

An Introduction to Evaluating Policy Debate (CX)



Basic Understanding

Policy Debate, or Cross-Examination Debate (CX), is a 90-minute debate between two sides of a resolution. Each side is comprised of a team of two individuals. The topic in Policy Debate is voted on nationally and is used for one full school year of competition. Each resolution will advocate that the United States Federal Government should take a course of action in a specific area of timely social controversy. Sides of the resolution will be predetermined.

One side, *the affirmative team*, has to defend the resolution. They will argue that the federal government should adopt a specific plan. The resolution topic area tends to be very broad, giving the affirmative team ample room to choose a specific plan of action to defend. After the affirmative team has presented their plan, *the negative team* will argue that this plan should not be adopted. They can make this case in various ways: they may argue that there is no harm in the current state of affairs; they may point to specific disadvantages of the plan; or they may point out that the plan is not the most effective way to accomplish the affirmative team's end goal. The negative team may also argue that the affirmative plan does not fit the resolution. This argument is commonly referred to as topicality. The object of each team is to convince the judge that their policy is preferable.

Structure

An excellent Policy Debate round will include quick thinking, good research, and strong clash. The round structure is as follows:

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| 1st Affirmative Constructive | 1AC | 8 minutes |
| Negative Cross-Examination of Affirmative | | 3 minutes |
| 1st Negative Constructive | 1NC | 8 minutes |
| Affirmative Cross-Examination of Negative | | 3 minutes |
| 2nd Affirmative Constructive | 2AC | 8 minutes |
| Negative Cross-Examination of Affirmative | | 3 minutes |
| 2nd Negative Constructive | 2NC | 8 minutes |
| Affirmative Cross-Examination of Negative | | 3 minutes |
| 1st Negative Rebuttal | 1NR | 5 minutes |
| 1st Affirmative Rebuttal | 1AR | 5 minutes |
| 2nd Negative Rebuttal | 2NR | 5 minutes |
| 2nd Affirmative Rebuttal | 2AR | 5 minutes |
| Prep Time (each team) | | 5 minutes |

Take Note

In Policy Debate, it is very important to take clear notes throughout the round. This practice, known as *flowing*, allows both the competitors and the judge to track arguments as they develop. Judges are instructed to ignore arguments that are introduced for the first time in the final rebuttals by each team.

Evaluating the Round

There are two key areas to consider when making a decision in Policy Debate. First, *argumentation*: competitors are to be evaluated based upon the soundness of their arguments. To make a complete argument, debaters are to first establish a *claim*, or a response to their opponent's claim. The claim is followed by a *warrant*, explaining why their argument is true, and an *impact*, explaining why their argument matters. Properly formulated arguments are to be given more weight than those lacking one or more of these aspects. Second, *interactive clash*: clash occurs when a debater explicitly responds to an opponent's argument. It is important to keep the overall goal in mind; the judge is not in the room to evaluate competing speeches, but to preside over an interactive exchange of ideas. When a competitor fails to address one of his or her opponent's arguments, this point is given more weight when the argument is brought up again in later speeches. By failing to respond to an argument, the team has tacitly agreed to the point. When making a decision, the judge should pay close attention to which side is advancing the most significant arguments in the round. The judge should examine the last two speeches and determine which team presented the better overall policy.

Filling Out the Ballot

At the end of the round, the judge records on the ballot which arguments convinced him or her to vote for a team and evaluates the speaking abilities of each competitor by ranking them. Judges are instructed to base their decisions only upon arguments made in the round; personal opinions are checked at the door. Just as debaters are required to argue both sides of the topic, judges are to remove any personal biases when making their decision. Any issues or questions the judge feels ought to have been addressed may be written on the ballot along with comments on the style or delivery of speeches. This is an educational activity and feedback is always welcomed and encouraged. 