

# HOW TO JUDGE LINCOLN- DOUGLAS DEBATE

## Judging in a nutshell

- Personal prejudices of the judge on the topic are to be set aside.
- The best argument wins, not the best sounding speaker -- this is a debate, not an interpretive event.
- You are the judge. The debaters' job is to convince you. If a debater is too esoteric, or too fast, or too complicated, it is the debater who doesn't know what he or she is doing, not the judge.
- Points -- on a scale of 0-30): 29-30 (grade point A) Excellent; 28 (grade point B) Good; 27 (grade point C) Average; 26 (grade point D) Improve. It is only acceptable to give fewer points than these in instances of improper behavior (which must be noted on the ballot). More specific numbers will be on the ballot, for you to use as you gain judging experience.
- Write constructive ballots. Give reasons for decisions based on the round ("aff's value of justice outweighed neg's value of home-cooking" or "aff dropped the argument about individual rights") rather than vague generalities ("aff was the better speaker" or "neg was more persuasive.")
- Here's a good way to make a decision when you're starting out. Ask yourself after a round, If I had to do what the resolution asks in the Real World right now, which way would I go, based on what I just heard?

# HOW TO JUDGE

## LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATE

### Judging out of a nutshell

Since schools occasionally need to enlist parents and friends as LD judges, we've put together this guide to explain what LD is all about. In this brief guide we'll explain LD, discuss the mechanics of a round, explain what to do as a judge, how to pick a winner, and how to prepare a ballot.

#### **What is LD**

Lincoln-Douglas is a one-on-one debate between two people affirming and negating a resolution. The resolutions change roughly every two months, and the topics usually boil down to is a conflict between the rights of one individual or group of individuals measured against the rights of some other individual or group, or, is a certain action right or wrong (i.e., moral). What the debaters offer in their cases is the greatest inherent value of either the affirmative or negative; they defend that value on their side, while attacking their opponent's value. And the thing is, there's no objectively right answer, which makes the topics eminently arguable. In any tournament, the debaters are required to argue both sides of the resolution; the point is to be persuasive on either side, by acquiring and demonstrating the skills of reasoned argument.

#### **What to do as a judge**

Prior to a round, schematics will be distributed, usually electronically, listing the names of the debaters, who's judging them, and where. In the non-virtual world, 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 at least they're both usually in the same room. In the virtual world, a round usually consists of just one debate/flight. If you are assigned a ballot, go to the correct room—a virtual room in the covid world, an actual room otherwise—where as judge you should find the most comfortable seat available, excluding the teacher's desk -- teachers are more territorial than grizzly bears, and any hint of disturbance at a teacher's desk can set the National Speech and Debate League back a hundred years. The debaters will logically take places where you can get a good look at them. Then everyone does a little bookkeeping. The debaters pre-flow, i.e., get organized (which will always make you wonder why they waited

until the last minute, especially if it's B flight and they've been camped outside your door for the last forty-five minutes). What the judge should do is prepare a pad to flow the coming argument, or if you're adept enough, an Excel or Word sheet. Flow? The thing is, you've got to take notes if you really want to track what's going on, and what's going on in debate parlance is "the flow" -- the flow of the arguments, the flow of the debate. If possible, get someone to show you an example: there are different ways of doing it, and you'll find one right for you. Mostly it's just taking notes in such a way that you can align the contentions with the refutations and compare what was said by whom.

When the debate begins, the students will usually time one another, and in tabroom, a timing clock is doing the countdown, so there's not much to worry about there. Aside from casually watching the timing, the judge is under no obligation to utter a word during the round. In fact, conversation with the debaters is discouraged until after your ballot is entered. Depending on the tournament, there is usually no requirement to disclose your decision to the debaters, and in fact, in the NYCFL, disclosure is against the rules. Whatever you do, do not get involved in yet another debate after the round is theoretically over! The judge's word is law. Make sure you don't end up starting up the argument again. (Some debaters never give up; this is a failing on their part which should be reported to their coaches -- they should know better.)

