any questions asked to establish an argument may be fruitless. In Public Forum, debaters should make liberal use of establishing questions to help focus and control the round. The more agreement that can be generated during crossfire

means, somewhat paradoxically, the more disagreement can be explained in the speeches. If competitors start from a common premise or idea that is established in questioning, then disagreements are thrown into stark relief and can be easily evaluated by the audience.

In both Congressional and Public Forum debates, speakers need to use establishing questions with care. Competitors who consistently ask this type of question may telegraph their arguments.

## EFFECTIVE QUESTIONING

---

Effective questioning begins with good listening. The best questions demonstrate that the questioner listened closely to the speaker and adapted to the answers given during questioning. Too many debaters ask questions just for the question's sake; they must remember that the goal of questioning is not to ask questions but to obtain answers that are useful in the debate. A powerful question can be effective on its own, but the very best debaters understand that it is the answers that matter most.

Effective questions have three characteristics:

1. **They are Brief.** Conciseness is tremendously important in questioning. In Congressional Debate, many

participants are eager to ask questions; if a competitor asks a particularly long question, they will draw the ire of their peers who lose the opportunity to ask a question as a result. In Public Forum, concise questions allow debaters to cover the most ground in crossfire and help debaters to avoid misunderstandings.

2. **They are Simple.** That is to say they are grammatically uncomplicated. Questions should have a single independent clause, and, at most, one modifying phrase or dependent clause. If questions become too complex, they fail to communicate clearly to the judge or to elicit the sought-after answer. Speakers should focus on simple sentence structure in all aspects of debate, but especially during questioning.
3. **They are Focused.** Asking brief and simple questions is easier if they are narrowly tailored to address one idea at a time. Questions that address multiple ideas are unlikely to obtain a clear answer; the speaker may jump from one idea to another, or answer only part of the question, or possibly just become too confused by the question's complexity.

## OPEN- AND CLOSE-ENDED QUESTIONS

---

To achieve appropriate focus, debaters must understand the difference between

open-ended questions and close-ended questions. Open-ended questions invite the speaker to expound on an idea; close-ended questions force the speaker to provide a simple answer, often merely “yes” or “no.” Both question types can be effective, though for very different reasons.

In Public Forum crossfire, close-ended questions tend to be the most effective because crossfire is largely about controlling the flow of ideas. If competitors ask open-ended questions, they offer their opponent the chance to explain himself and fill time. Close-ended questions, though, do not allow the opponent this opportunity; they let the questioner plan and execute a series of questions that may lead to a desired conclusion.

This process is sometimes referred to as the “garden path approach,” wherein a debater will ask initially innocuous questions that have seemingly obvious answers, but result in their opponent trapping themselves or eventually being forced to answer a more challenging question from a position of weakness. The questioner has led the speaker down the garden path, and the answerer does not realize the danger until it is too late.

Open-ended questions, by contrast, tend to be more useful in Congressional questioning. Because participants cannot ask follow-up questions, they will not have the opportunity to build on ideas. By asking open-ended questions, a questioner has a stronger chance of uncovering a weakness in an answer or

argument; they also get to perceptually hold the floor for a longer period. A strong question that requires a thoughtful answer showcases the questioner's insight; a close-ended question that is satisfied by a single-word answer only results in the questioner taking their seat as the speaker comfortably moves on to the next questioner.

## ASKING QUESTIONS

---

Speakers can ask questions in several ways, some of which are more effective than others. One of the least effective approaches is to ask the speaker if they are wrong; it is surprising how often this sort of question is asked. Imagine that Ben has just spoken for three minutes on the dangers of nuclear energy. When Ben finishes, Sam rises and asks Ben “Wouldn’t you agree that nuclear energy is a smart economic investment?” Of course, Ben is going to answer no, possibly by making reference to one of the many arguments they just made. This question merely offers them an additional opportunity to make their case. Sam also put Ben on the defensive by leading with a negative; when questions begin with words like “wouldn’t,” “isn’t,” and “aren’t,” they nearly guarantee that the speaker will offer a defensive and unproductive answer.

A more effective way to challenge an idea is to present the challenge as a fact and force the speaker to acknowledge a weakness. For instance, Sam might ask “Given the enormous

economic returns that nuclear power generates, how do you justify the lost tax revenues that would result from this bill?” This enters challenge into the debate and forces the speaker into a difficult spot.

Alternatively, a questioner can challenge an argument by pointing out a shortcoming in its construction. For example, if Elizabeth argues that increased pressure on North Korea will produce changes in its behavior but uses evidence that does not take into account North Korea’s recent change in leadership, then Joanna might ask “Does your evidence refer to the previous North Korean regime or the current one?” This question does not explicitly present a challenge to the argument, but it does call attention to the argument’s weakness. It also achieves the ideal result of a question: putting the speaker in a position where they must offer a simple answer that indicts their own position. Winning a debate is always easier if a debater can force their opponent to make their argument for them.

## EFFECTIVE ANSWERS

---

Crafting effective answers in questioning involves many of the same elements as constructing effective questions. Strong answers, like strong questions, begin with effective listening. Debaters must give their full attention to the questioner and be sure they understand the question. Too many speakers are easily

distracted by their own thoughts or performance and neglect to focus on the question.

Effective answers have three characteristics, two of which are same as the characteristics of effective questions:

1. **They are Brief.** Especially in Congressional questioning, answers ought to be as brief as possible while still being complete. When given the option to answer “yes” or “no,” speakers should do so. This allows for the most questions possible in each questioning period and allows the speaker to demonstrate control over many issues. In Public Forum, brief answers can be effective, but speakers should also keep in mind their goal of controlling the crossfire period. Longer answers may help to swing momentum, capture the judge’s attention, and possibly avoid being led down the garden path.
2. **They are Focused.** Answers should also be focused on the question that is asked. Speakers should try to limit their answers to the subject raised. In crossfire, debaters may choose to expand the focus to redirect the questioning to stronger ground.

3. **They are Honest.** Speakers should answer questions truthfully and to the best of their knowledge. If a speaker does not know the answer, they should say so; if they do not know how a question is relevant, they should provide an answer and let their opponent worry about relevance.

Speakers worry far too much about appearing not to know an answer and so offer any number of ridiculous sounding prevarications (“I don’t have those numbers with me right now” or “Well, that’s a complicated issue that doesn’t have a simple answer”). These answers are generally transparent to the audience and only draw attention to the speaker’s ignorance and attempt to obfuscate. Instead, a confident “I don’t know” puts the issue to rest and may even imply that the questioner is in the wrong for asking such an unusual question. No speaker is expected to know everything nor be able to answer every question; in any event, audiences respond better to a relatable, flawed speaker than to a know-it-all.

## CONGRESSIONAL QUESTIONING SPECIFICS

---

Congressional questioning is an excellent way for a competitor to both further debate and demonstrate to judges that they are

engaged in the chamber. Participants should take advantage of every opportunity to ask meaningful questions of a speaker and should

always be engaged during speeches in an attempt to craft intelligent and thought-provoking questions. Once recognized to ask a question, questioners should remember to thank the presiding officer and directly address their questions, and then remain standing or in the position they assumed when seeking recognition for the duration of the answer.

Despite regional variations on Congressional questioning, debaters should always avoid certain conventions. Competitors should never ask two-part questions; these steal time from other members of the chamber. Members should not preface their questions with independent citations or a brief oration; this, too, takes time away from the debate. Finally, speakers should not call on questioners; this job should always be reserved for the presiding officer. This helps ensure fairness and competitive equity.

One pernicious type of question found in Congressional Debate is the friendly or softball question. These questions simply reinforce the speaker's arguments or perhaps offer them an opportunity to talk some more with no real limits. Because competitors are often rewarded for being active in a chamber, they think that asking questions as often as possible will help raise their ranking. As a result, they ask questions even when they do not disagree with a speaker. Competitors should avoid these questions at all costs. The purpose of questioning is to produce and advance clash; friendly questions do neither. Instead, they waste the

chamber's time, produce the appearance of politics, and, in the worst cases, confuse the speaker so much that they end up disagreeing with themselves. If a competitor cannot produce a challenging or interesting question, they should not ask one at all.

When answering questions, members should strive to balance their attention between the questioner and the chamber as a whole. Speakers should give proper recognition to the questioner, but must ultimately remember that their primary task is to persuade the judge and audience as a whole, not just the questioner.

The final issue specific to Congressional questioning is a relatively new phenomenon known as "direct questioning." In Congressional direct questioning, the presiding officer will recognize a questioner for 30 seconds; during this time, the questioner may ask any series of questions they want. This allows the questioner to pursue one or more lines of questioning or perhaps just present several individual questions on different topics; as always, the goal is to produce further clash in the debate. Direct questioning functions like cross-examination and is controlled by the questioner. For a one-minute questioning period following a normal speech, the P.O. will recognize two questioners. Many tournaments have begun to implement direct questioning for semifinal and final sessions.

## PUBLIC FORUM CROSSFIRE SPECIFICS

---

Public Forum crossfire is unique among high school academic debate because it is an uncontrolled exchange: all participants are on equal footing. Consequently, managing the momentum of the crossfire is incredibly important. Speakers should strive to balance questions with answers. The team who spoke first always asks the first question.

When speaking second, many debaters initiate crossfire by offering their opponent the first question; this offer is unnecessary, as the first-speaking team has, by rule, the right to begin. After the first question though, such niceties can be an effective way to transition from questioning to answering or vice versa. Participants may follow up an answer by asking their opponents if they can ask a question; they may also respond to an answer by asking their opponents if they have a question to ask. This discussion of the crossfire's flow as the crossfire is occurring is a useful way for students to exercise control over the momentum of questioning — rather than relying on unspoken communication or convention to dictate the flow of the crossfire, participants can more directly manage their shared time.

Participants should also be sensitive to rhythm in crossfire. A series of close-ended questions and answers should be offset with an open-ended question; debaters should not be reluctant to answer many questions in a row nor afraid to ask a rapid series of questions;

working within the rhythm of the crossfire is important.

Remaining calm during crossfire is paramount. More than any other part of a Public Forum round, and probably more than any other form of debate, a crossfire can get out of hand very quickly. Participants can become angry because their opponents do not let them finish questions or answers or possibly even because their opponents do not let them begin questions or answers. A debater may be tempted to respond to this sort of opponent with anger or an increase in volume; instead, they should remain calm and retain the sympathy of the judge. If a speaker feels they are being bullied, they should trust that the judge notices and will take the behavior of their opponent into account. More practically, they should attempt to make their point or begin their question once or twice so that their opponent knows that they have something to say. If their opponent still does not let the debater get their ideas out, then they should simply wait for the opponent to stop speaking and then return to their idea. Finally, debaters need to focus on teamwork during the third, or grand, crossfire. A team can take many possible approaches to grand crossfire: they may evenly divide their time between them; they may allow one member, who perhaps is especially strong in crossfire, to take the lead; or they may allow the summary speaker to carry the burden

so the second speaker can prepare for the final focus. Any of these approaches may work well for a team. However, perhaps the most fundamental rule for grand crossfire is that teammates should not speak over each other

— communicating ideas while competing for time with one's opponent is difficult enough. Participants should allow their teammates to finish questions and answers before adding or clarifying information.

## CHAPTER 8 – KEY CONCEPTS

- The three communicative goals of questioning are to demonstrate poise, establish perceptual control, and get face time with the judges.
- The three argumentative goals of questioning are to clarify the arguments made, challenge those arguments, and foreshadow any new arguments being made in subsequent speeches.
- Effective questions are brief, focused, and honest.
- In Congressional Debate, competitors should avoid asking two-part questions and softball questions.
- In Public Forum crossfire, debaters must remain calm and respectful and must not attempt to speak over other competitors.





# CHAPTER 9

## *Debate: Refutation, Rebuttal, and Summary*

**W**hen the public envisions a high school debate, they imagine students arguing against the claims made by their opponents. This clash is what separates debate from dueling oratories, where students speak on opposite sides of an issue but do not engage one another at all. In both Congressional and Public Forum debate, competitors are expected to engage with their opponents' arguments, responding to them as need be. This chapter describes the appropriate response mechanisms that competitors should use in debate rounds.

### FLOWING

---

Clash begins with the flow. The flow is the totality of notes that a competitor has taken in

a given debate round. Without the flow, debaters would be unable to locate or remember the

arguments made by their opponents or even those made by their teammates. Consequently, individual flows must remain organized and understandable, otherwise, a debater may respond to an argument that was not made or they may forget to respond to one that was made. Neither of these options makes for particularly compelling debate.

Congressional and Public Forum debates have very different flows as the structures of these two events are extremely dissimilar. Congressional Debate involves dozens of speakers and a wide range of arguments, while Public Forum only involves four speakers and the range of arguments tends to be narrower. This creates different requirements for the flow in each event. Three elements of flowing remain consistent regardless of the event:

**1. The content that must be flowed.**

Many debaters choose to flow only their opponents' claims. This is easy to do; a claim is typically an overarching description of the argument being made, so taking this down seems natural. That said, flowing only the claim is not enough because the claim will not capture the nuance of the argument. For example, if the claim is that a resolution will decrease unemployment, there could be dozens of reasons why that is true. Responding to a claim would be difficult if a debater does not understand the reason why their opponent is making it. Hence, the most important part of the argument to record

is the warrant. Flowing the warrant ensures that a debater understands the explicit nuances and caveats of the argument being made. While many similar arguments may be made, flowing the particular iteration of the argument that is being made in the current debate round is important. Such flowing enables competitors to respond to that argument most effectively.

**2. Use of different colored pens.** One color should be used to designate affirmative arguments, while another should be used to indicate negative arguments. This helps debaters understand what is going on in a debate and allows them to most effectively recall what arguments have and have not already been responded to in the round. If the same color pen were used for each side, differentiating between arguments made by each side would be extremely difficult and confuse the debater about what needs to be done in the next speech.

**3. Use of a shorthand.** Especially in Public Forum Debates, which are often fast-paced, writing down every word an opponent says is impossible. Consequently, debaters use shorthand. No one system is ideal; each debater needs to develop a shorthand with which they are comfortable. That said, debaters can take some steps to develop a system. First, be sure to use acronyms and abbreviations. Consider a bill or resolution on micro-lending. The term "micro-lending" will be used repeatedly, and so writing out

the full word each time makes no sense. It takes time that competitors don't have as they need to be paying attention to the speaker and writing down other parts of their argument. Essentially, debaters can't focus on the arguments being made if they take a lot of time to write out one word. In this case, a debater could shorten micro-lending to "ML." Symbols can also

be used. If a debater makes an argument about money, they can use a dollar sign (\$) to signify money instead of writing out the full word.

