

select your two best responses along with a statistic or short quotation from authority. Provide a complete source for your evidentiary support.

MAKING STRATEGIC CHOICES

Every public forum round of debate begins with the toss of a coin. The winner of the coin toss must first decide whether to select a side (pro or con) or a speaking position (first or second). The loser of the coin toss makes the remaining choice.

If you win the coin toss, what should you do? Usually you choose your preferred side. Although the framers of public forum resolutions try to phrase well-balanced topics, there is usually a natural advantage to one side. Even when the resolution is evenly balanced, you probably have more confidence in one of your beginning speeches than in the other. You also might want to consider the reputation of your opponent. You might be aware that your opponent has experienced great success with its pro case. This knowledge might cause you to select the pro position, putting your opponent on its weakest side.

If, however, you have equal confidence in your two cases, you might consider selecting your preferred speaking order. Most public forum debaters, when given a choice, choose to speak second. Speaking second means you have the final rebuttal—the final opportunity to persuade the judge to vote for your side. The only advantage to speaking first is that you are given the opportunity to ask the first question in all three of the crossfire periods. In general, however, the advantage of having the final rebuttal is more important than questioning first in the crossfire periods.

PRACTICE ROUNDS

An important part of success in public forum debate is the development of a proper practice routine. Just as football teams would never consider playing an opponent without extensive practice sessions, so a debate team should plan a practice strategy. If your school has more than one public forum team, you can practice against each other. If neighboring schools have public forum teams, you might be able to set up an after-school scrimmage. If neither option is available, you can practice against one another, with one member of the team in the pro position and the other in the con. This final option is suboptimal, but it is certainly preferable to no practice rounds at all.

Try to find an audience for your practice rounds. You might find social studies or speech teachers who welcome the opportunity to have you do a demonstration debate for their classes.