As soon as the debate is over, you should enter your decision as quickly as possible so that the tab room can keep the tournament moving. You have until the end of the tournament to enter any comments; the recommendation is to enter your decision and points immediately, and as soon as you can after that, while the debate is still fresh in your mind, enter your comments. Do stay in the room, real or virtual, until you have entered your decision. You could hold up an entire tournament if you keep to yourself and run off somewhere private where no one can find you while you struggle with ballot-writing. We need your decision, and we need it right away. What we don't need is your reasons for the decision; they can wait.

### **Going the distance**

If you commit to judging at a tournament, you must follow the rules of attendance. These are essentially "debate etiquette," and they are all-important in presenting the team you represent as concerned and competent.

**NYCFLs:** CFLs are over at the end of the award ceremony. It is not acceptable to leave before awards, even if you feel that your team is unlikely to be in the running for any. Award ceremonies exist to acknowledge one's fellow competitors, and at these events are especially encouraging to younger students, while also building a sense of community. Yes, debate takes all day. It's worth it

for your students. If you have other plans for dinner, get someone else to either do the judging that day, or do the dinner-eating.

**Invitationals:** Invitationals usually expect that you stay until one round after your team is eliminated; this is usually the only way there are enough judges for the later rounds.

**States, NFL qualifiers, some others (including some colleges):** Some tournaments have specific rules that require you to stay for the entire tournament regardless of your team's success. Accepting their invitation implies accepting these rules. The New York State Finals is such a tournament; so is NYS Districts. There could be others. Know in advance what the rules are; not only could you embarrass your team, but you could incur deep fines (at NYSFL, for instance, the fine for leaving early is \$200 per judge).

### **The mechanics of LD**

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

- 1) **The affirmative constructive (AC -- 6 minutes).** First up is the affirmative side, for a six minute speech. Often the aff will begin with a quotation or summary statement, then perhaps some definitions of key terms in the resolution, and perhaps an observation or two setting some boundaries to the discussion. The aff will then usually declare a value that he or she is going to defend, and perhaps a criterion through which to measure that value (we'll explain that later). Then the aff will then go into its contentions, which are the meat of the argument: these are usually two or three areas of analysis explaining the affirmative position detail.
- 2) **Cross-examination by negative (CX -- 3 minutes).** At the conclusion of the AC, the negative debater will directly question the affirmative for three minutes. There are no boundaries on CX, short of abusing your opponent; 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 -- 7 minutes).** Next up (after a couple of minutes preparation time) is the neg to make the opposing argument. Again, we'll probably start with a quote or summary statement, then perhaps new 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, which may be the same or different from aff's. Next neg argues, as did aff, with two or three contentions, this time against the resolution (contentions, by the way, are also sometimes referred to as lines of analysis). When the neg is

finished its contentions, neg then goes on to refute the aff case, point by point. In other words, now, in the same speech, the debating begins as neg attacks aff's contentions.

4) **Cross-examination by the affirmative (CX -- 3 minutes).** 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 -- 4 minutes).** 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. It can get hectic, but it's one of the high points of the debate.

6) **Negative rebuttal (NR -- 6 minutes).** 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 or "crystallize" the round at the conclusion of the NR, urging you to deliver a negative ballot.

7) **The second affirmative rebuttal (2AR --3 minutes).** To make up for the apparent time imbalance, aff gets the last word in the 2AR. Aff usually uses the time to summarize the round, crystallizing the key voting points and, of course, urging an affirmative ballot.

8) Note that both sides do have an allotment of **preparation time**, usually a total of four minutes, which they will usually use prior to making their rebuttal speeches (although once in a blue moon a kid uses prep before a cx).

## **Speed**

As a rule, judges wishing to do so can call for slower speaking without initial penalty to the competitors in the round. Before the round starts, judges should tell debaters if they want a moderate speaking speed. It is no crime to advise the students that you are new, and that they should adapt accordingly. During the round, a judge may call out "Speed!" if a debater is talking too fast. The debater should slow down, without penalty. A second "Speed!" can be called if the debater is still speaking too quickly, still without penalty. After a third call of "Speed!" however, it is acceptable for the judge to adjust speaker points, or even award a loss. If you can't understand what they're saying, how can you judge it? Of course, if the judge doesn't mind speed, this policy doesn't prevent it.