Following the three basic elements outlined above will help competitors in any debate event ensure that their flow is as complete and clear as possible.

## FLOWING IN CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE

---

Debaters and coaches have developed many systems over the years to flow a Congressional Debate round. Competitors can flow the round on either one page or two pages and either vertically (up and down their legal pad) or horizontally (from side to side on their legal pad). Despite the lack of one overarching flowing mechanism, every Congressional Debate flow must have the following elements (in addition to the three listed above):

- **Every flow must have the name of the debater making the argument and whether that debater is an affirmative or negative speaker.** Debaters can organize their flow by the argument or by the speaker; either method is acceptable. If they choose to section off their flow by argument, they must add the name of each debater who makes that argument to that section of the flow. For example, if a section of a flow of the negative side reads "Bill increases

unemployment," and this argument was initially made by Senator Smith, then the flow would read, "Smith — bill increases unemployment." If another debater then makes the same argument, their name would be added (Jones, Smith — bill increases unemployment). Debaters should be sure to leave room on their flow to add the names of additional speakers who make the same argument. Alternatively, if a debater is flowing by speaker (if the flow for a speaker looks something like, "Smith — increases unemployment, contributes to debt, leads to health care system failure"), then they must be aware of the fact that many speakers may make the same argument. In this type of flow, a student writes down the name of each speaker and then lists the argument made by that speaker. This makes it easy to determine what a particular competitor argued in

their speech. It differs from organizing by the argument, where the overarching organizational factor is the particular claim made by the competitor. If you flow by the speaker, then you might flow the exact same argument multiple times, as many speakers may make the same argument. Taking note of the fact that multiple debaters have made the same argument allows competitors to form more complete refutations, as they will be able to cite the names of multiple students in doing so. This demonstrates awareness of the chamber to the judge.

- **A Congressional Debate flow must be directional.** A competitor must flow either horizontally on the legal pad or vertically. The arguments should not be flowed in random places, and they must be flowed in the order that they were delivered. Thus, debaters flowing from left to right must have the arguments or members who spoke most recently on the right/bottom of their pad, with those who spoke first on the left/top. This ensures that the debater is aware of the arguments that are most relevant at the time they choose to speak.

The flow should indicate the direction in which the debate is going. If the flow is not sequential based on time, it does not indicate the arguments that have become central to the debate, and the competitor risks giving a tangential

or irrelevant speech. Additionally, locating what arguments each side has made may be difficult if the notes are positioned randomly on the pad; hence, organized flows are key to a truly responsive speech.

- **A Congressional Debate flow must contain room for the competitor to write a response.** Leaving room helps the competitor as they give their speech. If a speaker has taken notes on one part of the pad but has written their responses to those notes on another part or on a separate sheet, they could become confused while speaking. The speaker may not be able to locate their responses, resulting in an awkward moment as they try to find their place. Additionally, if the speaker cannot locate the response in time, they inevitably will be less responsive than they had hoped. Leaving room to respond to opposing arguments next to the place you flowed them is therefore key to an effective speech.
- **The flow of a debate should be kept close to the constructive arguments the competitor has prepared.** It is distracting to the audience for a speaker to be flipping through pages when they are speaking; also, flipping often takes time away from the speech or causes the speaker to lose their place. All information required for the speech, including the flow, should be on one sheet of paper,

or, if two sheets are required, the two sheets should be next to each other. The goal is to minimize confusion and time lost to flipping between papers.

Again, multiple formats are available for flowing Congressional Debate that incorporate the various elements listed above; the two formats the authors recommend are described below.

## Flowing A Congressional Debate With Two Sheets

One effective flowing mechanism requires two sheets of paper and flows by argument. The first paper is used to deliver an affirmative speech, the second to deliver a negative speech. The top one-third to one-half of each sheet is used to write down constructive arguments. The remainder of the paper is used for the flow and is divided into three columns: speaker name, argument, and response. Affirmative speakers are flowed on the sheet where the competitor has written down negative constructive arguments; negative speakers

are flowed on the sheet where the competitor has written down affirmative constructive arguments (see table below). This allows competitors to have a clear idea of opposing arguments on the same sheet of paper that they are using to deliver their speech.





This flowing mechanism requires the competitor to flow vertically, by argument. Each argument a different speaker makes is listed in the “argument” column of the flow. The name of the opposing speaker is listed in the “speaker name” area of the flow; as more speakers continue to make the same argument, their names get added to the speaker name section next to that argument. In the response column, the competitor writes their response to the argument. This system allows the debater easy access to the arguments made in the round, along with the names of all opposing speakers who have made those arguments — all on the same sheet of paper as their constructive speech. Here is an example of such a flow.

Negative Flow for a Bill to Legalize Marijuana		
AFFIRMATIVE ARGUMENTS	SPEAKER NAME	RESPONSE
<b>Decriminalizing marijuana would lessen the burden on the prison system</b>	Smith Johnson Berkman	It would increase the burden on the health care system, which is worse
<b>Legal marijuana could generate tax revenue</b>	Johnson Hannan	People could still buy marijuana informally and so avoid paying taxes
<b>Legal marijuana could be regulated and made safer</b>	Berkman	The FDA is already overworked

## Flowing Congressional Debate By Speech

Another method organizes the flow by speech. Using this method, debaters record each speech as it is delivered, moving from left to right across the legal pad in a checkerboard pattern. Let's examine the sample flow below. The first affirmative speech (Smith) is recorded in the top-left corner of the page; the first negative speech (Berkman) is recorded to the right and below the first affirmative speech; the second affirmative (Miller) to the right and above the first negative, and so forth. Each speaker's

name is recorded as the first item for each speech and then the arguments below. The resulting checkerboard pattern leaves ample room for a debater to record their own arguments and responses; it also allows the debater to draw connections between ideas (by literally drawing connecting lines) and track the progress of the debate. This style of flowing can be somewhat more complicated than the first but allows for greater sophistication in terms of connecting and contrasting arguments. Here is an example of such a flow, with the debater's own thoughts and arguments in bold.

Flowing by Speech			
SMITH (AFF)		MILLER (AFF)	
1—Legal marijuana would decrease crime 2—Legal marijuana would generate tax revenue 3—Legal marijuana would lessen prison crowding	 <b>Both Smith and Miller focus on crime, and neither neg has answered this</b>	1—Legal marijuana would decrease crime 2—Legal marijuana would undermine cartels Berkman wrong about gateway drug, it's not causation	<b>How does this affect American citizens?</b> 
BERKMAN (NEG)		JOHNSON (NEG)	
 <b>So does alcohol</b>	1—Marijuana causes accidents 2—Marijuana could serve as a gateway drug 3—Smith ignores the black market's effects on taxes	<b>The slippery slope wouldn't happen; alcohol is already legal</b> 	1—Legal marijuana would send the wrong message 2—Legalizing marijuana a slippery slope to legalizing other drugs

Note that, in this example, the debater who is keeping the flow may use it to develop either an affirmative or a negative speech; they are recording their thoughts and arguments for both sides of the debate.

Again, the exact method of flowing is not important, as long as it includes the names of speakers, captures the directional nature of the debate, allows the student room to write their own responses, and keeps all potential arguments to be made in a speech close at hand.

## FLOWING IN PUBLIC FORUM DEBATE

---

Unlike Congressional Debate, Public Forum Debate has a much clearer consensus about the ideal form of flowing. It requires two sheets of paper, one for the affirmative flow and one for the negative. The affirmative flow should contain the affirmative case, and all subsequent responses made on the affirmative case. The negative flow should contain the negative case and all related responses. Both flows should always be vertical, starting at the top of a page and moving to the bottom (to allow maximum space to capture all arguments). Each flow should have the case aligned on the left side of the page, with room for multiple columns to the right of the case (ideally the debater's writing should be small enough to accommodate seven columns of notes).

Both sheets should have a column for each speech in the round. For example, an affirmative team that is speaking second would have an affirmative flow with seven columns, from left to right: the affirmative case, the negative rebuttal, the affirmative rebuttal, the negative summary, the affirmative summary, the negative final focus, and the affirmative final focus.

An affirmative team that speaks first would have fewer columns because the negative constructive and the first affirmative rebuttal would not be flowed on the affirmative side, since they would not contain responses to the affirmative case. Hence, an affirmative team that speaks first would have six columns, from left to right: the affirmative case, the negative rebuttal, the affirmative summary, the negative summary, the affirmative final focus, and the negative final focus. Because a Public Forum flow requires six or seven columns, each of the columns should be narrow; usually, each column is not wider than 1 or 1.5 inches.

Arguments should be flowed next to the argument to which they are responding. For example, if an affirmative team is arguing that the resolution would decrease unemployment, and the negative team responds with a statistic indicating unemployment would actually increase, then that argument should be flowed on the affirmative flow in the column directly to the right of the affirmative case on the same vertical level.



Responses are flowed next to the original argument that was made — not in the order that they were delivered in the rebuttal. If the first argument made in the negative rebuttal addresses an argument that is two-thirds of the way down the affirmative flow, then that response is flowed in the next column over, two-thirds of the way down the page, even though it was the first argument made in the rebuttal. This process continues throughout the debate, with responses to responses being flowed on the same vertical level as the original constructive argument. On the following page is a portion of a flow that shows the debate that occurs about the first argument in an affirmative constructive.

This system of flowing ensures that debaters are able to follow the flow of the round and easily recognize when arguments have or have not been responded to.

## RESPONDING: REFUTATION AND REBUTTAL

---

Flowing is an essential skill for the successful debater but ultimately is only a means to an end: generating clash by responding to one's opponent. Responding to arguments is the core element of debate and is broadly divided into two categories: refutation and rebuttal. Refutation is the process of answering an opponent's argument. Rebuttal is the process of defending one's arguments against an opponent's attacks. Debaters will find themselves

doing both refutation and rebuttal in every debate round, and the line between the two will often blur. Additionally, both refutation and rebuttal share the same basic goal: to respond to arguments.

Responsive debaters do four things:

1. Locate the argument they wish to answer.
2. Summarize the argument to which they are responding
3. Respond to the argument.
4. Explain the impact.

### Locating the Argument

This does not simply mean that a debater must find the argument for himself; the debater must locate the argument on the flow for their judge. In Public Forum, the debater will typically signpost, or refer to the portion of the case in which the argument is found. For example, a debater may say, "Look at our opponent's third contention." This enables the judge to go to that place on their flow, locate the argument, and flow the debater's response. Without such clear signposting, judges will inevitably be confused about what the speaker is responding to. Clarity about location is key to the judge's understanding of an argument and to the debaters crafting a clear round.

In Congressional Debate, locating an argument means knowing which speakers have made or responded to a particular argument. If three debaters have made an argument that the bill will increase unemployment, then a

## Flowing an Argument in an Affirmative Constructive

PRO CASE	CON REBUTTAL	PRO REBUTTAL	CON SUMMARY	PRO SUMMARY
<p>1. Legalizing marijuana would decrease burden on prison system</p>	<p><i>So would legalizing murder, but we don't do that</i></p>	<p>Not the same thing; marijuana isn't violent crime</p>	<p>→</p>	<p>They acknowledge that marijuana is a nonviolent offense</p>
<p>a. Prisons are overcrowded <i>NYTimes, 5/09 Prisons at 120% capacity</i></p>	<p><i>Only applies to public prisons</i></p>	<p>Still serious problem</p>	<p><i>How serious? Private prisons actually more common</i></p>	<p>They don't provide evidence for this</p>
<p>b. Drug crimes responsible for this <i>Economist, 12/11 80% of felons in prison for drugs</i></p>	<p><i>But some commit other crimes, too</i></p>	<p>→</p>	<p><i>They ignore this; it means that legalizing marijuana wouldn't really create much space in prisons b/c the criminals are there for other reasons</i></p>	
<p>c. Legal marijuana would free up space for violent felons Some felons are released early b/c no space</p>	<p><i>No evidence for this, how many are released?</i></p>	<p>If any violent felons are released early, then that's unacceptable</p>	<p>→</p>	<p>If we prove that even one violent criminal is released early b/c of overcrowding, that means marijuana should be legalized to help our prison system do its job</p>
<p>d. Impact is less crime b/c fewer violent criminals released</p>	<p>→</p>	<p>They don't dispute the impact; reducing crime is good</p>	<p><i>Reducing crime would be good, but the pro team doesn't do it</i></p>	

speaker wishing to refute them should know and mention the names of each of those debaters. This demonstrates awareness to the judge, who is now more likely to reward the speaker for being engaged in the debate.

### **Summarizing the Argument**

Simply saying “Go to my opponent’s third contention. They are wrong because . . .” is not enough. A debater must tell the judge what argument they are answering so that the judge understands the argument that the debater is making in response. This is called sign posting, and should be no longer than 5–10 seconds and should include the claim and a brief description of the warrant of the argument being answered. This makes the premise the debater is challenging extremely clear to the judge.

### **Responding to the Argument**

A response can challenge any part of the argument: the claim, the warrant, or the impact. Claim- and impact-level challenges typically do not respond to the reasoning provided by the opposing side; rather, they provide alternate reasons why the claim is ultimately untrue or why the argument is less important than the opposing side wants the judge to believe. For example: “My opponent argues that this resolution will increase unemployment by stifling private sector growth. This is not true because the resolution will increase public spending on infrastructure, thus creating more jobs.”

This statement does not challenge the explicit reasoning behind the opposing argument: the bill will stifle private sector growth. Rather, it challenges the claim that unemployment will go up by providing an alternate means of increasing jobs.

An impact-level challenge also does not address the explicit reasoning behind an argument; rather, it explains why the argument is fundamentally less important than the opposing side wants the judge to believe. For example: “My opponent says millions of jobs would be lost because private sector expansion will be stifled. These lost jobs, though unfortunate, are a necessary step to restructuring our economy for the twenty-first century.” Again, the debater is not disputing the claim that jobs will be lost; they simply claim that the impact is a necessary evil.

