

INTRODUCTION TO LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATE

What is LD

Lincoln-Douglas is a one-on-one debate between two people, one of them affirming and the other negating a resolution: that is, you're either for it or against it. The resolutions change every two months or so, and the topics are along the lines of, Which is Better, Anarchy or Tyranny? or, Is Multi-culturalism Good or Bad? or, Is the Death Penalty Just? What the resolutions usually boil down to is a conflict between the rights of one individual or group of individuals pitted against the rights of some other individual or group of individuals. Lately topics have been more specific, for instance discussing universal health care or due process applied to non-citizens. The basic premises remain the same.

At any tournament, the debaters are required to argue both sides of the resolution, regardless of their personal opinions on the subject; the point is to be persuasive on either side, by acquiring and demonstrating the skills of reasoned argumentation. You do not win by being a great orator; it is content, not presentation, that the judges are looking for. You win by having the better case for your side. What the debaters try to look for in developing their cases is the greatest inherent **value** of either the affirmative or negative, that is, the underlying reason for their position—values are an extremely important concept in LD, and they include such abstract ideas as justice, freedom, and equality. Debaters defend the value on their side, while attacking the value on their opponent's side (or at least the way the opponent is attempting to achieve that value). And the thing is, there's no objective right or wrong on any resolution, which makes the entire enterprise boil down to one thing: Who did the best arguing?

The mechanics of LD

The debate itself is a series of speeches on both sides. In order they are:

1) **The affirmative constructive (AC).** First up is the affirmative side, for a six minute speech. Usually the aff will begin with a some definitions of key terms in the resolution, and perhaps an observation or two setting some boundaries for the ensuing discussion. The aff will then declare the value that he or she is going to defend, and a criterion through which to measure that value. Then the aff will go into its contentions, the meat of the argument: these are usually two or three areas of analysis explaining the affirmative position and how it relates to the underlying affirmative value.

2) **Cross-examination by negative (CX).** At the conclusion of the AC, the negative debater will directly question the affirmative for three minutes. There are no boundaries on CX; any question can and will be asked. In CX, the best debaters both chisel away at the flaws in their opponent's case and set the framework for their own case.

3) **The negative constructive (NC).** Next up is the neg to make the opposing argument.

Again, we may start with definitions if for some reason neg feels that the aff's definitions are inadequate or misleading, followed perhaps by more observations. Then there's neg's value/criterion, which may be the same or different from aff's. Next neg argues against the resolution with two or three contentions, as did aff. When the neg is finished its contentions, neg then goes on to refute the aff case, point by point. In other words, now the argument begins. Neg has seven minutes altogether to present the neg side and then refute the aff, and usually divides the time roughly half and half.

4) **Cross-examination by the affirmative (CX).** At the conclusion of the NC, the aff debater will grill the negative, just like aff was grilled by negative before. Same no-rules apply.

5) **First affirmative rebuttal (1AR).** From now on, it's all argument. Both sides have made their cases. Now they defend their side and attack their opponent's. The first affirmative rebuttal is a four-minute speech by aff, and it's not much time to cover everything, but covering everything is the order of the day. Usually aff begins by going point by point refuting the neg case, then aff defends against the neg's previous refutations of the aff case, although it is perfectly acceptable to go the other way around. It can get hectic, but it's one of the high points of the debate.

6) **Negative rebuttal (NR).** Neg is up again, to defend the neg case and once again refute the aff. But neg has six minutes, plenty of time to go into deep analysis of the issues. Usually neg will attempt to sum up the round at the conclusion of the NR in what is called a crystallization, urging the judge to deliver a negative ballot.

7) **The second affirmative rebuttal (2AR).** To make up for the apparent time imbalance, aff gets the last word in the 2AR. This is only three minutes, and aff is not allowed to bring up any new arguments (it wouldn't be fair, since neg can't respond to them). Aff may cover points that are unresolved in the round, or may use the time to summarize the round, crystallizing the key voting points and, of course, urging an affirmative ballot. More likely than not, it will be a combination of both.

