

Public Forum Debate

The Maine Way

Largely excerpted from the National Forensic League
September 6, 2006

PUBLIC FORUM SCHEDULE

First Speaker - Team A = 4 Minutes
First Speaker - Team B = 4 Minutes
Crossfire = 3 Minutes
Second Speaker - Team A = 4 Minutes
Second Speaker - Team B = 4 Minutes
Crossfire = 3 Minutes
Summary - First Speaker - Team A = 2 Minutes
Summary - First Speaker - Team B = 2 Minutes
Grand Crossfire = 3 Minutes
Final Focus - Second Speaker - Team A = 2 Minutes
Final Focus - Second Speaker - Team B = 2 Minutes
Prep Time (per team) = 2 Minutes

THE COIN TOSS

Prior to each round the teams will flip a coin. The team winning the coin toss may choose either:

Side of Topic: Pro or Con
or
Order of Speaking: First or Last

This choice is very strategic. Considerations may include:
Is one side of the topic more intuitively acceptable to citizen judges?
Is our team significantly stronger on one side?
Are opponents significantly stronger on one side? Should our team pre-empt them by "choosing" our opponent's best side?
Is first speaker position critical to "sell" our case by making a good first impression?
Is the final "last shot" speech critical for us to have the last word to the judge(s)?
Are our opponents so effective in first (or last) speaker position we wish to pre-empt them by selecting that position for ourselves?

Once the coin toss winner selects either a side or a speaker position, the coin toss loser then has a choice. If the winner selects a side, the loser selects a speaker position. If the winner selects a speaker position then the losing team selects the side of the topic. The above list of options should be carefully studied by both teams.

Please realize the con side of the topic may begin the debate and argue directly against the adoption of the topic before the pro side says a word.

SPEAKER DUTIES

The **first and second speakers** should prepare in advance the reasons for adoption (or rejection) of the topic. Arguments should be carefully worded to be accurate and persuasive.

Delivery should be conversational and extempore in style but absent flaws like vocal pauses, fast delivery, poor articulation, and lack of vocal variety.

The second speaker, in addition to the presentation of prepared material, may respond to the most important argument made by the first speaker.

The **first crossfire** should be used to clarify arguments and define where clash exists. Probing questions to expose weakness are useful.

The **third and fourth speakers** have two duties: To attack (refute) the case (arguments) of their opponents; and to answer attacks made upon their own arguments by their opponents.

The **second crossfire** should advance the debate by finding areas of agreement and attacking arguments with which the debater does not agree. Previously prepared dilemmas may be posed. Contradictions should be exposed.

The **summary speakers** should consolidate their positions by defending the most important point in their own case and attack the most important point in the opponents' case. Select only the most important issue or issues and cover them thoroughly, but *do not rush*.

SPEECH DEVELOPMENT

Speaker 1 – This speaker position for both sides must be concerned with constructing and presenting a logical argument with evidentiary support. This is the one time in the debate where specific preparation can be used as a tool of the debate. Due to the uncertainty of whether this will become the first or second speech in the debate, a 4-minute speech for and against the resolution is warranted. Reserving time for response in the Speaker 1 position is not practical.

I. Introduction to the issue – An overview of the issue presented in a compelling introductory remark or quotation to alert the judge to the importance of the topic.

II. Definition of terms – Whenever a debate focuses upon an issue without support of a clarifying plan or value, the topic must have its own agreed upon parameters. Often this is accomplished with a field definition from an expert;

occasionally the topic is self-evident. In the latter case, it may be left to the judge to interpret the topic.

III. Analysis of the issues – Traditionally, three issues are considered sufficient to establish a warrant. These issues can be abstract or concrete, or a mix of both. However, to be successful, each should be an independent reason to vote for the topic. Given the nature of the audience, a most logical progression would be:

- a. Personal story or narrative story to provide context for the judge to understand what is at issue.
- b. Example from the news to show timeliness and to support the analysis and to show the debater as knowledgeable about the subject.
- c. General or theoretical issue to establish the argument beyond the particular and to provide grounds for revisiting this speech later in the debate.

IV. Closing – Why does this issue matter to us? Answering this question in closing provides reasons for the judge to care; while focusing the entire speech into a short, memorable summary.

Speaker 2 – This speaker position for both sides will have the burden of analyzing the opponents' position and explaining flaws in the ideas presented by the other team. While this speaker might present prepared arguments from briefs to establish new points, the judge using media analysis is now looking for the fight.

Argumentatively, at least, the judge places an expectation that the two sides will clash. This speech may take the form of a line-by-line refutation of the opponent's position, but this form is rarely followed in media debate. Instead, the speaker should identify the most attackable issues advanced by the other side. In this manner, the most memorable opposition points are refuted with memorable counter-points.

Time vested in responding will permit only one or two key responses. A suggested form for this debate would be:

I. Introduction - links the 2nd speech to the 1st speech, probably with a story or quotation.

II. Overview - issue to be discussed.

- a. Statement of what opponent said.
- b. Reasons and/or proof of why opponent is wrong.
- c. Explanation of what this means for the topic.

III. (a second issue as in II above)

IV. Closing - solidifies both of your sides' speeches.

Summary – Summary is an odd speech. The purpose is implied in the title. Because the summary speaker will have listened to partner respond in the 2nd speech and in the give and take of the Crossfire, the summary should manage all of what the judge has heard to this point. Something like this:

- I. Brief overview of the debate so far.
- II. Focus on the key idea, maybe with a fresh anecdotal story or other framing quotation.
- III. What does this all mean? The implications for the judge and the world provide a clear summary focus.

Final Focus – The duties of the Final Focus speaker are stipulated in the rules. Final Focus chooses the key issue(s) which matters the most and frames in a final parting focus of why this issue(s) is enough to warrant a ballot for the speaker's team.

- I. Statement of the issue(s) and its importance.
- II. Explanation of the issue(s).
- III. Appeal to let this issue(s) override all other concerns.

GRAND CROSSFIRE

All debaters should be seated but able to see the judge(s) and audience. The Crossfire TV Show on CNN is a good model.

The first question is asked *to* the team who just ended their summary by the team which had the first summary. After the first Q and A any debater may question and answer at will.

Be polite, but firm. Keep questions and answers brief and speaking style conversational. Don't interrupt or talk over another debater unless s/he is filibustering. Don't ever interrupt your partner. **Note well that teams may be given a loss for egregiously abusive behavior during crossfire.**

Have a plan in mind. What admissions do you wish to gain from your opponents? Which dilemmas do you wish to pose to your opponents?

Answering can be as important as questioning. Have brief retorts prepared for questions that you think might be asked.

Silence is golden. If you trap your opponent in an unanswerable dilemma, let their silence or frantic babbling expose their weakness. Don't rush in with the next question.

Relax. Don't rush! If you can establish one or two points that is enough.

THE FINAL FOCUS

The purpose of the Final Focus is to restate the reason(s) why your team has won the debate. Judges will be instructed that new arguments in the final focus are to be ignored.

Ask yourself this question (before your Final Focus): If I were judging this round, what would I be voting on now? Once you decide the key voting issue, make that your focus.

What should be argued? Several choices are available.

Answer the argument(s) that you are losing (if losing more than one, pick the most important)

Stress an argument(s) you are winning (if winning several, pick the most important)

Stress an argument(s) that is most appealing to a citizen judge and clearly win it.

Try to "turn" a major argument(s). Show how an opponent's argument proves your point.

Expose a major inconsistency made by your opponents - - two arguments they made which contradict each other.

Remember, judges are reminded on the ballot that new arguments should be ignored.

(Originally by John Durkee. Rostrum, January, 2003)