

What to Expect Competing in Public Forum

Public Forum Debate is a two-on-two team debate. Teams debate each other on a predetermined resolution that is based on current events. Designed to be accessible to the public, the goal for each team in Public Forum is to convince the judge that their side of the debate is preferable. The judge is responsible for evaluating each team's arguments and determining which side presented their position more effectively. Below is an interview with four year Public Forum competitor **Brett Ries** to give you an inside look at this form of debate.



Why did you choose public forum out of the available events?

When I first started debate, I competed in policy. However, halfway through my freshman year, I switched over to Public Forum debate because of partner issues. After competing in several tournaments of Public Forum Debate, I knew it was the category for me. The style of Public Forum was much more laid back than policy debate, and I liked how it was less technical and instead relied more on effective communication with the judge. Not only this, but the topic also changes every month, which provided ample research opportunities for me. I've now learned about an extremely wide variety of topics, from the Voting Rights Act to refugees to standardized testing.

What kind of challenges did you face in round?

The main challenges that I faced in round was learning how to make my points clear and concise. You don't have a lot of time to speak in Public Forum, so it's especially important that you learn how to speak quickly and effectively on many arguments. You also have the challenge of explaining your whole side to a judge that may not have any prior background on the topic. When it came to conveying either side of an argument to a judge, I found it important to use clear, concise, and catchy language. If you throw a bunch of jargon at them, it's easy for them to become bored. Instead, you have to use layman's terms to get your point across. Equally important is the use of relatable impacts. A judge wants to know

how your side will impact their lives or others' lives, so you want to pick impacts that will be important to the judge and will stick in their mind.

What skills are especially important in PF?

In order to be an effective Public Forum debater, one must be well-researched, collected, and passionate when debating. If you know what you're talking about, are calm while talking about it, and can show the judge that you care and that they should care too, it makes it very difficult for the judge to vote against you. In addition, you must find the balance of presenting your case while also pointing out the flaws in your opponent's case. Judges want direct refutation and want to know why your case is inherently better. If you can do that with the qualities I described earlier, you're going to find success in public forum debate.

What does a typical tournament look like for a PF debater?

A typical tournament can be very hectic for a Public Forum debater. There is typically little time between rounds in my experience, so you have to process what happened in the last round quickly and figure out how to improve for the next. The first tournament of a new topic is always the most nerve-wracking because you aren't sure how other people are going to frame the topic. Overall, I'd say it's normally a hectic atmosphere, but it provides a lot of energy to get through the day.

“In order to be an effective Public Forum debater, one must be well-researched, collected, and passionate when debating.”

— Brett Ries, alumnus, Watertown High School, SD