

*The Ultimate Lincoln-Douglas  
Debate Handbook*

*Third Edition*

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# *Introduction*

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## WHY I WROTE THIS HANDBOOK (AND WHY YOU SHOULD READ IT)

Lincoln-Douglas debate is a high school activity like no other. The skills it can teach you will be useful in any path of life you choose to take. Communication, presentation ability, research experience and the knack for analyzing an argument are characteristics found in great doctors, lawyers, businessmen, teachers, engineers, writers and scores of other professions. The reason why debate probably looks better on a college transcript than any other activity is that it aims to teach you skills that have undisputable value in the modern society. Great communicators with a keen analytical capability are always of use.

But there is a flip side to this coin. Lincoln-Douglas debate is a tough form of debate to master. Learning all these skills isn't easy and can often be overwhelming. To truly excel in debate requires a time commitment equivalent to lettering in a varsity sport. If you expect to gain the aforementioned skills from being a debater you should be prepared to invest some time and energy into the activity. You'll have to do research on your own, spar with your classmates in practice rounds and re-examine your ideas on a regular basis. As much as this is a cliché, it is true – debate is an activity that rewards you based upon how much you put into it.

Deep inside, you probably know this already. You would not expect to become a standout quarterback by skipping practice and only playing on Friday nights. It's the same with debate – if you want to be able to demonstrate to your teachers, friends, parents, and college admission committees that you actually learned something while participating in high school debate, you'll have to put some serious work into becoming a good debater. But this doesn't mean that you can't have fun. If anything, debate tournaments are more fun when you see yourself winning and learning at the same time. And that's why I wrote this handbook – to show you how to maximize the overall value of your debate experience and help you become not just a formidable Lincoln-Douglas debater but a keener observer and better researcher. I focus heavily on teaching you the underlying fundamentals of successful argumentation: preparation through research. This handbook will first teach you how to properly conduct research and then show you how to apply the information you find to Lincoln-Douglas debate. In the process, you will pick up skills that will be useful to you far beyond the weekend tournaments.

Coaches should know that I wrote this book to aid debaters of all levels, from novices to TOC qualifiers. If you are a beginner this book shows you how to start off on the right foot. If you are a

varsity debater this handbook takes you back to the basics and allows you to hone and re-evaluate your approach to the activity. To this end, I made the handbook as jargon-free as possible. The greatest value of L-D Debate is its potential to teach you how to be a better communicator – how to express complex ideas in a way that is understandable to both bus drivers and college professors.

And everyone should know that this handbook is free. The only bottom line here is my interest in teaching you a useful way of approaching some fundamental dilemmas of our time. In many ways, this handbook is not even about L-D debate – my main satisfaction comes from knowing that if you take the time to read this book in its entirety and follow its advice you will emerge as a better debater, a savvy consumer and a more aware citizen. Thus, the time you put into reading and absorbing the information in this handbook is one of the most high-yielding investments you will ever make.

The layout of the book is as follows: Chapter One serves as a brief introduction to the activity for novice debaters. Chapters Two through Four focus on the research process and provide a clear outline for how to find the underlying puzzle of a resolution and locate the information that will later serve as the foundation of the case. The strategies contained in these chapters are the bedrock of solid social inquiry and can be easily applied to virtually any other research project. Chapters Five and Six discuss the process of building a case. Chapter Seven contains a speech-by-speech analysis of an L-D round and Chapter Eight presents the myriad strategies that will help debaters get the most out of the activity. Although each of the book's sections can be used as a stand-alone set of lessons, these eight chapters should be read as a packaged prescription on how to get the most out of L-D debate.

Finally, I owe many thanks to several individuals who made the writing of this handbook possible. My high school debate coach Andrew West of Myers Park High School convinced me to attend a debate tournament during my sophomore year and I was instantly hooked. But more than that, Mr. West was one of the kindest and most charming teachers I ever had. His ability to cheer up his students and his dedication to the activity were always soothing proof that there are good-natured people in this world. Mr. West has received a number of "Coach of the Year" awards from the Tarheel Forensic League and deserves every single one of them. Jason Baldwin's comments on the first edition of the handbook were eye-opening enough to make me realize that there was a great need for subsequent editions. Reading his columns in the *Rostrum* and listening to his oral critiques on the few judge panels we shared were all valuable learning experiences as well. Acknowledgements are also in order for one of my closest friends, Allison Pickett. You might know her as the 1998 NFL Nationals LD champion and lecturer at the Iowa Summer Institute. I know her as the most rational, lucid and perceptive individual I have ever met and an absolute joy to talk to. And although I only had a number of brief interactions with Ms. Marilee Dukes I had a chance to witness the way she ran her debate program at Vestavia High School. Time after time I judged her students and was always impressed with the solid grounding they had received in the fundamentals of debate.

The opinions and advice contained in this handbook are solely mine. If there are serious oversights, incomplete analyses or factually incorrect statements I hope that you will point them out to me.

Marko Djuranovic  
New York City  
July 2003

# Chapter One

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## L - D DEBATE : HISTORY AND OVERVIEW

Lincoln-Douglas as you know it is a one-on-one debate that was introduced to National Forensic League tournaments in 1981 as a complement event to Policy (CX) debate. This new event aimed to be different in two important respects. First, instead of charging the affirmative with the overall burden of proof and the task of proposing a specific plan for the negative to counter, L-D debaters would be asked to present opposing viewpoints on the truth of some statement of import. The burden of proof was to be shared equally by the affirmative and the negative. Second, the issues in question moved away from specific policy proposals toward broader questions of the way things ought to be. The aim was to get students make persuasive arguments about adopting a certain set of values rather than rely on straightforward counting of harms/benefits commonly found in Policy debate. So while Policy debate continued to focus on factual evidence and expert testimony, Lincoln-Douglas debate asked students to explore arguments about abstract concepts, standards of behavior and competing visions of what kind of a world we should strive to create.

The name “Lincoln-Douglas” comes from a series of recorded historical debates that took place between Stephen Douglas and Abraham Lincoln in 1858. This name was chosen on purpose. Lincoln and Douglas debated the issue of slavery and its extension into the Western Territories and both presented many value-based arguments. While Douglas championed the idea of popular sovereignty – that the inhabitants of the region in question should be allowed to decide for themselves whether to allow slavery – Lincoln argued that slavery was morally wrong and, as such, should be outlawed. But this is where the comparison ends. The original Lincoln-Douglas debates looked nothing like what one will witness at a tournament today; the speeches were long and the crowd actively participated in the debate by shouting in agreement with the speakers. It was not uncommon to hear someone shout, “Tell ‘em Abe” during a speech. But the debates’ underlying purpose – a frank discussion of values that underlie many controversial issues of the day – has remained intact through the decades.

### ***Basic Structure***

A Lincoln-Douglas debate is commonly referred to as a *round*. It features two high school debaters who take up opposing positions on a pre-determined *resolution*, a carefully worded central topic that debaters either affirm or negate in a given round. A Lincoln-Douglas debate round thus consists of one debater, the affirmative, arguing for the truth of this statement while the other debater, the negative,

argues that it is false. During a tournament debaters can count on having to argue for each side of the resolution several times. And to keep everyone from being bored, resolutions in the National Forensic League switch every two months during the school year. Thus, each year you can look forward to debating four resolutions, plus a bonus one if you are fortunate enough to qualify for NFL Nationals in June (but let's not get ahead of ourselves here).

More to the point, **L-D debate resolutions are statements that either explicitly assert or strongly imply conflict between two competing courses of action.** Here are two examples resolutions: “Resolved: When in conflict, a business' responsibility to itself ought to be valued above its responsibility to society” and “Resolved: The United States has a moral obligation to mitigate international conflicts.” The first topic tells you exactly the two opposing courses of action while the second topic implies a general conflict between interventionism and isolationism. You will learn how to spot this underlying conflict and identify the opposing courses of action in later chapters.