Thus, claim- and impact-level responses do not disprove the argument being answered; they merely provide alternative reasons to disregard the argument or reasons that carry greater weight than the original argument. While claim and impact challenges are perfectly acceptable, challenges to warrants are usually the most compelling form of refutation. Challenges to warrants explain why an opponent’s explicit reasoning is incorrect; challenges to data demonstrate that the opposing debater is simply making assertions unsupported by fact. For example: “My opponent argues that the resolution would increase unemployment by stifling private sector

growth. This is not true because the resolution actually increases private sector expansion by funneling money through the federal government into the hands of private contractors.” This directly challenges the opponent’s warrant by explaining why the opposite effect will take place. These arguments are typically the most engaging because they target the explicit reasoning of the opposing debater. Warrant-level challenges demonstrate strong critical thinking skills to the judge — more so than claim-level responses, which do not necessarily engage with the line of reasoning used by the other side, or impact-level responses, which typically are not as strong as warrant-level responses.

Another way to think about the various types of responses is to use some rudimentary logic. A **claim-level** response follows this model:

Debater 1 — A, because B

Debater 2 — C, because D

This exchange offers two noncompeting arguments (“A” and “C”) with noncompeting warrants (“B” and “D”). A judge could evaluate each argument separately with little interaction between them. Both arguments could be true or both false; this does not produce clash.

A **warrant-level** response follows this model:

Debater 1 — A, because B

Debater 2 — Not A, because Not B

In this exchange, two competing arguments (“A” and “Not A”) are presented in direct

opposition to each other, with competing warrants (“B” and “Not B”). A judge is forced to evaluate these claims in competition with each other because only one of the arguments can be true. This produces clash and healthy debate.

## Explaining the Impact

After the debater has responded, they need to explain the impact of their response. They can choose between two separate kinds of impacts: impacts on the real world and impacts in the debate. An impact on the real world details the effect the response will have on some element of society. It should explain in detail what will happen, good or bad, as a result of the argument (for further explanation, see [Chapter 3: Argument Construction](#)). An impact on the debate details the effect the response has on the opponent’s argument. It connects the argument that is being made to the ballot and decision that the judge ultimately must make. A good response will contain both a real-world impact and an impact on the debate round. For example:

Because the resolution will not stifle, but rather will stimulate, the private sector, millions of jobs will be created and millions of families will be better off. This argument is central to the affirmative’s position, and now that it has been turned against them, it should be clear that a negative ballot is justified.

This impact begins with a real-world explanation of the argument's effect and ends with an explanation of the argument's weight and importance in the debate.

## OFFENSE AND DEFENSE IN DEBATE

---

An important distinction exists between offensive arguments and defensive arguments. "Offense" refers to a proactive reason to vote for one side of the debate; "defense" refers to a reason to disregard or discredit an argument made by an opposing debater. For example, an argument that claims a resolution will increase employment is offense because it gives the judge a reason to endorse the resolution. An argument that says the resolution will not increase employment by as much as has been claimed is defense because it provides no proactive reason to vote against the resolution but, rather, attempts to mitigate, or lessen,

the affirmative impact. It defends against a claim made by the other side; it does not compel the judge to vote one way or another. Typically, offensive responses are more persuasive because the debater can derive tangible impacts from them and explain them to the judge. Hearing that jobs will be created is much more meaningful to the judge than hearing that "only" 10,000 jobs will be lost (instead of 20,000).

That said, some defensive responses can impress judges. The most notable of these is a methodological indictment of data. This is when a debater analyzes and explains the flaws in an opponent's evidence. For example, if a team presents a study and the opposing team explains why the study's methodology was flawed, they are using a defensive response that demonstrates a deep understanding of evidence and related issues. Hence, while offensive responses are preferable, good defensive responses can be made.

## RESPONDING IN CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE

---

In Congressional Debate, every speaker except for the author or sponsor must respond to opposing debaters. If competitors choose not to do so, Congressional Debate ceases to be debate and turns into competing oratories. Each speaker, therefore, must respond to at least one key argument made prior to their speech. This demonstrates engagement in the debate to the judge and keeps debate fresh.

That said, a speaker is not expected to respond to everything that previous speakers have said; rather, debaters must make choices about which arguments they will answer.

Unlike most other forms of debate, in Congressional Debate judges are not rendering an affirmative or negative ballot at the end of the session; which side "wins" the debate is somewhat beside the point. Rather, judges

score and rank competitors based on the overall quality of argumentation. Thus, Congressional debaters need not worry too much about making “strategic” choices for their side of the argument. They are not primarily trying to win the debate; rather, they are attempting to deliver the most compelling speech possible.

Members speaking very early in a debate are free to pick from almost all of the arguments that have been made by the opposing side; which arguments are central to the debate and which are tangential has not yet become clear. Ideally, early speakers will attempt to answer the opposing arguments that are most compelling. Judges will generally recognize if a competitor is answering bad arguments or responding to arguments that are easy to refute. Refuting strong arguments is more impressive, so competitors speaking early in the debate should seek meaningful clash and avoid “straw man strategies” (strategies in which one speaker misstates the argument of an opposing speaker to make it weaker and then refutes that weaker argument).

Students who speak in the middle or at the end of a debate have different burdens. First, speeches toward the middle or end of a debate need to be more responsive to previous arguments than speeches made earlier in the debate. While all speakers (except the first affirmative) must refute, the obligation to refute becomes greater as the debate progresses. As each speaker adds to the debate, the next speaker must respond more and more

to the debate as it is occurring. Constructive speeches late in the debate are more likely to be ignored or rated poorly by the judge because they tend to disregard what has already transpired.

In fact, the debate may proceed to the point where making constructive arguments is no longer advisable. Competitors can then give one of two types of speeches: a refutation speech or a crystallization speech. Crystallization involves a summary and clarification of arguments made in the debate round, with the impact of those arguments being weighed against one another to come to a conclusion about the validity of the legislation. (The “crystallization speech,” a term of art in the debate community, will be discussed in the next chapter.) To give a refutation speech, the speaker should preface their arguments by indicating that they will be responding to the arguments in the round rather than offering their own constructive analysis. The speaker can then give a speech that is entirely focused on answering the opposition’s arguments. This tactic, which is underutilized in Congressional Debate, is an excellent way to demonstrate awareness, engagement, and critical thinking.

The arguments made in a refutation speech, as with all refutation in Congressional Debate, should have the same claim/warrant/impact structure used in constructive speeches. A refutation is a complete argument; it needs a label, an explanation, and a reason why it matters. Debaters too often make the mistake

of assuming that refutations can be underdeveloped — this is not the case. Many speakers lack warrants for refutation; they will often dismiss something as incorrect without giving an explanation or will give a one-sentence explanation that doesn't make clear why the original argument is false. For a refutation to truly be compelling, it needs to be as well-developed and as well-explained as any constructive argument.

Incorporating refutation into a Congress speech can be difficult. Debaters should avoid merely giving a laundry list of refutations (“Senator Smith said this, they’re wrong because . . ., then Senator Johnson said this, they are wrong because . . .,” etc.). One way to add refutation to a speech is by simply setting it apart from constructive arguments; after delivering a prepared argument, a speaker could indicate to the judge that they will now answer some arguments made by the opposition. This approach is still somewhat simplistic though; refutations should, ideally, be a part of a broader argument. Additionally, this kind of speech is not advisable late in a round, when a constructive speech would be ill-timed. While this structure is certainly preferable to not engaging in refutation at all, it is one of the least effective means of responding to opposing arguments.

One more effective way is to incorporate responses into broader arguments by delivering a refutation after the warrant of a regularly structured argument. This tactic is advisable since it turns the refutation into a

full argument with a claim, a warrant, and an impact; consequently avoiding the problem of underdevelopment that so many refutations face. Incorporating refutation by making the response after the warrant will contextualize the response for the judge, while still emphasizing the speaker's own argument and viewpoint. After the response is made, the speaker would continue with their argument (providing an impact). For example, say a negative speaker, Senator Sonnenklar, claimed that a bill to eliminate the death penalty will increase crime because we would be eliminating a deterrent. An affirmative speaker could respond with:

The first reason to affirm this bill is that it does not increase crime the way the negative claims. This is true because people who commit capital offenses rarely consider the punishment for a crime before committing those crimes. Additionally, from an individual standpoint, there is little difference between life without parole and the death penalty. Hence, eliminating the death penalty won't change the psychology of capital offenders. So Senator Sonnenklar's argument that this bill will increase crime is incorrect, since we aren't removing a meaningful deterrent. This means that all of the impacts the opposing discusses in terms of increased crime rates just are not going to happen.



This incorporation is more sophisticated and ensures that the refutation is as well-developed as a constructive argument would be.

As the debate progresses, each side will offer so many arguments that responding to all of them will be impossible. Consequently, each debater needs to decide which arguments to address. Early in the debate, speakers should prioritize refutation of whichever opposing arguments they perceive to be the strongest. This strategy is less useful later in the debate when between two and four arguments generally dominate the discussion. These arguments will be advanced or referenced in the majority of speeches and will be the central focus of the debate. Speakers later in the debate should focus on these issues. A judge will think it odd if the fourteenth speaker on a bill discusses issues that have become irrelevant; focusing on these demonstrates a lack of engagement with the rest of the debate round. The best debaters will find new, compelling reasons why one side of a central argument is correct and the other is not.

An important concept to further this goal is “grouping,” or dealing with many similar

arguments at one time. To deal with a multitude of issues when attempting to refute, debaters should group together arguments that have common threads. Several debaters in every long discussion are going to make the same or very similar arguments. Additionally, competitors will make arguments that seem different but rely on the same fundamental assumptions. For example, one speaker may argue that increased funds for businesses will lead to increased hiring, while another argues that it will lead to better technology. While these arguments are distinct, they both rely on the assumption that businesses will actually receive an increase in funds; a good debater will group these arguments and respond to them by disproving the underlying assumption. If a speaker proves that the bill will not actually lead to increased funds for businesses, then they have adequately responded to both of these very different arguments because they have responded to the fundamental assumption of both arguments. Additionally, when grouping or refuting a central idea, speakers should make clear to the judge why they have chosen to answer this concept.

## RESPONDING IN PUBLIC FORUM DEBATE

---

In Public Forum Debate, the result of the debate is the focus of the round, thus debaters spend more of their time and energy attacking and defending the arguments made than do participants in Congressional Debate, where

the entire first half of a debate can be mostly constructive. Additionally, Public Forum debaters are subject to the burden of rejoinder or the obligation to answer arguments made by the opposition. If one team advances an argument,



their opponents must respond to it; if they fail to do so, the argument becomes “true” in the debate. An unanswered argument, sometimes called a “dropped argument,” is a powerful tool in the debate round; it can be used to answer other arguments and, as a “true” argument, the debaters advancing it need not worry about defending it from further attacks.

This last point is important; with the exception of the first constructive speeches, debaters in Public Forum must answer arguments as soon as they can. Arguments made in the constructive speeches must be answered in the rebuttal speeches; arguments made in the first rebuttal speech must be answered in the second rebuttal speech; arguments made in the rebuttal speeches must be answered in the summary speeches. If a team fails to answer an argument in the appropriate speech, they may not address it in a later speech. Doing so would allow teams to delay their answers until the end of a round, or, worse, offer new answers that their opponents would not have a chance to answer.

Each speech has different burdens and expectations in terms of refutation. The first speech on either side is a constructive speech, which involves no refutation. The second four-minute speech, the rebuttal speech, is the first to require refutation. The debater from the team that speaks first has the simpler task during the rebuttal speeches: they must use their four minutes to answer the arguments presented in the opposing team’s constructive speech. To do so, the debater may use a line-by-line approach,

beginning at the top of their opponents’ case and proceeding down the flow one line at a time. They may use grouping to answer multiple arguments at once. They may also employ blocks, or pre-written responses to arguments that their team anticipated. Whatever her approach, the debater’s goal is to effectively cover all their opponents’ arguments, leaving none unanswered. This tactic offers their team the most options for future speeches, while leaving their opponents the fewest.

The debater from the team that speaks second has a far more difficult task in the rebuttal speech. They must answer not only the arguments made in the constructive speech, but also the arguments made in the first rebuttal speech. The debater must both attack their opponents’ case and defend their own case. This requires remarkable efficiency: the debater must answer eight minutes worth of arguments in only four minutes. To do so, they will likely also use a line-by-line approach and make extensive use of grouping. They will employ three additional strategies as well:

1. **Use a road map.** A road map is a brief explanation at the beginning of the speech that explains to the judge the order in which the speaker will address the arguments. Often, this is as simple as “I will begin by answering our opponent’s case, then defend our own.”
2. **Extend arguments.** The debater will point out an unanswered argument and emphasize its importance in the round.

To make an extension, a debater should use clear language: “Our opponents did not answer our first argument, which maintains that affirming the resolution will improve the economy by spurring corporate growth. Extend this. The impact of this argument is that we will create hundreds of thousands of new jobs and improve GDP by billions of dollars.” These extensions will become important as the debate proceeds and arguments are challenged and mitigated; a cleanly extended argument automatically becomes true and unmitigated, so it can be made to outweigh or negate other arguments in the round.

- 3. Cross-apply arguments.** The debater will use an answer made on one part of the flow to answer an argument in a different part of the debate. Cross-application allows a debater to avoid repeating a response multiple times during a speech, giving them time to make additional arguments. For example, if a Con team’s contention argues that the resolution will destroy jobs and the Pro team’s second contention dictates that the resolution will actually create jobs, the Pro team can answer the Con team by saying: “Go to the Con’s first contention, where they say the Resolution will destroy jobs. First, cross-apply our Second contention, which provides evidence that the Resolution

will actually create jobs.” Ideally, the competitors will cite the particular piece of evidence they are cross-applying to answer their opponents’ case.

Ideally, a debater delivering the second rebuttal speech (the last of the four four-minute speeches) will spend about two minutes answering their opponents’ case and two minutes defending their own. Debaters should strive for balance in this speech to avoid being “ball-parked,” or drawn into a debate dominated by their opponents’ arguments. Debaters should always be advancing their own position and attempting to frame the debate from their perspective.

After the rebuttal speeches and the second crossfire, each team will prepare summary speeches. The summary speakers must blend line-by-line debate with summary and crystallization. The summary speech has a somewhat decreased burden of coverage. Because the summary and final focus speech times are so short, three and two minutes respectively, expecting any debater to cover all arguments made is unreasonable.

