

Judge Guide  
Public Forum Tournaments  
2025-2026



**CHICAGO  
DEBATES**

Judge Materials for Tournament Day

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## Introduction

This judge guide serves to centralize all the materials that judges will reference during Public Forum debate tournaments or scrimmages. You may choose to print this yourself, and add notes to the pages, however, Chicago Debates will provide these materials at each tournament. Additionally, videos of all materials are available in the Google Classroom linked below, where you can see live examples of what a debate round can look like, and how you should take on your role as a judge.

Moreover, we strongly encourage our volunteers to review the Public Forum Judge Handbook, for policies, expectations & FAQs, regardless of judging experience.

Please direct any questions you may have throughout your volunteering experience with Chicago Debates to the Volunteer Manager, Jocelyn Aguirre at [jaguirre@chicagodebates.org](mailto:jaguirre@chicagodebates.org).

### [Google Classroom](#)



## In-Round Procedure

### **Before The Round Starts**

- Introduce yourself
  - What's your professional background?
  - How often do you judge debates? Saying you are inexperienced at debate is allowed and helpful for competitors to know.
- Identify the debaters and their speaking positions (First Pro Speaker, Second Pro Speaker, First Con Speaker, etc.)
  - Confirm the students in front of you are the same as those on your [tabroom](#) ballot.
  - Now**, hit "Start Round" on [Tabroom.com](#) to indicate to Chicago Debates staff that your round has all the right people present.
  - Remind each team they share a total of **3 minutes of preparation time** between them and their partner. They can use prep time *after* any speech, and you should track the time used. Timers are available on your ballot screen.
  - Instruct students to write notes during the debate and while you're providing feedback at the end.

### **During the Round**

- Encourage your debaters to stand up and speak, and put the materials they are reading on a podium, if possible.
- If debaters seem nervous, take the initiative in guiding the students on which speech you're moving on to, and how much time they have.

### **After the Round Ends**

- Once the last speaker has finished, **immediately** fill out the following on [Tabroom](#): Round Winner, Speaker Points, and Reason for Decision. Then, hit submit.
- Now**, you can offer both teams verbal feedback, following the "Compliment Sandwich" process, Positive - Critical - Positive: One thing they did well, followed by one thing they can improve on, concluding with something else they did well.
- DO NOT disclose** who won or lost the round!

## Public Forum: Speech Times & Order

***Prep time: 3 minutes per team, shared between partners.***

**Topic:** In the United States, the benefits of the use of generative artificial intelligence in education outweigh the harms.

SPEECH	TIME
<b>Constructive - Pro Speaker 1</b> <i>Read the Pro Constructive (Core Files)</i>	<b>4 mins</b>
<b>Constructive - Con Speaker 1</b> <i>Read the Con Constructive (Core Files)</i>	<b>4 mins</b>
<b>Crossfire- Pro Speaker 1 v. Con Speaker 1</b> <i>Ask questions that provide clarity, test knowledge, and contest evidence. Both debaters ask and answer.</i>	<b>3 mins</b>
<b>Rebuttal - Pro Speaker 2</b> <i>Refute opponent's arguments by using evidence and logic. Debaters should refer back to previous speech's evidence.</i>	<b>4 mins</b>
<b>Rebuttal - Con Speaker 2</b> <i>Refute opponent's arguments by using evidence and logic. Debaters should refer back to previous speech's evidence.</i>	<b>4 mins</b>
<b>Crossfire- Pro Speaker 2 v. Con Speaker 2</b>	<b>3 mins</b>
<b>Summary - Pro Speaker 1</b> <i>Start narrowing down the most impactful arguments in the round. Extend arguments made in rebuttal. No new evidence, typically. Crystallize the big impacts/consequences or 'voting issues' in the debate.</i>	<b>3 mins</b>
<b>Summary - Con Speaker 1</b> <i>Start narrowing down the most impactful arguments in the round. Extend arguments made in rebuttal. No new evidence, typically. Crystallize the big impacts/consequences or 'voting issues' in the debate.</i>	<b>3 mins</b>
<b>Grand Crossfire- All Four Debaters!</b>	<b>3 mins</b>
<b>Final Focus - Pro Speaker 2</b> <i>Finalize most impactful arguments in the round, provide key voting issues. Weigh relative risks of voting pro vs con. No new evidence.</i>	<b>2 mins</b>
<b>Final Focus - Con Speaker 2</b> <i>Finalize most impactful arguments in the round, provide key voting issues. Weigh relative risks of voting pro vs con. No new evidence.</i>	<b>2 mins</b>

