

Competition Events – At A Glance

An Introduction to Lincoln-Douglas Debate (LD)



Event Description

In this one-on-one format, students debate a topic provided by the Association. Lincoln-Douglas Debate topics range from individual freedom versus the collective good to economic development versus environmental protection. Students may consult evidence gathered prior to the debate but may not use the Internet in round. An entire debate is roughly 45 minutes and consists of constructive speeches, rebuttals, and cross-examination.

Considerations for Lincoln-Douglas Debate

Lincoln-Douglas Debate typically appeals to individuals who like to debate, but prefer a one-on-one format as opposed to a team or group setting. Additionally, individuals who enjoy LD like exploring questions of how society ought to be. Many people refer to LD Debate as a “values” debate, as questions of morality and justice are commonly examined. Students prepare cases and then engage in an exchange of cross-examinations and rebuttals in an attempt to convince a judge that s/he is the better debater in the round.

Traits of Successful LD Debaters


When considering what event you should choose, or in which direction to point a student when selecting an event, below are some general traits of successful LD debaters to keep in mind:

- Independent
- Thinks logically
- Analytical
- Intrigued by philosophy
- Determined
- Thoughtful

List of Past LD Topics

- Resolved: The United States ought to prioritize the pursuit of national security objectives above the digital privacy of its citizens.
- Resolved: Placing political conditions on humanitarian aid to foreign countries is unjust.
- Resolved: Developing countries should prioritize environmental protection over resource extraction when the two are in conflict.
- Resolved: Targeted killing is a morally permissible foreign policy tool.
- Resolved: Individuals have a moral obligation to assist people in need.
- Resolved: The United States is justified in using private military firms abroad to pursue its military objectives.
- Resolved: In the United States, juveniles charged with violent felonies ought to be treated as adults in the criminal justice system.
- Resolved: The abuse of illegal drugs ought to be treated as a matter of public health, not of criminal justice.

Note: For novices, the Association designates the following topic for districts to use during the first two months of a novice season:
Resolved: Civil disobedience in a democracy is morally justified.

Learn More! The National Speech & Debate Association is the leading provider of competitive and educational resources to aid students and coaches as they explore our competitive events. For Lincoln-Douglas Debate, we provide a number of helpful resources—including live and recorded webinars designed to introduce foundational and advanced concepts in LD; access to LD final round videos; an LD textbook; specific guidance on the annual novice topic; topic analysis; research assistance; and much more! Take advantage of the amazing benefits of being a member by using our resources to help advance yourself in competitive speech and debate activities. Visit www.speechanddebate.org for more information. 

Find Your Voice

“LD allowed me to question basic assumptions and reevaluate aspects of the world. Despite debating individually, the community is so welcoming; I made friends across the country.”

— Jordan Friedman, Association Alum

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Basic Understandings

Lincoln Douglas Debate (LD) is a one-on-one event where debaters argue against one another on a specified resolution. Therefore, it is imperative when students begin LD, they know the resolution being debated. If you visit www.speechanddebate.org/currenttopics, you will see the topics assigned by month. Additionally, the Association specifies a separate topic for the first two months of a novice season. It is important to note that not all tournaments use the topic suggested for their competition. Therefore, be sure to check the invitation for complete information.

Once a debater knows the resolution, the student should begin brainstorming arguments on the topic. An argument's basic structure is referred to as claim, warrant, and impact (more details below). The debater should also construct their cases (more details below). Finally, they should consider their opponent's arguments and brainstorm responses. At the end of the round, a debater should also offer summary reasons as to why they should win, which are commonly referred to as "voting issues."



Research

After students do an initial brainstorm session, conduct research. Look in reputable journals for articles written by experts in the field and texts written by philosophers. Additional sources include, but are not limited to, newspaper articles, think tanks, and credible websites. Check with your school's Media Center/Library Services Department for research tips and information on what you have access to through your school.

Structural Components

The structure of the round, and corresponding speaker responsibilities, can be found below:

Speech	Time Limit	Responsibility of Debater
Affirmative Constructive	6 min	Present the affirmative case
Negative Cross-Examination	3 min	Negative asks questions of the affirmative
Negative Constructive/ Negative Rebuttal	7 min	Present the negative case and refute the affirmative case
Affirmative Cross-Examination	3 min	Affirmative asks questions of the negative
First Affirmative Rebuttal	4 min	Refute the negative case and rebuild the affirmative case
2nd Negative Rebuttal	6 min	Refute the affirmative case, rebuild the negative case, and offer reasons that negative should win the round, commonly referred to as voting issues.
2nd Affirmative Rebuttal	3 min	Address negative voting issues and offer crystallization for why the affirmative should win.

**Each debater is also entitled to four minutes of prep time during the round.*

Organizing

Argumentation

First, a debater must clearly establish their claim. This is generally a declarative statement that establishes the point they are setting out to justify. Next, a debater must clearly establish why their argument is valid. This is known as the warrant for an argument. Debaters need to go beyond asserting their claims by backing them up with analysis explaining why the argument is true. The warrant can come in many forms, but is necessary for the

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development of the argument. It is important to note that having an author simply make an assertion about a topic is not a warrant. Finally, a debater must provide an impact for their argument. This means the debater establishes why the argument is significant in the round.

