

Lincoln-Douglas Format and Sample Resolutions

Lincoln-Douglas debate is one person debating against another person and is primarily focused on competing values. Every two months, a resolution is selected from a list and used at tournaments held during that time period. Resolutions often take the form in which two values are pitted against each other. A classic example is the equality v. liberty resolution - "Resolved: A just social order ought to place the principle of equality above that of liberty." For this resolution, the goal of the debate should be to determine which value is of greater importance in a just social order.

Other resolutions may not be as straightforward in establishing what values are in conflict. Examples include: "Resolved: Secondary education in the United States ought to be a privilege and not a right" and "Resolved: When they are in conflict, a business' responsibility to itself ought to be valued above its responsibility to society." Through an examination of these resolutions, underlying values will emerge. Debaters then write cases (the affirmative should write a 6 minute case and the negative should write a 3 to 4 minute case) that are presented in the constructive speeches and extended in the form of spontaneous rebuttals later in the debate.

In LD, the format of the round is as follows:

- Affirmative Constructive- 6 minutes
- Cross-Examination- 3 minutes
- Negative Constructive- 7 minutes
- Cross-Examination- 3 minutes
- First Affirmative Rebuttal- 4 minutes
- Negative Rebuttal- 6 minutes
- Second Affirmative Rebuttal- 3 minutes
- Prep Time - Varies depending on the tournament

Previous Topics

1. In United States courts, victim impact statements ought to influence sentencing.

2. The precautionary principle ought to guide environmental regulations.

3. The actions of corporations ought to be held to the same moral standards as the actions of individuals.

4. On balance, violent revolution is a just response to political oppression.

5. The United States government ought to allocate humanitarian aid to foreign nations based on the need of recipients rather than its own interests.

6. A just society ought not use the death penalty as a form of punishment.

7. In the United States public university admissions, socioeconomic disadvantage ought to be a higher priority than race.

8. In the United States, the federal government ought not limit the autonomy of local school districts to determine their own curriculum.

9. The United Nations's obligation to protect global human rights ought to be valued above its obligation to respect national sovereignty.

10. On balance, in its trade agreements the United States ought to value the welfare of workers in developing countries over its economic gains.

B. Resolved: Governments ought to make economic reparations for their country's historical injustices.

D. Resolved: It is morally permissible to kill one innocent person to save the lives of more innocent people.

E. Resolved: In the United States, jury nullification is a legitimate check on government.

F. Resolved: Successor governments ought to pursue transitional justice through truth and reconciliation commissions rather than through criminal prosecution.

G. Resolved: International lenders ought to cancel the debt of highly indebted poor countries.

J. Resolved: Public health concerns justify government violation of pharmaceutical patents.

Sample Affirmative Case (Death Penalty topic)

I affirm the resolution that "A just society ought not use the death penalty as a form of punishment."

My value today is Justice. Justice is defined simply and traditionally as giving each their due. Justice within the context of today's debate can be seen as solely retributive insofar as we are discussing the just response to wrongdoing. The central question of the resolution is whether a *just* society ought implement death punishments thus justice must be the overarching value premise.

My criterion today is the happiness principle. Utilitarian in practice, the happiness principle gives you a clear mechanism to weigh different paths as well as their consequences within the context of the same end state or goal, Justice. In addition, the happiness principle is the most appropriate criterion for this debate topic. Jeremy Bentham explains "the immediate principle end of punishment is to control action," *ie* the conduct of those who are liable to a punishment if they violate the law as well as the conduct of those who are undergoing punishment after having been sentenced for a violation. Bentham further clarifies that the goal of punishment ought to be "general prevention," an end that will be achieved if and only if adequate "control" is attained. But both of these ends are penultimate. The ultimate end of penal laws is one shared with all legislation, to positively augment the total happiness of the community. Thus, in his theory, the only rational or justifiable punishments for a society to adopt are punishments that most efficiently produce the greatest happiness.

Observation 1: Resolutional Analysis

The resolution asks us to evaluate the nature of death penalty as just or otherwise. We must first look at how theoretical ideas are properly used in discussing real world occurrences. Concepts of justice and morality exist within a vacuum but when practically applied to actions must be contextualized as existing among alternatives. In other words, the morality of genocide is neutral unless it's considered within the span of less offensive and egregious forms of combat. With this view, it's seen that both sides of this debate must argue the death penalties morality/just nature etc as it compares to a comparable alternative, namely life imprisonment.

Contention 1: The death penalty consumes costly resources.