The actual debate on the resolution takes place in front of either a single judge or a panel of judges in a series of timed speeches and breaks. An L-D round looks like this:

- Affirmative Constructive – (6 minutes) – The Affirmative starts the debate by presenting a prepared speech that outlines the basic tenets of her position.
- Cross Examination by the Negative – (3 minutes) – This the Negative's opportunity to pose questions and have them answered by the Affirmative.
- Negative's 1<sup>st</sup> Preparation Time – (3 – 5 minutes, varies by tournament) – The Negative collects his thoughts and prepares for the upcoming speech.
- Negative Constructive – (7 minutes) – The Negative usually presents his prepared speech in which he outlines why he disagrees with the resolution and responds to the Affirmative's speech by pointing out his reasons for disagreement.
- Cross Examination by the Affirmative – (3 minutes) – The Affirmative now has the opportunity to pose questions and have them answered by the Negative.
- Affirmative 1<sup>st</sup> Preparation Time – (3 – 5 minutes, varies by tournament) – The Affirmative collects her thoughts and prepares for the upcoming speech.
- 1<sup>st</sup> Affirmative Rebuttal – (4 minutes) The Affirmative responds to the points raised in the Negative's prepared speech and defends her case by addressing the criticisms levied by the Negative.
- Negative's 2<sup>nd</sup> Preparation Time – (whatever time remains from the 1<sup>st</sup> segment)
- Negative Rebuttal – (6 minutes) – The Negative's last speech. The Negative responds to the Affirmative's latest round of arguments and offers his summary of the round and why he believes he should win.
- Affirmative's 2<sup>nd</sup> Preparation Time – (whatever time remains from the 1<sup>st</sup> segment)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Affirmative Rebuttal – (3 minutes) – The Affirmative's last speech. She comments on what she sees as the most important issues of the round and in the process reiterates why she deserves to win the round.

As you can see, a Lincoln-Douglas Debate round lasts anywhere from 38 to 42 minutes. If the debate takes place at a tournament, at the conclusion of the round the students leave the classroom and the judge fills out the *ballot* – a sheet of paper the judge uses to mark the winner of the round and (hopefully) explain why the winner won. The judge also assigns *speaker points* to designate each

student's overall presentation style and communication ability in the round. Most judges do not disclose the winner of the round while the debaters are still in the room.

At the conclusion of the tournament's preliminary rounds the debaters with the best records (highest number of wins) advance to single-elimination competition that eventually results in a final round to determine the tournament champion. When a number of debaters have the same record, the speaker points total is used as a tiebreaker. Most tournaments end with an awards ceremony where the participants of the elimination rounds receive trophies.

***Policy Debate vs. Lincoln-Douglas Debate***

There is much confusion over what differentiates value-based debate from policy-based debate. The best way to illustrate the differences between these two types of debate is to look at their resolutions. Although they often address the same issues, L-D and Policy resolutions explore different aspects of these issues. Here is a brief comparison of some past resolutions.

<b>Policy (CX) Debate Resolution</b>	<b>Lincoln-Douglas Debate Resolution</b>
<i>The United States federal government should establish a foreign policy significantly limiting the use of weapons of mass destruction.</i>	<i>The possession of nuclear weapons is immoral.</i>
<i>The federal government should establish a policy to significantly decrease juvenile crime in the US.</i>	<i>Violent juvenile offenders ought to be treated as adults in the criminal justice system.</i>
<i>The US federal government should significantly increase protection of privacy in the US in one or more of the following areas: employment, medical records, consumer information, search and seizure.</i>	<i>When in conflict, the safety of others is of greater value than the right to privacy of those with infectious diseases.</i>
<i>The federal government should significantly strengthen regulation of immigration in the US.</i>	<i>Giving sanctuary to illegal refugees in the US justifiably places moral law above positive law.</i>
<i>The federal government should adopt a nationwide policy to decrease overcrowding in prisons and jails in the United States.</i>	<i>The American criminal justice system ought to place a higher priority on retribution than on rehabilitation.</i>

Whereas Policy debaters argue about the effects of specific changes in foreign or domestic policies and focus heavily on providing evidence such as expert testimonies, statistics and economic data, Lincoln-Douglas debaters tend to lean more toward logical analysis and sheer persuasion. This is not to say that there is no place for statistical evidence in L-D debate but that the preponderance of arguments L-D debaters use generally rely on stringing together observations, assertions and appeals to common standards of behavior in some coherent manner.

# Chapter Two

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## RESEARCH: TOPIC ANALYSIS

Your coach has announced the resolution for the upcoming two months. You're eager to argue the issues and write your cases. But where should you start? Start at the beginning: **find out what the resolution requires you to debate.**

First, it might help if you knew how a resolution is created. Every year, the National Forensic League topic selection committee meets to consider several proposed resolutions. The committee members discuss which resolutions are a good fit and eventually narrow the field to ten possible resolutions. At the NFL Nationals in June all the participating coaches vote for their favorite topics and the most popular topics are chosen for the upcoming year. The point you should take from this is that while this doesn't mean that every resolution will be flawless and interesting, it does mean that someone put a lot of thought into phrasing a resolution exactly as it appears. It also means that a significant number of coaches felt that the resolution addresses an issue worthy of your consideration and debate. Keep this in mind as you analyze a resolution.

### *Four Types of Resolutions*

You should start analyzing a resolution by defining its *key terms*. **Key terms in the resolution are words that determine the topic of the debate and its limitations.** Since you need to know exactly what these terms mean you should look to dictionaries with precise definitions like Black's Law Dictionary and expanded versions of Oxford's Collegiate Dictionary. But don't limit yourself to just dictionaries. If you encounter a particularly good definition during your research feel free to adopt it – just make sure you properly cite the source. In fact, some definitions are so complex that they are the topic of full-length books.

You should also take care to **define terms as a whole and not just their individual words.** Consider the following topic: "Resolved: When in conflict, the letter of the law ought to take priority over the spirit of the law." In this case, defining the words "spirit" and "law" separately will not help you understand the term "spirit of the law." If figuring out exactly which words should be defined together and which should be considered separately seems difficult, keep the following in mind: since the resolution is attempting to outline a specific clash of values the best definition is probably the one that provides for such clash. In the above resolution, the resolution's pitting of "the letter of the law" versus "the spirit of the law" is a powerful clue that each of these terms should be defined as a whole.



Here is a list of resolutions for the 2003 and 2004 calendar years to help you practice deciding which words need to be defined. I underlined the terms for which you must obtain definitions. Pay special attention to where the underlining starts and stops and try to get a sense for spotting the words that address a single concept and should therefore be defined as one term. The idea here is for you to get comfortable with identifying the concepts/ideas/actions in the resolution that will later serve as the central points of the debate.

- The United States has a moral obligation to mitigate international conflicts.
- A society has a moral obligation to redress its historical injustices.
- When in conflict, the letter of the law ought to take priority over the spirit of the law.
- When in conflict, globalization ought to be valued above national sovereignty.
- When in conflict, a business' responsibility to itself ought to be valued above its responsibility to society.
- In the U.S. judicial system, truth seeking ought to take precedence over privileged communication.
- In the United States, federal control is the best way to improve public education.
- Rehabilitation ought to be valued above punishment in the U.S. criminal justice system.
- In Constitutional conflicts, the "establishment of religion" clause should be given priority over the "free exercise" clause.
- Government limitations on political campaign spending are antithetical to democratic ideals.
- Individual claims of privacy ought to be valued above competing claims of societal welfare.
- A just government ought to value the redistribution of wealth over property rights.
- As a general principle, individuals have an obligation to value the common good above their own interests.
- Even if a disclosure is legally permissible, journalists have an ethical obligation to limit material released to the public.
- The United States has a moral obligation to promote democratic ideals in other nations.
- Media monopolization is antithetical to the public's right to know.
- In the US, the use of race as a deciding factor in college admissions is just.
- Civil disobedience in a democracy is morally justified.
- A government's obligation to protect the environment ought to take precedence over its obligation to promote economic development.
- A just society ought to value the legal rights of people with mental illness above its obligation to protect itself.