The summary speakers must make choices about which arguments they will cover. An effective summary speech advances strong offense while reinforcing strong defense. A summary speaker should be sure to extend strong offensive and defensive arguments from the rebuttal speeches; the most effective Public Forum teams consistently demonstrate this sort of teamwork. In the same vein, a

summary speaker should be sure to coordinate with their partner. A summary speaker should use a clear road map and attempt to add clarity, not confusion, to the round as a whole and the line-by-line debate. The time allocation in

a summary speech may vary widely depending on the number and quality of arguments made by both sides, but the summary speaker should still be wary of being ball-parked by their opponents.

## CHAPTER 9 – KEY CONCEPTS

- Clash is key to debate; it is what separates debate from dueling oratories.
- Debaters should keep track of the arguments made in a round via the flow, or notes taken about the arguments made by each debater.
- While there are multiple ways to flow Congressional Debate, there is one standard way to flow Public Forum Debate.
- In Congressional Debate, all flows must contain a shorthand version of the arguments being made and the name of the competitor who made them.
- Public Forum Debate flows require two sheets of paper; responsive arguments must be flowed next to the argument that they respond to.
- A full refutation requires a competitor to locate the argument they are responding to on the flow, summarize that argument, and then respond to it.
- Refutations can challenge the claim, the warrant, or the impact of an argument, but challenges to the warrant are usually the most responsive and effective.
- Each refutation should be a full argument with an impact all its own.
- Offensive responses are typically better than defensive responses.

# CHAPTER 10

## *Crystallization and the Final Focus*

Every round of debate can be broadly divided into three phases: the constructive phase, the rebuttal phase, and the crystallization phase. Earlier chapters have dealt with the constructive and rebuttal phases; this chapter will address crystallization, or the process of clarifying, summarizing, and prioritizing the most important arguments in the round. This process is an integral part of both Congressional Debate and Public Forum Debate.

### CRYSTALLIZATION

---

Crystallization is a vital skill for any debater because a debate round can be extraordinarily complex. Judges may be asked to consider as

many as 20 or 30 distinct arguments, each with several responses or challenges attached, and all in some form of conflict with one another.

Without a serious effort by debaters at the end of the round to clarify these issues, a judge will be left to sort through the round on their own. This can often lead to them making a decision based on their own thoughts or feelings rather than on the arguments presented. Crystallization is also important because it enables debaters to showcase a distinct set of skills. While constructives demonstrate the ability to research and rebuttals to process and challenge information, crystallization displays the ability to compare, contrast, and prioritize information and argumentation. Constructives and even rebuttals can be planned before the round begins: arguments may be pre-written by debaters or their coaches. Crystallization, however, must be specific to the round: debaters must think for themselves and craft unique arguments based on how the round has played out.

## GOALS OF CRYSTALLIZATION

---

All crystallization speeches have three goals: select and highlight the most important issues in the round, close the debate on those issues, and then prioritize or weigh the arguments selected.

### Selecting The Issues

Debaters must identify the most important arguments in the round. They can use three possible standards:

1. **Quantity of debate.** The arguments that have produced the most clash

and the most numerous responses are typically considered the most important in the round. This is not always the case, however, as a lengthy discussion of an issue may actually resolve it or render it irrelevant. Additionally, debaters may be distracted by an argument and spend more time on it than is merited. Nevertheless, if an argument produces multiple responses from both sides, it is probably worth mentioning during crystallization.

2. **How connected the argument is to the other issues of the round.** Some issues exist independently of others, while some issues are central to the rest of the debate. Crystallization time is generally better spent on issues that will have a broad impact on the round — those that are connected to and interact with many other issues. By selecting these, debaters ensure that they are addressing the bulk of the round.
3. **Strategy.** Debaters can choose those arguments that they are most clearly winning or that give them the best chance to win. Even in Congressional Debate, where the outcome of the actual debate is irrelevant to the outcome of the competition, selecting strategically important issues makes debaters seem attuned to the debate and invested in its outcome, both of which carry great persuasive weight.

## Closing Debate On Important Issues

Closing debate means answering any lingering objections to arguments or perhaps extending an argument one final time. The goal is to avoid leaving unanswered questions for the judge; at the conclusion of a crystallization speech, the judge should not need to do any additional thinking about an argument's or idea's impact in the round. Because of the burden of rejoinder, this process is very different in Public Forum than in Congressional Debate.

## Prioritizing And Weighing The Arguments Chosen For Discussion

Prioritizing and weighing are the most difficult tasks of a crystallization speech. Debaters must not simply make additional responses nor should they repeat the answers that have already been given. Instead, debaters must provide analysis that enables the judge to distinguish between important and trivial arguments.

At the end of a round, both sides of a debate will likely have made many valid arguments; some of these may have been answered, others will have been extended. Debaters must find a way to evaluate these arguments and give the judge or audience a way to decide between them.

Consider a debate about withdrawing American troops from Afghanistan. The affirmative side of the debate may rightly claim that withdrawing troops would save the U.S. government billions of dollars; meanwhile, the negative side may claim that withdrawing

troops would endanger Afghan civilians. If both of these arguments have been adequately supported and defended, how should the judge decide between them? Which is more important? Which argument should be considered first? These are difficult questions, but they are the questions that crystallization attempts to answer. Making matters more complicated are the numerous answers and challenges made during a debate; neither of these initial claims is likely to survive the debate unscathed. Now a judge must not only weigh between claims, but also evaluate how the various responses to those claims affect the end-round decision. A crystallizing debater must take all this into account and provide a coherent rationale for endorsing their position over that of their opponents. They must compare the strength of the warrants and the magnitude of the impacts on each side of the debate in order to support a particular position on the resolution. This skill, called “weighing,” is vital to all forms of debate.

## WEIGHING

---

Arguments can be weighed in a number of different ways, using a number of different standards. Some of the most common are by:

- **Magnitude, or the size or severity of the argument's impact.** If affirming a resolution results in the death of a thousand and negating the resolution results in the death of two thousand, then magnitude tells the judge that

they should affirm. This is the simplest conceivable weighing mechanism, merely requiring the debater to summarize the impacts of each side, then present those impacts side-by-side for the judge to evaluate. Decisions are rarely this simple, though. For one, arguments may result in different sorts of harms, such as loss of life, financial losses, or environmental disruptions. To provide clarity, debaters may choose to translate the various harms into a common “currency.” Essentially, a debater may translate costs in one arena to costs in another arena to give the judge a clear means of evaluating impacts. For example, a debater may relate financial losses or environmental decay to the loss of human life, thus making a comparison of magnitude more appropriate and easier for the judge.

- **Competing frameworks, or analysis of value in the debate round.** At various points in the round, debaters may make “framework” arguments, contentions that aim to convince the judge that some arguments are more important than others. By ordering impacts in this way, the debaters have a clear mechanism for weighing arguments. If they have demonstrated that human life should be considered before financial loss or gain, then the judge can easily weigh between the two; alternatively, if a debater

proves that environmental decay is more harmful than any immediate loss of human life, then this also provides a clear weighing mechanism.

- **Probability, or how likely the argument’s impact is to occur.** Probability may simply refer to the likelihood of an event occurring in the real world; for example, meteorologists can calculate the probability of rain on a given day with some degree of precision if certain conditions are known. Debaters can perform similar probability analyses by citing experts who predict the likelihood of a particular outcome if certain conditions are met. Alternatively, the probability of an argument may depend on the strength of the link the debaters provide; if an action only marginally contributes to a problem, this decreases the argumentative probability of the impact occurring. For example, if a particular resolution would increase the national debt by \$1,000, the strength of the link to impacts derived from increased debt would be extremely small; if the resolution increased the debt by \$1,000,000,000, the strength of the link would be much greater.
- **Examining how aggressively or successfully an argument has been answered.** As covered earlier, an argument that has gone unrefuted becomes true at the end of a round; if a

debater has cleanly and clearly extended such argument, then it may have more weight at the end of the round than arguments that have been answered or mitigated. This weighing standard is not as preferable as the others because it ignores the internal logic and real-

world applicability of arguments in favor of a strategic evaluation of the round. Nevertheless, debaters may successfully argue that a judge should evaluate unanswered arguments before contested ones as a way to make a simple and clear decision.

## THE FINAL FOCUS IN PUBLIC FORUM DEBATE

---

The final speech in a Public Forum round is aptly called the “final focus”; this is the speech wherein debaters will crystallize the round for the judge. The various processes that lay the foundation for crystallization will naturally have begun earlier in the round: debaters select which issues to spend time on in the rebuttal, summary, and crossfire; debaters attempt to close debate on issues throughout the round; and successful debaters will be weighing arguments throughout the round. All of these efforts come to fruition in the final focus, though, when the second speaker on each team has two minutes to make their final plea for the ballot. This section will address the appropriate content and structure of this speech.

The last speech must never introduce new arguments. A final focus may respond to new arguments made in the summary speeches, or, if the debater is speaking second, to new arguments made in the opponents’ final focus. Beyond those immediate responses, though, the final focus should consist entirely

of weighing and extending arguments already made in the round.

The final focus speaker should always advance a clear set of offensive reasons to vote for their team. These are called “voting issues.” They serve as bullet points for the judge to write an easy ballot. Although it may be necessary to make defensive arguments during the final focus, the emphasis should always be on offense. At the end of the round, the judge needs to have something to vote for, not merely vote against. Crystallization in Public Forum Debate should always be centered around the offense-defense split and should always favor offense.

A speaker can structure a final focus speech in many ways. They may begin with defensive arguments, laying to rest any lingering offense or objections their opponent has raised, and then move on to the offensive reasons the judge should prefer their team. Alternatively, the speaker may follow the flow of the round, dealing with both offensive and defensive arguments in the order they were raised.



Both approaches are acceptable as long as the debater is sure to end strongly (generally by offering a 10–15 second summary of their position and enumerating the reasons to vote for it) and is sure to advance enough offense to win the ballot.

The final focus speaker should also endeavor to have the last word on the subject. If speaking first, they should try to predict and preempt their opponent's arguments; if speaking second, they should take their opponents' final focus into account when crafting their speech

and do their best to dismiss the arguments raised. Language in the final focus should be clear and definitive, leaving no room for doubt or equivocation.

The most effective final focus should work in concert with the summary speech to highlight the arguments that a team thinks are most likely to win them the ballot. These arguments should include significant offense and, ideally, should have already been settled or resolved in earlier speeches. The final focus should, in effect, write the ballot for the judge.

## CRYSTALLIZATION IN CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE

---

Crystallization in Congressional Debate is significantly different from crystallization in other debate events. Because Congressional Debate has no burden of rejoinder, and because the outcome of the debate has no bearing on the success of a debater, crystallization in Congressional Debate serves a very different purpose. It demonstrates to the judge that the debater is engaged in the debate and can think critically about the arguments presented.

Because so many speeches can have been made on one bill or resolution, participants in Congressional Debate often run into the problem of repeating old arguments. After 10, 16, or even 20 speeches, it is extremely unlikely that any arguments have been unexplored. Nevertheless, debaters often find themselves in a position where they must speak late in the cycle of debate; this is where crystallization

becomes important. Much like the final focus in Public Forum Debate, crystallization in Congressional Debate necessitates specific content that fits within one of the recommended structures listed below.

In a crystallization speech, speakers must first make their purpose clear to the judge. Judge fatigue is a common problem in Congressional Debate; judges who have listened to 20 speeches on a topic are primed to write off additional speeches as unnecessary rehash. For a late-cycle debater to stand out, they must use explicit language to differentiate their crystallization speech from those of others. At the conclusion of their introduction, they should say something like “It is vital that we weigh the arguments made thus far in the debate” or “Rather than repeat old arguments, we must determine which arguments have held

up under scrutiny.” Statements such as these make clear to the judge that this speech will accomplish something unique.

Next, speakers must add to the debate by introducing clear weighing mechanisms. In Congressional Debate, speakers will generally both make constructive arguments and refute the arguments made by others; rarely do speakers focus on weighing between arguments because there is no ballot to be won through weighing. This is where a crystallization speech can contribute to the debate. Rather than offer new material for consideration, the crystallizing debater will offer new perspective on old material.

One helpful metaphor for this process is a sports broadcast. The actual game being played may be thought of as the constructive and rebuttal portions of the debate; decisions are made, strategies are formed and responded to, and one side generally wins in the end. As the game (debate) approaches its conclusion, the announcers (crystallizing debaters) offer their analysis: what strategies were employed, why they were employed, and whether or not they were successful. This analysis does not change the result of the game, but it does make it clear and understandable to the audience. This analysis is what crystallization adds.

## Crystallization Structures In Congressional Debate

Like in the Public Forum final focus, crystallization in Congressional Debate has multiple possible structures:

- **Identify the two or three most important issues in the round.** One common approach is to simply identify the two or three most important issues in the round and discuss the debate that has occurred on those issues. This approach is easy for debaters to grasp but often lacks sophistication; it does not structurally add any evaluation to the arguments, but merely presents them in an arbitrary order.
- **Pave the Road.** A more sophisticated approach is sometimes called “paving the road.” In this approach, debaters take important arguments that support their side of the debate and address the objections to those arguments. A debater may rebut the refutations made by their opponents; they may answer questions raised by the debate; they may provide alternative analysis that overcomes argumentative obstacles. The result is the same: the argument in favor of their position is now established as a truth in the round. Having dealt with objections, the crystallizing debater can focus on the offensive reason to prefer their position. In a crystallization speech, a debater may pave the road for two or three arguments, using the same approach for each.
- **Blend small-picture refutation with big-picture summary.** Using this approach, a speaker will begin by

addressing a small or under-discussed issue in the round, possibly offering some additional insight or refutation. Then the debater will move on to the big-picture debate, addressing the large issues in a more general way. This approach shows the judge that the speaker is capable of both types of debate and, perhaps counterintuitively, helps to focus the audience's attention on the big-picture discussion. Like paving the road, this approach conveys a sense of settling old business (the refutation) before moving on to new business (the crystallization).

A speaker in Congressional Debate does not have to focus on offense or provide voting issues. Because the speaker's focus is not solely on winning the debate for the affirmative or negative but, rather, impressing the judge, they may choose to structure their speech in whatever way makes the most sense to them. If providing three defensive answers to their opponent's central argument would make clear why a speaker has chosen their position, then they should proceed with that speech. If the speaker strays too far from the central issues of the debate, however, they risk being perceived by the judge as out-of-touch with the round.

