

Minnesota Debate Teachers Association
Public Forum Guide

A student and coach's guide to
Public Forum Debate

DRAFT

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To the Reader: This guide is an attempt to capture the heart of public forum debate in the state of Minnesota. At times you will see differences in regards to speech times and format when discussing the NFL style of public forum debate.

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His publication along with other resources for learning and teaching debate can be found at the Minnesota Debate Teachers Association web site: <http://www.mdtta.org>.

Chapter I: What is debate?

Debate is a competitive speaking activity that involves two sides arguing the merits of a resolution in an attempt to convince the judge that their argument is best. This process of convincing the judge is done through both real world examples and persuasive arguments made by the debater.

Competitive debate has occurred in high schools around the United States for over a century. Debate encourages students to formulate research and deliver arguments on a range of topics. Students who participate in debate often find the skills learned through the debate experience to be some of the most valuable skills used throughout their lives.

There are many different debate formats that are used in competition; Lincoln-Douglas, Policy Debate, student congress and many others.

Being On the Debate Team

Because debate is a competitive activity, participants are members of a team. The debate team is much like a typical sports team with practices, meets/tournaments, and coaches. A debate round (one full debate) takes about an hour. A judge picks a winner in each debate based on which side does the better job of upholding their position.

Public Forum debates are argued by teams of two (two debaters on each side for a total of four in each round of debate). Each member of the two-person team gives speeches and helps his or her partner the best they can.

The debate season consists of about 12 weeks of invitational tournaments which attract schools from around the state. Awards are often given out to the top teams based on record. The final tournament of the year is the championship tournament. Your coach will have more information on your competitive schedule.

Debaters practice each week. Just like a football team runs through plays, talks about upcoming opposition, and generally sharpens their skills, the debate team uses practice time to prepare for competition.

How much time does all of this take? The best answer is “it depends.” The typical debater practices a few nights per week. Each competition is on Saturday and ends in the mid-afternoon. Time commitment really depends on each participant’s goals and desires. A team member can choose the tournaments that he or she wishes to attend. In other words, debaters are able, for the most part, to set their own schedules. This will vary depending on the specific requirements of your coach.

The Benefits of Debate

Competitive debate is a challenging and highly rewarding activity for most who become involved in it. There are a full range of benefits associated with being on the debate team.

- **Fun:** The vast majority of the tens of thousands of students who compete in debate tournaments each year will tell you that it's fun. For every person, the experience is a little different, but generally the thrill of competition, the camaraderie of teammates and the travel opportunities make debate fun.
- **Teammates:** An additional benefit of getting involved is building friendships with teammates who enjoy similar interests.
- **Public Speaking Skills:** Most people naturally avoid public speaking--debate provides a nonthreatening environment to practice these skills so that down the road when you're called on to speak in college or on the job, you'll have the skills necessary to do a great job. This increases your chances of doing well in important interviews for jobs or scholarships.
- **Analytical Skills:** The ability to critically analyze a problem and propose workable solutions is invaluable. This is a skill that debate best teaches and high-level business people and professionals possess.
- **Research Skills:** From traditional library research to the Internet, debate teaches you to become a world-class researcher. Ask any college student and they'll tell you how valuable this is.
- **Listening & Note taking Skills:** Debate requires that you become a careful listener and good note taker. This helps students get better grades and learn faster.

Many of this nation's top lawyers, business executives, doctors, engineers, and elected leaders were involved in high school debate, and for good reason. Simply put, debate-related skills help one get ahead and stay there. The power to persuade is highly respected and there is no better way to master this art than through debate.

The Role of the Judge

Each debate round will have a judge who will decide which team does the better job of debating. The judge is instructed to base his/her decision on the arguments made in the debate round, not on his/her personal beliefs about the issues. Usually, a judge will take notes and do his or her best to follow all of the arguments you make. At the conclusion of the debate, the judge will write a ballot which explains his/her decision. You will get your ballot back at the end of the tournament.

Judges are hired by the schools that attend a debate tournament. They may be teachers, parents, former high school debaters, or other interested adults. Some judges are very experienced, but many are not. Undoubtedly, at some point in your debate career you will be disappointed by a decision that a judge makes. It is best to assume that your judge is doing their best. Remember, debate is subjective and will be seen differently by different people.

Chapter II: What is Public Forum Debate?

How does a debate round work?

There are two sides to the debate topic (resolution); pro (affirmative) and con (negative). The pro side must argue in favor of the given resolution while the con side would argue that the resolution is incorrect.

Based on the merit, delivery and persuasiveness of your arguments a judge watching your round will award your team a win or loss. In addition to a win and loss, your judge will also award each team by giving them a ranking between 20 and 30 points speaker points.

Each team will present a speech (case) that provides the debaters with a starting point of what to argue. Each team will prepare a speech prior to the debate tournament and will read their case during the first speeches of the debate.

At any given debate tournament, you may debate several rounds of debate on the topic and you can expect to have to debate both sides of a debate resolution at a tournament.

Before the Debate

At the start of each tournament you will be assigned a code or number. It is important to write down your code and not to lose it. Some tournaments will use a common school abbreviation and the first letter of the last name of the two participants. For example: CooperLL.

Before each round of debate a schedule will be posted or handed out that will detail the side of the debate, location, opponent and judges code.

Sample Schedule			
Round 1 – 9:00 AM			
<u>Room</u>	<u>Pro</u>	<u>Con</u>	<u>Judge</u>
A201	CooperLL	EaganMW	Madson
A202	FlakeNT	BlakeTT	Baron
A203	CannonER	EdinaUT	Brynteson

Next? Once the schedule is released you would find your code and go to the room listed at the time listed. Make sure to arrive a few minutes before the round starts. The judge will sit in the middle of the room with the students at the front of the room. You should face the judge during the debate and the Pro team should be on the left side based on how the judge is sitting.