You may have noticed that the majority of every resolution is underlined.<sup>1</sup> That's actually a good thing. It means that there aren't any unnecessary terms to worry about. But pay careful attention to which terms are underlined – it's not that the entire sentence is underlined from the first word to the last. Instead, words are grouped into specific terms that make up the core of the resolution. Once you figure out exactly which terms you need to define it's time to start analyzing the resolution. Keep in mind that in the previous chapter a resolution was defined as a statement that either explicitly asserts or strongly implies conflict between two competing courses of action. So your next step will be to determine the two competing courses of action that will form the heart of your debate round.

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<sup>1</sup> If certain words are not underlined it doesn't mean that you can ignore them, simply that you need not define them. Although the term "ought to be valued above" term does not need definition, you should still keep in mind what this term is asking you to do – make a well-reasoned argument for why your take on the resolution is better than your opponent's.

Students often have a problem with this step. Usually, the source of the confusion is a lack of understanding of the relationship between all the terms in the resolution and an inability to see how the terms interact with each other. One thing I found to be very helpful is to determine the *resolution's underlying structure*, a **specific sentence format that was used to create the resolution**. Figuring out the resolution's structure allows you to determine the two competing courses of action and gives your first clues for where you should start your research.

You may have already noticed that all resolutions are written like simple “true/false” statements of opinion. This is done with two purposes in mind. The first reason is that short statements of opinion in this “true/false” format tend to quickly arouse debate. The second reason is that such statements keep things simple and make it very easy to take up affirmative and negative positions. You can either agree with them or not – and if you don't agree, you have a debate! What makes matters even simpler is that these short statements of opinion are always presented in similar structures.

But how do you discern between these different structures?

The good news here is that resolution structures are actually simple formulas that, once learned, allow you to immediately spot the two competing courses of action. The even better news is that there are only four of them – **only four types of L-D debate resolutions to learn to recognize**. To illustrate this point I have broken down each of the above resolutions into parts that expose the resolution's underlying structure. See if you can figure out the basic structures of the four different types of resolutions by looking at the list below. The answers are on the next page.

#### Resolution Structure Type 1

In the US, federal control is the best way to improve public education.  
 (LIMIT) (ACT) (EVALUATIVE TERM) (DESIRED GOAL)

#### Resolution Structure Type 2

The United States has a moral obligation to mitigate international conflicts.  
 (AGENT) (DUTY) (ACT) (OBJECT)

The United States has a moral obligation to promote democratic ideals in other nations.  
 (AGENT) (DUTY) (ACT) (OBJECT) (LIMIT)

A society has a moral obligation to redress its historical injustices.  
 (AGENT) (DUTY) (ACT) (OBJECT)

Even if a discl. is leg. permiss., journalists have an eth. oblig. to limit material released to public.  
 (CLARIFYING TERM) (AGENT) (DUTY) (OBJECT)

As gen. principle, individuals have an obligation to value common good above own interests.<sup>2</sup>  
 (LIMIT) (AGENT) (DUTY) (WEIGHING) (VALUE 1) (VALUE 2)

<sup>2</sup> Here there is no object and the action is the process of weighing one value over another. This is essentially a mixture of resolution structures 2 and 4 – it is extremely rare.

### Resolution Structure Type 3

Government limitations on political campaign spending are antithetical to democratic ideals.  
(ACT) (COMPATIBILITY WITH VALUE)

Media monopolization is antithetical to the public's right to know.  
(ACT) (COMPATIBILITY WITH VALUE)

In the US, the use of race as a deciding factor in college admissions is just.  
(LIMIT) (ACT) (COMPATIBILITY WITH VALUE)

Civil disobedience in a democracy is morally justified.  
(ACT) (LIMIT) (COMPATIBILITY WITH VALUE)

### Resolution Structure Type 4

Rehabilitation ought to be valued above punishment in the U.S. criminal justice system.  
(VALUE 1) (WEIGHING) (VALUE 2) (LIMIT)

When in conflict, the letter of the law ought to take priority over the spirit of the law.  
(LIMIT) (VALUE 1) (WEIGHING) (VALUE 2)

When in conflict, globalization ought to be valued above national sovereignty.  
(LIMIT) (VALUE 1) (WEIGHING) (VALUE 2)

When in conflict, business' responsibility to itself ought to be valued above its resp. to soc.  
(LIMIT) (VALUE 1) (WEIGHING) (VALUE 2)

In the U.S. judicial system, truth seeking ought to take precedence over privileged comm.  
(LIMIT) (VALUE 1) (WEIGHING) (VALUE 2)

In Const. conflicts, "est. of rel." clause should be given priority over "free exercise" clause.  
(LIMIT) (VALUE 1) (WEIGHING) (VALUE 2)

Claims of individual privacy ought to be valued above competing claims of societal welfare.  
(VALUE 1) (WEIGHING) (LIMIT) (VALUE 2)

A just government ought to value the redistribution of wealth over property rights.  
(LIMIT) (WEIGHING) (VALUE 1) (VALUE 2)

Govt's oblig to protect the env. ought to take precedence over its oblig to promote econ develop.  
(VALUE 1) (WEIGHING) (VALUE 2)

Just society ought to value the leg. rts of people with ment. ill. above its obligation to prot. itself.  
(LIMIT) (WEIGHING) (VALUE 1) (VALUE 2)

Below, I explain each resolution type thoroughly in terms of its component parts and the underlying question that these types of resolutions want you to consider. If you want to get more comfortable with resolution structure types the Appendix contains a list of all the past NFL resolutions classified by type.

**Type 1** (*Use of a specific evaluative term to link a concept or an action to a desired goal*)

As you can see these types of resolutions are very rare and you are not likely to have to debate one of these resolutions any time soon. That's probably a good thing as these resolutions are often not clear and frequently result in difficult and disappointing debates. In any case, this resolution presents you with some specified action and goal. It then links the action to the goal by asking debaters to use an evaluative term (usually the word "best" or "superior") to determine whether this action meets the desired goal. The evaluative term is a key aspect of this topic. In the example above, note that you are not asked to determine whether federal control improves public education but whether it is the best way to do so.

**Underlying Question:** *Does the act in question achieve the desired goal by meeting the criterion provided by the evaluative term?*

**Type 2** (*Assertion of obligation, usually a moral one. A limit is sometimes specified*)

This type of resolution limits the topic to a specific agent and designates a definite act that this agent performs on some object. The object of the action can vary widely – it can be a group of people or a legally protected right. The most important thing for you to realize here is that these types of resolutions ask debaters to discuss whether the specified agent has a duty to carry out the act in question. Does a society have an obligation to redress its past injustices? Does the US have a moral obligation to mitigate international conflicts? Resolutions of this type clearly give the affirmative the burden of proving that an obligation to carry out the act on the object in question exists. The negative's burden is to prove that there is no such duty.

**Underlying Question:** *Does the agent in question have a (moral) obligation to carry out the specified act on some specified object?*

**Type 3** (*Assertion that some action is compatible – or not – with a certain value*)

This resolution type is a fun way to debate and it is growing in popularity. Debates on these topics tend to be fairly open-ended because the underlying question in these resolutions is quite broad – it asks you to evaluate whether a certain act is compatible with a value. Is it just to use race as a deciding factor in college admissions? Is it moral to possess nuclear weapons?

**Underlying Question:** *Does the act under consideration clash with a certain value?*

**Type 4** (*Weighing of two values or courses of action against each other within a specified limit*)

This is the most common resolution structure. You are provided with either two values or two courses of action and asked to weigh them against each other. These types of resolutions usually have a limit on the scope of their comparison (within the US or when in conflict). They also usually limit the discussion to instances when the two values are in conflict. The affirmative upholds one value/course of action while the negative champions the other.