At the end of the day (and the round), a speaker must make strong choices about what to cover in their speech. They must make these choices clear to the judge using explicit language, and they must tailor these choices

to the debate as it has occurred. The speaker should add to the debate by providing analysis of the arguments presented, weighing between them, and structuring them in a way that communicates their overall position clearly. A good crystallization speech has the highest degree of difficulty of any speech in Congressional Debate, but also the highest reward; debaters should invest much of their time learning this higher-order skill to be successful in their event.

## CHAPTER 10 – KEY CONCEPTS

- Crystallization is the process by which debaters frame, prioritize, and conclude their thoughts on the major issues of the debate.
- Debaters should weigh arguments against one another at the end of the round.
- Debaters should always strive to make the judge’s decision as easy as possible; in essence, they should “write the ballot” for the judge.
- In the final focus, a debater should concentrate on clarity and simplicity while advancing offensive reasons to vote for their position.
- Crystallization speeches in Congressional Debate should demonstrate that the debater is engaged in the debate and can think critically about the arguments presented.



# CHAPTER 11

## *Congressional Debate Procedure*

**U**nlike other forms of debate, Congressional Debate is governed by a fairly elaborate procedural system, with rules dictating who gets to speak and when, what order legislation will be debated in, and when a competitor can leave a chamber, among other things. Congressional Debate procedure is difficult to master, can be complicated, and often requires specialized knowledge. This chapter will walk through a Congressional Debate session from a procedural standpoint, enabling competitors to understand what happens in a session and why it happens. Eventually, these tools will be used by competitors who wish to run for presiding officer in their respective chambers.

### Setting The Agenda

Each tournament begins with the formation of the agenda, the order in which the bills will be debated. This usually happens in one of three ways. The first is the simplest: the tournament has set the agenda beforehand, so a vote or any invocation of procedure is not necessary. In this case, competitors should write the pre-set agenda on the board in the chamber; no voting takes place, since the tournament has already mandated the order of the bills.

The second system is the most common. Here, competitors collaborate to form an agenda for the legislation in the docket they receive before the tournament. Several potential agendas are formed and then voted on by the members of the chamber. An agenda needs a majority vote for adoption. Consequently, several rounds of voting may be needed. Each time, if no majority is reached, the agenda with the lowest vote total is eliminated. If two agendas are tied with an extremely low vote total, both can be eliminated at once. If two agendas are tied for a vote total that is not the highest vote total but that still represents a significant number of votes, then a runoff vote is held to determine which is removed from the ballot. The losing agenda is eliminated and the winning agenda remains on the ballot. This process is repeated until a majority is reached. Agenda elections are conducted by a show of hands.

The final way in which agendas are selected is the committee system. This process divides the chamber into three committees, typically Foreign Affairs, Economics, and Public Welfare. Each piece of legislation will have been categorized into one of these three groups. Each committee then orders the legislation that has been assigned to it; hence, each competitor has a say over the order of one-third of the bills. Prior to the tournament, participants are informed of their committee assignments. Despite the differences in these three approaches, the result is the same: an ordered list of the legislation to be debated during the tournament.

### Electing The Presiding Officer

After an agenda is selected, the chamber elects a presiding officer (P.O.). The first step in the process is for a participant to rise and say, "I move to open the floor for presiding officer nominations." Typically, this motion is directed to the president pro tempore or staff member running the chamber. Once the floor is open for nominations, any member of the chamber may rise to nominate a fellow participant; no one may nominate himself. Each nomination requires a second by another member of the chamber and then the acceptance of the nomination by the nominee. Once all nominations have been made, a competitor moves to close the floor for presiding officer nominations.

As nominations are made, seconded, and accepted, the president pro tempore or parliamentarian creates a list of the nominees. Before the voting takes place, nominees are given a brief opportunity (no more than 20 or 30 seconds) to introduce themselves and explain why they should be elected. Nominees are typically recognized to speak in reverse order of nomination. Then, the voting begins.

Members of the chamber vote for one nominee, generally by writing the nominee's name on a small slip of paper. The person running the election will collect and count the votes. If one student wins a majority of the vote, they are elected presiding officer. If no one

wins a majority, there is a runoff. Typically, the runoff will be between every candidate except the one who received the lowest vote total in the initial balloting. If two or more candidates received fewer combined votes than the next lowest candidate, they can be eliminated from the ballot prior to the runoff. If two candidates receive the same vote total that isn't the highest vote total, but collectively is greater than the next lowest candidate's vote total, a runoff is held between those two candidates to determine who is eliminated from the ballot. The winner then participates in the next runoff. This process repeats itself until one candidate receives a majority of the votes cast.

## DURING THE SESSION

---

### Debating Legislation

After a presiding officer is elected and an agenda has been selected, debate begins. No motion to open the floor for debate is necessary; the floor is automatically open once these initial procedures have been completed. The presiding officer will call for an author of the first item on the agenda. If no author is present, the P.O. will call for a sponsor. If no one sponsors the legislation, debate on the item cannot proceed. The chamber must either table it or recess until a competitor writes a sponsorship speech.

The times for authorship or sponsorship speeches vary by region. The National Speech & Debate Association specifies that they should be three-minute speeches followed by two minutes of cross-examination. After the first affirmative speech (either an authorship or a sponsorship), the presiding officer will call for a negative speech. The remainder of debate on the bill ideally will alternate between affirmative and negative speeches. It is possible, but not advisable, to have multiple consecutive speeches on one side of a debate if no competitor wishes to speak on the opposing side. If a P.O. calls for affirmative speeches and sees that there are none, they proceed to negative



speeches. Participants should avoid speaking under these circumstances, though, as they tend to produce stagnant and uninteresting debate.

## Questioning

In most regions, each speech is followed by a minute of questioning, except for authorships and sponsorships, which are followed by two minutes. If debaters wish to extend the questioning period, they must suspend the rules. A suspension of the rules requires a two-thirds supermajority of the total members of the chamber. The speaker making the motion must specify for how long questioning is to be extended (they should rise and say “I move to suspend the rules and extend questioning by x minutes/seconds”). Debaters generally should avoid these motions because they take time away from speeches, and one minute is usually sufficient to question a three-minute speech and produce clash.

## Ending The Debate And Voting

When debate reaches a point at which no members of the chamber wish to speak, or if the chamber thinks that debate has become stale, a member may move to the previous question (the speaker should rise and say, “I move to the previous question”). Calling for the previous question ends the debate and the chamber votes on the bill or resolution. Moving to the previous question on a piece of

legislation requires a two-thirds supermajority of all members of the chamber. Typically, the vote on a previous-question motion is conducted by a voice vote. If the winner is unclear, then a member may call for a division of the house (by rising and saying, “I move for a division of the house”). A division of the house entails a vote taken either by raising hands or standing up.

After previous question has been successfully called, the presiding officer will initiate a vote on the measure. Members have three voting options: affirmative, negative, and abstention (neither affirmative nor negative). With the exception of resolutions to amend the Constitution, all legislation requires only a simple majority of those present in the chamber, not including abstentions, to pass. A vote of 2 affirmatives, 1 negative, and 15 abstentions means that the bill passes because a majority of the non-abstentions voted affirmatively. On the other hand, a vote of 8 affirmatives, 9 negatives, and 0 abstentions fails because the majority of non-abstentions voted negatively. The presiding officer breaks a tie; they cannot abstain. This is the only point at which the presiding officer breaks ties. For all other simple majority votes, if there is a tie, then there is no majority and the motion fails.

## Tabling A Measure

If, at any point, debate stalls but the chamber is not ready to call previous question, a member can move to table the bill (by saying,

“I move to table this legislation”). If the motion is seconded and passed, debate ceases on the legislation for the moment, and the chamber moves on to the next bill or resolution. Tabling a bill requires a simple majority of the members currently present in the chamber.

Competitors should not abuse this motion. For example, tabling a bill when only half the chamber has spoken and debate is still lively is poor form. Tabling legislation should happen most often when debate has stalled but members of the chamber think they would be willing to speak on the bill later in the day after they have prepared further.

## Recess

After debate has finished on a bill, the house usually takes a recess. This is a 5–10 minute break in the middle of a session. Recesses are necessary because both judges and competitors will tire throughout the course of a session. To call for a recess, a member must have a specific amount of time in mind. For example, a competitor who wants a five-minute recess should seek recognition and say, “I move for a five-minute recess.” This motion requires a simple majority of the members present to pass; usually, it is unanimously supported. Recessing when fewer than 30 minutes are left in a session is not advisable. If such a motion is made, the presiding officer should rule it out of order and proceed with the session.

## Personal Privilege

If a competitor wishes to leave the chamber, they must invoke personal privilege by seeking recognition and saying, “I rise to a point of personal privilege.” The presiding officer then responds, “State that privilege” and the member replies, “To exit/enter the chamber.” The presiding officer has discretion over whether or not the member can exit or enter. Usually, they will grant this motion, though they may deny it if several members have already exited the chamber and not returned. Members should spend no more than 5–10 minutes out of the chamber at any time. Some tournaments allow an open chamber, which permits competitors to leave the chamber whenever they wish without rising to a point of personal privilege. If the tournament so allows, then only a simple majority is required to open the chamber. All chambers begin as closed chambers; a simple majority of competitors must vote to open it. Members in an open chamber should be respectful of their colleagues and not leave or enter the room during a speech or during a questioning period.

Debaters also use the motion of personal privilege to address the chamber on a procedural matter unrelated to the content of a bill. When requesting the privilege, a debater must follow the same process they would use to exit the chamber with one difference. When the presiding officer asks the speaker to state the privilege, they say “To address the chamber.” Members should use this privilege only rarely. A

speaker should move to address the chamber only if the presiding officer is not addressing it or is not aware of a grossly unfair procedural matter. Otherwise, most competitors and judges will view it as a waste of the chamber's time.

## POINTS OF INFORMATION AND POINTS OF ORDER

---

If a competitor has a procedural question or a question about the competition, they should rise to a point of information (they should move to be recognized and say, "I rise to a point of information"). The presiding officer can either grant or deny it; the vast majority will be granted. After gaining permission from the P.O., the speaker should ask their question,

and the presiding officer should answer to the best of their knowledge.

Different from the point of information is the point of order. While the point of information is used merely to gather a piece of information about the competition, the point of order is used to correct a mistake made by the presiding officer that had a tangible effect on the session. For example, if the presiding officer incorrectly calls on a person who has given two speeches over a person who has given only one speech, the speaker who has been overlooked should state, "I rise to a point of order." The presiding officer will then recognize the speaker, and the speaker will point out the error. At this point, the presiding officer should correct the error.

## ENDING THE SESSION

---

When time for the session has elapsed, one of two things will happen. First, if the tournament has made each session its own legislative day (a complete and independent session of the Congress) or if the session is the last session of any competitive segment of the tournament (such as the last preliminary or semifinal session), a debater must move to the orders of the day, the motion used to conclude a session. The presiding officer alone rules on this motion. Once the chamber has moved to orders of the day, the previous question is

automatically called on every bill or resolution for which debate has been opened but that has not yet been voted on. The presiding officer will conduct a vote on each of these pieces of legislation. Unless the tournament has instructed competitors otherwise, the students are free to recess after the votes are completed until the next session or segment of the tournament begins.

If the tournament has decided that each session is not its own legislative day, a debater will move to recess until the next session

begins. Orders of the day will only be called during the final session of each segment of the tournament (the last session in prelims, semifinals, and finals). Calling a recess does not entail a vote on open legislation; rather, the chamber picks up right where it left off when the next session begins.

## REGENCY AND PRECEDENCE

---

Each tournament will have its own rules about precedence and recency. Precedence refers to the number of times a speaker has spoken in the legislative day. Students who have spoken less have higher precedence; the presiding officer is obligated to select the speaker with higher precedence. Recency refers to how long ago a speaker's last speech was given. Debaters with better recency are those whose speeches were further in the past; a debater who has spoken less recently will be called on over a debater who has spoken more recently but has the same precedence. If the tournament has determined that recency and precedence reset after each session, then the number of times each speaker spoke and the speaking order from the previous session are irrelevant to the speaking order in the next session. If the tournament decides that recency does not reset, the speaking order and the number of speeches given in the previous session determine the speaking order in the next session.

## AMENDMENTS

---

Amendments are the most complicated procedural matter in Congressional Debate. Amendments are changes made to particular bills and resolutions while the chamber is in session. Typically, they are used to improve legislation or to correct minor errors in the original draft of a bill (for example, if a bill is slated to take effect in the past, it ought to be corrected via an amendment).

The amendment process begins with a competitor writing an amendment either on a sheet of paper or on an amendment form the tournament has provided. The written amendment should cite the section of the legislation being amended and explain which text is being removed and which is being added. For example, if a competitor wanted to change the date that a bill takes effect, their amendment should read: "In Section 4, change the text 'This bill shall take effect on March 1, 2011' with text that reads 'This bill shall take effect on March 1, 2013.'" After the amendment is written, the author must move to approach the chair. The member then hands their amendment to the presiding officer, and the P.O. and the parliamentarian determine whether the amendment is germane and does not alter the intent of the original legislation. If they decide that the amendment is germane, the P.O. will announce that to the chamber. At this point, the author of the amendment must move to amend. The presiding officer will then read the amendment

to the chamber, which will vote on whether or not to begin debate on it. If one-third of the members present in the chamber agree to begin debate, the chamber ceases to debate the legislation as a whole and begins to debate whether or not the amendment should be added to the bill.

At this point, amending a bill can become confusing. Debate on the amendment begins with an affirmative cycle, but there is no authorship; the person who wrote the amendment is not entitled to give the first affirmative speech.

Precedence and recency determine who gets to speak on the amendment. Debaters should almost never speak on amendments. The speeches will be less meaningful than a speech on a typical bill, and they count against the speaker's precedence and recency. Instead, members should immediately call for previous question on the amendment. A two-thirds supermajority of the total membership of the chamber is required for the amendment to pass and become part of the bill.

## PRESIDING

---

Presiding is an important skill that, when done well, appears effortless. An excellent presiding officer is one who controls the chamber without dominating it. Achieving this goal and accomplishing the various tasks that accompany it are very demanding. Presiding officers need to be organized, efficient, and comfortable handling many tasks at once. They are responsible for selecting speakers, ruling on motions, and keeping the chamber moving along quickly.