Chapter III: The Debate

Once you know where to go and the side you will be debate, the next question is, what do I do once I'm in the room? Below is a timeline of the speeches and what occurs in each speech.

Speech	How Long	What happens
1st Pro Speech	4 Minutes	The first pro speaker reads the prepared pro speech.
1st Con Speech	4 Minutes	The first con speaker reads the prepared con speech.
Cross Fire	3 Minutes	Involving the 1st Pro and Con speaker, each debater is allowed to ask each other questions about the topic. Usually, the debaters will stand in the front of the room during this time.
2nd Pro Speech	4 Minutes	The 2nd Pro speaker will make arguments against the Con speech that was just read. Arguments should follow the claim/warrant/impact process and refute claims made by the Con.
2nd Con Speech	4 Minutes	The 2nd Con speaker will refute the 1st Pro speaker's speech and also argue why the claims made in the last speech are false. The 2nd Con must be careful to ensure that they argue everything from both the 1st and 2nd Pro speakers.
Cross Fire	3 Minutes	Involving the 2nd Pro and Con speaker, each debater is allowed to ask each other questions about the topic. Usually, the debaters will stand in the front of the room during this time.
1st Pro Speech	3 Minutes	The 1st Pro speaker refutes the claims made by the 2nd con speaker in their last speech.
1st Con Speech	3 Minutes	The 1st Con speaker refutes the claims made by the 1st Pro speaker in their last speech.
Grand Cross Fire	3 Minutes	Involving all four debaters, debaters are allowed to ask each other questions about the topic. Debaters will usually remain seated during this time.
2nd Pro Speech	2 Minutes	The 2nd Pro speaker will summarize the round into one or two main arguments.
2nd Con Speech	2 Minutes	The 2nd Con speaker will summarize the round into one or two main arguments.

Step by Step Debate

Speech #1: The Pro Constructive Speech
Time Limit: 4 Minutes
Purpose: The pro team presents their arguments in support of the resolution
Speaker: Pro #1

This is a pre-prepared speech that is written prior to the tournament. The first pro constructive speech should present the primary position of the pro in regards to the resolution for debate. The speech should be written to persuade your audience in favor of your position.

Speech #2: The Con Constructive Speech
Time Limit: 4 Minutes
Purpose: The con team presents their arguments in opposition of the resolution
Speaker: Con #1

This is a pre-prepared speech that is written prior to the tournament. The first con constructive speech should present the primary position of the con in regards to the resolution for debate. The speech should be written to persuade your audience in favor of your position.

Crossfire #1: Crossfire
Time Limit: 3 Minutes
Purpose: Question/Answer Time
Speakers: Pro #1 / Con #1

Crossfire is a period of time of time that can be used to clarify arguments presented in the round. Both debaters are allowed to ask questions during this time. Questions should be probing questions and not open ended questions. Both debaters should stand during this speech.

Speech #3: The Pro Rebuttal
Time Limit: 4 Minutes
Purpose: Refute Con Constructive
Speaker: Pro #2

The job of the pro speaker is to refute the arguments provided by the Con in their previous speech. The speeches should reflect analysis and argumentation in support of the resolution but should directly answer the claims made by the opposition speech.

Since the Pro speech (speech #1) has yet to be refuted the Pro #2 does not have the duty to argue (extend) their first speech.

Speech #4: The Con Rebuttal
Time Limit: 4 Minutes
Purpose: Refute Pro Constructive & Rebuild Con Constructive
Speaker: Con #2

The most difficult speech, the second speaker must attack (refute) the arguments made in speech #1 (pro constructive) and also refute the claims made against made in speech #3 (pro rebuttal). The speaker must carefully take notes of the arguments made against their speech and be able to answer the claims made by the pro.

Crossfire #2: Crossfire
Time Limit: 3 Minutes
Purpose: Question/Answer Time
Speakers: Pro #2 / Con #2

Crossfire is a period of time of time that can be used to clarify arguments presented in the round. Both debaters are allowed to ask questions during this time. Questions should be probing questions and not open ended questions. Both debaters should stand during this speech.

Speech #5: Pro Summary
Time Limit: 3 Minutes
Purpose: Summarize Pro Position
Speaker: Pro #1

In the pro summary speech, the pro should consolidate their position (arguments) by defending the most important speeches and attacking the most important points in the opponent's case. Select only the most important arguments; this is typically about four (4) arguments in favor of the resolution. This speech should not be rushed.

Speech #6: Con Summary
Time Limit: 3 Minutes
Purpose: Summarize Con Position
Speaker: Con #1

In the con summary speech, the con should consolidate their position in a few key arguments. Primarily, the con should answer the four main arguments provided by the pro in the previous speech (speech #5) while offering a few key arguments of their own.

An effective con speech will limit the debate to 4 or 5 key points at the end of this speech.

Crossfire #3: Grand Crossfire
Time Limit: 3 Minutes
Purpose: Question/Answer Time
Speakers: All students

The grand crossfire should work on finding areas of agreement and highlighting arguments that clash with your opponents. This time gives you the opportunity to highlight the differences between your position and your opponents. Use the time wisely to help build speeches for the final speeches.

All debaters should be seated and facing the judge(s) during the grand crossfire.

Speech #7: Pro Final Focus
Time Limit: 2 Minutes
Purpose: Give final voting issues in favor of Pro
Speaker: Pro #2

In this speech the debater is expected to restate the reasons why their team has won the debate. This is typically done by finishing up with two primary arguments in favor of the pro team.

