

## ***How do I write a Public Forum Debate?***

Public Forum Debate is very similar to writing a paper for your English class. It will contain an introduction paragraph, thesis and reasons that support your position. In debate, the process to writing a speech is very similar to writing a paper in any other class.

It begins by determining what the topic is and getting some background information on the topic. Throughout this guide, we will use the following topic (resolution):

Resolved: Current immigration laws in the United States should be enforced.

The first step to writing your debate case is to determine what the key points are in the resolution. This is done by brain storming for the reasons why the resolution is both true and false. This is best done by making a list for each side of the resolution and placing arguments as to why it is true and false. It is best to do some light reading on the topic before doing your brain-storming so you can create as complete of a topic as possible.

Pro	Con
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Illegal immigration harms US workers</li><li>- Illegal immigration overburdens public services, like welfare and Medicaid</li><li>- Illegal immigration increases the risk of terrorism</li><li>- Current laws can be enforced</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Illegal immigration benefits the US economy</li><li>- Illegal immigration does not take jobs away from Americans</li><li>- Illegal immigrants pose no greater terrorism threat than anyone else</li><li>- Border enforcement is a waste of money</li><li>- Guest worker program would be even more beneficial to current system</li></ul>

Once you have gone through the process of brain storming on the topic, it is best to narrow your list to the top three or four arguments you believe best upholds your side of the resolution.

## Introduction

The next step is to start by writing your introduction and thesis to your speech. Your introduction and thesis should each be one paragraph in length. Your introduction should include the side of the resolution you are debating along with the resolution. Your introduction might include a quote from an author on the topic.

### Sample: Pro Introduction

“Working and middleclass Americans know that illegal immigrants do not “live in the shadows,” as political mythology would have it, but more aptly they occupy a parallel universe: one that sees them compete for American jobs, access benefits for Americans and yet send their hard-earned money out of the country to Mexico, propping up a hopelessly corrupt government.” Because I agree with Mark Cromer and his research that illegal immigration has and will continue to have a negative influence on the United States, its people and economy I stand in support of today’s resolution. Resolved: Current immigration laws in the United States should be enforced.

In the above example, you can see that our introduction introduces the problems that currently exist in regards to the resolution and provides the judge with a summary of the position the pro will argue in the debate round. The example above uses a quote (evidence) from a writer on the topic to help introduce the topic area. A quote is not always necessary when writing your introduction.

### Sample: Pro Introduction #2

In the United States today, the government has taken a wait and see approach to enforcing the laws passed years ago on immigration and illegal immigration. Because the problems associated with illegal immigration has reached new heights in this country and our current system can no longer absorb the influx of illegal immigration, I stand in favor of the resolution. Resolved: Current immigration laws in the United States should be enforced.

## **Thesis**

The purpose of a thesis is to summarize the three or four main arguments that your team will be introducing to the debate. The thesis provides the judge with guide (road map) to understanding your speech. The thesis is important as it allows the judge to understand how each of the arguments work together.

Sample: Pro Thesis

In today's round, we will argue that because of increasing threats to both the security and economy of the United States, current immigration policies should be enforced. Currently, the United States has a policy in place that defines who should be allowed entrance into our country through both legal and illegal means. It our position that currently we are not enforcing those laws adequately for our country's safety. We will argue that there are three reasons why our current immigration laws should be enforced. First, the threat of terrorism is still very real today and the United States should not become lax in its security measures. Second, that illegal immigration has a negative influence on our country's economy. And lastly, that our current immigration laws are sufficient to protect our country, if enforced.

As seen above, the thesis details the position of the speech and gives the judge a road map to the arguments that will be made.

## **Arguments/Contentions**

In writing your arguments (often called contentions); debaters will often use a modal to their argumentation. In this model, an argument will begin with a claim: the statement of the argument you are making. The claim is simply of the reasons that were found during the brainstorming process.

Sample: Claim

Contention I: The threat of terrorism demands enforcement of current immigration laws.

The claim has no reason why the statement is true, simply that it is. The warrant is the answer to the question, why is your claim true? Claims always need a warrant to why the statement is that of fact. When you support a claim with a warrant, you are telling the judge the reasons why your argument is based on more than just opinion. Warrants are often found during research of a topic and will be a quote or position explaining why a claim is true.

### Sample: Warrant

When illegal immigrations are allowed to live within the country unchecked, it creates a risk to everyone. As Mark Krikorian, Executive Director at the Center of Immigration Studies wrote in *The National Interest* (Spring 2004, Page 77), “Unfortunately, enforcement of the prohibition against hiring illegal aliens, passed in 1986, has all but stopped. This might seem to be of little importance to security, but in fact holding a job can be important to terrorists for a number of reasons. By giving them a means of support, it helps them blend into society. Neighbors might well become suspicious of young men who do not work but seem able to pay their bills. Moreover, supporting themselves by working would enable terrorists to avoid the scrutiny that might attend the transfer of money from abroad.”

The warrant is often a quote (evidence) that supports the claim. Here, we see that our research found a quote supporting the idea that illegal immigrations can influence the security of our nation by allowing illegal immigrants to gain access to the system.

Finally, you need to impact your argument or explain why the argument is important in the debate round. Your impact will usually relate back to the thesis of your speech.

### Sample: Impact

When terrorists are allowed to freely enter into our country through unchecked borders and un-enforced immigration laws, it allows terrorists to blend into society. This process of blending which is nature for all immigrants is why measures must be taken to ensure only legal and checked immigrants are allowed to settle within the borders of the country. As Krikorian explains, terrorists often use this ability to blend into society as a mechanism for preparing attacks against a nation.

Each argument you make would follow this similar process until you have completed your speech. Each speech should last four (4) minutes in length when read aloud. Once you have written your pro speech, a con speech of similar style and length would be written next.