Casing

After students brainstorm arguments, it is time to construct cases. While there is no rule requiring a specific structure, there is a traditional approach to constructing a case. Most commonly, LD debaters use a value and criterion model to structure their case. Under this model, the students propose a specific value that they feel is the ultimate goal debaters should be striving for in the round. Subsequently, they offer a criterion which offers a specific mechanism to determine if the value is being achieved by either debater in the round. A common example is offering a value of Justice with a criterion of Rights Protection. A debater should offer definitions of these terms, as well as explain how the value best fits the resolution and how the criterion best measures if the value is achieved. After they establish their value and criterion, they would offer contentions. These are the main arguments of the affirmative or negative and would strive to assert that the value/criterion is being achieved. When developing arguments the arguments should link back to the value/criterion.

are not limited to, asserting the reverse of the argument, showing the opponent's arguments do not carry as much weight as their arguments, or taking out the link between the opponent's argument and the value/criterion being used in the round. Students can pre-write their answers to arguments they expect their opponents to make. These are commonly known as "blocks."



Refutations

Lincoln Douglas debate is more than just cases! Debaters engage in refuting each other's arguments. Students may refute cases by denying the validity of the argument, which is most common. Additional strategies include, but

Flowing

It is important for debaters to learn how to keep track of arguments in the round. Typically debaters "flow" the debate round—making note of the arguments that are presented and refuted in the round. This note-taking approach requires students to abbreviate terms, phrases, and ideas so that they can get as much of the debate written down as possible. Here are some tips:

- Two sheets of paper. One page will be for anything said about the affirmative, the other for anything said about the negative. Each speech in the round will receive its own column on these pages.
- At least one pen, but we recommend two, in different colors.

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- If your opponent is speaking, you should be writing (do not try and determine what is or isn't important—just get as much down as possible)
- Orient both pieces of paper vertically, as in a book. Fold (or draw lines) on the sheet of paper into 5 columns of equal width. This can be achieved by folding an initial 1.5" column from either side. Flip the paper and fold in another column to match; continue until the piece of paper has 4 folds to produce 5 columns. This is your affirmative flow.
- Fold the other sheet of paper into 4 columns of equal width. This is your negative flow.
- Label the top of each column on the affirmative flow with the names of the speeches, in chronological order from left to right.
- Label the top of each column on the negative flow with the names of the speeches, in chronological order from left to right.

Standing it Up/Practicing

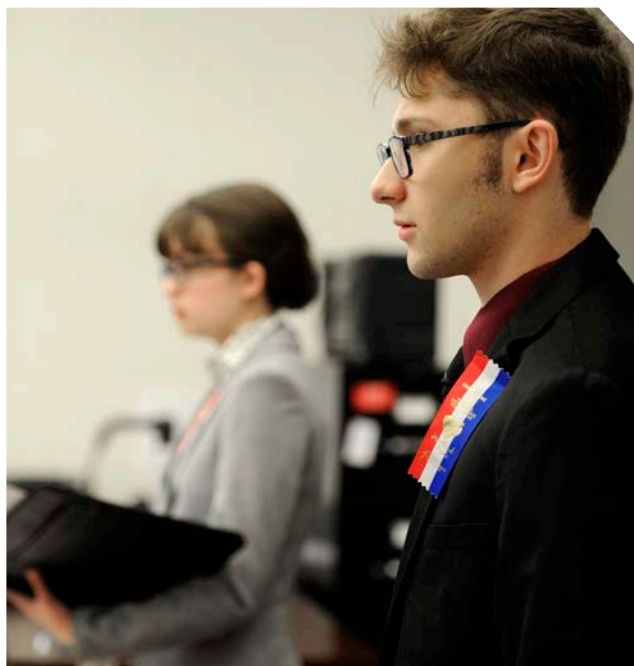
It is a great idea to do practice rounds before going to your first tournament. At first, it may seem that you do not have enough to say to fill up the speech times. However, that will change with practice. The first round could be a stop and go round where a coach or observer stops you when there's a missed opportunity or confusion about what you are saying. During these rounds, you may re-give speeches until you or the observer/coach are satisfied with the speech that is delivered. Additionally, since your cases are prepared in advance, students should spend time working on the delivery of that speech. A student should work on emphasis, eye contact, and fluidity.

Performance Tips

It is important to remember that you are communicating to your judge. The decision rests solely in the hands of the judge! You must focus on persuading them, which means that you should be directing your speeches and cross-examination questions and answers to the judge, and not to your opponent.

When at your first tournament it is important to keep in mind that it gets easier with more practice. The goal

is not about where you begin, but where you end. If you get better from round to round or tournament to tournament—you're successful. Focus not only on what you could improve upon, but also on what you did well. Celebrate what worked and try and emulate that in future rounds or tournaments. Take feedback from judges as opportunities to improve. If judges provide oral feedback, take notes on what they share to review with your coach. Finally, do not fixate on the outcome of a round—focusing on wins and losses won't lead to greater success!



Resources

The Association offers great resources to our members. These include lesson plans for introducing Lincoln-Douglas Debate to novices, recorded videos on casing, flowing, and drills, written topic analyses, research guides, a textbook, and more!

Once you join and register on our website, you can access these and other materials at www.speechanddebate.org/resources. Use the filter function on the left hand side of the page to find resources specific to Lincoln-Douglas Debate.