8) One more thing. Both sides do have an allotment of preparation time, usually a total of four or five minutes, which they will usually use half and half prior to making their speeches.

A little bit about tournaments

LD is divided into Novice, Junior Varsity and Varsity divisions. So while all of the above may sound a little overwhelming, you don't have to go up against polished professionals when you're starting out. Everybody debates at their own level, so you'll usually get good, competitive rounds that you have as much chance of winning as your opponent. Most schools participate in tournaments almost every week, but not everybody goes to every tournament (although if you find you like debate, you'll find yourself hooked, and you'll *want* to go every week). New debaters usually begin by participating in Metro-Hudson League debates (MHLs). These include only Novice and JV divisions, and take

place on Saturdays at schools no more than a couple of hours at most from home. MHLs consist of four rounds, and usually last from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Meanwhile, the varsity, and occasionally the junior varsity, travel to tournaments ranging from Pennsylvania to Massachusetts. These are usually two-day events, beginning Friday afternoon, with a minimum of five preliminary rounds and four or five elimination rounds. Students are usually housed by the students at the school hosting the tournament, but once in a while we shell out for hotels. These tournaments usually end Saturday evening.

So in your first year, expect mostly to hit Saturday one-day events. As you stick with the activity, you'll travel more and more, until eventually you'll need a tag saying "My Name is—" when you go home so that your parents will recognize you.

The tournaments themselves include lots of sitting around punctuated by 45-minute jolts of pure adrenaline. Prior to a round, schematics will be distributed, listing the names of the debaters, who's judging them, and where. Most LD rounds consist of two flights, an A flight and a B flight, which simply means that each round is actually two rounds cleverly disguised as one, but you only have to debate one of them. When schematics are posted everybody scrambles around trying to gauge their opponents, after which you head off to the correct room, where the real fun begins. You and your opponent take seats at the front of the room, while the judge finds the most comfortable chair in the middle and perches there (teachers' desk are verboten for all).

The judge could be anyone from an experienced varsity debater to a recent graduate to a parent of another student (LD was originally meant to be understandable by the average person, and surprisingly enough, that includes your parents), or an opposing coach. Understanding what a judge is looking for is one of the keys, and one of the imponderables, of LD.

When the debate begins, you will need to keep track of time. Kitchen timers and smart phones and iPod Touches can be used. You can go on until the timer goes off (and note that opponents tend to time too), at which point you can complete the thought you're in the middle of, but that's it. Eventually you'll get a good sense of how to budget your time well.

The judge is under no obligation to utter a word during the round. As a rule, however, there is disclosure of the decision to the debaters, and often a detailed verbal critique. Whatever you do, don't get involved in yet another debate! The judge's word is law. Make sure you don't end up starting the argument again. Whatever a judge says, no matter how stupid, just say thank you and move on. A round ain't over till they hand in the ballad: you could conceivably win a round a lose a critique—not a good idea!

When a round ends, it is a tradition for the two debaters to congratulate each other for a good round. This is true, even if the round was a total disaster, and pretty much the worst forty-five minutes you have ever spent in your life. The negative stands and says, "Good round," and shakes hands with the affirmative, who also says, "Good round." Keep in mind that the other debater may, in a round, be your competition, but for most of your

debate life, other debaters will be your friends. We are all in this together. An arrogant attitude is usually rewarded by your not making many friends in your debate career, and probably not enjoying it very much. Competition is the means to an end (this will be said to you many times over the years), and not the end itself.

It is also a tradition to thank the judge for judging as you make the way out the door. Some debaters like to shake the judge's hand at the end of the round, but most judges consider this a bit much, and mostly an excuse to collect physically transmitted germs that could have otherwise avoided. Thanking the judge is a nice thing, though, especially if it's a parent. We need those people to make this activity last for the long term.

How to win

Actually, you'll be discussing that for your entire debate career—no easy answers there. Choosing in favor of a debater is called picking them up. Choosing against them is called dropping them. Theoretically, the person who makes the best argument wins.