This speech should be very conversational in tone. Students should try not to rely on notes and instead give a clear and persuasive reason to vote for the pro team.

Speech #8: Con Final Focus
Time Limit: 2 Minutes
Purpose: Give final voting issues in favor of Con
Speaker: Con #2

In this speech the debater is expected to restate the reasons why their team has won the debate. The best strategy for the con speaker is to answer to provide its own two primary arguments in opposition of the resolution while answering the final claims made by pro speaker in their previous speech.

This speech should be very conversational in tone. Students should try not to rely on notes and instead give a clear and persuasive reason to vote for the pro team.

How do I write a speech (case)?

Speech writing is very similar to writing a paper for your English class. It will contain an introduction paragraph, thesis and reasons that support your position. In debate, the process to writing a speech is very similar to writing a paper in any other class.

It begins by determining what the topic is and getting some background information on the topic. Throughout this guide, we will use the following topic (resolution):

Resolved: Current immigration laws in the United States should be enforced.

The first step to writing your debate case is to determine what the key points are in the resolution. This is done by brain storming for the reasons why the resolution is both true and false. This is best done by making a list for each side of the resolution and placing arguments as to why it is true and false. It is best to do some light reading on the topic before doing your brain-storming so you can create as complete of a topic as possible.

Pro	Con
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Illegal immigration harms US workers- Illegal immigration overburdens public services, like welfare and Medicaid- Illegal immigration increases the risk of terrorism- Current laws can be enforced	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Illegal immigration benefits the US economy- Illegal immigration does not take jobs away from Americans- Illegal immigrants pose no greater terrorism threat than anyone else- Border enforcement is a waste of money- Guest worker program would be even more beneficial to current system

Once you have gone through the process of brain storming on the topic, it is best to narrow your list to the top three or four arguments you believe best upholds your side of the resolution.

Introduction

The next step is to start by writing your introduction and thesis to your speech. Your introduction and thesis should each be one paragraph in length. Your introduction should include the side of the resolution you are debating along with the resolution. Your introduction might include a quote from an author on the topic.

Sample: Pro Introduction

“Working and middleclass Americans know that illegal immigrants do not “live in the shadows,” as political mythology would have it, but more aptly they occupy a parallel universe: one that sees them compete for American jobs, access benefits for Americans and yet send their hard-earned money out of the country to Mexico, propping up a hopelessly corrupt government.” Because I agree with Mark Cromer and his research that illegal immigration has and will continue to have a negative influence on the United States, its people and economy I stand in support of today’s resolution. Resolved: Current immigration laws in the United States should be enforced.

In the above example, you can see that our introduction introduces the problems that currently exist in regards to the resolution and provides the judge with a summary of the position the pro will argue in the debate round. The example above uses a quote (evidence) from a writer on the topic to help introduce the topic area. A quote is not always necessary when writing your introduction.

Sample: Pro Introduction #2

In the United States today, the government has taken a wait and see approach to enforcing the laws passed years ago on immigration and illegal immigration. Because the problems associated with illegal immigration has reached new heights in this country and our current system can no longer absorb the influx of illegal immigration, I stand in favor of the resolution. Resolved: Current immigration laws in the United States should be enforced.

Thesis

The purpose of a thesis is to summarize the three or four main arguments that your team will be introducing to the debate. The thesis provides the judge with guide (road map) to understanding your speech. The thesis is important as it allows the judge to understand how each of the arguments work together.

Sample: Pro Thesis

In today's round, we will argue that because of increasing threats to both the security and economy of the United States, current immigration policies should be enforced. Currently, the United States has a policy in place that defines who should be allowed entrance into our country through both legal and illegal means. It our position that currently we are not enforcing those laws adequately for our country's safety. We will argue that there are three reasons why our current immigration laws should be enforced. First, the threat of terrorism is still very real today and the United States should not become lax in its security measures. Second, that illegal immigration has a negative influence on our country's economy. And lastly, that our current immigration laws are sufficient to protect our country, if enforced.

As seen above, the thesis details the position of the speech and gives the judge a road map to the arguments that will be made.

Arguments/Contentions

In writing your arguments (often called contentions); debaters will often use a modal to their argumentation. In this model, an argument will begin with a claim: the statement of the argument you are making. The claim is simply of the reasons that were found during the brainstorming process.

Sample: Claim

Contention I: The threat of terrorism demands enforcement of current immigration laws.

The claim has no reason why the statement is true, simply that it is. The warrant is the answer to the question, why is your claim true? Claims always need a warrant to why the statement is that of fact. When you support a claim with a warrant, you are telling the judge the reasons why your argument is based on more than just opinion. Warrants are often found during research of a topic and will be a quote or position explaining why a claim is true.

Sample: Warrant

When illegal immigrations are allowed to live within the country unchecked, it creates a risk to everyone. As Mark Krikorian, Executive Director at the Center of Immigration Studies wrote in *The National Interest* (Spring 2004, Page 77), “Unfortunately, enforcement of the prohibition against hiring illegal aliens, passed in 1986, has all but stopped. This might seem to be of little importance to security, but in fact holding a job can be important to terrorists for a number of reasons. By giving them a means of support, it helps them blend into society. Neighbors might well become suspicious of young men who do not work but seem able to pay their bills. Moreover, supporting themselves by working would enable terrorists to avoid the scrutiny that might attend the transfer of money from abroad.”

The warrant is often a quote (evidence) that supports the claim. Here, we see that our research found a quote supporting the idea that illegal immigrations can influence the security of our nation by allowing illegal immigrants to gain access to the system.

Finally, you need to impact your argument or explain why the argument is important in the debate round. Your impact will usually relate back to the thesis of your speech.