**Underlying Question:** *Should some specified value outweigh another specified value within a limited set of circumstances?*

## *Definitions*

Once you figure out the format of the resolution and decide which terms you need to define, it's time to go and do it. Unfortunately, finding definitions is generally not a process that many students find exciting. As a result, they tend to rush through it and end up making crucial mistakes that later become increasingly more difficult to fix. After all, you do not want to find yourself in a situation where you realize your entire case is based on a definition that makes no sense, is not widely accepted or simply misses the point of the debate. Therefore, take this process very seriously.

On the surface, finding definitions doesn't sound hard: you consult a dictionary or a book written on the topic and copy the definition word for word. In some cases, this is all you will have to do. In other cases, the process requires a bit more work. I picked three topics that have varying degrees of difficulty when it comes to defining their crucial terms. Here's how you would go about defining

### *Resolved: Civil disobedience in a democracy is morally justified*

- Civil disobedience – There are many definitions of this term. Although it would help you to see how different authors have defined civil disobedience, this sentence from Black's Law Dictionary will suffice: "a form of lawbreaking employed to demonstrate the injustice or unfairness of a particular law and indulged in deliberately to focus attention on the allegedly undesirable law." Note how nicely this definition highlights the debate – civil disobedience is lawbreaking designed to focus attention on a particular law.
- Democracy – If you're an L-D debater, you most likely live in a democracy. But there are many types of democracies. Which one should you focus on? That one is really up to you but I think that the true sign of a good argument is that it holds water in a wide variety of situations. Thus, instead of attempting to limit the debate to a specific type of democracy, you would probably want to cast your net wide and define democracy as any system of government where the power to rule ultimately rests with the people and where that power is exercised either directly or through some process of representation. Any good dictionary should give you an adequate definition of democracy.
- Morally Justified – This one isn't easy. If you look to law dictionaries they'll tell you that justice is that which is legal. But clearly that can't be the case – if it were, there would be no debate on this topic. The more you look, the more you'll find that that justice has many definitions. Entire books have been written about theories of justice. In addition, the topic wants you to consider whether civil disobedience is *morally justified*. This term implies that your definition should also incorporate some sense of what constitutes morality – another difficult term to define. The solution to this dilemma is that at this stage you don't really need to find a perfect definition of morally justified actions but merely define the term broadly enough so that you and your opponent can agree on what you will be arguing about. A good thing to do would be to define *morally justified* as all actions that conform to commonly accepted notions of what is right and what is fair. Why use such a vague definition? The process of what exactly you consider to be right and fair will be spelled out more clearly in your case (which you will learn how to write in subsequent chapters). You will likely spend the majority of the round arguing that your conception of what is right and what is fair should win out. Thus, there is no need to go into too much detail about what exactly makes for a morally justified action in the definitions stage – there will plenty of time for that during the round.

*Resolved: A just government ought to value the redistribution of wealth over property rights*

- Just government – This term presents you with the same problem as the “morally justified” term in the previous example. The definition of a government is easy enough to find – but what exactly makes for a just government isn’t so easy to define. Again, your best may be to offer a broad definition of justice that you will later expand upon in your case. You may think that a just government must also be a democratic one – but that may not always be the case and your opponent may disagree. If that happens, you want the debate to take place over the arguments made in your case, not your definitions. You’re therefore better off giving any standard definition of justice you can find in a dictionary (such as “each getting his due” or “fairness”) and then expanding upon the specifics in your case.
- Redistribution of wealth – Here is a term that is merely a combination of two words that still mean the same thing when taken apart. Redistribution of wealth is nothing more than the process of re-assigning possessions. For this term, you would want to find separate definitions of “redistribution” and “wealth.” The only problem you might run into here is that there are many definitions of wealth. My suggestion is to go with the definition that makes the most sense in the context of the resolution.
- Property rights – The entry for “property” in Black’s Law Dictionary is almost two pages long but the first sentence gives you exactly what you need: “that which belongs exclusively to [any person].” You’ll encounter the same problem with the word right, except that the entry here is even longer. But, again, the first paragraph offers a definition that usually suffices: “a power, privilege or demand inherent in one person and [dependent] upon another” (this last part of the definition implies that in order for rights to mean anything they have to be respected). From this you can offer one definition of a property right as the power/privilege/demand to claim something exclusively for yourself. And although this definition is still far from settling the matter, it sets up the debate of the resolution: how many possessions can you claim exclusively for yourself? Where would a just government place this limit?

*Resolved: When in conflict, globalization ought to be valued above national sovereignty.*

- Globalization – This very popular topic nowadays. I did a quick web search on Yahoo for “definition of globalization” and on the first page of matches found a website by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. They looked like a pretty credible source and provided me with this definition: “*Globalization is a term used to describe the acceleration and intensification of economic interaction among the people, companies, and governments of different nations.*” Not bad. If you don’t buy the idea that globalization only reflects economic interaction you would look for a more inclusive definition that talks about all types of interaction between foreign nations, not just economic ones. Also, always test to see whether the definition makes sense to you. If it doesn’t, keep looking for one that does.
- National Sovereignty – This one is rather difficult. Everyone seems to talk about it but no one wants to define it. A part of the problem is that the definition of sovereignty has been changing throughout the ages too. Finally, there are entire books written on the topic of sovereignty. This is really not helpful, as you don’t have the time to read a whole book just to define a term. Instead, a useful strategy might be to focus on just one book. With a bit more digging I found several references to a book by Daniel Philpott titled Revolutions in

Sovereignty. In the book's introduction Philpott defines sovereignty as "supreme legitimate authority within a territory." We have a winner – succinct and to the point! (Philpott further defines what he means by "supreme," "legitimate" and "authority" so you would want to keep these clarifications handy in case anyone ever asked you to provide a deeper explanation). Thus, going by Philpott's definition, national sovereignty would be "*supreme legitimate authority within a nation.*"

After you have found your definitions take a closer look and see whether they make sense to you or your teammates. Brainstorm. On the first topic, can you think of any clear examples of civil disobedience that would not be covered by your definition? If so, you have a problem because your definition is too narrow. Look through some dictionaries again and try to expand your definition. Similarly, if your definition is too broad it needs to be refined further. Continue the process until you can no longer think of clear-cut examples of civil disobedience that are not covered by your definition.

But do not go overboard with this process either. You merely want to find a definition that will allow you to debate the issue with another high school student for forty minutes. Stay away from paragraph-long definitions that are too specific – remember, the point of your debate round is to argue about the broader issues found in the clash between two important values, not their definitions.

We're not done with definitions just yet. One final rule that you should always keep in mind is this: **make your definitions fair to your opponent**. Do not try to define your opponent out of the round by offering a biased definition that clearly favors your side of the resolution – you have to give your opponent some ground to stand on. As tempting as it may seem, you don't want to start your debate by defining the terms of the resolution in a way that makes it impossible for your opponent to debate you. Although there are many ways to make a definition unfair, in most cases **unfair definitions are the product of prematurely made arguments – of muddling the processes of defining and arguing to the point that they become indistinguishable**.

This mistake occurs for many reasons. Some L-D debaters are uncomfortable with definitions that appear to even remotely aid their opponent's argument. For the most part, they tend to be afraid of making it appear like they are agreeing with their opponent from the start. Thus, instead of giving the standard dictionary meaning of the term, some debaters alter definitions to suit the overall point they are trying to make in their case. On the other hand, many debaters do not realize that their definitions are unfair and that there are alternate definitions available, both products of poor research. Finally, some students get into the problematic habit of looking for definitions that specifically aid their position. As a result, they may define the same term in very different ways depending upon whether they are arguing the affirmative or the negative. This last approach is probably the most common practice and also the easiest way to assure a frustrating debate round. You should avoid it at all costs. Here are some examples of possible unfair definitions:

- *Resolved: The United States has a moral obligation to mitigate international conflicts* – If a negative were to insist that the term *to mitigate* means "to resolve," that would be an unfair definition. Such a formulation makes the affirmative's job very difficult because it creates a policy-like burden – and a very unrealistic one at that. The crux of the resolution is the question of whether the US has any moral obligation to help, like an international Good Samaritan, not whether it has the duty to resolve the conflicts, like a world policeman.

