



# Massachusetts Forensic League

## Public Forum Judge Manual

On behalf of the Massachusetts Forensic League and all member schools, we would like to thank you for judging for us today. Without you, this tournament could not function. We hope that you enjoy the results of the hard work that these competitors have put into preparing their cases and arguments.

This booklet has been written to help you with the practicalities of judging high school debates. While it has many guidelines, there are very few “rules” in debate. There may be times when this booklet does not apply to the debate you are judging. Feel free to use your common sense and judgment. If you have any type of question during the day, please ask a tournament official. Remember that you are doing all the debaters a favor, and that all will end well if you rely on your judgments.

### The Tournament

Your school’s head coach should tell you where and when you should arrive at the tournament site. When you do arrive at the tournament site, find the coach to find out which pool you are in. You will often be assigned to judge only one of the debate events, and sometimes even a specific division of one event, for the day. If you can’t find him/her, check in at the registration table, usually in the main lobby, and the tournament staff will help you find someone from your school.

The control center of the tournament is the tabulation room, which everyone will refer to as the “tab” room. From this room emerge all schedules, instructions, and results — which requires that into this room go all ballots, problems, and complaints. Work is feverish here, and it is important that mistakes be avoided. The MFL keeps a “closed tab”, meaning that the room is off-limits to all who are not assigned to work there. However, there will be a table set up in front of the tab room, referred to as the Ballot Table – the people there will be able to answer questions and direct requests into Tab. Some tournaments will also supply runners — students or helpers from the host school — who are posted around the tournament to answer questions.

The rest of the tournament is comprised of the classrooms of the school. It is in these rooms that the debates will take place. It is important that these rooms be used and not abused. Please direct students away from school equipment if you think their activities suspicious. Usually, these rooms will be set up so that the judge may sit in the center, facing front, with the debaters at the front, to either side. Thus the speaker may face the judge from his position at the front of the room. The debaters will usually mark their names on the blackboard to help you identify them. When you leave the room, please be sure you leave nothing behind, as judges will be switching rooms throughout the day.

**The Schematic:** Before the beginning of each debate round, the tab room will issue a schedule listing the room, debaters, and judges involved in each debate. We call this the “schematic.” These are passed out to all judges and debaters, though you occasionally may have to seek one out. Your job is to find your name in the judge column, see what room you are directed to, and go there. Pick up “ballots”, or comment sheets, from the tournament staff on the way – either at the ballot table or from runners who will supply them when the schematic is released. There are different types of ballots for each debate event – be sure you have picked up the right ballot for the debate event you are judging.

**Flights:** Sometimes your name will be listed next to two sets of debaters. This means the tournament is “double-flighted”, because there are more debates than judges or rooms. A double-flighted tournament means that a judge will watch one debate – marked as the “A flight” – first, and then watch another pair of debaters debate, called the “B flight”. Flights are assigned by chance – there is no qualitative distinction between the flights. Follow the instructions of the tournament staff whether to hand in your ballot between flights or to watch both debates before handing in your ballots.

## Conducting the Round

After you have read the schematic, picked up your ballots, and found your assigned room, you will find yourself in a debate “round.” There will be several rounds during the day, in which one or two-person teams meet similar teams from other schools. Teams or individuals will typically debate both sides of the topic during the day, going back and forth from round to round. From the decisions in their rounds, debaters build a win-loss record which will be used to determine the winners. You are present to determine the winner and create those win-loss records.

When you enter the room, you may introduce yourself to the debaters, which helps especially to put new debaters at ease. Please only do this if you are comfortable, and try not

to show favoritism toward either side. If you have students in your round whom you know personally, contact the tab room before starting the round. They will make any necessary adjustments.

The debaters often will have written their names or codes on the blackboard. Then, conduct a coin toss to determine the side (PRO or CON) and the speaking order (1st or 2nd) that each team will take in the debate. The team that wins the toss may choose either the side or the speaking position it prefers. The team that loses the toss makes the remaining choice. The team that speaks first in the debate should be listed on the left side of the ballot and sit on the left side of the room as you, the judge, look at the debaters. Copy the students' codes onto the ballot, being careful to note which debater or team is speaking on the pro and which is speaking on the con. Also, write your name or judge's code in the space provided, and your school.

The debaters will then get up and deliver timed speeches that comprise the debate. The times and pattern for these speeches will be indicated on the ballot. You should listen to these speeches, and time them to ensure the debaters do not go over time. If asked, please provide time signals to debaters – however, some debaters will time themselves, or sometimes their teammate or audience member will keep time for them. This is permitted, but maintain an “official” time as well on your own. A 15-20 second grace period is permitted for debaters to finish their sentences or thoughts at the time limit. Judges should not ask questions or otherwise interrupt the round except to give time signals.

Remind all people in the room to turn off cell phones and beepers before the round begins. It is common courtesy to listen with interest to all students. No eating or drinking should take place during a round of competition. Do not stop a student during a presentation unless there is an emergency (e.g. fire alarm) or a significant disruption to the performance that clearly impacts the contestant's ability to proceed. In that case, please allow the contestant to start again (from the beginning) once the disruption ceases. Noise from neighboring competition rounds should be ignored; don't restart the round for it.

After the round is done, decide who has won the debate using the event guidelines listed below. It is important to judge based only on what the debaters tell you. You are judging not who is “right”, but who is most skilled at debating. You may feel quite strongly that one side or the other is correct, and you may also be able to think of strong arguments yourself. Please do not let these arguments affect your decision; instead decide based on what happens inside the round. Debaters should only be responsible for arguments that their opponents present, not ones in the minds of the judges, since these are not spoken in the round. A good question to ask as you decide each round is, “If I had no prior beliefs about this resolution,

would the round as a whole have made me more likely to believe the resolution was true or false?”