Sample: Impact

When terrorists are allowed to freely enter into our country through unchecked borders and un-enforced immigration laws, it allows terrorists to blend into society. This process of blending which is nature for all immigrants is why measures must be taken to ensure only legal and checked immigrants are allowed to settle within the borders of the country. As Krikorian explains, terrorists often use this ability to blend into society as a mechanism for preparing attacks against a nation.

Each argument you make would follow this similar process until you have completed your speech. Each speech should last four (4) minutes in length when read aloud. Once you have written your pro speech, a con speech of similar style and length would be written next.

Sample Pro Speech

In the United States today, the government has taken a wait and see approach to enforcing the laws passed years ago on immigration and illegal immigration. Because the problems associated with illegal immigration has reached new heights in this country and our current system can no longer absorb the influx of illegal immigration, I stand in favor of the resolution. Resolved: Current immigration laws in the United States should be enforced.

In today's round, we will argue that because of increasing threats to both the security and economy of the United States, current immigration policies should be enforced. Currently, the United States has a policy in place that defines who should be allowed entrance into our country through both legal and illegal means. It our position that currently we are not enforcing those laws adequately for our country's safety. We will argue that there are three reasons why our current immigration laws should be enforced. First, the threat of terrorism is still very real today and the United States should not become lax in its security measures. Second, that illegal immigration has a negative influence on our country's economy. And lastly, that our current immigration laws are sufficient to protect our country, if enforced.

Contention I: The threat of terrorism demands enforcement of current immigration laws.

When illegal immigrations are allowed to live within the country unchecked, it creates a risk to everyone. As Mark Krikorian, Executive Director at the Center of Immigration Studies wrote in The National Interest (Spring 2004, Page 77), "Unfortunately, enforcement of the prohibition against hiring illegal aliens, passed in 1986, has all but stopped. This might seem to be of little importance to security, but in fact holding a job can be important to terrorists for a number of

reasons. By giving them a means of support, it helps them blend into society. Neighbors might well become suspicious of young men who do not work but seem able to pay their bills. Moreover, supporting themselves by working would enable terrorists to avoid the scrutiny that might attend the transfer of money from abroad.”

When terrorists are allowed to freely enter into our country through unchecked borders and un-enforced immigration laws, it allows terrorists to blend into society. This process of blending which is nature for all immigrants is why measures must be taken to ensure only legal and checked immigrants are allowed to settle within the borders of the country. As Krikorian explains, terrorists often use this ability to blend into society as a mechanism for preparing attacks against a nation.

Contention II: Illegal immigration threatens the stability of the United States economy.

Illegal immigration causes a ripple effect with workers in the United States and exacerbates the wages of low income and middle income families. In any economic system, there are always varying degrees of economic wealth. However, it is important that the gap between lower and middle class is kept small. When low income jobs diminish or wages decrease it causes increased pressures on the social services within the country to help offset those lower incomes. Gene Spearling in Fortune Magazine writes about the wage disparity that exists because of illegal immigration. “... the degree to which significant increases in immigration can depress wages and even cost jobs of low-skilled U.S. workers. Harvard's George Borjas and Larry Katz have found that between 1980 and 2000, predominantly low-wage immigration from Mexico depressed the wages of U.S. high school dropouts by 7.7% compared with those of their college-educated peers.”

When jobs are allowed to depress wages because of illegal immigration, it causes individuals who would normally fill low-income jobs to rely on social services to make up the difference in lost wages. This idea, called pay gapping, causes a drain on services that would normally be reserved to the neediest.

Contention III: Current laws provide effective means to reverse the problems with illegal immigration.

Although not currently enforced, our existing set of laws in the United States is more than sufficient to prevent the problems as detailed above. However, the first step to this solution is to start immediately enforcing current laws which include protecting our borders from unauthorized access. And this enforcement doesn't need to be to round up every illegal immigrant and throw them out in some sort of draconian witch hunt, but rather simply enforcing border laws that exist now would reduce the illegal immigration population.

According to US Newswire, May 5 of 2006. "The Center for Immigration Studies finds that, according to the government's own cost estimates, an attrition strategy could cut the illegal population by nearly half in five years, with an additional investment of less than \$2 billion, or \$400 million per year - an increase of less than 1 percent of the President's 2007 budget request for the Department of Homeland Security."

Allowing the government to simply enforce the already existing policies that exist in the United States, substantial gains could be made in decreasing the threats posed by today's immigration crisis. For all of these reasons, we stand in support of today's resolution.

Cross-Fire & Grand Cross Fire

Cross-fire serves three important purposes in the debate. It gives one side the chance to clarify the arguments and evidence presented by the other. Secondly, it is an opportunity to demonstrate flaws in the opponent's arguments. Thirdly, cross-fire is the time when the audience and judge have a chance to see the debaters interact with each other. In other words, cross-fire is a chance to gain the judge's favor.

Cross-fire in Public-Forum debate is much like cross-examination in other types of the debate with the notable exception that both sides are allowed to ask (and respond) to questions during the same time period. A student who is good at cross-fire must balance the time between asking and responding to questions. A student who dominates the exchange by asking all of the questions or one that never asks a question can be unpersuasive in the judge's view.

In cross-fire, both participants face the judge rather than each other. This is because the questions are intended for the audience. The keys to an effective cross-fire are good questions and a professional demeanor. Specifically:

1. Ask specific questions that get to the heart of the issue.
2. Be polite, professional, and respectful during the cross-fire.
3. Never personalize the cross-fire —the focus should always be on issues.

One of the best ways to improve your performance is to improve your topic knowledge. The more you know about the topic, the easier you will find it to ask insightful questions and provide effective answers in cross-fire.