- *Resolved: When in conflict, a business' responsibility to itself ought to be valued above its responsibility to society* – On this resolution, some affirmatives may try to argue that “the good of the society” is by definition a part of *a business' responsibility to itself*. The implication here is that the business will, in an attempt to take care of itself, also take care of the rest of the society. First, this definition is in violation of the limiting term in the resolution because it ignores the condition that the two must concepts must be in conflict. Second, and more importantly, such a definition leaves the negative no room to debate. If the business' responsibility is really so encompassing, why would the negative ever want to oppose it?
- *Resolved: Rehabilitation ought to be valued above punishment in the U.S. criminal justice system* – Some debaters may be tempted to define rehabilitation as “an effective method of administering criminal justice that returns an individual to society free of danger and ready to contribute to its well being.” What's worse, they may even find some version of this definition in a book or even a dictionary. But the problem with this definition is that it is taking for resolved an issue that is actually very contested. The effectiveness of various rehabilitation programs, the subsequent danger of released inmates to others and their ability to fit back into the society are all propositions that no debater arguing the negative would ever accept.

There are two things you can do to make sure your definitions are fair. First, be on the lookout for definitions from advocacy groups with a particular “bend” or a set agenda as they may offer definitions of resolution terms that are very biased and quite far from the more accepted definitions. One way to guard against this is to only use definitions from established dictionaries like Webster's, American Heritage, Black's Law or Oxford's. However, this is somewhat limiting as you will surely encounter terms too specific for inclusion in a dictionary. Thus, it would be wise to take a look at the source of your definition – does it sound like it's biased? If so, you may want to hold off on using such a definition. How do you know if a certain source is biased? Although that is a topic beyond this handbook, you would be wise to ask your coach or your history/social science teacher for help in analyzing a source – historians are trained to be particularly aware of biases.

The second method is a lot simpler. Be prepared to use the same set of definitions in your affirmative and negative cases. If you really like a particular definition when you are arguing the affirmative side of the resolution but absolutely hate it when you have to debate the negative, you should probably look for a better definition – chances are that the one you are currently using is unfair to one side of the resolution.

Still, despite this last warning, I've found that students sometimes still ignore this advice and instead purposefully offer loaded definitions as part of a tactic to catch their opponent off-guard. I think that such actions are more than just a bad strategy – they are intellectually dishonest. While it is okay to be able to argue the same topic from two different viewpoints, it is a completely different matter to change your definitions along with your viewpoints. **The practice of having one set of definitions when you are debating the affirmative and another one when you are debating the negative goes against the very nature of debate as an activity.** Don't do it.



## *Finding the Underlying Puzzle*

Let's take a look back and see how far you've come. At this stage in your preparation you should have a rough idea of what the debates on the resolution will look like because you have the resolution structure figured out and your definitions picked out. You should also have some idea of why the topic is important and relevant – even if it asks you to envision fictional societies, abstractions of ideas, or alternate social orders. That's one of the exciting parts of L-D debate: you're not going to be debating just pure philosophy – you're going to engage others in a discussion of issues that lie at the heart of many modern-day problems.

Of course, that's easier said than done. The reason why concepts like justice, liberty, equality and democratic ideals rarely pop up in your everyday conversation is that they are broad and complex values. We know that they are important, but it's hard to quantify them and compare them to each other. So to make this process easier you have to know precisely what kind of an argument you wish to create. If you want to remain on topic and have an intelligent and fun debate, you have to know what type of a position you should take when you affirm or negate the resolution. And the way to do that is by uncovering the underlying puzzle of the resolution. Although the next few steps might seem tedious they are also crucial to the process of writing your cases and preparing your arguments.

All the resolutions above are essentially a restatement of some problem or puzzle present in the current literature. You will discover just how much literature these puzzles generate when you begin your research in later chapters – the sovereignty vs. globalization argument alone has been the topic of scores of books in the last fifteen years. **If you can locate the underlying puzzle you will not only have a much easier time researching the resolution, but you will also take a large step toward clarifying your understanding of the affirmative and negative positions.**

So how do you do that? **By asking one specific question: “Why?”**

It sounds deceptively simple, but learning to continually ask this question is the secret to becoming a great debater. The first benefit of asking “Why?” is that you'll be able to get to the bottom of the resolution and locate the underlying puzzles that drive the inherent conflict. The best way to illustrate this process is by giving you an example. Let's work with Resolution 4: “When in conflict, globalization ought to be valued above national sovereignty.” We've already located the terms that need defining and we know the structure of the resolution. Now you need to find the underlying puzzle that creates clash and will drive your debate rounds by asking the “why” questions. It's not hard at all.

First, take the affirmative stance on the topic and turn it into a “Why?” question, like so:

**When they conflict, why value globalization over national sovereignty?**

That is the underlying question of the resolution. Now, use the definitions you found to make the question more specific. Here's how it would sound if you used my definitions from the previous page:

**When the two come into conflict, why value the acceleration and intensification of economic interaction between the people, companies and governments of nations over the norm that a nation has supreme authority within that its territory?**

Aha! What you have here is the underlying puzzle of the entire debate round. This is the essential question that the debater arguing the Affirmative side is asked to answer. On the other hand, the negative's duty in the round is to answer the opposite question and present reasons why globalization ought not to be valued over national sovereignty.

The importance of what you just discovered about the resolution cannot be overestimated. A great number of debaters will unfortunately debated this resolution last year for two months and never realized that the above question is what they were really arguing about. But the real advantage of analyzing a resolution in this way and uncovering its underlying puzzle is that it will make it much easier to conduct research, write your cases and think up arguments.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

### How to Analyze an L-D Resolution

- Figure out which words in the resolution should be defined together.
- Determine the format of the resolution by classifying it into one of the four types. Use the resolution type to make sure you have selected the right terms to define.
- Conduct the necessary research to obtain useful and fair definitions of the important terms concepts and terms in the resolution. As a precaution against biased definitions, be prepared to use the same definitions in both your affirmative and negative cases
- Uncover the underlying puzzle of the resolution by reframing the resolution into a “Why?” question and replacing its component terms with their full definitions.

# Chapter Three

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## RESEARCH: GATHERING INFORMATION

King Ptolemy I once asked famous Greek mathematician Euclid whether there was an easier way to learn geometry aside from reading his several lengthy volumes. Euclid smiled and said: “There is no royal way.”

It’s the same with L-D debate. If you want to win on weekends and learn all the skills that make debate look so good on your transcript you have to put in the time at the library. You have to do research – there’s just no easier way. This chapter is probably the most valuable part of this handbook because it will show you how to conduct *effective* research. Although they are tailored specifically to L-D debate, the next several pages contain an outline of how to conduct research on practically any topic, not just ones that pertain to debate. Heeding the advice in this chapter and following its research suggestions will prove immensely helpful in just about every aspect of your life.

Research is also what separates consistently successful debaters from the occasionally lucky ones. Your success at tournaments may be boosted by your intelligence, maturity, experience and innate speaking ability but these skills will rarely allow you to win a round against an opponent who’s done the necessary research. Moreover, if you are concerned with your speaking ability, research often takes care of this problem as well – nothing helps you speak more eloquently and with greater confidence than having a clear idea of what you are talking about. **So if you wish to pick up all the skills that debate as an activity can give you and have consistent success at tournaments, you have to do research.**

But before we get started there are a few things you should keep in mind. The first is that you are not a college student – you are a high school student with limited time and resources. The difference between you and a college student is not the capacity to understand reading material but reading experience and time limitations. Most high school students are not used to reading entire books written by academics. And while expecting a high school junior or senior to read and understand A Theory of Justice is not unrealistic, it is a tall order. More importantly, college students have only four or five courses per semester to worry about and usually spend no more than 15 hours in class per week. As a high school student, you are probably faced with a 7-hour school day, homework and additional after-school activities. So don’t expect to check out six books from the library and read them all in one week because it won’t happen. Remember, a book from the library is useless if you don’t read and analyze it.