Subpoint A: From purely a financial perspective the death penalty wastes financial resources that could be used more effectively and efficiently elsewhere. "A New Jersey Policy Perspectives report concluded that the state's death penalty has cost taxpayers \$253 million since 1983, a figure that is over and above the costs that would have been incurred had the state utilized a sentence of life without parole instead of death. The study examined the costs of death penalty cases to prosecutor offices, public defender offices, courts, and correctional facilities." The report concluded "From a strictly financial perspective, it is hard to reach a conclusion other than this: New Jersey taxpayers over the last 23 years have paid more than a quarter billion dollars on a capital punishment system that has executed no one." Furthermore this is not a phenomenon for New Jersey, "according to a report released by the National Bureau of Economic Research, Counties across the US manage the high costs associated with the death penalty by decreasing funding for highways and police and by increasing taxes. The report estimates that between 1982-1997 the extra cost of capital trials was \$1.6 billion."

This evidence has two implications. First, the death penalty is using vast financial resources while rarely actually being used *ie* killing people. This speaks not only to its wastefulness but also its decreasing ability to deter future capital crimes. Second, the money that is wasted in death penalty cases could be spent in numerous other areas to increase the overall happiness of any given community. Using the happiness principle it's clear that a just society trying to increase its community's happiness wouldn't use the death penalty as a form of punishment.

Contention 2: The death penalty is not just.

Subpoint A: There is no way to correct the erroneous infliction of the death penalty. Imprisonment however can be abruptly ended as soon as there is reason to conclude that an innocent person is being punished. Furthermore, there is no way to compensate the wrongly executed person; the wrongly imprisoned person can be awarded a compensatory sum. Insofar as the happiness principle applies to all sentient beings that are able to feel happiness, imprisonment allows the greatest ability for corrective action toward greater happiness. This characteristic of imprisonment will always leave it a small amount more just and consequently yield an affirmative ballot.

Subpoint B: The execution of an individual hinders the ability of the criminal justice system to effectively administer justice. Extending Bentham's critique Hugo Bedau explains, "To the effect that executing a convicted criminal destroys one source of testimonial proof concerning other crimes, committed by the offender or by other criminals. That same criminal, however, if confined to prison may well be persuaded to divulge such information and thereby aid the cause of justice. In utilitarian terms, the usefulness of the convict to the administration of criminal justice is frustrated by the death penalty, at least by comparison with prolonged imprisonment." The implication of this evidence is overall total possible social happiness is lessened that it otherwise would be. This violates the happiness principle and warrants an affirmative ballot.

Subpoint C: The death penalty is applied at random. Politics, quality of legal counsel and the jurisdiction where a crime is committed are more often the determining factors in a death penalty case than the facts of the crime itself. The death penalty is a lethal lottery: of the 22,000 homicides committed every year approximately 150 people are sentenced to death. Such a divide in convictions and death sentences violates the equitable nature of the happiness principle by unevenly affecting the happiness of certain criminals as opposed to others. Such an application is unjust and should be rejected.

David Marquardt

Short How To

The most important thing is to throw yourself into the specifics of the topic and look for as many examples as possible. The more reading you do on the topic and the more you think about the specifics of the resolution, the more success you will have. Find out who is writing articles on each side of the topic and get familiar with those works so that you can talk about particular authors.

After you have immersed yourself in the literature of the specific topic, you need to brainstorm the values (underlying grounding—some might call them the ethics) and the value criterion (the intermediate concepts that link the ethics back to the very realization of the topic—what leads the broad principle back to the resolution?). Once you have brainstormed those lists, you should write a few paragraphs against each item on the list so that you are prepared for clash. That is what this file is intended to show. Once you feel as though you have created the platform for clash—you can contest most of the predictable arguments on either side of a resolution, THEN you need to write your cases. Sometimes you have to write your cases first because the tournament is in three days or you are debating in an hour, but usually you want to do a lot of preparation before you sit down to craft your opening.

At this point, you divide into an affirmative debater and a negative debater and you devise your cases, including an incorporation of your style, the use of evidence to prove a point, clear organization, and direct incorporation of the topic wording.

Also, from an Alabama debater's mindspring cite:

What is a Value Premise?

From all these values that arise, your first goal should be to decide on a "value premise." In some regions, debaters refer to their value premise as a core value, but the term value premise is more generally recognized. A value premise should be the ultimate value that you seek to uphold and/or achieve in the debate round. Examples include things like Justice, Morality, Social Welfare, Individual Welfare, or Liberty. Some debaters tend to use more obscure values, but sticking to the basics is generally preferable unless you have a specific goal in mind. It is important to remember that your value premise must be a VALUE, and not something else like the Social Contract which is an IDEA but not a value in and of itself. Every argument that you make in a debate round should relate to this value premise. If you cannot show how your side better achieves your value premise, then you (ideally- if you have a good judge) should lose the round. Therefore it is very important to choose a value premise wisely and never forget that your arguments should focus on it at all times.