The grand cross-fire is where all four students are able to participate in the process at the same time. During the grand cross-fire students typically sit at their desks. Desks should face the judge and could be angled slightly so you can easily address your opponents. It is important that during the grand cross-fire that you do not talk (or yell) over your partner or opponents questions. Stay calm and collected and make sure that both sides are an equal chance to participate.

Final Focus

The final focus of the debate should be used to synthesize various arguments into a one or two critical points for the judge to consider. One might introduce their final speech with a statement like “in light of the arguments made in today’s debate, we have upheld the resolution because...” This summary statement is difficult for several reasons. First, because of the general nature of the closing argument, the speaker must focus on the “big picture” and less on specific details. Second, the speaker must extend his/her best arguments while answering his/her opponent’s best arguments. This requires a careful balance. Of course, each round of debate will lead to unique summary statements. However, here are some general tips for making successful summary statements.

- 1) Ask yourself, what are our most powerful arguments? After selecting your most powerful arguments you must explain why you have won these arguments and why this means you have won the debate. In other words, explain the *impact* of your best arguments.
- 2) Ask yourself, “what are the weaknesses in my opponent’s best arguments?” Explain these weaknesses to the judge.
- 3) The summary must be an extension of the debate. It should show what your team has accomplished during the debate. It should not be new ideas or perspectives that haven’t been brought up.

Chapter IV: Argumentation & Organization

A debate is a series of arguments. While these arguments differ in function, structure, and importance, the basic format for delivery remains the same. There are many models of argumentation. The most basic model is the Claim-Support format. In addition to the argument itself, debate requires organizational structure to hold the arguments together and to help everyone keep track of the arguments. Therefore, a sound debate argument consists of the following three parts.

1. **Sign-posting:** A signpost is a verbal map that allows the listener to know where to place the argument in the context of the debate. This tells everyone listening which issue the argument pertains to. This is essential for the debate to remain organized. For more information about sign-posting, see the organization section later in this chapter.
2. **Claim:** The statement of the argument. The claim, much like an evidence tag should be brief and powerfully stated. Example: “The Death Penalty Decreases Crime Rates.” This tells the listener what the argument is. A claim by itself, however, is only an assertion. To become an argument, it requires support.
3. **Support.** The two most common forms of support for an argument are reasoning and evidence. For many arguments, logical reasoning is sufficient to win the point. The debater may also refer to previously presented evidence as support. At times, new evidence is required. Please see Chapter V for much more information about the use of evidence in debate.

While sign-posting and stating claims require practice, supporting claims requires the most preparation and work. The type of support given to an argument will depend on its importance in the debate and the arguments and evidence presented up to that point. Many arguments are made without the presentation of new evidence. Some examples:

- “Global Warming is scientifically doubtful [claim]. The global warming theory is suspect for several reasons. First, despite predictions of scientists, we have seen no significant temperature increases. Second, the computer models used to predict climate change are faulty. And third, a growing number of qualified experts tell us that the theory is untrue.” [support—the debater gives reasons for the listener to support the claim]
- “Global Warming is scientifically doubtful [claim]. The negative team has provided evidence from three leading scientists that casts doubt on the global warming theory. This evidence has not been refuted. Therefore, we should consider the theory doubtful at best.” [support—the debaters refers to previous evidence and the lack of refutation to support the claim]

- See Chapter V. For more information on using evidence to support your arguments.

There are two specific kinds of debate arguments that you will make often: refutation and extension.

REFUTATION

Refutation is the process of disproving an argument. Not all of your opponent's arguments require refutation. There are generally three ways to answer an argument. First, you may simply agree with it. Second, you can partially agree but modify (e.g. "we agree that air pollution causes health problems, however, you overstate the impact"). Thirdly, you can refute the argument (prove it wrong). Let's look at how each method may be used effectively.

Agreement

Why would you want to agree with an argument made by your opponent? There are three main reasons.

1. Occasionally, your opponent may make an argument that actually helps you. In this case, simply explain to the judge why the argument actually supports your position.
2. Your opponent's argument may be irrelevant to the debate. In this case, explain why the argument is irrelevant.
3. Your opponent's argument may be true. If you know that your opponent has made a true argument, it may not be worth your time fighting against it. Instead, you may grant the argument and use your time to explain that while your opponent's individual argument is true, you should still win the debate.

Modification

Often, you will agree with part of your opponent's argument, but will disagree with the amount of weight they try to assign it. This most often happens when you feel that your opponent is exaggerating. Example: "While I agree with my opponent that President Bush deserves *some* blame for the faltering US economy, the truth is that he only deserves a small share of the blame."

Refutation

There are several good ways to attack or disprove a debate argument. Here are some effective strategies:

- 1) Attack the argument's support: You may explain that the argument lacks adequate support. This may be because of insufficient reasoning, no evidence, poor evidence, or misapplied or mis-tagged evidence.

As you think about how to respond to your opponent, you may ask yourself:

- Is the argument supported at all? (If so, continue down the checklist)
- Does the evidence match the claim/tag?
- Does the evidence have a credible source?
- Does the evidence provide reasoning?

- 2) Present Counter-arguments and evidence. Even well supported arguments often have equally persuasive counter arguments. These counter-arguments can be reasoning, evidence, or (hopefully) both. It then becomes your job to convince the judge that your reasoning and evidence is superior. For example, experts disagree about whether tougher prison sentences reduce crime rates. Your opponent may have very credible evidence that giving dangerous criminals more prison time makes America safer. But, because experts disagree, you may present evidence from an equally reliable source to indicate that tough sentences don't really reduce crime rates.