Write comments for each debater, and also the Reason For Decision, which describes your reasons for deciding the round as you did. Clearly mark the school and the code/name of the winner on your ballot, and hand it into the ballot staff as instructed by the tournament staff.

## Public Forum Debate

Public Forum, or PF debate involves two teams of two students each debating an issue of current interest or policy. Public Forum debaters across the nation debate the same issue, referred to as the resolution, for one month. You should be sure to learn the exact wording of the tournament’s resolution, as the entire debate will turn on it.

The debate consists of four constructive speeches of 4 minutes apiece. After each side has delivered its first constructives, there will be a “crossfire”, or mutual cross examination. After both second constructives are delivered, there will be another “crossfire”. After the constructives and crossfires, the first debaters will speak 2 minutes in rebuttal, followed by a 3 minute “Grand Crossfire” between all four debaters. Then each team’s 2nd speaker will have 1 final minute for a “Final Focus”, or clarifying speech.

1. **Constructives** are where the debaters establish their reasoning and evidence in support of their side. They should present arguments and reasoning for why the resolution is a true statement (on pro) or a false statement (on con). Debaters will also use constructives, particularly their second constructives, to respond to their opponents’ arguments and defend against their opponent’s attacks. Unlike Policy Debate, each team should argue the resolution on its general merits and should not propose a specific method or program (called a “plan”) that would implement a public policy following the resolution; Con teams likewise should not propose a *counter-plan*.

2. **Crossfire** periods are chances for the opponents to clarify each others’ cases in the round, in order to better respond to their opponent’s points. These are not intended to be prosecutorial sessions where the questioner backs the questioned into a corner through inference. The purpose of cross-examination is clarification, not argument; the questioner should always question and avoid statements of any kind. Debaters directly question each other only during cross-fire, with the team that spoke first usually asking the first question.

3. **Rebuttals** occur after the constructives and cross examinations. They are a chance for each side to clarify what they presented, and show how they best answered the points of the other side. Rebuttals are not a chance to make sudden, surprise introductions of new analysis or evidence, however. Debaters should refrain from bringing in new material, and judges, in making their decisions, should disregard any material that their opponents correctly identify as being completely new and not a response to the others' case.

4. **Final Focus** is a last chance for each team to tell you why they believe they won the round; it generally will clarify the main important arguments, and give you a reason to vote for each side, bringing the debate into focus. This speech will often then "crystallize" the round for you, hopefully allowing you to clearly decide the round.

## Adjudicating Public Forum Debate

The pro should prove that the resolution is true, and the con should prove that the resolution is false. Arguments unrelated to the truth or falsehood of the resolution should not influence your decision. Reward students who present well-explained arguments. The debaters themselves will clarify the round and present arguments to you on which issues are the most important. Listen to the debaters and judge which of them presents the strongest case on their own criteria.

Judge the quality of arguments presented in the round as a whole. To promote quality debate, do not penalize students for failing to address frivolous or minor points due to time constraints. The debaters' evidence and reasoning should play a part in this decision. Well-chosen evidence may strengthen arguments. However, quoted evidence should not replace arguments by the debaters, and evidence should be relevant.

Also, remember that debate is a speech communication event. Weigh arguments only to the extent that they are clearly explained. It is acceptable to discount arguments that are too fast, too garbled, or too jargon-laden to be understood by an intelligent high school student or a well-informed citizen. The debaters should adjust their style to you; do not feel like you should vote for something you do not understand. Do not penalize a debater for failing to understand his or her opponent's unclear arguments

**Speaker Points:** Along with the basic decision, you will also be asked to give speaker points to each debater. The points go up to 30. Judges never give below a 20 unless there are very extreme circumstances. If the debater is a good or great speaker, somewhere between a 27 and a 30 should be given. If he or she is mediocre, a 24 to a 26 should be given. And if he or she is a rather poor speaker, they should get somewhere from a 20 to a 23.

## Flowing

To “flow” a round is to use a note-taking technique which the debaters themselves employ to track arguments in both forms of debate. No matter what the debaters themselves say, flowing a round is not *required* of a judge. However, it is often an invaluable aid for the judges themselves to track arguments and see how the debate has taken shape. You are encouraged to try it, especially if you find it difficult to remember who said what at the end of the round. Virtually all experienced judges flow debates.

Flowing is usually done with a sheet or sheets of paper divided into columns for each speech. Sometimes debaters and judges will flow in two colors of pen, one for things said by each side of the debate, to help keep track. The idea is to write shorthand notes about the arguments presented by one side of the debate down a column, and then write the responses that the other side presents to those arguments in the next column, with lines connecting the arguments to the responses. The next speech will be in the third column, and so on until you have constructed a picture of the entire debate. After the debate, you will best be able to see how each debater answered the points of the other side, and will be able to confirm the claims made by each side during their rebuttals and crystallization. A flow is often hard to understand for anyone except the person who wrote it, but ask an experienced judge to see an example of a flow if you want a better picture.

**Drops:** The debaters may refer to the other having “dropped” an argument in rebuttals. A drop is when one debater presents an argument, and the other debater fails to answer it. It is commonly accepted in debate that when this occurs, the argument is conceded by the side that dropped it. The flow will help you track this.