What is a Criterion?

The next step in preparing for a new resolution is deciding on a criterion. A criterion is a way in which you can define and achieve your value premise. More specifically, it is the key to a winning a debate round. A criterion should be the mechanism by which you weigh the values at stake and ultimately come to the conclusion that your value premise is achieved. Examples of criterion include the social contract, giving each his due, protection of individual rights, etc. A criterion should not be another value such as fairness or legitimacy. Instead, it should clear up all the questions that proposing a huge, overarching, undefined value premise like Justice raises. And remember, if you want to have more than one criterion, the plural form is "CRITERIA." It is important to pay attention to little things like this so you will appear more knowledgeable.

What is a Contention?

After you have decided on a value premise and a criterion, the next important thing to do is think of two or three main arguments (preferably 2) that you feel are the most important. These should become your contentions (they are called justifications or points of analysis in some parts of the country). Contentions make up the majority of the case and all your important analysis should be in the contentions. You can add subpoints to your contentions, but it is not required, although it does make for a better case. Each contention should have at least one quote in it to back up your argument with something other than your own words, but several quotes (more than 3) is often overkill and a waste of time.

What do I do now?

After you have formulated your contentions, value premise, and criterion, the next step is to put them in case format. The ideal affirmative case should be structured as follows:

- Opening Quote - 30 seconds
- Definitions - 30 seconds
- Value Premise and Criterion explanations - 45 seconds
- First Contention - 2 minutes
- Second Contention - 2 minutes

The case should be as close to 6 minutes as possible, but allow yourself at least 10-15 seconds leeway in case you speak too slowly in a round so you don't run out of time.

The ideal negative case should be structured a little differently because of greater time constraints. In the negative constructive speech, you have 7 minutes, but you must read your own case and then attack the affirmative's case, so it is vital that you allocate your time effectively. The best negative case should be about 3:30, although it can vary between 3 and 4 minutes. The structure should be as follows:

- Opening Quote - 20-30 seconds
- Value Premise and Criterion explanations - 30 seconds
- First Contention - 1 minute 15 seconds
- Second Contention - 1 minute 15 seconds

One quick word on definitions - the affirmative should define all the key words in the resolution and the definition must be from a source of some kind (preferably Black's Law Dictionary, Webster's, or American Heritage). The negative should only define terms if the affirmative has used an abusive, unfair, or just plain wrong definition because of the time constraints.

How to Flow

Flowing is probably one of the most important things to know how to do well in LD. Flowing is simply a method of taking notes in an LD round. It consists of a series of columns and boxes where you write down your case and your opponent's case in an outline fashion.

How to Rebut Arguments

The key to LD is CLASH. In order to clash with your opponent, you must directly refute the arguments they present as well as defend your own arguments against the attacks your opponent has made on them. Because LD is a very structured and organized form of debate, your attacks and speeches must be structured as well. The easiest way to stay organized is to "go down the flow." This simply means that you attack your opponent's arguments in the order they present them. Start with the Value Premise and show how your value is more important or how your criterion better achieves their value premise. You can also show any potential contradictions between the value premise and criterion they present. If there is a contradiction, you must IMPACT this argument and show how it means they can't win the round now. There are several ways to attack or deal with value premises. They include....

- Subsuming their VP if yours is more inclusive or superior.
- Accepting their VP if yours is similar or the same and then showing how you achieve it better.
- Using both value premises (your and theirs) and achieving both.
- Point out contradictions or inconsistencies between their VP and criterion.

After you've dealt with value premises and criteria, move on to attack their contentions. Always **SIGNPOST**... i.e. tell the judge where you are on the flow and what argument you are attacking. For example, say "My opponent's first contention is _____. She states in the first subpoint that _____. This is wrong because _____." It's important that you be that blatant because your judge cannot flow the round if they don't know where you are on the flow.

There are several steps to attacking an argument. It is not simply enough to say that your opponent is wrong. You must show **WHY** the argument is flawed and then **IMPACT** this. Impacting means showing how they cannot win the value premise now because this argument is necessary for it. Without an impact, you can rarely win debate rounds against good debaters.