### Gaveling And Selection Procedures

Once a P.O. is elected, they thank the chamber and then announces their gaveling and selection procedures. The gaveling procedure recommended in most districts is to gavel once with one minute left in a speech, twice with 30

seconds left in a speech, and three times when there is no time left. In online debate, this is typically done with time cards held up to the screen instead. Starting at about five seconds after time has run out, the P.O. should begin to gavel the speaker down, with the gavel taps getting progressively louder as time passes. This system communicates the time remaining to the speaker without being intrusive and enables the P.O. to reclaim the floor from a speaker who has exceeded their time.

Selection procedure is more complicated. The NSDA requires that presiding officers first use precedence and then use recency in determining who gets to speak next (the person with the fewest speeches gets called on first; if multiple individuals standing have given the same number of speeches, then the person who gave their last speech longest ago gets to speak).

To keep track of all the necessary information, presiding officers should make a precedence and recency chart. This chart should contain several columns on a sheet of paper, with each column numbered beginning with zero and increasing by one. In the column labeled zero, the P.O. should list the name of every student in the chamber. As students speak, their names should be crossed off the “zero” column and placed into the “one” column in the order that they spoke. All speeches should also be numbered, so a presiding officer, if challenged on recency, can explain their decision to the chamber using the specific speech number given by each competitor. Because not all competitors will be familiar with this type of recency chart, having additional information, such as the speech number and order, serves

as a reliable fallback option for the P.O. When a student speaks for a second time, their name should be crossed out of the “one” column and moved into the “two” column. This process repeats itself until the end of the legislative day. Such a chart will make it very easy for the presiding officer to keep track of precedence and recency, since each speech will be numbered and precedence can be determined by which column the student’s name falls under. Below is an example of a recency and precedence chart. Precedence can be read from left to right (debaters who have spoken fewer times are to the left); recency can be read from top to bottom within columns (debaters who have spoken less recently are toward the top of a column).

<b>Precedence and Recency</b>			
<b>0 SPEECHES</b>	<b>1 SPEECH</b>	<b>2 SPEECHES</b>	<b>3 SPEECHES</b>
Berkman	1 – Sonnenklar	7 – Shaw	13 – Sonnenklar
Hannan	2 – Berkman	9 – Sonnenklar	
Meadows	3 – Hannan	10 – Hannan	
Miller	4 – Shaw	11 – Berkman	
Shaw	5 – Walwema	12 – Meadows	
Smith	6 – Meadows		
Sonnenklar	8 – Miller		
Walwema			

If several speakers wish to speak and none has spoken, the presiding officer should randomly choose one. The presiding officer can use geography (where in the chamber a speaker is located) to decide. When using geography,

P.O.s deliberately move across the room. For example, a presiding officer would first select someone from the right side of the room, then from the middle, then from the left before moving back to the right and beginning the

cycle all over again. Geography is considered fair because location in the chamber is always fairly random. Presiding officers should take particular note of shorter competitors sitting in the back of the room; they are often difficult to see, so presiding officers should be sure to check if such competitors are visible prior to making a speaker choice.

How the P.O. sets the initial speaking order is not as important as whether the initial selection is fair and as unbiased as possible. No P.O. can avoid all bias, and even the best system will be subject to some degree of perceived unfairness. Two frequently used methods should be avoided, however, because they actually promote certain forms of unfairness. These systems base selection of speakers on “longest standing” and “activity.” Longest standing refers to the number of cycles that a debater has been seeking recognition and waiting to speak. Using this criterion to select speakers is flawed — many speakers will seek recognition even when they do not have speeches prepared because they believe it is to their advantage: by seeking recognition, they ensure that they will be able to give a speech earlier than those who do not. Hence, it does not reward preparedness; it rewards strategizing. Activity refers to the number of motions made and questions asked by a specific competitor. This selection method is flawed because the presiding officer controls activity; they could merely select people from their school or people they like for questions and motions and then use that to

justify calling on them. This method does not minimize bias; it gives the presiding officer an avenue to introduce and mask bias.

## Recognizing Questioners

After the P.O. announces their procedures, their job is to keep the chamber moving. After each speech, they should call on questioners. Questioners should be determined in roughly the same way that speakers are, by precedence and recency. Finally, the P.O. should attempt to move around the room with questions as randomly and efficiently as possible.

A more sophisticated approach to recognizing questioners takes into account the debate as it occurs. Because questioning is designed to increase clash in a debate, a presiding officer should recognize questioners to further this goal. For instance, if a speaker attacks the remarks of another member of the chamber, the debate would be improved if the member whose speech was attacked had a chance to ask a question of the speaker. In a similar vein, rewarding speakers who ask brief, sophisticated questions over those who ask long-winded or “softball” questions may be appropriate.

## Other Skills

Presiding officers must know all the rules that govern the chamber. They will be the ones who are asked procedural questions and are charged with knowing what the chamber must do after a particular motion or action.



Prior to the session, the P.O. should determine the number of votes that makes a two-thirds supermajority as this number will not fluctuate during the session. The P.O. can then make reference to this number as needed throughout the round. They will still need to calculate majority votes as they occur to account for abstentions and students who are out of the chamber.

Presiding officers should also aim to minimize unnecessary rhetoric. Often, they have a tendency to be wordy when running the chamber. This wastes time that could be used for additional speeches. After each questioning period is over, the P.O. should seat the speaker, and then wait a few seconds to see if there are any motions. After entertaining all motions, the presiding officer should simply say, “Affirmative/Negative speakers please seek recognition.” This is efficient and does not waste time. The best presiding officers are often those who say the least.

A presiding officer should constantly be thinking about who they are going to call on next. As explained above, during each speech, they should be determining who wishes to be recognized, but has not yet spoken and should also be checking precedence or recency. This will ensure that they are prepared to quickly call on a speaker.

Finally, a presiding officer should attempt to inject some personality and humor into the session. Sessions can often be long and dry for competitors and judges alike; judges are more

likely to remember and reward a P.O. who made the session enjoyable. That said, presiding officers should not attempt to inject humor after every cycle, and their humor certainly should not distract from the debate. They must balance professionalism with the need to maintain a lively chamber.

In sum, a presiding officer can be the most important person in any debate round. They determine the flow of the session, are charged with knowing all procedures, and must determine who gets to speak. If they are efficient and organized, they can make a chamber run smoothly and the session enjoyable, and they will likely be rewarded for their efforts.



## CHAPTER 11 – KEY CONCEPTS

- Congressional Debate is facilitated by the use of parliamentary procedure.
- Each session begins with the setting of an agenda and the election of a presiding officer.
- Actual debate about legislation comes to an end when the chamber has passed a motion to call the previous question.
- Debaters must rise to a point of personal privilege to exit or enter the chamber.
- Debaters may call for a recess during a session, typically between debates.
- Debaters should use points of order or points of information to ask procedural questions or make procedural points.
- The presiding officer should be fair, efficient, and personable.
- The presiding officer should select speakers and questioners by a fair system that incorporates the concepts of recency and precedence.
- The presiding officer should keep time for all speeches and provide time signals via gavel taps.

# CHAPTER 12

## *Preparing For Tournaments*

**D**ebate requires not only a sharp mind in the round, but also significant pre-round preparation. Debaters need to learn how to perform adequate research and prepare to refute. In fact, much of the educational value of the activity comes from effort put in before the tournament. This chapter will briefly outline the steps that competitors need to take before they walk into a round.

### PREPARATION IN CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE

---

Congressional Debate does not require competitors to prepare both sides of a topic. Hypothetically, a participant could prepare for only the affirmative side of a bill and still give

an excellent speech. That said, the session does not always work out as debaters anticipate. If a debater has poor recency or precedence, they may have difficulty speaking on the side they

have prepared. Consequently, most debaters will prepare to speak on both sides of each issue on the docket.

Unlike a Public Forum constructive, which is written out in its entirety, a Congressional Debate speech is only outlined. Ideally, the outline should fit on no more than one half of a legal pad page, leaving the rest of the page for the flow. The speaker needs to write only a few words to remind themselves of their introduction and conclusion. Each argument should be organized by claim, warrant, and impact, with a few words used to remind the speaker of each element of their argument. Debaters may want to jot down phrases or specific words that they want to use in their speech. By planning some of their vocabulary beforehand, they can ensure that they sound as eloquent as possible.

While debaters can write out a number of constructive arguments before the session, there is no guarantee that those arguments will not have already been made by the time a competitor gets the opportunity to speak. Consequently, debaters must be prepared to alter their argumentation at any point. This requires them to read broadly on each topic before the round begins; there is no good substitute for understanding an issue before the debate. Debaters should also read and print out a number of articles on each side of a topic before the debate round. Having this topic-specific reference material available allows speakers to make new constructive arguments if their original arguments have already been made and allows them to use evidence when refuting. A refutation, just like any other argument, is stronger when it is supported by topic-related expertise.

## PREPARATION IN PUBLIC FORUM DEBATE

---

In addition to writing an affirmative and negative case, Public Forum debaters need to prepare for rebuttals. They should attempt to anticipate the most common positions on each side and prepare responses to them. Each Public Forum team should have two block files: one that answers affirmative arguments and one that answers negative arguments. Each of these should be organized by argument and include a table of contents for easy access.

In addition, if a team is using particularly important pieces of evidence that they anticipate other teams will also use, they should become familiar with the methodology of the evidence. Such preparation allows the team to defend their evidence against a challenge; it is difficult to respond to methodological indictments if a team doesn't understand the methodology supporting their evidence. Understanding the methodology also makes it much easier to criticize that piece of evidence

should another team use it. Every piece of evidence will have flaws; no source is perfect. Being familiar with important pieces of evidence allows a debater to point out those

flaws when that evidence is used against them. Such an indictment can be an effective defensive argument.

## RESEARCH

---

Debaters must perform research to gain a broad understanding of the issues they discuss. Research can be conducted in a variety of ways, but the guiding principle should always be the same: research a subject to learn more about it. This sounds obvious, but many speakers make the mistake of seeking specific evidence to support a specific point; they write an argument, then look for a quotation or statistic to substantiate it. This type of research can be useful when preparation time is limited, but ultimately leads to a narrow and incomplete understanding of an issue. A speaker who finds only three pieces of evidence to support their three arguments will be unprepared for questions and ill-equipped to answer the arguments their opponent makes. Instead, speakers should read and research to obtain a broad understanding of the issues involved in a topic.

Acceptable sources include: academic monographs; articles published by academic experts; reports from think tanks (like Cato, Heritage, and Brookings, though debaters should be wary of the bias inherent in many think tanks; Cato has a libertarian agenda, while Heritage leans to the right, and Brookings leans to the left); government reports (from the

relevant organizations; if there is a bill about reducing crime, it would make sense to cite FBI statistics); articles from respected magazines (*The Economist*, *Foreign Policy*, *Foreign Affairs*, etc.); Supreme Court and appellate court rulings; and articles from reputable newspapers (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, etc.) are also acceptable. Academic studies usually provide the most reliable evidence because they are written by qualified experts in the field, and they tend to have sound and well-explained methodologies.

Debaters use a number of databases to find evidence, including LexisNexis, HeinOnline, and JStor. These provide academic and legal research that competitors can use to form arguments. While students may not have access to all these tools, all NSDA members have free access to HeinOnline and all competitors have access to Google.

That said, debaters must realize that simply typing the topic into search engines and databases is unlikely to yield useful results. Debaters should take several steps when using these online resources. First, they should attempt to find the key terms used when discussing each topic. A key term is a specific phrase used by

academics collectively to talk about a particular issue. For example, if a debater were discussing whether or not corporations have the right to fund political campaigns, they would discover that the term academics and the courts use to describe this right is “corporate personhood” and search using that term. Additionally, a large amount of academic research is available online in PDF format. Debaters searching for academic research should perform an advanced search on Google and select PDF as the file type. This will ensure that only PDF files appear as search results, greatly increasing the proportion of useful results.

## Understanding Sources

On the vast majority of topics, the amount of topic literature available will be immense. Debaters should use different types of sources based on the kind of argument they are going to make. If a debater wishes to make an argument about broad global trends, academic research is probably more valuable than a newspaper article. In general, academic articles and books are great sources if a competitor is looking for depth on an issue. They provide extremely well-researched and thorough accounts of major issues. Yet, because they provide such thorough research, they won’t necessarily be the timeliest. Debaters searching for the most up-to-date information should look for newspaper and magazine articles — they are most likely to provide on-the-ground coverage of global situations. Debaters can also use RSS

feeds, an online tool that provides links to the most up-to-date articles on specific issues. If a debater wishes to make an argument about public opinion, then polling services are the way to go. Reputable polling services, like Gallup, Zogby, and Pew, are methodical and provide more accurate accounts of public opinion than, say, a poll on the CNN website.

Debaters must also understand any bias in the sources they use. Authors or organizations may have agendas that inform their writing; this can make some sources less credible than they first appear. For example, certain news organizations have political tendencies; Fox News and the *Wall Street Journal* lean to the right, while MSNBC leans to the left. While news organizations may not have explicit political agendas, some think tanks will. Debaters should read the mission statement of the organizations they are citing; this will allow them to assess the validity of the information they are reading. For example, if a debater wished to cite Americans for Tax Reform, reading their mission statement would quickly inform the debater that their stated purpose is to oppose tax increases. This agenda likely informs any research they may provide. Debaters should also perform a quick Internet search of the authors they are citing to discover any bias they might have. For example, if a competitor is citing a real-life legislator to support their argument, it is important to know whether or not that legislator has a political interest in supporting one side or another. If a legislator

makes an argument against increasing agricultural regulations, and their biggest contributor is Monsanto (a multinational biotechnology company that produces herbicides), then their argument is less likely to be unbiased.

Finally, while the Internet is full of helpful and credible research, much of the available material is unreliable. It is important that debaters be able to differentiate between the two. Credible information can usually be found on think tank websites, websites of major newspapers, websites of government agencies, and on academic databases like JStor, LexisNexis, and HeinOnline.

On the other hand, blogs, forums, and message boards are almost universally unreliable or heavily biased sources. Anyone can create a blog or a message board post; there is no standard to ensure that the information being presented is reliable. If a blog provides an excellent piece of information, then make sure that the author of the blog post is an expert in the relevant field. For example, The Volokh Conspiracy is a popular blog run by Eugene Volokh, a professor of law at UCLA. When discussing legal issues, he is considered to be an expert, and so citing this particular blog is acceptable. On the other hand, citing the Daily Kos, a popular liberal blog, is much less acceptable because the authors are usually not experts in a particular field. Competitors must check the credentials of all authors they wish to cite; this is largely how they can tell whether or not a particular piece of research is credible.