## Speaker Points Rubric

### What are speaker points?

Speaker points are how we award **individuals**, as opposed to *teams*. Points are ultimately subjective, and based on style, presentation, content, and persuasiveness. A debater can lose the round but still earn high speaker points. These points also influence a team's place within their bracket.

### What do speaker points reward?

Organization of thought, strategy in extending/defending/negating arguments, strength of their main arguments, teamwork, comparative weighing of issues, explanation of evidence, persuasiveness.

### What should I consider when assigning speaker points?

- Adjust the scale in accordance with the academic level! Middle school expectations are not the same as high school debate. Novices are not evaluated on the same scale as Varsity (Open Division).
- Do not penalize a debater's speaker points for omitting arguments they should have made. Base your points off of what *was* presented and how it sounded.

### Rubric

*Note: you should award a 10th of a point (i.e. 28.0, 28.7, 29.1, 29.3...)*

Points	Grade	Details
30.0	A++	An outstanding speaker. Flawless performance given the constraints of the round.
29.5	A+	Excellent speaker: exceptionally persuasive. All arguments have sound reasoning. Very well organized. Eloquent overviews, demonstrates strategic understanding. Little to be improved.
29.0	A	Very good speaker. Unusually effective rhetoric; highly persuasive. No dropped arguments except for thoughtful or intentional concessions. Very organized. Most arguments are well reasoned. This team belongs in the elimination rounds.
28.7	A- / B+	Good speaker. The reasoning for arguments is sound and persuasive. Well organized speech. Few poor argument choices. You can see this team in an elimination round.
28.4	C+ / C	Average for their level. Not someone you think belongs in an elimination round. An effective speaker. No major dropped arguments, but argument choice could be improved. Thoughtful organization, but execution is slightly flawed.
28	C	Strengths and weaknesses are nearly balanced; dropping some key arguments but answering others well, somewhat disorganized, some arguments are properly explained while others are not.
27.5	C-	A speaker with strengths, but also with unmistakable flaws (dropping key arguments and poor reasoning for arguments).
27	D	Highly disorganized. Poor Argumentation.
26.5	D-	Grossly underprepared, did not participate or under participated, lacking interest, disengaged, distracted. Can be considered punitive.
26	F	Punishment for egregious conduct such as regular use of profane language or abusive tactics against an opponent or judge. Poor sportsmanship.
25	N/A	The debater on your ballot was absent and not in the room during the debate.

## **Deciding the Winner**

### **What should I consider when choosing the winning team?**

Focus on the substance of the arguments in the current round, prioritizing strength, refutation, evidence-based persuasion, and comparative issue-weighting over style.

Questions you should be able to answer by the end of the debate:

- Has the Pro convinced me that affirming the resolution has greater benefits?
- Do the Pro's positive impacts outweigh the negative team's negative impacts?
- Who won the impact comparison debate?
- Did the Con take out any vital affirmative ground/argument?
- Did the Con team prove that things will be worse in the world of the Pro team?

### **What should I NOT consider when deciding the winning team?**

Do not base your decision on the debaters' stylistic choice of presenting themselves in the round, such as their clothing, pitch of their voice, accent, decorum, reading fluency, or imposing your idea of what a "friendly" debater acts like (i.e. smiling, overly joyous, etc).

Do not base your decision on new arguments made during final speeches, arguments not explicitly made by the debaters in-round, your own outside knowledge of the issues, or your personal opinion for or against certain arguments. Your role as the judge is to determine which team did a better job at both arguing for their claims and dismantling their opponents' claims/arguments.