Time Allocation Tips

Time allocation is a very important part of LD, especially as you become more experienced and have more to say. In order to win debate rounds, it's important that you lend equal time to each of your arguments and your opponent's arguments to ensure that everything is attacked properly. I've seen many lose a debate round because

they ran out of time and didn't get to attack one of their opponent's contentions. So, it's important to take mental note of time signals and make sure you are moving along quickly enough. The hardest speech to do this is 1st Affirmative Rebuttal (1AR). You only have 4 minutes to rebuild your case and attack all of the negative's case. I recommend allocating time as follows:

- 0:00-0:30 - Attack your opponent's value premise and criterion.
- 0:30-1:15 - Attack your opponent's first contention.
- 1:15-2:00 - Attack your opponent's second contention.
- 2:00-2:15 - Touch on your own value premise if necessary.
- 2:15-3:00 - Rebuild your first contention.
- 3:00-3:45 - Rebuild your second contention.
- 3:45-4:00 - Sum up your arguments, any last minute comments.

For the negative rebuttal, time allocation is also important. Roughly 2 to 2 1/2 minutes should be spent on each case and the remaining 1-2 minutes should be spent crystallizing (summing up) the round. Don't use all of your time on the cases and then not have any time to deal with the bigger picture.

In addition, wise time allocation also should be applied to your prep time. Prep time is such a valuable commodity in LD, and how you use it can make or break the debate. During this time, you should write out your responses briefly on your flow, prepare for the next speech, and collect your thoughts. DON'T use it to go to the bathroom in the middle of a round or something... I know that sounds crazy, but I've seen people do this! Most debaters I've seen tend to use half of their prep time before each speech. At a tournament that gives 3 minutes, then an affirmative speaker would tend to use 1 1/2 before the 1AR and 1 1/2 before the 2AR. Although this is certainly fine, I tended to use a somewhat different approach. I would always use 2 minutes before the 1AR since it is the most difficult speech of the round. This was extremely helpful once I was an advanced debater, because I had to organize my 1AR speech very well to avoid running out of time, as mentioned above. The 2AR, which involves a lot of summing up, doesn't need such intense preparation, so the 1 minute left over tended to be more than enough. For the negative side, I had the opposite approach. Because the NC was already half planned (i.e. I had already written my case), I didn't need as much time to prepare for this speech. I usually used 1 minute or 1:15 for it. Because the NR is such a difficult speech (you have to defend your case, re-attack your opponent's case, and then crystallize), the remaining 1:45 or 2:00 was very helpful. Whatever you decide to do with prep time, make it work for you!

What is crystallization?

Crystallization is the term used for summing up the reasons why you have won. Debaters should make up several points (usually 3) that they have been winning throughout the debate and show why they are winning these points and then MOST IMPORTANTLY... why these points are so important to the big picture. This means that you should IMPACT the points to your value premise and show that because of them, you win the value premises and the round. If you simply list arguments that you've won, no judge is going to be convinced.

Because the crystallization points are ARGUMENTS and will ultimately all tie in with the value premise, my personal philosophy is that the value premise should NOT be a crystallization point. The value premise isn't an independent entity in the round - it should be connected to everything you say, so it's odd and rather pointless to try to make it independent when crystallizing. A lot of debaters tend to make the VP a point, especially when they are novices or don't have a coach. If you watch final rounds at any national tournament (Emory, Bronx, Wake Forest, Stanford) however, notice that virtually none of these debaters will do this, so that should be all the convincing you need.

Crystallization should be done at the end of the debater's last speech. For the negative, this means at the end of the NR and at least 1 minute (if not 2) should be allocated for crystallization. The affirmative should spend almost all of the 1AR's 3 minute time for crystallization. Keep in mind if you are negative, that the affirmative will have 3 minutes to do what you must do in 1 or 2, so make your crystallization count. Don't forget, crystallization is always a must for a debater... if you don't sum up why you have won the round for the judge, why should any judge take the time to have to do it for you? It's your responsibility to make it crystal clear...

Quick “How To” Guide to the Speeches

1AC (first Affirmative Constructive) – 7 minutes

A good introduction that attracts the audience’s attention and interest in the topic
Clearly state the resolution
Clearly state each of your contentions
Support with reason and evidence
Conclude effectively

Cross Ex of the Aff by the Neg – 3 minutes

You ask questions – have a strategy or at the very least a direction to your questioning
Be courteous
Face the audience

1NC (first Negative Constructive) – 8 minutes

A good introduction that attracts the audience’s attention Clearly state the Negative’s position on the topic
Clearly state the Negative’s Observations
Support with reason and evidence
Attack and question the Affirmative’s Contentions/evidence
Conclude effectively

Cross Ex of the Neg by the Aff – 3 minutes

You ask questions – have a strategy or at the very least a direction to your questioning
Face the audience

Rebuttal Speeches – No new arguments are allowed – new evidence, analysis is ok

1AR (first Affirmative Rebuttal) - 4 minutes

Respond to the Neg Observations – show how they are not as strong/relevant as the Aff Contentions
Rebuild the Aff case

NR (Negative Rebuttal) – 7 minutes

Respond to latest Affirmative arguments
Make your final case to the audience that the Neg position is superior to the Aff
Try and convince the audience the Aff has failed to carry the burden of proof
Summarize the debate and conclude effectively and ask for the audience to agree with the Neg position

2AR (second Affirmative Rebuttal) – 4 minutes

Respond to final Negative arguments
Summarize the debate and show the audience how the Aff position is superior – and the Aff has carried the burden of proof
Conclude effectively.

