

Lincoln Douglas Debate



OVERVIEW, by Sandy Mandell, Wellington 2003

Lincoln Douglas Debate is a two-person debate in which one person upholds the affirmative side and the other person upholds the negative side of the resolution. There are three speeches by the affirmative and two speeches by the negative. Each person reads his/her case and then proceeds to refute their opponent's case. There are two cross-examination periods where each side can ask questions to their opponent. The object is to show the judge why you win the round by better upholding your side.

During rounds you have to be able to think quickly on your feet and be able to respond to questions you might not know the answer to. You can't get flustered, hurt or angered by what someone else says in a round; you just have to take it in stride. If your opponent says something that you didn't say (and it will happen), then in your next speech (if you have one), just simply clear up what was said. If you don't have a chance to refute the point, then it is called "sleazing" and the judge should not consider that argument in the round.

Remember to "signpost" before you start your rebuttal. Signposting is informing the judge and your opponent the order of issues on which you will speak. For example, first I will go over my value premise and value criterion. Then I will look at my three contentions, and then refute my opponent's values and contentions. At the end of your final speech, don't forget to "crystallize," or "sum up," your arguments. You will generally use your two values and strongest contention. This can be the difference between winning and losing.

You never want to look directly at your opponent during cross-examination; instead, you want to keep your eye contact with the judge.

When the round is over, you should always shake hands with your opponent and with the judge.

*And remember ... **always** have fun!*

GENERAL INFORMATION

Lincoln-Douglas debate is a two-person format where the affirmative supports the resolution and the negative attacks it. The resolution, which changes every two months, is always a question of value – that is, morals, ethics, and philosophy.

Wellington has an entire library of LD-related reading and research material, and is well-vested in LD history. It's what Wellington is known for nationally.

The debaters will try to show why their position supports the more important, fundamental principles inherent in their position and why that position is superior to the opponent's.

Each debater will present a case that includes:

1. **Value:** A universally held principle that the debater advocates in order to affirm or negate the resolution.

Example: justice

2. **Criterion:** The standard by which the debater achieves the value that he/she presents. It is a measuring stick. Example: How is the value of justice achieved? By ensuring equality before the law.

3. **Definitions:** These may be given by the affirmative to clarify terms in the resolution that are ambiguous. Not every word in the resolution must be defined. Sometimes the negative will offer a counter-definition because they disagree with the affirmative's interpretation.

4. **Arguments:** Also called contentions/areas of analysis/justifications/levels of argumentation, these are the reasons the debater gives in support of the position presented.

The debaters will construct their cases using logic, theory, and philosophy. Arguments are to be substantiated by analysis, testimony, comparison and contrast, analogy, example, and/or factual data. As the official NFL ballot states: neither debater is responsible for providing a plan to solve for the problem(s) identified with the resolution.

In this event, debaters take different approaches to delivery. The most important requirement for a debater's delivery is that you are able to understand them and write down their arguments. If the arguments do not make sense to you, be sure to comment on that problem on the ballot. You are not expected to consider arguments that are presented at such a rapid pace that you cannot understand them.

Ultimately, a balance between relevant content and persuasive delivery is optimal.

Speaking Order and Times

Affirmative Constructive: 6 minutes

Cross-Ex by Negative: 3 minutes

Negative Constructive: 7 minutes

Cross-Ex by Affirmative: 3 minutes

First Affirmative Rebuttal: 4 minutes

Negative Rebuttal: 6 minutes

Second Affirmative Rebuttal: 3 minutes

Sample Topics

Resolved — The United States has a moral obligation to mitigate international conflicts.

Resolved — A government's obligation to protect the environment ought to take precedence over its obligation to protect economic development.

Resolved — As a general principle, individuals have an obligation to value the common good above their own interests.

10 EASY STEPS TO BECOMING A MASTER, by Darren Goldman, Wellington 2003

1. **Know your philosophers.** Locke's Natural Rights and Mill's Utilitarian theories are vital Lincoln Douglas Debate arguments.
2. **Know the U.S. Constitution and important Supreme Court cases dealing with the Bill of Rights.** LD is supposed to be a philosophical debate, but having this type of evidence to support your philosophies can be very useful.
3. **Get a good quote book.** Although a quote won't be the sole factor in determining a win or loss, a great quote can have a lasting impression and sway a judge if the debate is close.
4. **Buy a timer.** Never rely on a judge to give you time signals. They are too preoccupied and will most likely mess up. Having your own timer will prevent judges from making mistakes and will allow you to be constantly aware of how much time you have left.
5. **When writing a case, think like your opponent.** Realize the flaws in your theories and the counter-arguments your opponents will use. If you can deal with the problems in your own case, your opponent will have less steam in his or her rebuttal.

6. **Learn how to flow.** Every debater has a different technique, so find the one that works for you. As long as you can clearly and effectively organize your thoughts and your opponents' arguments on the sheet of paper, your technique is fine.
7. **The cross-examination period is where rounds are won or lost.** When asking the questions, have a plan. Get your opponent to admit something that he or she doesn't realize may ruin his or her case. Then, hammer it in rebuttals. When being asked, think about the answer, and try to guess where your opponent is going with it, so you can be prepared.
8. **Use all of your prep time.** You have three minutes of prep time. Separate your time into two 1:30 intervals. Never leave any prep time over, because some of your best arguments can come to you while prepping.
9. **Do not drop arguments.** Make sure that you counter every argument your opponent gives. If you cannot come up with a good rebuttal, just briefly mention the tag. By not dropping arguments, your opponent will have less ammunition against your case, and will have to spend more time defending his or her own.
10. **Don't be afraid to change your case.** If you are in a round and an argument completely backfires, or if you just don't think it was as effective as you would have liked, change it before the next round. Do not think it will work the next time. If it failed once, it will most likely fail again.