Values. Each debater must uphold his value. If the value for both sides is the same, for instance, justice, then which side ultimately comes across as the most just will win. If the values are different for the two sides, say justice for aff and individual rights for neg, the judge will measure which value applies better to the resolution after they've heard the arguments.

Criteria. A good analogy to understand values and criteria is that, let's say you want to buy a car because you need transportation. Transportation is your value. What are the criteria you use to buy the car? If you want to pick up members of the opposite sex, you might opt for a sports car, while if you want to drive around your tribe of rug rats, you might opt for a minivan. The end result is still a car and a means of transportation, but it's a different kind of car, and your reasons—or criteria—for buying it are entirely different. Criteria in LD usually come into strongest play when the values are the same for both sides. And if you wish to speak correct English, there is one criterion, two criteria. Teacher judges are especially appreciative of students who use the right words in the right places. So is anyone who appreciates the fine points of the English language. Try to include yourself among this elite.

Technical aspects. As we said earlier, LD debate is *not* an event where the style of speech comes into play, so it's not the best orator that wins but the best debater (although speaking well will never hurt you, and will often influence an inexperienced judge). And that means there has to be a clash, and someone has to come out of that clash victorious. As you go down the flow (outline) of a case, sometimes a debater will drop an issue; that is, the first debater contends that cows have wings, and the opposing debater never mentions it. That means that the second debater has dropped this. If the original debater comes up next and points out the drop to the judge, that is a contention that must stand for the original debater; in other words, the debater who first made the statement *wins* that statement, no matter how cockamamie. Having a point stand in this way can be just as good as proving through argumentation that cows have wings. Anything the opponent

subsequently says to this point after dropping it is unacceptable. If the original debater does *not* cite the drop, then the dropping of it just disappears as an issue from the round, since no one is bothering to argue it. Sometimes, especially with novice debaters, whole cases will be dropped left and right, and a debater will get a straightforward technical win as a result. You won't see this much at the varsity level.

There are many differing judge opinions about drops. Some judges want to see everything covered. Some care more what you say about things than that you simply said any old thing, and covering every little nook and cranny of the flow isn't as important to them as your demonstrating an understanding of underlying themes of what's being said. In other words, they won't believe in flying pigs no matter how the technical aspects of the debate broke down. Obviously, therefore, the idea of understanding important versus unimportant issues is key, in either approach. Spend your time on the important arguments. Cover the unimportant ones, but dismiss them quickly, because they're just not worth your time.

Ad hoc voting issues. One interesting thing that might occur during a cross-examination is that both debaters make an agreement that whoever wins this or that specific point wins the entire round. This is perfectly acceptable in LD and makes the judge's job easy (sometimes). The judge will now give the round to whomever does best what the two debaters agreed had to be done.

Ballots

After the round is over, the judge completes a ballot. There are two parts to the ballot. There's picking the winner and loser and assigning them speaker points, and there's (usually) a write-up of the reasons for the decision. Sometimes the write-up is done by the judge while the round is happening.

Speaker points usually range from 20 to 30, and are used by the tabulators to balance rounds and award trophies. In LD, ties are acceptable at some tournaments. Rules of thumb: anything below 25 is unacceptable behavior. 25 is pretty much a disaster, a kid who drops a whole case, whose contentions didn't make any sense, that sort of thing; 26 is when you seemed to have the basics down but just didn't debate that well, you hemmed and hawed a lot where you should have been refuting, you repeated yourself over and over rather than adding new levels of analysis; 27 is pretty good but they didn't wow the judge; 28-29 are from really good to really really good to really really really excellent, depending on the judge, so any 28 point ballot or above, win or lose, is a job well done; and 30s are occasionally awarded, not because perfection has been reached, but because the judge feels this is about as close to perfection as he or she will ever see.

There are as many different styles of ballots as there are judges. You'll find this out when you start reading your ballots, which are usually handed out after the tournament (giving you something to read in the dark on the bus). Much of your time as a debater will be spent vilifying the judges you claim have screwed you; be it known from the beginning

that there *are* bad judges out there, but half the time they'll screw your opponent instead of you, so you'll come out even in the end.