From Wikipedia (fairly helpful): http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lincoln%E2%80%93Douglas_debate

Cases are logical syllogisms that attempt to prove the resolution true/false or the desirability/undesirability of a side. The typical (though not mandated) case is divided into a framework, which outlines the conditions for discussing the resolution, and contentions. The most essential part of the framework is the value structure, which is composed of an ultimate value (often called the value premise) that the case attempts to demonstrate the resolitional action achieves/is in accordance with, and a value criterion (also called the standard), which is a way to attain or quantify the nebulous value. In most modern NFL resolutions, the value is inherent in the resolution, e.g. "Resolved: A just government should provide health care to its citizens" or "Resolved: A victim’s deliberate use of deadly force is a just response to repeated domestic violence". In both cases, the value would be justice or some essentially identical variant because the resolution is asking whether taking a certain action would conform to that principle. Justice is by far the most common value due to its inclusion in many resolutions, though sometimes morality, social welfare, or other values may be more suitable. The framework also may contain definitions for purposes of clarity and/or excluding certain lines of argumentation, and

preemptions/"spikes" that attempt to preclude certain arguments that one's opponent is expected to make. A narrow definition can be a spike. The contention(s), of which this type of case must have at least one, links the resolution to the value structure. A proper contention necessarily has a claim, which summarizes the argument, at least one warrant, which is a reason the claim is true, and an impact, which explains the importance of the argument—or specifically why this argument meets the value criterion.

For example, a negative case for the resolution "Resolved: A just society ought not use the death penalty as form of punishment" could have a value of justice, a value criterion of crime deterrence, and then contentions that demonstrate that the death penalty serves as a uniquely powerful deterrent (which would require statistical and possibly psychological evidence.) An affirmative case could have a value of justice, a criterion of respecting human worth, and contentions arguing that killing human beings is inhumane for any reason regardless of their actions. It could also argue that all presently available methods of execution are inhumane (lethal injection is believed to be physically painful and psychologically traumatizing, while hanging, electrocution, and gassing certainly are). The debaters would then argue whether practical crime deterrence or adherence to the principle of human worth is more important to justice, and if each other's contentions sufficiently meet even their own value criterion. (The value is not usually contested anymore, since both debaters generally share similar ones.)

Other, less frequently used case structures include the narrative, an anecdotal or non-fiction account designed to appeal to the judge's emotions with a framework explaining why emotional reaction is important; resolitional kritik, which argues that a fundamental assumption of the resolution is flawed/offensive and thus it can't/shouldn't be debated or proven true; and discourse kritik, which argues that the effects of an action one's opponent has taken during or in relation to the round should outweigh consideration of the resolution. An example of a common discourse kritik is a gendered language kritik, which could be used if an opponent's case has been written exclusively containing the male pronoun. Much more rare are the irony case and the major/minor premise case. All these types of cases are extremely controversial, and many judges, especially those unexperienced with debate or whom consider themselves to be "traditional", will simply refuse to evaluate them. The only type of case that is virtually universally accepted is the value/value criterion/contention structure, and even that has its detractors.

Recently, methods of winning the round have become prominent that cannot be classified as true cases, because they are used as a semi-independent part of or in addition to the case proper, and do not advocate an extensively developed position. These include the "a priori" or "prima facie" argument which attempt to demonstrate that the resolution is true/false outside of the typical syllogistic model, most commonly by collapsing it into a tautology or presenting some reason why it's nonsensical. "Theory" debate, which says that an opponent's argument or style of argumentation (e.g. talking too fast or interpreting the resolution in a certain way) is unfair or uneducational and explains why fairness or educational considerations supersedes the resolitional evaluation, has also proliferated. Like atypical cases, the merit of these types of arguments is heatedly contested, although theory is becoming very common.

Resolved: Justice requires the recognition of animal rights.

Why do we care about animals?

How do we define "animal?"

Which animals would have rights?

Which rights would these animals have?

Where do rights come from?