### **What to look for in a debate round in order to pick a winner**

Choosing in favor of a debater is called picking them up. Choosing against them is called dropping them. Regardless of your abilities as a judge, debaters you pick up will consider you an expert (provided your allotment of speaker points is commensurate with their normal expectations -- we'll discuss speaker points later), while the debaters you drop will suspect that their pet ferret could have done a better job than you have. But that's to be expected. They'd feel exactly the same way if you'd been doing this for 50 years and were the president of the NSDA.

Obviously, the person who makes the best argument wins. If the subject is one on which you have a personal opinion (for example, the death penalty), it is still the person who makes the best argument in that round, and not what you happen to believe yourself. Of course, usually the resolutions are so broad that either side could win, so you won't have to worry about your own prejudices.

**Crystallization points.** Often debaters wind up by offering crystallization points, or voting issues, at the end of their last speeches. These are the aspects of their side of the case that the debaters claim to have won. It is a good idea to use these voting issues as your own issues when making a decision. Of course, you may not agree that the debater won a point that he or she claims he won, and you may rank the importance of the issues differently than the debaters, but that's precisely why you earn the big bucks. Newer debaters don't often use crystallization points, but more seasoned varsity debaters usually are adept at this part of the presentation, which is very helpful to any judge, no matter how experienced.

**Values.** Each debater should uphold his value, if he or she has one. (NOTE: There is no rule that a debater must have a value per se—it's an old-time approach). If the value is justice for both sides, for instance, which case ultimately came across as the most just? If the values are different for the two sides, say justice for aff and individual rights for neg, you have to measure which value applies better to the resolution after you've heard their arguments. Which debater convinced you that he or she best supports his or her value? If it's equal, which proved to have the "higher" -- more important -- value?

**Criteria.** If a debater establishes a criterion for a case, you should use this criterion to measure the value. A good analogy in understanding 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 speed and fashionability and fun, you might opt for a sports car, while if you want spaciousness and safety for a family you might opt for a minivan. The end result is still a car, and 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. However, as with values, there is no "rule" that a debater must have a criterion (despite what some debaters might say to you during the round).

**Style.** LD debate is not an event where the style of speech comes into play, so it is not the best orator that wins but the best debater. You do not vote for the debater who sounds the best; it is what they say that is important. That's why you have to listen carefully and take notes. There has to be a clash, and someone has to win it. Essentially, each side defends two or three contentions of his or her own, and replies to the opponent's two or three contentions. The best arguments are the ones that you found the most logically compelling. It's as simple as that. Some arguments might sound entirely ridiculous to you. That means that, as far as the judge in this round is concerned, an argument is indeed ridiculous. YOU ARE THE JUDGE. Be open to what they're saying, but don't turn off your brain, only your prejudices. You want to be an impartial evaluator of their debating. Who outdebated whom?

**Interventionist vs. noninterventionist judges.** An interventionist judge applies some of his or her own thinking on a topic, while a noninterventionist judge only evaluates what is said by the debaters. This is not as simple as it sounds. If a debater argues something that you know is wrong, but the opponent doesn't know it, and concedes it, you would not want to intervene and give the point to the opponent who misguidedly conceded it. Similarly, if you hear a contention and can think of a great argument against it, but the opponent instead comes up with a pretty lousy argument, you have to follow what was actually said rather than what should have been said. That is simple nonintervention, and this is what you should be trying to do.

**Drops.** Intervention gets more complex, and more controversial, with the issue of drops. We're now talking about the "game" of debate, with rules, albeit tacit, to conduct that game. As you go down the flow 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 responds to it. That means that the second debater has dropped flying cows. If the original debater stands up in the next speech and points out the drop to the judge, I would suggest that this 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, if the opponent drops it. Having a point stand in this way is just as good as proving through argumentation that cows have wings. Anything the opponent subsequently says to this point after dropping it is unacceptable. However, if the point is dropped

and the original debater does not cite the drop, then it just disappears as an issue from the round. This happens all the time. Neither debater can bring up that subject again. If either of them do, all that discussion is wasted, because once a point has been dropped, it cannot be revived. That's the game of drops. We're not saying a round should be won or lost on flying cows, but simply that this is how dropping points does work. 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. The interventionist issue can be very sticky here. Usually dropped points are good points, but what if the dropped point is indeed that cows have wings? Use your judgment here. If the dropper made all good arguments and dropped some small stuff, go that way. If the round is close, and you need to evaluate on drops and extension, you just have to do it. I hate to think that a debater can win by responding to everything that is said, without having good arguments. Good arguments should win. That should be what debating is all about.