EXTENSION

When you "extend" your argument it means that you are restating and strengthening it in a later speech. To effectively extend an argument, you need to do more than repeat what you said earlier. Often debaters mistake repetition for extension ("if I just say it again, the judge will understand and will vote for me." Effective extension includes the following:

- 1) Clarification: You must make sure that the judge understands your argument. Be the one who clarifies the debate.
- 2) Presenting additional reasoning and evidence: You simply need to strengthen your position with more (and better) support.
- 3) Add new (additional) argumentation: Sometimes it may be advantageous for you to add new ideas in support of a position. For example, your general position may be that coal harms the environment. In the first affirmative constructive, you argue that coal causes air pollution, acid rain, and global warming. In the first affirmative rebuttal, you may further explain the health impacts of these environmental problems.

Often, extension and refutation go hand in hand and must be carefully blended

FAQ: Can I bring up "new" arguments in rebuttals?

Debaters often want to know what they can and can't bring up in rebuttals. The answer is somewhat dependent on the specific round of debate, but here are some general guidelines:

- You are always allowed to directly answer your opponents arguments.
- You may extend arguments you made earlier by presenting clarification and additional supporting evidence.
- You should not bring up totally new main ideas in rebuttals. This is unfair to your opponent because they will have less time to refute these new ideas. Imagine a debate in which you are winning all of the major issues. It would be unfair for your opponent to bring up a whole new set of main issues in one of the last speeches of the debate. This is why debaters should not bring up new main arguments in rebuttals.

Organization

During the course of a debate, hundreds of arguments are made. Dozens of facts and experts are cited. The issues are complex and interconnected. Because of this complexity, effective organization is absolutely essential to debate. This chapter deals with two aspects of organization within a debate, note-taking and sign-posting.

Note-taking (Flowing)

In order to keep track of everything, debaters need to keep a flow of the debate. This is a set of notes that track the arguments made throughout the debate. Flowing goes beyond normal note-taking because it charts the progress of arguments. When a specific argument is responded to, the flow chart places the response directly to the right of the original argument. In this way, you can see the entire history of an argument by reading from left to right across the page. Here are some important tips on flowing:

1. You will need (at least) two sheets of paper for your flow chart. Two 8 ½ by 14 size legal pads are ideal. Label 1 flow sheet "Affirmative Case" and 1 flow sheet "Negative Case." The affirmative sheet will need to be divided into 7 columns. The negative sheet will only need 6 columns. Each column is for a speech during the debate.
2. Write small and neatly. You need to fit seven columns across the page, so you will need to write small. To increase your space, you may use a 8 1/2 x 14 inch legal pad turned sideways. This gives you 2 inches for each column. Of course, your flow is only valuable if you can read it--be NEAT!

3. Abbreviate. You need to record all the main arguments in the debate. If you try to write out all of the words, you will fall behind and miss things. Develop your own set of abbreviations. Instead of writing “Russia will decrease organized crime,” for example, you could write “R will ↓ org. cr.” You should immediately come up with a set of abbreviations for words you are likely to hear often for your debate topic.

4. Leave yourself space. As you flow the arguments made by the first affirmative, write them down the first column on your chart. However, after each point is made, skip some space, maybe half an inch to an inch, before writing the next argument. This way, when responses are made you’ll have plenty of room to write them directly to the right of the original argument. This leads to the next point.

5. Flow responses to the right of the original argument. If the 1NR is responding to the third point made by the affirmative, you want to find the point and write the responses in the 1NC column to its right. This way, all the arguments pertaining to a certain issue should be grouped together. This allows you to respond directly to your opponents arguments and improves the clash in rebuttals.

6. Don’t give up. Flowing takes practice. You will miss points from time to time. Don’t stop. Keep listening and write as much as you can. Your partner may be able to help you get missed points *or* you can ask for clarification in cross-examination.

SIGN-POSTING

Sign-posting means telling the judge and your opponents “where you are on the flow.” Put another way, it is stating the argument that you are responding to before you respond. You should state which main issue you are on, which specific point you are answering, and what your answer is.

Sample: “Please turn to my opponent’s second contention. She states that the death penalty is applied in a discriminatory fashion. I have two responses. First...”

If you forget to sign-post, it will be unclear to the other people in the debate which argument you are responding to. This will create confusion for all when they try to answer you. It is also helpful to deal with the issues in the order they were originally presented. Debaters who jump from point to point tend to lose their audience (and judge) and are therefore less effective.

CONCLUSION

Once again, the skills of organization and argumentation are improved upon greatly through practice. As a summary, try to always remember the following tips for effective debating:

- 1) An argument consists of a claim and support for that claim
 - 2) It is important to keep a flow chart of the arguments made during the debate
 - 3) When making any argument, you must sign-post
- Now that you are more familiar with the mechanics of debate, let's focus on the art of public speaking.

Chapter V: Research & Evidence

It is essential that debaters provide support for the arguments they make. The quality of the support you provide for your arguments is a key to successful debating. One way to support your arguments is with logical reasoning. In addition to reasoning, you will need to provide evidence to support your claims. The focus of this chapter is how to gather, organize, and use evidence in debate.

Let's begin with the assumption that what we personally know is limited. Very few high school students are experts on the topics they will be debating. Therefore, debaters need to use outside sources of information to increase the credible support for their arguments. Usually, debaters will quote directly from a variety of sources.

In preparation for a debate, you will want to gather evidence (quotes) that you feel will support arguments that you plan to make. Because you will be unable to predict the exact arguments that will be made, it is good to have a variety of evidence quotes to use.

Finding evidence requires effective research. You are probably already an experienced researcher. Even so, you can probably improve your skills by reviewing the following steps in the research process.

