Public Forum Debate:
By James Hoggatt

The Case

1. Top of the Case
   a. Definitions:
      i. Choosing Definitions: Effective Definitions depend on the type of resolution that is being debated. The more complex the resolution, the more you should err to a definition coming from an organization that specializes in the field of study the resolution is about, and the less complex the more acceptable it is to use just academic dictionary definitions. If you immediately feel that there is more than one way to define a term in the resolution err to a definition from an organization. EX: the term “Deadly Force” is best defined by a legal group and not a dictionary definition of “Deadly” and “Force”.
      ii. What to Define: Define only terms that are necessary to be defined. Do not define terms simply because they are there. Define the ones that are contentious, can be interpreted different ways, or are at the heart of the resolution.
      iii. Respect a phrase: If a resolution makes use of a phrase as part of the resolution, always define the phrase, never the individual words inside of the phrase. As you know, phrasing changes everything.
   b. Observations:
      i. Observations in Public Forum: Observations in Public Forum tend to be an explanation of what each side must uphold in order to win the round. They are generally only necessary if the resolution is somehow vague in its terms, or the case position is more unorthodox. They appear less frequently and are less impactful than observations in Lincoln Douglas Debate.

2. Contentions:
   a. Style: Contentions in public forum should quickly arrive at their point and provide immediate real world evidence from academic, news, or other sources to immediately establish legitimacy of their point. The contention should take the form of a story that establishes the point that the debaters wish to get across. More so than in any other type of debate, Public Forum debaters are allowed to focus on the persuasive skills and the level of language used can be more casual and relaxed.
   b. Creating the Cases: Unlike in LD debate, two partners are creating cases that they share—this changes some of the way the casework is often done, however; some of the trends are harmful to the success of a team. Do not have one student write one side of the case, and the other student the other. This will invariably make the team weaker. Each student needs to have an investment and say in the argumentation of both cases. Many great teams have unfortunately crippled themselves by using the split work approach.
   c. Real World Impacts: The one major issue that finds itself in Public Forum debate, is a PF team attempting to debate like LD debaters or Policy Debaters. Unlike LDers, philosophical arguments are best avoided, and unlike policy debaters complex political arguments are best avoided as well. Public forum debaters should focus on developing concise real world argumentation that can be easily connected to by the average
The strongest PF teams in the nation are teams that are both highly versed on the topic’s core issues and can explain them in real-world terms.

**The Round**

1. **Time Allocation:**
   a. **First Speeches:** The first speech of either side of the debate should be the constructive speech prepared in advance by the students.
   b. **Second Speeches:** The Second speech needs to determine which arguments are dangerous in the opponents speech (and if second speaker attacks on their case) and divide the time properly to address these arguments.
   c. **Third Speeches:** This speech should solidify the final arguments the team is going to go for from their case as well as answer the strongest answer form the opponent.
   d. **Final Speech (final focus):** This speech should determine the one or two most important arguments from their case as well as whatever major arguments exist from their case and present voting issues to solidify and finish the round.

2. **Cross-Fire:**
   a. **Courtesy:** Do not attempt to monopolize the time within cross-fire. Because the time is shared it becomes bad manners to attempt to control the entirety of cross-fire. Its much more impressive and effective to not only ask good questions but be able to answer the questions posed at you.
   b. **Control:** Do not let your opponent anger you in Cross-Fire. So many great teams become flustered during this period and lose their appeal to their judge by falling into an emotional trap set by the opponent.
   c. **Have your evidence in front of you:** Nothing is more frustrating as a judge than the phrase “My opponent can bring that up in his/her next speech”. 99/100 times that phrase is uttered in PF debate, that piece of evidence never shows up. Please answer the question the best you can, and if it becomes an issue, then bring up the evidence.