One last thing about drops. The 1AR is that four-minute rebuttal by affirmative, where everything has to be covered in a short amount of time. This is the place where it may appear that an aff is dropping issues, but keep in mind the reality of the time pressure. No matter how fast the aff speaks, he can't have that much depth of analysis, and there's going to be tradeoffs in both directions. The aff should cover the main points of the contentions, or perhaps group similar ideas together, but when the neg has 112 bitsy little subpoints all the aff has to do is address the meat, not every little detail.

**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 round. This is perfectly acceptable in LD and completely clarifies your job as a judge. You will now give the round to whomever does best what the two debaters agreed had to be done.

**Summary.** In the final analysis, you are the judge and what you say goes. Sometimes a round will be easy, when two opponents are mismatched and one clearly takes it from the other. In closer rounds, one little dropped point may make the difference. And in the best rounds, with equal opponents, you will simply listen to what they both have to say and award the win to the side that convinced you better that he or she was right. We offer this possibility for helping make a decision: think of the resolution (banning capital punishment, spending money on X versus Y, doing this or doing that). After you've heard the debate, if you had to immediately take the action described by the resolution, which way would you go? If you can clearly see a path of action as a result of what you've just heard, the person who offered that path must needs have won the round. It won't always happen, but if it does, go with it.

## **How to prepare a ballot**

There are two parts to the ballot. There's picking the winner and loser and assigning them speaker points, and there's writing up the reasons for your decisions.

Speaker points, as noted above, are awarded on a scale of 0-30, although in reality it's more like 25-30, with tenths of points available for shadings. Basically think of it like this: 29-30 (grade point A) Excellent; 28 (grade point B) Good; 27 (grade point C) Average; 26 (grade point D) Improve. It is only acceptable to give fewer points than these in instances of improper behavior (which must be noted on the ballot). More specific numbers, broken down in tenths, will be on the ballot, for you to use as you gain judging experience, but you can go much broader when you're starting out at CFLs. If you happen to judge an elimination round, by the way, speaker points are not necessary, as only the issue of winning or losing is important now.

If you're worried about speaker points, it is better to err on the side of generosity. Giving a couple of extra points to a lesser debater won't hurt anybody, and will make the lesser debater feel good. Giving undeservedly low points to a solid debater, however, may be enough of a difference for them that day to lose a trophy. NOTE: Fewer points may be given in situations where a debater's behavior in a round was improper. This must be noted clearly on the ballot; the coach will want to know about it, and act on it.

Writing up the reasons for your ballot is not an easy business. There are as many different styles of ballots as there are judges. Whatever you want to say is fine, but certainly more is better than less. In the case of newer debaters, anything you say to both of them will help them improve in the future. But be constructive: these are kids, after all: you want to give them tips for improvement, not traumas that will eventually turn them into serial killers. In the case of more experienced debaters, your decision will probably be pretty complicated and boil down to one or two debating issues from the round. Here you might try to recapitulate what you heard and the way you heard it, compare the arguments, and say what it worked or didn't work because whatever. It's up to you. The biggest thing to keep in mind is that these ballots are torn into after a debate like they're the Dead Sea scrolls. Be fair, clear and constructive.

# Glossary

We've covered some of these terms already. Others are rare or special, but worth knowing about if they pop up.

**cross-apply** Cross-applying an argument means taking an argument made against one argument, and applying it to another argument. "What I said before about X? Apply it to Y." This allows debaters not to have to repeat the argument and give up valuable time on it. It can also be confusing to a judge. If you get confused by it, it's the debater's fault, not yours. (And rest assured that, if you've gotten confused by it, then the cross-application was probably erroneous.)