Research Process

Step 1. Formulate research questions. Before you begin any research, you should identify the questions you are trying to answer. It is important to identify research *questions* rather than *topics*. A question gives you a specific goal, whereas a topic is too open-ended. A good question is one that meets the following criteria:

- The wording of the question is clear and specific
- The question can be answered
- The answer to the question is meaningful (i.e. the question leads somewhere important)

If you are new to a topic, adjust your questions accordingly. You should begin by building general topic knowledge before trying to answer specific questions. For example, let's say you are learning about Russia's economy. As you begin your research, you may ask "What is the current status of Russia's economy?" As your topic knowledge grows, your questions should be more in-depth: "What programs does Russia have to encourage foreign investment?"

Step 2. Select a Method. There are a variety of ways to find answers to your questions. Students who try various sources usually find more success and end up with deeper research. Some good methods include:

- Article databases. Your school library probably has several databases which are easily searchable. You may also have access to more powerful databases like Lexis/Nexis.
- Specific Internet Sites. You may know of specific sites on the Internet that have excellent resources on your topic.

- General Internet searches. If you don't know of a specific site that will be helpful, you may try a general Internet Search. Google is a good place to start.
- Printed materials in the library (most periodicals and newspapers can be found on-line. However, you may find some very helpful printed materials that are not accessible on-line.
- Books (advantage: depth; disadvantage: time consuming)
- Personal interviews (including e-mail requests for information)

Step 3. Keep Trying. Most likely, you won't succeed right away. Research takes perseverance. If you are not having any luck answering your questions, try new a different method, different key words, or ask for help. Often, you will need to try several different key words before you get what you want. Write down what you have tried and keep going. If your question is "Who are the main contenders for the 2004 election (US)?" try: presidential elections, 2004 election, candidates for presidency, presidential candidates, presidential hopefuls, etc.

Help falls under two categories: people who know what they are doing and shortcuts that others have created. If you are new to a library, ask the librarian. They will appreciate you having a focused research question. As for shortcuts, check out bibliographies, names mentioned in articles, and references to other publications.

Step 4. Have a system for recording your results. Make sure you have the ability to take something away from your research. Always have a notebook to jot down notes (good web sites, important names, leads for further research etc.). Furthermore, make sure you are getting full source citations. If you are printing or copying articles, it is a good idea to staple them together and write the full source citation on the top right away. This will avoid confusion later.

Making Evidence Cards

Once you have gathered and read the information necessary to answer your questions, it is time to transform your articles into evidence cards—a format that is easily used within a debate. When you present evidence in a debate, you actually present three different pieces of information: a tag, a citation, and the body of the evidence. Each part is very important to effectively using the evidence in the debate.

As you read articles, you should look for passages that may be useful during your debates. When you find such passages, follow this procedure for making evidence "cards." The term card refers to a 4x6 index card. Debaters used to write their evidence quotes down on index cards. Today, some debaters still used index cards, but many also simply print their evidence on 8 ½ x 11 pages.

Step 1: Mark Useful Passages

As you read your articles, you should mark passages that you believe will make good evidence quotes. The best way to mark passages is by putting brackets around the sentences that will be cut out and placed on index cards or paper. Highlighting is problematic because it may be difficult to copy. As you bracket the quotes you intend to use, you may also want to make notes in the margin about what the main idea of the quote is. This will make it easier when you go back to cut and paste.

What Makes A Passage Worth Cutting?

Students will immediately struggle with a major question: what should be marked and cut? In other words, what makes a passage or excerpt good evidence? Although it is difficult to say exactly what will be useful in a debate, good evidence fits the following criteria:

1. The excerpt says something that may be useful in a debate. That is, it supports an argument that a debater is likely to make.
2. The excerpt is authoritative. It is from an expert, cites a credible study, or gives strong reasoning to support the argument. It should also be free from excessive bias.
3. The excerpt is concise. Because the evidence is read verbatim during the debate, an ideal passage communicates the idea with a minimum of words.
4. The excerpt is taken in the context of the article. An excerpt should never alter the meaning the author intends. Any qualifiers should be included. Additionally, statements the author goes on to disagree with should not be represented as the author's view.

Step 2: Cut & Paste

At one time, debate evidence was written out by hand or manually typed on cards. Today, students find it most efficient to cut and paste from copies or computer printouts. Some even copy text directly from electronic sources into word processing programs. Regardless of the method, the idea remains the same, to transfer information from an article to a self-contained card or brief that can be filed. In a way, the article is "harvested." The useful parts are identified, picked, and stored. The useless parts are recycled. When students cut and paste, they should be conscious of future copying. The text should be dark enough to copy and the paper should be firmly glued or taped down.

Some guidelines for bracketing:

- Cut in context. Make sure you do not alter the meaning of the article by omitting any important information.
- Always cut full sentences. Even if you do not intend to read it, have full sentences on your final product.
- A good evidence card is usually 3-7 sentences long. Cards that are too short lack credibility and reasoning. Cards that are too long are not useful because they are too time consuming and usually bore the judge to tears.

Step 3: Source Citation & Tag

The excerpt alone is not complete without a source citation and tag. For printed materials a full source citation consists of:

- Author
- Author's Qualifications
- Publication (name of periodical, book, or report)
- Date of Publication
- Page Number(s)

For electronic sources (like Internet sites), the full citation consists of:

- Author
- Author's Qualifications
- Publication
- Date of Publication
- Name of Computer Service or Network (i.e. Nexis, SIRs, or www address)

If any of this information is not available, the student should make a note. For example, NQA is often used to signify No Qualifications Available. If the information is available, the student has an obligation to correctly provide it with each evidence excerpt.