## Citation

Debaters need to ensure that they properly cite their sources in the debate round. This involves giving due credit to the authors or organization that produced the text. Proper citation is necessary for two reasons: first, it ensures academic honesty, as students will be making the audience aware that the information they are using is not their own; second, it allows fellow competitors to identify and criticize the sources being used, a necessary step in any academic discussion.

The exact content and form of the citation depends on the kind of source being used. Anything involving an academic authority should include the author's name and credentials. The debater should have the book title or the name of the academic publication that they are citing on hand, but it is not necessary to cite it in the round unless asked. If the source being cited is a newspaper or magazine, a think tank, a government agency, or a polling service, then the competitor must cite the name of the publication or agency; they need not cite the author's name, but should have it to hand in case they are asked for it. Regardless of the source, debaters must always cite their source's publishing date. This allows the judge and competitors to determine the timeliness of the content being presented. A good rule of thumb is that a competitor's citation should reveal enough information that a listener could find the exact article given only the information presented in the round.

Source citations can be inserted in a speech in three ways: before the data, in the middle of the data, and after the data. The actual words used to introduce a source can vary widely, but students should try to keep these attributions brief and clear. Some examples of pre-source citations include “According to an April 2nd report from the Carnegie Foundation . . .,” and “The Congressional Budget Office reported last month that” Both of these citations provide clear attribution and set up the ensuing information in a grammatically simple way.

Mid-source citations move these attributions to the middle of the sentence rather than at the beginning. For example, “In 2000, according to a March report from the Department of Justice, there were fewer than 10 cases of this type prosecuted in the entire nation.” This style of citation is the most sophisticated option for students, but can also lead to a lack of clarity if the speaker does not clearly differentiate between the citation and the information.

Debaters should avoid post-source citations because they violate the audience’s expectations; providing a citation after the fact causes the audience to retrospectively evaluate the source and the information, which means the audience is no longer paying attention to the speaker. By providing the source before the information, the speaker allows the audience to evaluate the data as it is delivered.

Debaters should not cite websites. Finding information on a website is perfectly acceptable, but the citation delivered in the round

should exclude the “dot-com” label. For example, if a debater has found information on CNN.com, they should cite CNN in the round, not CNN.com. Always cite the organization providing the information, not the website. Additionally, much of the information published in newspapers and magazines has underlying sources that they rely on. When possible, these underlying sources should be cited instead of the newspaper or magazine. For example, if a *New York Times* article says, “A Gallup poll reported that 67% of Americans favor socialized medicine,” the debater should attempt to find and cite the Gallup poll instead of the *New York Times* article. This ensures the most accurate representation of the evidence.

Finally, while Wikipedia is a valuable tool, debaters should never cite Wikipedia. Wikipedia can be used to gain a broad understanding of an issue since, more often than not, the information is accurate. That said, because Wikipedia is susceptible to false edits, it should never be used as a source in a debate round. However, each Wikipedia article links to several sources, many of which are credible. Debaters can use these sources and cite them in the debate round.

## MATERIALS

---

Once the debaters have researched their topic, developed their arguments, and prepared the materials that can be written before the debate, they must organize the information

and ensure that they have all of the materials necessary to compete effectively.

## **Congressional Debate**

Congressional debaters should have all of their outlines on a white or yellow legal pad before the round begins. Additionally, they should bring at least two different colored pens and a folder containing whatever research they wish to use. Competitors need not have each article they will cite — they need only the paragraph they are citing — but the folder should include the materials they will use to develop additional speeches or refutation as well. They can organize the information as they wish, but it is usually organized by piece of legislation. Debaters should also have a copy of the legislation packet as well as copies of any other information the tournament provides. An almanac or a book detailing important Supreme Court cases might also be helpful as these will provide useful information for almost any debate.

## **Public Forum**

Public Forum debaters should have at least three copies of each of their cases to ensure that even if a copy is lost, extras are available; having an electronic copy of the case on a flash drive or laptop provides additional backup. They should also have multiple copies of their block files for each side of the resolution. The block files should be organized by the

argument they address in either a folder or an expando file. An expando is ideal because its pockets help the debater create a built-in filing system that makes finding documents easy. In order to flow the round, debaters should bring a substantial amount of unlined paper and several pens in multiple colors.

Competitors may need to show their evidence to the judge or their opponents. Consequently, they must have the full paragraph containing the information they are citing accessible, either in print or electronic form. This allows their opponents and the judge to evaluate the quality of the evidence and to ensure that the evidence is not being distorted. Having the full article is not required, but it is most helpful. It gives everyone an advantage: it prevents their opponents from making claims of misrepresentation, and it allows the judge the most clarity if a dispute arises over the quality of evidence.



## CHAPTER 12 – KEY CONCEPTS

- Debaters should prepare for both constructive speeches and rebuttal speeches before the tournament begins.
- Research serves two primary purposes: to be well-informed generally and to obtain evidence for specific arguments.
- Debaters need to become familiar with a wide variety of sources, both academic and popular.
- Debaters should be aware of potential biases in their evidence.

# CHAPTER 13

## *Competing at Tournaments*

**F**or the inexperienced debater, a tournament can be an intimidating event. Each tournament will feature seasoned competitors and judges who have been involved with the activity for years. Consequently, knowing what to expect and, more important, how to behave at a debate tournament is essential. Debaters need to behave with professionalism and respect the host school, their judges, their coaches, and their opponents. When students behave properly, debate tournaments run more smoothly and provide a more accepting, respectful, and enjoyable environment for everyone involved.

## TOURNAMENT STRUCTURE

---

Most larger tournaments will have both preliminary and elimination rounds. Preliminary rounds are those in which every team participates. Public Forum Debate usually has four to seven depending on the tournament; Congressional Debate has two to four preliminary sessions. Some tournaments, usually local tournaments, have only preliminary rounds; the winners of the tournament are those with the best preliminary record.

Other tournaments will advance the top preliminary competitors to elimination rounds. Elimination rounds are those in which only the top competitors participate. In Public Forum Debate who reaches the elimination rounds is determined in one of two ways: either every team with a certain number of wins or better (usually four or five wins) will advance or some number of teams that was set before the tournament will advance. If the latter is the case, then that number will either be 64 (triple octa-finals), 32 (double octa-finals), 16 (octa-finals), 8 (quarter-finals), or 4 (semifinals). These numbers create a clean bracket that yields a two-team final round.

If the tournament decides to advance everyone with a particular record, then the first elimination round will usually be a partial one in which not all advancing teams participate. For example, if a tournament wishes to advance all teams with a winning record, this will, in all likelihood, not yield a full bracket

of 4, 8, 16, 32, or 64; there will be some other number of debaters with a winning record. Thus, not every team will participate in the first elimination round; some teams will advance straight to the second elimination round without debating. If 30 teams have a winning record at a tournament and each of them advance to elimination rounds, then the top 2 teams will advance automatically to octa-finals and the remaining 28 teams will debate for the 14 remaining slots. The second elimination round will feature a full bracket in which every remaining team participates; this bracket eventually yields a final round of two teams. If a team loses in an elimination round, they are out of the tournament.

Whereas most preliminary rounds will have only one judge, most elimination rounds will have a panel of three judges (or more, depending on the size of the tournament). Whoever wins a majority of the ballots on the panel wins the debate and advances to the next round.

Congressional Debate also has tournaments with elimination rounds and tournaments without them. At tournaments with no elimination rounds, competitors will take part in a number of sessions, and the students with the best scores or the highest ranks in those sessions will be declared the victors. At these tournaments, every competitor participates in every session.

At tournaments with elimination rounds, competitors will advance from preliminary sessions to a semifinal session or a final session. At tournaments that advance directly to a final session, the top competitors in each chamber will be consolidated into one “Super Session,” and the debaters with the highest scores or the best ranks in that chamber will be declared the victors. If a tournament advances to a semifinal session, then the top students from each preliminary chamber will be advanced to one of a number of semifinal chambers. The top students from each semifinal chamber will advance to the Super Session, and the top students in the Super Session will be declared the winners. Some final rounds will feature a scenario, a fictional situation that the tournament develops for students to debate. These situations can range from an economic collapse to an invasion. The tournament will develop bills or resolutions that attempt to solve the problem the scenario created. Because the tournament staff provides the scenario, they will often supply evidence (such as a fake Supreme Court ruling or a fake issue briefing) the competitors can use when speaking. Competitors should be creative and should attempt to role-play when debating a scenario. This involves consistently making reference to the specific situation at hand rather than making generic arguments that could apply to any similar situation. If the tournament also provides resources, then debaters will appear to be more creative and engaged if they make use of these resources. Debaters

need to make clear that they are debating this specific scenario, rather than merely delivering arguments that they have made before.

## PROFESSIONALISM

---

At tournaments, debaters should behave the same way they would in front of potential employers and college interviewers. Competitors should avoid being excessively loud, using vulgarities, and horsing around with teammates and other competitors. These types of behavior have a tendency to annoy or offend those in the surrounding area. If a debater acts inappropriately, chances are someone will see it; this person could very well be that student’s judge in the next round. Out-of-round behavior can affect in-round results. Judges who have already formed an unfavorable opinion of a competitor are unlikely to rate them highly in the round. Therefore, in addition to being the right and courteous thing to do, behaving with respect is in the best interests of all competitors.

Competitors should also treat the building they are in with respect. Often debaters must move materials in a classroom to accommodate a round. Consequently, they should make sure that the room is exactly as they found it when they leave. If desks were moved, they should be put back in their original position. Any trash generated during the round should be picked up and thrown away. Additionally, altering the electronic devices in a classroom is incredibly

discourteous; teachers rely on these for their classes. In sum, debaters should make an effort to change as little as possible in the classrooms in which they are competing.

Respect for fellow competitors is crucial. In the round, debaters should not talk in a condescending or scornful tone when addressing competitors. In questioning periods, the speakers should always use a respectful tone, even as they attempt to poke holes in their opponents' arguments. Judges will never vote down a debater for being too courteous; many times, however, they have rated competitors poorly for being disrespectful to their opponents. This advice extends to out-of-round behavior as well. Debaters should not say negative things about their fellow competitors while at a debate tournament. This behavior is disrespectful and rude. Additionally, competitors never know whose coaches or parents are sitting next to them; students can offend someone without knowing it.

Respect is especially important when the tournament releases postings for elimination rounds. Whether or not a debater advances, they should always remember to be courteous to their fellow competitors. If a competitor is fortunate enough to move on to the next stage of the competition, they should not celebrate in a way that will embarrass those who did not advance; similarly, if a debater did not advance, they should not express their disappointment in a way that detracts from the accomplishments of others. Above all, debaters should

remember to act with respect for those around them.

In Congressional Debate, competitors should work hard to cooperate with each other. This will make the session more pleasant for all involved. Treating their opponents with the utmost respect is also in a competitor's best interest. Congressional Debate is a largely communal activity; the presiding officer election and the selection of the agenda all require a vote. If a competitor is disrespectful to their fellow students, their chances for being elected presiding officer or getting the agenda they want passed decrease significantly. Additionally, presiding officers have a degree of discretion over who to choose for speeches and questions. A disrespectful competitor does themselves no favors by insulting or shunning their peers.

If competitors follow all of the steps above, they will be respectful throughout the tournament. The importance of respect in this activity cannot be overstated. Because this is an activity designed to facilitate argument, it is often easy to not be civil to opponents. Students cannot let the ease with which incivility comes overwhelm them. All competitors must make an effort to be courteous to their fellow students, to their judges, and to all involved in the activity. If they do, then debate is an activity that will be enjoyed by many for years to come.

## INTERACTION WITH JUDGES

---

Public Forum Debate (and, to a lesser extent, Congressional Debate) offers opportunities to interact with the judge before and after the round. These opportunities can be useful, but they can also be dangerous for those competitors who fail to treat the judge with respect.

Making small talk with the judge is acceptable before the round begins; in fact, it is encouraged. Debaters are to treat judges as human beings, not automatons whose only function is to make a decision in the debate round. That said, any questions competitors have about the tournament or the judge more specifically should be reserved until both teams are present in the debate room. This ensures that each team has access to the exact same information before a round begins, making the playing field as equitable as possible.

In Public Forum Debate, asking the judge for a paradigm is acceptable. A paradigm is the judge's preferences about how a debate round should be conducted. Avoid using the term, however; many judges will be from the general public. They will not have a background in debate and won't understand what you mean. Judges are more likely to respond to debaters' concerns if they ask specific questions. For instance, "Do you prefer that competitors stand or sit during crossfire?" is much more helpful to a judge than asking "What are your preferences for the debate?" The more targeted the question, the better. Debaters should never argue

with a judge's paradigm. Instead, they should adapt to whatever the judge tells them to do. If a judge prefers a slow, persuasive debate style to a faster, more analytical one, then competitors should make an effort to conform to that preferred style.

Debaters should be respectful of their judges and their judges' role. For example, competitors should not expect the judge to time their speeches. They should come equipped with a stopwatch to time their own speeches and those of their opponents. During the round, competitors should have almost no interaction with the judge except for the content of the debate. This allows the judge to flow the round and evaluate the debate as carefully as possible.

After a Public Forum round, the judge should give some indication as to whether they will offer an oral critique or a disclosure (these never happen in Congressional Debate). An oral critique has the judge giving competitors advice on how to improve their debating after the round. A disclosure is when the judge announces their decision immediately after the round. Some tournaments prohibit disclosure, while others encourage it. If a judge has remained silent for a short period after the round, a debater may ask if there will be an oral critique or a disclosure. If the judge announces that there will be, the debaters should remain in the room until the judge is finished writing their ballot. If there will not be, they should pack up their belongings and exit the room

quietly. Debaters should never attempt to persuade a judge to give an oral critique or a disclosure if they have stated that there will not be one.

If the judge does decide to disclose or give an oral critique, debaters must never argue with the decision or the comments. Even if a competitor feels that the critique errs in some way, they should remain silent and exit the room without voicing their concerns to the judge.

Arguing with a judge about their decision is never a good idea for several reasons. First, to argue with someone who has taken time to judge a debate round is disrespectful. Second, the judge's mind will never be changed; altering a decision after interacting with competitors is almost universally against tournament rules. Third, arguing will cause the judge to look on the arguing team unfavorably, potentially leading to future losses.