### **What do I do if both teams have gone off track from the original topic?**

If neither team is really addressing each others arguments, here are two things you can consider voting on:

1. Which team was the most persuasive and balanced their arguments using logic, cohesion, and evidence?
2. If at the end of the debate, the Pro failed to defend why the resolution is a good idea and the Con failed to demonstrate why it's a bad idea, you can vote for the negative team "on presumption." In the absence of a choice, we default to inaction because we *presume* the status quo is the safest choice.

## Providing Feedback After the Round

***Submit your ballot before providing brief verbal feedback.***

<b>Debate Content Feedback</b> <i>Feedback on specific arguments or evidence used in the round. Use your notes here.</i>	<b>Round Mechanics Feedback</b> <i>Feedback on presentation or how to make an argument more persuasive</i>
<p><b>Example 1:</b> [insert specific argument here]. This argument could be stronger if you said..., and used your evidence to support it.</p> <p><b>Example 2:</b> [insert specific argument here]. I think you were repetitive and can condense your arguments and cross-apply your answers from one argument to another argument your opponent made. This way you spend more time refuting [X] offense arguments made by your opponent.</p> <p><b>Example 3:</b> [insert specific argument here]. This argument you made in the first speech was very strong, but I didn't hear more on it through the debate. I would have liked to see you carry it over and further elaborate on it in the rebuttal speech.</p> <p><b>Example 4:</b> Con team, during the cross examination, the Pro said this [insert specific argument here], which contradicts the argument they made. For the future, point this out to your judge in your speech, and explain why this contradiction is reason enough to vote for you.</p>	<p><b>Example 1:</b> For future rounds, please indicate what argument you'll be moving onto (also referred to as "signposting"). Which contention are you moving onto? This makes it easier to keep track of which arguments are being extended or dropped.</p> <p><b>Example 2:</b> To both teams, use your evidence to persuade me. Say the author's name, explain why the information matters, and tell me how I should interpret it. Don't just describe the content to me; <i>compare</i> the quality of your evidence to your opponent's.</p> <p><b>Example 3:</b> To help organize your arguments, follow this format: they said ____, but we say ____, and judge you should consider our argument based off of [insert an example]. This makes it easy for me, as the judge, to compare and weigh your arguments. Weighing means that you're comparing the probability, timeframe, magnitude, reversibility, and scope of your impact (impact = the bad thing that will happen if I vote a specific way).</p>

### **How should I present my feedback without disclosing?**

***DO NOT*** disclose the results of the round. Provide both teams with balanced feedback.

Provide debaters with clear, encouraging, and content-focused feedback on their effective arguments, ways to improve persuasion, and suggestions for arguments to use in future rounds.

<b>Instead of....</b>	<b>Try....</b>
<p>"Con team, you lost because you dropped the Pro team's arguments and your impact was weak."</p>	<p>Pro team, really good job on extending the argument that AI can hurt critical thinking because of students' high reliance on it. Referring back to your evidence, and explaining it in your own words help me understand the important parts of your argument. For next time, I would suggest that you spend more time explaining your impact, or why it's bad for critical thinking skills in our youth to weaken. If you can prove that the Pro team creates a worse world, then it would be easy to understand who I should vote for. You also did a great job comparing your evidence to theirs!</p>
<p>"Pro team, you dropped your second contention on Teacher Assistance. You lost on this because the Con refuted it."</p>	<p>Pro team, good job expanding on how AI can help ESL, disabled, and other marginalized students whose needs are not currently being met by our education system. In future rounds, if you feel pressed for time, try tying the idea of teacher assistance to how AI can help provide much-needed support for these groups. Paint a clear, concise story so it's easy to see how AI can benefit multiple communities and help address larger societal issues.</p>

## **Topic Overview One-Pager**

**Flow Sheet Template**

<b>Constructive Pro Speaker 1 (4 minutes)</b>	<b>Constructive Con Speaker 1 (4 minutes)</b>	<b>Rebuttal Pro Speaker 2 (4 minutes)</b>	<b>Rebuttal Con Speaker 2 (4 minutes)</b>	<b>Summary Pro Speaker 1 (3 minutes)</b>	<b>Summary Con Speaker 1 (3 minutes)</b>	<b>Final Focus Pro Speaker 2 (2 minutes)</b>	<b>Final Focus Con Speaker 2 (2 minutes)</b>