## **Public Forum Debate Example**

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### Contention I: The threat of terrorism demands enforcement of current immigration laws.

When illegal immigrations are allowed to live within the country unchecked, it creates a risk to everyone. As Mark Krikorian, Executive Director at the Center of Immigration Studies wrote in The National Interest (Spring 2004, Page 77), "Unfortunately, enforcement of the prohibition against hiring illegal aliens, passed in 1986, has all but stopped. This might seem to be of little importance to security, but in fact holding a job can be important to terrorists for a number of

reasons. By giving them a means of support, it helps them blend into society. Neighbors might well become suspicious of young men who do not work but seem able to pay their bills. Moreover, supporting themselves by working would enable terrorists to avoid the scrutiny that might attend the transfer of money from abroad.”

When terrorists are allowed to freely enter into our country through unchecked borders and un-enforced immigration laws, it allows terrorists to blend into society. This process of blending which is nature for all immigrants is why measures must be taken to ensure only legal and checked immigrants are allowed to settle within the borders of the country. As Krikorian explains, terrorists often use this ability to blend into society as a mechanism for preparing attacks against a nation.

#### Contention II: Illegal immigration threatens the stability of the United States economy.

Illegal immigration causes a ripple effect with workers in the United States and exacerbates the wages of low income and middle income families. In any economic system, there are always varying degrees of economic wealth. However, it is important that the gap between lower and middle class is kept small. When low income jobs diminish or wages decrease it causes increased pressures on the social services within the country to help offset those lower incomes. Gene Spearling in Fortune Magazine writes about the wage disparity that exists because of illegal immigration. “... the degree to which significant increases in immigration can depress wages and even cost jobs of low-skilled U.S. workers. Harvard's George Borjas and Larry Katz have found that between 1980 and 2000, predominantly low-wage immigration from Mexico depressed the wages of U.S. high school dropouts by 7.7% compared with those of their college-educated peers.”

When jobs are allowed to depress wages because of illegal immigration, it causes individuals who would normally fill low-income jobs to rely on social services to make up the difference in lost wages. This idea, called pay gapping, causes a drain on services that would normally be reserved to the neediest.

Contention III: Current laws provide effective means to reverse the problems with illegal immigration.

Although not currently enforced, our existing set of laws in the United States is more than sufficient to prevent the problems as detailed above. However, the first step to this solution is to start immediately enforcing current laws which include protecting our borders from unauthorized access. And this enforcement doesn't need to be to round up every illegal immigrant and throw them out in some sort of draconian witch hunt, but rather simply enforcing border laws that exist now would reduce the illegal immigration population.

According to US Newswire, May 5 of 2006. "The Center for Immigration Studies finds that, according to the government's own cost estimates, an attrition strategy could cut the illegal population by nearly half in five years, with an additional investment of less than \$2 billion, or \$400 million per year - an increase of less than 1 percent of the President's 2007 budget request for the Department of Homeland Security."

Allowing the government to simply enforce the already existing policies that exist in the United States, substantial gains could be made in decreasing the threats posed by today's immigration crisis. For all of these reasons, we stand in support of today's resolution.

## ***Cross-Fire & Grand Cross Fire***

Cross-fire serves three important purposes in the debate. It gives one side the chance to clarify the arguments and evidence presented by the other. Secondly, it is an opportunity to demonstrate flaws in the opponent's arguments. Thirdly, cross-fire is the time when the audience and judge have a chance to see the debaters interact with each other. In other words, cross-fire is a chance to gain the judge's favor.

Cross-fire in Public-Forum debate is much like cross-examination in other types of the debate with the notable exception that both sides are allowed to ask (and respond) to questions during the same time period. A student who is good at cross-fire must balance the time between asking and responding to questions. A student who dominates the exchange by asking all of the questions or one that never asks a question can be unpersuasive in the judge's view.

In cross-fire, both participants face the judge rather than each other. This is because the questions are intended for the audience. The keys to an effective cross-fire are good questions and a professional demeanor. Specifically:

1. Ask specific questions that get to the heart of the issue.
2. Be polite, professional, and respectful during the cross-fire.
3. Never personalize the cross-fire —the focus should always be on issues.

One of the best ways to improve your performance is to improve your topic knowledge. The more you know about the topic, the easier you will find it to ask insightful questions and provide effective answers in cross-fire.

The grand cross-fire is where all four students are able to participate in the process at the same time. During the grand cross-fire students typically sit at their desks. Desks should face the judge and could be angled slightly so you can easily address your opponents. It is important that during the grand cross-fire that you do not talk (or yell) over your partner or opponents questions. Stay calm and collected and make sure that both sides are an equal chance to participate.

## ***Final Focus***

The final focus of the debate should be used to synthesize various arguments into a one or two critical points for the judge to consider. One might introduce their final speech with a statement like “in light of the arguments made in today’s debate, we have upheld the resolution because...” This summary statement is difficult for several reasons. First, because of the general nature of the closing argument, the speaker must focus on the “big picture” and less on specific details. Second, the speaker must extend his/her best arguments while answering his/her opponent’s best arguments. This requires a careful balance. Of course, each round of debate will lead to unique summary statements. However, here are some general tips for making successful summary statements.

- 1) Ask yourself, what are our most powerful arguments? After selecting your most powerful arguments you must explain why you have won these arguments and why this means you have won the debate. In other words, explain the *impact* of your best arguments.
- 2) Ask yourself, “what are the weaknesses in my opponent’s best arguments?” Explain these weaknesses to the judge.
- 3) The summary must be an extension of the debate. It should show what your team has accomplished during the debate. It should not be new ideas or perspectives that haven’t been brought up.