If a competitor has a legitimate complaint about a judge's behavior in the round and not the reasoning behind their decision, the competitor should inform their coaches immediately. This should happen when the judge has committed some egregious violation of judging norms or displayed behavior that is harassment or discriminatory. These include: inappropriate or suggestive comments, falling asleep during the round, talking on a cell phone during the round, and making demands about the content of future speeches while the debate round is still in progress. Students should immediately

report any inappropriate judge behavior to their coach. If the issue is discrimination or harassment, the student may also speak with an equity office if the tournament has one.

## MAINTAINING MENTAL AWARENESS

---

Debate tournaments can be a harrowing experience. Competitors wake up at five or six in the morning and often compete until after nightfall. Maintaining awareness and keeping energy levels up throughout the day can be difficult. Yet, the most energetic debaters usually give better performances throughout the day.

Participants can take three steps to ensure that they are as awake and aware as possible throughout a tournament.

1. **Get enough sleep on the night before the tournament and during the tournament.** Debaters who don't will inevitably be exhausted before the tournament is over. This can lead to sloppy performances from even the most talented and prepared debaters. At some point, there are diminishing marginal returns to the work a debater can do the night before a tournament. It is usually in a debater's best interest to maximize the time they have to sleep instead of writing that one last argument or reading that one last article.
2. **Ensure that they are well-hydrated and fed throughout the tournament.** Debaters should bring a refillable

water bottle to the tournament and fill it frequently. Because competitors speak so much over the course of a tournament, their mouths will become dry at some point. Being well-hydrated can combat this and can ensure that a debater has the fuel to continue with the tournament. Debaters should not compete on an empty stomach. They should eat something before arriving at the tournament, even if it's something small. Hunger can distract a debater, preventing them from turning in the best performance they possibly can. Participants should bring money to a tournament, as many tournaments require them to purchase their meals. Many tournaments will include a meal or two with registration, but many more do not.

- 3. Perform verbal warm-ups before the tournament begins.** Most teams have a warm-up ritual that involves repeating various phrases and playing various word games. Warm-ups get the vocal chords prepared for a day of speaking, and they assist with both energy levels and overall enunciation. If a team does not have a warm-up ritual, then individual members can observe what members do. This will give them ideas that they can use to form a ritual for their team. At the very least, all competitors should follow this cardinal rule: do not let the

first speech given at a tournament be one that the judge hears. Competitors should always practice a speech on the day of the tournament before walking into the first round. This minimizes the number errors made in the first competitive speech.



## CHAPTER 13 – KEY CONCEPTS

- When at a tournament, debaters should behave professionally at all times.
- Most tournaments have preliminary rounds, which every debater participates in, followed by elimination rounds, for which only certain debaters qualify.
- Final elimination rounds in Congressional Debate are often called “Super Sessions” and may involve a scenario.
- Debaters should always behave with respect: respect for their opponents, for the judges, and for the tournament host.
- Debaters should limit their interactions with judges when not in rounds and should always assume that a potential judge is nearby.
- Debaters should engage in healthy behaviors while at tournaments: get enough sleep, stay hydrated, and eat regularly.
- Debaters should warm up before the first competition of the day.

## Glossary

**10th Amendment** Establishes states' rights; all powers not explicitly granted to the federal government are reserved to the states or to the people. Some consider this a major limitation on the bills that can be debated in Congress.

**Adjourn** End a session.

**Affirmative team** *See* Pro team

**Agenda** Set of legislation placed in the order in which it will be debated.

**Amendment to the Constitution** In Congressional Debate, a piece of legislation intended to change the text of the U.S. Constitution.

**Argumentative goals** What a debater is trying to accomplish in the debate, i.e., what arguments and ideas the debater is trying to advance.

**Article I Section 8 of the U.S.**

**Constitution** This section enumerates the various powers of the Congress.

**Assertion** Unwarranted claim; a statement made without support.

**Attention-Getting Device (AGD)** Dynamic first lines of a speech designed to “hook” the audience and raise their interest in the speech.

**Authorship** First affirmative speech on a piece of legislation; delivered by the student who wrote the legislation or a student from the same school as the author.

**Ball-park** To draw one's opponents into a debate about one's own arguments while downplaying opponents' arguments.

**Ballot** Form a judge fills out during and after a debate round. It provides feedback to the debaters, indicates the winner of the round, and assigns speaker points.

**Bill** A proposed law.

**Blocks** Pre-written responses to anticipated arguments; read during refutation speeches.

**Burden of rejoinder** Obligation to respond to arguments. If this burden is not met, the unanswered arguments become "true" in the debate.

**Case** Text of the four-minute constructive speech; establishes the advocacy for the debate round.

**Chamber** Physical room of Congressional Debate or the group of students competing.

**Claim** Most basic expression of an idea or argument.

**Close-ended question** Query that has only a few possible answers, often either "yes" or "no."

**Committee** Group of students tasked with ordering or amending a subset of the docket.

**Communicative goals** In their speech, what a debater is trying to tell implicitly to the judge or audience.

**Con team** Team debating against the resolution; also called the "negative" or "neg."

### **Congressional questioning**

**period** Following each speech, a specific time when questioners are recognized individually by the presiding officer; each questioner may ask a single question of the speaker.

**Constative** Statement declaring something to be true.

**Constructive speech** Speech that establishes the core advocacy for the debate. The constructive is typically fully written out before the debate round begins. Also called a "case."

**Contention** Main argument in a debate case.

**Convergent communication** Speech or assertions that satisfy the expectations of the audience, aligning them with the speaker's purpose.

**Cover** To answer all of the arguments made in a previous speech; to avoid "dropping" any arguments.

**Cross-application** Using an argument made in one part of the debate to respond to an argument made elsewhere in the debate.

**Cross-examination** Period of questioning controlled by the questioner, similar to the exchange between a lawyer and a witness.

**Crossfire** Three-minute period of questions and answers in a Public Forum Debate round. The first speaker has the right to ask the first question, but after that any participant may ask or answer questions.

**Crystallization** Process of clarifying, summarizing, and prioritizing the most important arguments in a debate round.

**Data** A piece of evidence that proves, illustrates, or explains a warrant, claim, or impact.

**Defense** A reason to discount an argument, but not sufficient on its own to justify a vote for one debater or another.

**Direct questioning** A style of Congressional questioning where one questioner, chosen by the presiding officer, controls 30 seconds of time during which they may ask any questions they want.

**Disclosure** Judge revealing their decision at the end of a round.

**Dissonant communication** Speech or assertions that violate the expectations of the audience, pitting them against the speaker.

**Division of ground** Ability of each side of a debate to make arguments and reasonably uphold their burdens for the round.

**Division of the house** Motion used to obtain a precise vote count when a voice vote is inconclusive.

**Docket** Set of legislation compiled for a tournament.

**Dropped argument** Argument that has not been answered by the opposition. It becomes a “true” argument for the purposes of the round.

**Extension** Process of pointing out an unanswered argument. Debaters must explain why their extensions are important for the debate.

**Final focus** Last speech given by each team in a Public Forum Debate round. Teams use these speeches to reiterate and expand on the primary reasons the judge should vote for their side.

**Flex case** Case that may change depending on the specific content of a round.

**Flow** Stylized form of note-taking used to record the arguments in a debate round.

**Framework** Analysis of value that enables clear weighing of arguments.

**Friendly question** Query directed to a Congressional debater who shares the questioner’s position. Rather than challenging the speaker, it allows the speaker to simply rehash their arguments.

**Garden path** Series of questions that lead the speaker to a particular, and often damaging, admission or contradiction.

**Gaveling procedure** System used by a presiding officer to communicate time information to the speaker.

**Grace period** Small amount of time given to speakers beyond their allotted speech time to allow them to conclude their final thought; usually between 5 and 10 seconds.

**Grand crossfire** Third crossfire in a Public Forum Debate round; follows the summary speeches. During grand crossfire, all four debaters participate and may ask or answer questions.

**Grouping** Answering or analyzing many similar arguments at the same time. Grouping is a useful way to save time or add clarity to a debate.

**Impact** Reason why an argument is important or should matter to the audience.

**Intervention** Judge making a decision based on their own thoughts or feelings rather than on the arguments advanced by debaters during the round.

**Jargon** Terminology employed by debaters that is not widely used or understood beyond the context of a debate round.

**Judge fatigue** The growing uninterest felt by judges when listening to a long debate.

**Legislative day** Complete and independent session of Congressional Debate.

**Line-by-line** An approach to refutation that answers each argument in the order it was made, proceeding down the flow “line by line.”

**Link** Causal or correlative relationship between two ideas.

**Magnitude** Size or severity of an impact.

**Majority** More than 50 percent of those members of the chamber voting. Abstentions and those members who are not present for the vote do not count.

**Menu** List of what will be covered later in the speech, also called a “preview.”

**Mitigate** To lessen or de-emphasize an argument or impact.

**Negative team** *See* Con Team.

**Normative truth** Statement of value; statement that cannot be empirically verified.

**Null and Void clause** Language (clause) attached to the end of every bill that cancels or overrides any conflicting legislation or regulation.

**Observation** Argument that defines or clarifies the burdens of the debate round.

**Offense** Proactive reason to vote for a debater or position.

**Open chamber** In an open chamber, students may exit and return without asking permission of the presiding officer.

**Open-ended question** Query that allows the speaker to answer in many ways or explain previous ideas without limitations.

**Oral critique** Judge providing oral feedback to the debaters immediately following the round; may or may not be accompanied by a disclosure.

**Orders of the day** Motion used to conclude a session.

**Paradigm** Set of criteria and preferences that determine how a judge makes their decisions.

**Parliamentarian** Adult tasked with monitoring procedure in a session; the individual often serves as a judge as well.

**Paving the road** Dealing with objections and argumentative obstacles before advancing offensive arguments.

**Perceptual control** Appearance of dominance in a room or chamber. A debater may be argumentatively losing a debate but can still be perceptually winning a debate.

**Personal privilege** Motion used when a student wishes to exit or enter the chamber for any reason.

**Point of information** Motion used to obtain information from the presiding officer about procedure or tournament rules.

**Point of order** Motion used to correct a procedural error made by the presiding officer.

**Poise** Debater's presence in the room or chamber; a debater's ability to project confidence, maturity, and professionalism.

**Positive truth** Empirical statement of fact that can be verified or disproved through observation and analysis of the world as it is.

**Power of the Purse** Congress's constitutional mandate to set the federal budget and raise income through taxation.

**Precedence** The rule that grants participants who have spoken the fewest number of times priority when standing to speak. Precedence does not carry over to the next session.

**Preferential ballot** A ballot for ranking competitors at the end of a session; used at most tournaments to determine advancement.

**Preparation time** Amount of time allowed for debaters to prepare and organize their thoughts between speeches in a debate round. Also called "prep time" or "prep."

**President pro tempore** Student or adult temporarily serving as the presiding officer of a session, typically at the beginning of a session before the presiding officer is elected.

**Presiding Officer** Student elected by their peers to run the session; responsible for selecting speakers and questioners and for dealing with procedure.

**Previous question** Motion used to call for a vote on the legislation currently being debated; if passed, it ends debate on the legislation.

**Pro team** Team debating in favor of the resolution. Also called the "affirmative" or "aff."

**Probability** How likely an argument's impact is to occur; probability often depends on the strength of the link to the argument.

**Rebuttal** Defending one's arguments against the attacks made by an opponent; "rebuilding" one's argument.

**Rebuttal speeches** Second set of speeches in a Public Forum Debate round. Debaters use these speeches to answer the arguments made by their opponents.

**Recency** In conjunction with precedence, the rule that grants students who have spoken least recently priority when standing to speak. Recency does not carry over to the next session.

**Recess** A break from the session.

**Refutation** Attacking an opponent's arguments.

**Rehash** To repeat arguments that have already been made. Also used as a noun to describe the content of rehashed speeches.

**Resolution** Piece of legislation that expresses the opinion of the Congress.

**Resolution** Topic for debate in Public Forum Debate.

**Resolved clause** Language at the end of a resolution that encapsulates the actual opinion or judgment of the Congress.

**Road map** Brief explanation of what a debater will cover in a speech. Typically roadmapping occurs either before timing of the speech has begun or at the outset of a speech.

**Role-playing** In Congressional Debate, students are asked to play the role of a U.S. representative or senator.

**Scenario** A session of Congressional Debate where participants are presented with a series of events or situations and must make decisions about how to react. Role-playing becomes more important in a scenario session.

**Secret ballot** System of voting that does not reveal each member's vote to the chamber.

**Section** Unit of division in a bill.

**Session** A single round (typically three hours) of Congressional Debate. A tournament may have multiple preliminary sessions followed by semifinal and/or final sessions.

**Signposting** Making statements that indicate to the judge where a debater is in the flow in a rebuttal speech.

**Sin tax** Sales tax on an unpopular item, often one associated with vice (such as alcohol or tobacco).

**Softball question** See Friendly question.

**Sponsorship** The first affirmative speech on a piece of legislation if the author is not present.

**Straw-man** Attacking an opponent's weak or insubstantial argument to make one's own position seem stronger.

**Sub-point** Common method of providing additional organization and structure to a contention.

**Summary speeches** Third set of speeches in a Public Forum Debate round. Debaters use these to summarize the key arguments in the round.

**Super session** Final session of Congressional Debate.

**Supermajority** At least two-thirds of the members present at the beginning of the session. Abstentions and members who are not present for the vote count as voting "nay."

**Suspension of the rules** Motion used to alter the format or regulations of a session; most often used to extend questioning.

**Table** Motion to suspend debate on a bill with the intention of returning to it later.

**Tagline** First sentence of an argument; used to label or "tag" the idea; sometimes used as a synonym for claim.

**Transitional movement** Physical movement by the speaker that indicates or reinforces a transition from one main idea to another; often takes the form of a few casual steps across the stage or speaking area.

**Voice vote** Voting for or against a motion by saying “aye” or “nay,” respectively; used to quickly move through procedural issues.

**Voting issues** Simple, bullet-point style summary of an offensive reason to vote for a team.

**Warrant** A reason why a claim is true.

**Whereas clause** Language in a resolution that justifies the resolved clause. A whereas clause may present findings or information that explains the subject of the resolution.