Second, there is the issue of the available resources and the quality of your library. This is a touchy subject. There is no question that students who attend high schools near large colleges with good library systems are at an advantage over those who do not. What is in question is how significant this advantage really is. Better libraries are more likely to have a wider selection of books and a larger number of academic journal subscriptions. However, for your basic Lincoln-Douglas research needs the presence of a college library is only a slight added bonus and by no means a prerequisite. In most cases, your public library will prove to be more than adequate when it comes to finding books and journal articles on your subject area. Even your high school's library can often provide you with the bulk of your research material.

It is difficult to be more specific on this topic as resources available to students vary widely – some high school libraries will have a better selection of books than some public libraries. If you feel that your library cannot meet your research needs – or you have no access to a library at all – turn to the Internet. With faster connection speeds, improved search engines and an increase in reliable information, the Internet has truly become a powerful research tool. Although it cannot replace a trip to the book stacks, some information from a quality Internet source is better than none. Also, though it will probably take longer, you may be surprised by how much useful information you can find on the Internet if you are patient enough and methodical in your search. Still, do not underestimate libraries. They should be your first stop, even if you have to travel to get to one.

You may notice that up to now I have not mentioned mail-order analyses of the resolution. That is because you should not use them. First, the quality of these products varies widely and you may very well end up paying for an assortment of collected junk that isn't worth the paper it's printed on. Second, even if you choose to get mail-order evidence from a reputable company that has a money-back guarantee, you're missing one of the main points of debate as an activity – to get you to go to the library and become comfortable with doing research. **Any public library will most likely prove to be a sufficient source of research material for your L-D debate needs**. The resolutions you'll debate are by no means obscure and there are plenty of quality books and journal articles on these topics. Chances are high that just about any public library will have some of these titles – and since you won't have the time to read all the books on one topic anyway, as long as there are a few of them available you should be fine.

Now that we've established that a visit to the library is a must, the first thing you should do when you get to the library is look for the reference desk and ask the librarian to help you. This is their job and they would rather show you how to locate what you are looking for than see you frustrated because you don't know how to find it. Show the staff librarian your resolution topic, briefly explain the underlying puzzle and ask for advice on where to look for relevant books and articles. You'd be surprised how helpful a librarian can be and just how much time you can save by having someone show you where to look for information.

### *Your Opinion*

Well... what do you think? I'm serious. Do you think the use of race as a deciding factor in college admissions is just? Your opinion should be the starting point of every research project. You may not know enough about the topic to argue about it quite yet, but you do have *some* understanding. Finding

out your initial leanings on the topic will allow you to do several things. First, it will make it easier to correct for bias when you are preparing to present both sides of the argument. Is the argument in front of you really poorly conceived or do you just not like it because you don't agree with it? Second, noting your initial preference will allow you to track just how much you've learned in the process. After debating a topic for two months and researching it you may find out that your opinion changes significantly. If it does, be proud – it's a sure sign that you learned something new.

### ***Keyword List***

The second thing you need to do is put together a list of keywords. You will use this list to narrow your searches during the research process. At first, your keyword list will consist of only a few terms taken straight from the resolution but it will grow as you continue to find more and more relevant sources. Start your keyword list by writing down the main values. You may want to write down *national sovereignty* and *globalization*. Now, brainstorm other possible ways to phrase these two terms. For example, you can search for just *sovereignty*, as it's likely to give you more results of similar relevance and quality.

You can take a look at your definitions for specific descriptions and terms you can turn into keywords, but that won't always help you. Be careful not to veer too far from your topic. On the globalization vs. sovereignty resolution it might be tempting to search for *economic interdependence* or *economic interaction between nations* but both of these terms are already far enough from your topic that it's unlikely you will find anything useful.

You should keep referring and adding to your keyword list throughout the research process. Just make sure you stay on topic – it's easy to get caught up in searching for terms that are only tangentially related to your task. The best way to do this is to write the underlying puzzle of the resolution on top of your keyword list and ignore any keywords that do not help you find material to answer this question.

### ***Background News Stories***

If you have defined all the terms in the resolution and figured out its format you know that your topic is a restatement of some general dilemma, issue, proposition or question. Your next step is to find out more about the underlying issues that drive the clash between the values in the resolution.

To stay with the same example, your definitions should provide you with a vague idea of what globalization entails and what national sovereignty is – the next step is to find out more about the differences in opinion between those who support globalization and those who champion national sovereignty. If it's possible and if the resolution deems it necessary, you also want to try to find instances when globalization conflicts with national sovereignty. Real world examples are very valuable in L-D debate because they illuminate the dilemma for the judge and give you and your opponent something substantial to argue.

The best initial starting points for this endeavor are the news stories on recent events that embody these clashes and conflicts. Locating such events will be easier than you think – the NFL committee

often creates topics that tease out moral dilemmas and value clashes from current events. Some resolutions listed in Chapter Two stem from campaign finance reform, recent debates of reparations for slavery or the Supreme Court's decision to allow race as a factor in college decisions. The resolutions about US involvement in international affairs are particularly relevant in the aftermath of the Iraq war. But you should also know that not all topics have a clear current events counterpart – some topics are simply a rehashing of old debates on the nature and character of the criminal justice system or control over the education system. Still, it doesn't mean that there are no real-world examples to illustrate the conflict – it just means that these examples may not be as obvious to you right away.

If you do not immediately recognize a topic's roots in certain current events, don't panic. Just ask someone else. Your coach, teachers, friends, family, and other debaters are bound to have heard something that relates to your topic on the news recently and will probably be able to direct you to it. Asking the extemporaneous speakers on your team may be your best bet as they are likely to have a few articles on that topic for you to borrow. A surefire way is to go to the library armed with nothing more than the resolution and your keyword list and ask the library staff to help you locate current events news stories that deal with this topic. Don't be shy – the library staff is there to help you.

Once you have located the related news stories read them quickly or just browse them. You really don't need any more than a dozen relevant articles – but make sure that the ones you have are appropriate. If the resolution has a limiting term try to find the news stories that report on cases when the two values are in conflict. The idea here is not to acquaint you with the specifics of each event but to give you a better sense of how the issues in your resolution translate into real world situations. In the process, you are likely to learn more about each side, get ideas for arguments to use in writing your cases and perhaps find a nice example that illustrates a point you are trying to make perfectly. Most importantly, you want to use the news stories to gather keywords that you will later use to search for books and articles on the topic.

## ***Books***

A proper approach to books is the key to successful research. Perhaps the most common mistake when conducting research is to leave the books for the very end. This is somewhat understandable as most books are several hundred pages long, difficult to skim and in general require a large amount of time to analyze. It is even possible to spend a whole day looking through a single book and not find what you are searching for. Still, even though books may take a lot of time to read you should never leave them until the end.

Books are not the only medium that allows for a truly in-depth analysis of a subject but they have some advantages that other mediums do not. While articles in academic journals can be both long and thought provoking it is better to start with books. Unlike journal articles that face strict word limits and must quickly get to the point, in a book an author can comfortably devote an entire chapter to reviewing the literature that already exists on the topic or to commenting on the general nature of the dilemma she is exploring. In most books authors will offer you an introductory chapter where they will clearly roadmap the book for you – tell you their central thesis and briefly describe how each subsequent chapter ties into it. Instead of immediately launching into a full discussion on the topic, authors of books are also likely to slowly lead you into the crux of the dilemma they seek to explain.

As such, books can be a great “one-stop-shopping” for explanations of the resolution topic and arguments that pertain to it.

The only problem with books is that if you are not careful and methodical in your search they’ll quickly eat up your time in the library. When you are researching a Lincoln-Douglas resolution you’ll discover that there are four types of books:

- Books that don’t offer you any useful analysis and should be put back on the shelf.
- Books that only contain a chapter or two of interest to you.
- Books that contain a lot of useful information but will confuse and bore you if you don’t already know something about a topic.
- A well-written and easily accessible book that offers a great overview of the issues surrounding the underlying puzzle.