A tag is like a headline for the excerpt. It should summarize the main idea of the passage using powerful language and a minimum of words (ideally five or less). The tag should not exaggerate the quality of the information it represents. The tag serves two main purposes. First, it allows students to know the contents of a particular piece of evidence at a glance. Second, the tag is often written during a debate in a competitor's notes. It represents the content of the evidence and therefore needs to be accurate and concise (so that it can be easily written).

Step 4: Organize Your Evidence

Much of a debate is spontaneous. As one side makes an argument, the other side thinks quickly of responses and counter-arguments. These responses most often require evidence. A debater must quickly find the necessary evidence in his or her files. Typically, evidence is sorted two ways. First, the student decides whether it is pro, con, or both. Of course, some evidence may be useful for both sides depending on the specific argument.

Secondly, the evidence is sorted by topic. These files will be alphabetized or otherwise grouped. When a student needs evidence on a topic, he or she will quickly go to the appropriate file and pull out what has been prepared.

The following page is an Evidence Card checklist that you can use to evaluate your work. Does your evidence measure up to the following criteria?

Evidence Cards Checklist

What makes an excerpt a good piece of evidence?

_____ Relevance: The excerpt says something that may be useful in a debate. That is, it supports an argument that a you may make.

_____ Authoritative: It is from an expert, cites a credible study, or gives strong reasoning or data to support the argument. It should also be free from excessive bias.

_____ Presentability: Is the excerpt short enough so that it can be read in a debate? Because the evidence is read verbatim during the debate, an ideal passage communicates the idea with a minimum of words (usually 3 to 7 sentences).

_____ In Context: An excerpt should never alter the meaning the author intends. Any qualifiers should be included. Additionally, statements the author goes on to disagree with should not be represented as the author's view.

What is included in a full source citation?

For Printed Sources, the full citation consists of

- _____ Author
- _____ Author's Qualifications
- _____ Publication (name of periodical, book, or report)
- _____ Date of Publication
- _____ Page Number(s)

For electronic sources (like Internet sites), the full citation consists of:

- _____ Author
- _____ Author's Qualifications
- _____ Publication (name of periodical, book, or report)
- _____ Date of Publication
- _____ Name of Computer Service or Network (e.g. Nexis, SIRs, or www address)

What makes a good tag (headline) for a piece of evidence?

_____ Summarizes the main idea of the excerpt accurately

_____ Uses powerful and descriptive language

_____ Is six words or less

Sample Evidence Card

Bush Plans To Strengthen US Military

Ron Hutcheson & Jodi Enda, Washington Bureau Writers, St. Paul Pioneer Press, August 22, 2000, p.2A (or www.pioneerplanet.com)

In a stinging critique of the Clinton administration's handling of national defense, George W. Bush said Monday that the next president will inherit a military crippled by low morale, muddled missions and inadequate equipment. The Republican presidential candidate used an appearance at the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention to underscore his belief that defense remains a potent issue even a decade after the Cold War ended. "I don't care what's said in the political campaign, these are signs of a military in decline and we must do something about it," Bush said after citing a litany of problems with equipment and recruitment.

Please Notice:

- The tag summarizes the content of the evidence quote in a minimum number of words
- A complete source citation is given
- The text of the evidence is copied exactly from the original source

CONCLUSION

The process of accumulating evidence might seem complicated, with all the rules about tags and citations and cutting and pasting. Now is a good time to return to basics. Preparing evidence for use in a debate round simply means finding useful quotes, writing down a summary of what the quote says, and writing down where the quote is from. Because beginning debaters often struggle with the details of this process, this chapter goes into detail to help you get it right the first time.

Chapter V: Differences in NFL Public-Forum

The Minnesota Debate Teachers Association (MDTA) has adopted some changes from the NFL sanctioned rules and guidelines. These changes were made for competitive and educational reasons. However, it is important to note the changes between the format used in Minnesota and elsewhere in the country. These changes are explained below:

Coin Flip

At National Tournament Qualifying events a coin-flip is used prior to the start of the round to determine which side a team will debate and the order of the speeches. For example:

Team A wins the coin flip and has the choice between which side of the debate to represent or if they would like to speak first or second. Team A chooses to uphold the pro side in the debate. Team B, who lost the coin flip, then gets to choose the remaining option of speaking first or second in the debate. Team B chooses to speak first.

In this example the Con Team (Team B) would speak first in the debate and the Pro Team (Team A) would speak second.

Minnesota Public Forum does not use the coin flip and instead allows the tab room to assign sides to the debate. Additionally, the pro team always speaks first and the con side speaks second.

Time Limits

At National Tournament Qualifying events the time limits for rebuttal speeches are shorter in length. The last four speeches are one minute shorter.

Minnesota Public Forum rebuttal and final focus speeches are one minute longer. This change was made to provide students with additional time during the debate to summarize the debate round.

Speaker Points

Minnesota Public Forum uses speaker points on a scale of 20 to 30 to rank each debater. Speaker points are used a scale for students and used by tournament staff to break ties.

NFL Speech Times

Speech #1 – 4 minutes

Speech #2 – 4 minutes

Cross-Fire – 3 minutes

Speech #3 – 4 minutes

Speech #4 – 4 minutes

Cross-Fire – 3 minutes

Speech #5 – 2 minutes

Speech #6 – 2 minutes

Grand Cross-Fire – 3 minutes

Speech #7 – 1 minute

Speech #8 – 1 minute

Appendix I – The Public Forum Ballot

Public Forum Debate Ballot

Round: _____

Division: _____

Judge Name: _____

Judge School: _____

PLEASE CIRCLE WINNING TEAM

Aff Code: _____

Neg Code: _____

Name: _____

Name: _____

Points: _____

Points: _____

Name: _____

Name: _____

Points: _____

Points: _____

Reasons for Decision and Comments (you may use the back if needed):