**drop** A dropped argument is an argument that one debater makes, and the other debater does not cover

**extend** Extending an argument means, essentially, "What I said before about this? Apply it again."

**flow** Take notes during a round. Past tense: **flowed**

**impact** This is often used as a verb, to impact a statement. Impacting meets showing the point of one's contention, usually relating back to the value/criterion

**intervention** Judge intervention means doing work that the debaters have not done themselves. It is not a good way to judge. All you have is what the debaters said. Just go with that.

**kritik** A critique, known in debater circles as a kritik or K, is a case that claims that there is an inherent flaw in the resolution, and argues not a side of the resolution (usually the negative) but against the resolution per se, and therefore against the opponent who implicitly accepted the flawed resolution. A performative kritik is the literal acting out of the reasons why the resolution is flawed. You will most likely only come up against these at the highest levels of competition, or at least those contenders who fancy themselves high level, i.e., national circuit debaters.

**national circuit** A small number of tournaments around the country award entry qualifications to the annual Tournament of Champions in Kentucky. Debaters with the funds and talent to do so travel to these tournaments, often halfway or completely across the country, and often on a weekly basis. The tournaments with these TOC bids are considered the national circuit. Debaters who attend

these tournaments week after week are called national-circuit, or just circuit, debaters. And boy, do they have a high opinion of themselves!

**non-unique** An argument is non-unique when it could be made for either side. It's not that it's an irrelevant argument, merely that it's not specific to one side of the argument.

**paradigm** Debaters will often ask a judge, before a round, what their paradigm is. This means, what exactly does the judge believe about LD that the debater ought to know. If you do have a paradigm, that probably means you've been doing LD for years, so feel free to offer it. If you don't have a paradigm, well, that's a paradigm too: it says that you're a relatively new judge with a lot of intelligence and a dedication to supporting your debate team who wants debaters to debate in such a way that you can follow what they're talking about. Debaters, if they're any good, will accept that and act accordingly. At many invitationals, all the judges are required to post a paradigm on tabroom.com. If it comes to that, your coach can help you put something together.

**pick up/drop** To pick up a debater is to award them a win; to drop them is to award them a loss

**pre-flow** Pre-flowing is what debaters do before a round. They write down their arguments on their flow devices, so that when the debate begins, they can flow their opponent's arguments on those lines. This sort of went out with the advent of computers in rounds, but you never know.

**pull across** Pulling across an argument is what you do when an argument was dropped. That is, one debater makes an argument, and the second debater doesn't respond. The first debater then asks you to pull across his original argument. The first debater should also impact the argument at this point; that is, show you why it's important and why it shouldn't have been dropped. Just saying it was dropped isn't enough.

**schematics** The sheets issued by the tabroom showing who is debating whom, who is judging, and where. Nowadays these are usually simply posted online.

**standard(s)** This is usually referred to as "the standard for the round," and is really just another way of talking about values/criteria. The standard is the way we can determine which side wins; if the standard for the round is, say, individual rights protection, the side that protects the most individual rights, wins. Often there is an argument which side's standard to use, as there may be an argument which side's criterion/value to use. It is up to the judge to make this determination. Go the way that makes the most sense to you, if the sides cannot agree on a standard.

**turn** To turn an argument means to take an argument made against you, and turn it against the other debater. This is a rather complicated and rare occurrence, but you will often find debaters claiming they are turning everything that isn't nailed. Not so. A turn is rare, and should be rather startling. If it is successful, it not only renders the argument moot against the turner, but allows the turner to claim the argument as his or her own. Powerful stuff. That's why it's rare, and why people are always claiming that they're doing it.

**value/criterion** The value is the reason you're making an argument: "I'm going affirmative because I believe it is more just/moral/whatever." The just/moral/whatever is the value. "I'll show that it is more just/moral/ whatever through this process or weighing mechanism." The process of weighing mechanism is the criterion. For example: "My value is justice; my criterion is access to information." The case will show how this side gets more access to information, and the debater will also show how this access leads to justice.