Let me tell you from personal experience that you want to start with this last type of book – it’s a lot less frustrating. If you start with a book that is too general and superficial, you’ll be wasting your time. On the other hand, if you start with a book that is too specialized or complicated you’ll just end up confusing yourself, getting bored and giving up.

There are several ways to find the right book. You certainly do not have time to use all of these techniques but you should know that they are available to you. Also, some of these tasks are quite time consuming so pick and choose the ones that are most appropriate to your situation. You’re the best judge of how much time and patience you’re willing to invest.

- The first thing to do is to ask the library assistant. In general, although he may not know some good titles from personal experience, he can direct you further and save you countless hours of aimlessly plodding around the library and the online catalog on your own. On the other hand, do not expect the librarian to do the research for you. Think of them as general guides who will help you with the basics, tell you where the computers are located, how to access the online catalog, or what special rules you may need to adhere to when it comes to checking out books or printing materials.
- A good technique that policy debaters use often is to find several books on the topic of your interest and skim their footnotes and introductions. If you consistently see that a book keeps re-appearing it may be worth to read it.
- Amazon.com can be a good resource as well. Not only is this website a great source for new and used books, but you can search the site by subject or keyword and sort the books by customer ratings. There are also reviews posted by readers. But since the reviews are not moderated they can be very useful or totally misleading – use your own judgment on whether the reviewer is knowledgeable. Also, when you look at a certain title the website will tell you about other purchases of customers who bought this book and will suggest similar titles.
- If you are particularly dedicated you can look through a local college’s web page and try to find a professor whose research interests include your topic. If you send him a polite email explaining that you are a high school student interested in the topic and would like to know a

few books and articles that explain the issues at hand really well he may respond with a few useful titles or even attach a syllabus from a related course. Although this approach may sound strange, don't underestimate it – any subsequent lists you receive will come from an expert with a doctorate degree in the field that you are researching.<sup>3</sup>

- Perhaps the most ambitious option is to look at syllabi from college courses. If your topic is particularly broad you can go to the main websites of top colleges and search for the topic keywords. Often times you'll be taken to web pages designed for specific courses in political science or philosophy – web pages that may contain recommendations on which books to read to acquaint yourself with a particular topic. Now, I admit that this last one has a low chance of success, but college websites contain all sorts of interesting tidbits on a wide range of topics. Who knows what you might find. Just remember to be smart and judicious about your use of time or you'll never actually get around to pulling out the useful evidence. So please don't spend an entire afternoon looking through Harvard's website in search of a good book on globalization. There's a fine line between research and procrastination.

**You should aim to find two or three books with multiple chapters devoted to your topic.**

Anything more than that is unnecessary as you are not likely to have the time to handle more than three books. If this seems like too little, remember that you're not looking for just ANY book. You want a book that deals with your topic directly, introduces the issues surrounding the underlying puzzle and describes the major opposing viewpoints – and does it all in a way that's accessible and understandable to you. If you actually do find three such books you will have done a very good job in your research. And since you may end up reading through more than half of the chapters in such a book rest assured that you won't run out of things to do.

Recall that there are three other types of books: books that aren't of any use to you, books that can be marginally useful and books that are intended for an audience that already knows a lot about the topic. The next few paragraphs will show you how to tell these books apart. While it's not a perfect method it is efficient and your chances of missing something crucial are low.

I don't mean to insult your intelligence but start by looking at the book's full title. Does it sound like it contains information you could use? If not, don't complicate your life any further – just put it back on the shelf and move on. It's that simple.

If the book does sound like it could be of use you should invest a minute or into seeing whether it's worthy of being checked out. First, look at the table of contents. Do any of the chapter headings strike you as relevant? If so, note which chapters and flip to that part of the book. If the author had any sense when he wrote the book – or if he had a good editor – the first few paragraphs should give you a flavor of what the rest of the chapter is about. If it still sounds interesting go ahead and check it out of the library (or set it aside and take notes on it later if you're not allowed to check out books). If the chapter headings and beginnings leave you in doubt, there is one more place you can look. Turn to the beginning of the book and skim the introductory chapter (usually the first one). In this section the author will most likely provide you with some sense of the book's main thesis and offer a quick

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<sup>3</sup> Professors do respond to such queries, especially if you ask them about their own work. While I was a debater I emailed the late Robert Nozick to ask him whether he could recommend any books that succinctly summarize his theories in a way that a high school student can understand. He responded the next day with two suggested titles.



overview of each chapter. If the book is a collection of essays from multiple authors, the editor will probably write a few words about why these particular essays were selected. If any of these articles sound like they could be of help, the whole book is probably worth checking out.

Finally, if you come across a book that addresses your topic but sounds too complicated let it be for now and just note the book's author and title somewhere in your notes. Once you've fully acquainted yourself with the topic you may find it useful to take another crack at this book. However, remember that your time is limited – you still have to analyze these books.

### ***Articles in Scholarly Journals***

Compared to books, researching articles in academic journals is easy. Usually, there will be a sophisticated search engine at your disposal with the ability to search for specific words in the article's body. Also, journal articles often address one specific topic and have very long but detailed titles which will allow you to tell quickly whether you should read them or not. They are usually short, pretty easy to browse for useful arguments due to their narrow focus and come with abstracts – brief summaries at the start of the article. What's best, journal articles are the best source of rebuttals because the authors often do nothing more than offer pointed criticisms of an existing theory. If you want to know how to respond to a certain argument your best bet probably lies in looking at an article in a scholarly journal.

How should you search for articles in academic journals? That's a tough one to answer because there are too many different search methods and the appropriateness of each depends on your library. Thus, I have to refer you to the librarians. Just tell them what you're looking for and ask them to show you the best way to search for academic journal articles. Remember to use your keyword list.

### ***The World Wide Web***

I left the easiest and most fun way of research for the end because there are serious issues with using the Internet that go beyond “unsavory” material you may stumble upon by “accident.” I believe surfing the World Wide Web is an activity best left for the end of your research process. There are virtually no filters for quality on the Internet. If you know how to make a web page you can put one together and stuff it with your own ramblings about the world. It's practically free and no one can stop you from doing it. While this is a great freedom to enjoy it also means that there's a lot of junk in cyberspace. When you're reading a book you have some assurances of its quality. Since the publisher had to invest money into printing a book an editor also had to read through the manuscript and consult with the author to make sure the book is worth the paper it's printed on. For example, a university press published book was most likely peer-reviewed by other academics and deemed suitable for publication. On the web, you rarely have such assurances.

Second, if you start your research on the web you'll have an opportunity to choose from a vast amount of unchecked information – larger than any library you could possibly visit. You will have no trained librarian to ask for help. I wouldn't advise this, especially if you have little experience with researching a debate resolution. The chances that you will find something useful on your own are low.

This lack of professional assistance leads to a third problem with the Internet – it is endless. You could easily spend a day surfing the web trying to find research materials and you’d be nowhere close to exhausting it – especially if you don’t have a fast connection. If you start your research by surfing the web, chances are high that you’ll never get around to reading books and journal articles.

But the Internet is still a very powerful resource. Many organizations and government agencies have figured out that they can make their data and research more readily available to the public – and at a substantially reduced cost – by posting them up on the web. You’ll find 100+ page reports in .pdf format that you can browse through on-line and only print out the few pages you actually need – the cost of making these available to you would have been astronomical ten years ago.

There are two ways to do research on the Internet: random browsing and focused research.

Random web browsing usually takes a while but it can yield some interesting and rare results. Go to Google.com or another search engine and type in the terms you’re looking for. In less than a second you’ll probably get more responses than you could look at in a week. Personally, I can only get through about 100 website matches before I get too bored (in any case, only the first 25 tend to be useful). If you perform several searches with different combinations of keywords, you run a good chance of finding something of value (most debaters find my website by searching for the resolution’s exact wording). Unfortunately, the only tip I can give you for determining what is valuable information and what is not – aside from looking at the content – is to look at the source. The best evidence and analysis usually comes from established “brick-and-mortar” institutes, research centers, think tanks and foundations.

