

Important Terms in Public Forum Debate

Understanding debate terminology is essential to excelling in the round. These terms are not limited to debate. They are applicable more broadly to assessing ideas and arguments.

Affirmative: The side that supports the resolution is affirming. The affirmative case explains why the resolution is correct and is presented during the affirmative constructive (AC). In Public Forum Debate we refer to this as the PRO side.

Abuse: This refers to arguments, assumptions, or definitions made by one side that prevent both sides from completing on equal ground. Abusive assumptions skew the round in favor of one team.

Apriori- see “Prima Facie”

Best Definitions: Debaters may argue that their definition is superior to that of another debater for a variety of reasons such as setting fair limits for the debate or being used in the literature.

Card: A piece of evidence with a claim and warrant.

CON: This is what the negative team is called in Public Forum Debate.

Constructive: Constructive speeches are speeches in which debaters introduce their position and advocacy. In Public Forum debate the first four speeches are constructives.

Contention: A contention is a major argument in the debate. Pro and Con teams build their cases with contentions.

Cross-ex: Cross-ex and CX are both short for cross examination. Cross-ex is the time one debater gets to interact with another debater by asking questions. In Public Forum Debate there are 3 times for Cross Examination, with one of those being ‘Grand Crossfire,’ in which all four debaters ask questions. The time can be used for clarification or to set up an argument.

Crystallize: Debaters generally crystallize the debate in their last speech. Crystallizing involves summing up the debate, addressing the most important arguments, and offering voting issues.

Evidence: Evidence refers to published literature introduced into the debate to provide support for an argument. Evidence is important in Public Forum Debate.

FIAT: A term used to mean a formal authorization. This refers to the fact that debaters do not have to *prove* that a plan will occur, under fiat it is accepted that it will. This way the debate can focus on the arguments around the plan, not whether or not congress would pass it.

Flow: Flowing is a note taking technique. Debaters and judges flow throughout the round to keep track of the arguments being made. The “flow” may also refer to the notepad itself.

Games Theory: Games theory is the idea that debate must be fair for both sides. The rules of debate must not provide a better opportunity for one side to win over another.

Ground: Ground refers to the arguments debaters can make during the round. It is used to say that each side must have sufficient ground for the round to be fair.

Impact: This concept explains what the result of the argument will be. Impacts are why the argument is important/why it is more important than opponent’s arguments.

Link: This concept spells out how the argument links to the resolution. A typical argument against something can be ‘No Link,’ which means it doesn’t matter if the argument is true, it is not applicable to the resolution.

Prep Time: In Public Forum debate, debaters have a total of four minutes of prep time that can be used during the debate to get ready and plan for their next speech.

Prima Faciae: Latin for “on face”. A prima facie argument, or an apriori argument, is one that supposedly comes before arguments that relate to the value criterion. Sometimes called a “prestandards issue”, you must answer these arguments somehow, since they are intended to be arguments that will make you automatically lose the round.

Predictability- This is used to refer to how predictable an argument was based upon the topic literature or some standard of preparedness.

Rebuttal: Rebuttal speeches are shorter speeches later in the debate in which debaters argue over issues that were built during the constructive speeches.

Refutation: Arguing against constructive arguments made by the other debater.

Resolution: The topic of the debate. The resolution sets forth the issues to be discussed in the debate and the respective sides affirmative and negative teams will take.

Spread: Spreading is when one debater makes as many arguments as possible attempting to make too many for the opponent to answer.

Standard- This means the value criterion.

Status quo: The status quo is the current situation while the debate is occurring.

Topicality: This concept states that debaters are focusing on the resolution, or staying on topic.

Voting Issue: Both teams can make voting issues throughout the debate. A voting issue is a reason to affirm or negate. Voting issues are arguments that have been won by one side or another that conclude that the resolution is true or false.

Warrant: The reason why your claim is true. If an argument has no warrant, it may be automatically disregarded by some judges.