Focused web research refers to going to a specific website to look for information. You may have seen repeated references to a certain institute in books and articles, or you may have heard of a watchdog group whose intent is to educate the public on your topic. Whatever the case, you’ll usually do this type of research after you have analyzed and evaluated all the other information you already collected. Because it is so specific, focused web research is quick and effective and can yield useful information in the least amount of time. The only catch is that in order to be able to conduct this kind of research you must have already looked at some books, news stories and journal articles or found a good annotated list of relevant websites – otherwise you won’t know where to look.

That’s it! You now know how to find information on any Lincoln Douglas debate topic. You also know how to find relevant facts and opinions on any topic that interests you – not only in high school or college but later in life as well. But the journey is far from over. What we covered in this chapter is only the first half of the research process. I’ve only shown you how to collect information – it still has to be analyzed and evaluated. The next chapter will show you how to synthesize all the essentials you have found and put them to good use by extracting arguments that penetrate straight to the core of the resolution’s underlying puzzle.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

### How to Research an L-D Resolution: Part 1

- You cannot expect to succeed in Lincoln-Douglas debate and learn from the activity if you do not research the topic.
- Think about the topic a little and see how you feel about it. Do you support the affirmative, the negative, or do you see merit in both positions and have a tough time deciding?
- Once you get to the library head for the reference desk and ask the staff librarian to help you. Mention that you are a high school student with limited research experience (if this is true).
- Start your research with background news stories about real-world events that capture the essence of the resolution. Find about a dozen of these and quickly read them.
- Move on to books. Look for one to three books that deal directly with your topic and offer you an understandable overview of the issues involved. Be prepared to check these books out and read them in their entirety when you go home – they’ll be the cornerstones of your research. If you find other books that have a few useful chapters or could be helpful later in the research process, check them out or note their titles and be prepared to return for them once you’ve done more research.
- Continue your research with articles published in scholarly journals. Ask the librarian if there is an index to help you find all the articles on a specific topic.
- Finish your research by browsing the web to see if you missed anything or if there is additional interesting information that has not yet made its way to your library. Also consider visiting the websites of some established think tanks or research institutions that you have encountered during the research process.

# Chapter Four

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## RESEARCH: THE ARGUMENT SHEET FILE

The primary point of Chapter Three was to show you how to gather information on a Lincoln-Douglas debate resolution. The main purpose of this chapter is to teach you how to put this information to a good use. At the end of the previous chapter you were left with a few days worth of research materials. Now it's time to sift through this information and uncover the arguments that will be the basis for your cases and rebuttals. This is where the rubber meets the road – at the end of this chapter you will have completed the majority of your research and qualify as somewhat of an expert on the resolution topic. You will also have done enough information collection and analysis to write a solid high school research paper.

A good starting point for this chapter is the concept of an argument. What exactly constitutes an argument? **An argument is a claim supported by evidence.** This evidence is also sometimes referred to as a warrant. Whatever terminology you choose to use, when you put forth an argument you are either making a claim that things are as you say they are or that they should be as you say they should be. You also offer proof of your claim so that people will have more of a reason to believe you. In policy debate the evidence usually takes the forms of expert testimonies, facts and figures. In L-D debate the majority of your evidence will be presented as series of logically connected assertions and analyses.

Arguments are no fun when everyone agrees. That is why we usually only call something an argument when there is some disagreement on the issue – nowadays, that has pretty much become the primary meaning of the word. When you argue with your friends or family it is over competing claims. Unfortunately, the competing claims part of an argument is the only part that most people remember. The part about offering convincing reasons to prove your point is often lost. This is where debate becomes a civic activity and a life-long lesson – if you learn to always offer reasons to support your claims and to spot when others are making empty claims with no supporting information you will not only go far in debate but life in general. This is precisely why gathering information is so important. Without solid information on which to base your arguments debate becomes nothing more than a (polite) shouting match without any substance. And in this form, the activity does little to teach you anything of merit.

## *Reading Tips*

You spent all afternoon and part of the evening at the library. You have a pile of books on your desk and printouts of articles and news stories in your book bag. What you do with them now?

**You read this material and take specific notes on which arguments suggest answers to the resolution’s underlying puzzle.** Again, to some of you this may seem insultingly obvious. But to many high school students – I was one of them – finding books and articles was the same as actually doing the research. Needless to say, learning doesn’t work by osmosis and you’ll have to read a book to find out what’s in it. Here are some quick tips about reading scholarly material to make this process easier.

- **Don’t read for more than one hour at a time.** Your attention span is probably not that high. Mine certainly isn’t. Simply put, reading a book about national sovereignty is not the same as reading the latest installment of Harry Potter (I just started “The Order of the Phoenix” myself). Not only is the purpose of the book different – one is meant to educate and the other to entertain – but the language that academics use is very specific, often unbelievably dry and even more often difficult to interpret. Scholarly articles and books also ask you to retain a lot of information and follow fairly complex arguments. If you pace yourself you’ll have a much higher chance of actually figuring out what the author is trying to say. What works really well for me is reading for about 45-50 minutes and then taking a ten-minute break. I can keep this up for a few cycles before I need a really long break. Find your own comfortable pace.
- **Be cognizant of the time it takes you to read a book.** If you are reading at a pace of about 25 pages per hour (an average time for reading a scholarly text if you’re taking notes) and the book is 360 pages long, there’s a problem – at your current rate it will take you over 14 hours to finish the book. I’m willing to bet that you don’t have that kind of time, energy or dedication – nor should you. What’s the solution? One possibility is to see whether you are spending too much time focusing on the details. Take a look at your notes and see whether everything that you have written down is absolutely necessary. If not, you can afford to speed up a little – but not to the point that you’re not following what the author is saying. Also, think about whether every chapter in the book needs to be read. Are they all relevant to your topic? If not, skip the ones that are not.<sup>4</sup>
- **Read in a well-lit area at the time of day when you’re most alert.** This is more of a tip to keep your eyes healthy and keep you from nodding off by the time you reach page eleven. Your eyes will thank you later in life.
- **Plan out your reading.** Don’t just pick up a book and start reading – make sure you always know why you are reading what you are reading. First, take a close look at the introduction. The author will usually offer a brief synopsis of each chapter and tell you the main purpose of the book. Don’t just glance over this section – read it closely and decide which chapters you

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<sup>4</sup> Realize that it is rare to find a book where every chapter will fall in line with the exact topic you are researching. Authors have to anticipate counter-arguments as well as effects and impacts on matters that have nothing to do with your topic – it’s therefore quite likely that a careful examination of the introductory chapter will yield several chapters that aren’t relevant to the underlying puzzle of the resolution.

should read. Trust me, this is the only way that you'll actually get to read the books you checked out from the library. The same goes for journal articles as they usually have subheadings instead of chapter titles. If the upcoming section of the article discusses something that is only tangential to your topic, either ignore it completely or just skim it.

- **Take specific notes.** There are not many things more frustrating than vaguely remembering a great comment or explanation but not knowing how to find it again. Taking notes will not only prevent this from occurring but it will also help you organize your thoughts while reading.
- **Don't write or make any marks in library books.** It's a criminal act in some states. I'm serious. Not only that, it is just downright selfish and destructive. Any highlighting and underlining immediately makes books lose more than half of their value and cuts down their shelf time significantly. If you've ever seen what a book looks like after four different people have marked it up for their own purposes you'll understand – the original printed text is next to illegible and it is very straining on the eyes to have to deal with four different colors and/or handwriting styles. If you write in library books you're making it that much more difficult for others to extract the same information. So don't do it. If you need to note a specific comment on a certain page, write down the page number and the paragraph on a separate sheet of paper – it's just as effective.
- **Write down the resolution's underlying topic on a separate sheet of paper and keep it within easy reach while reading.** This may sound silly but it's a great way to stay on topic. If you are not sure whether the chapter you are reading is helpful, just re-read the underlying question of the resolution. If the chapter you are reading provides some form of an answer to this question – or paves the way to answer this question later – keep reading. Otherwise, you may want to consider skimming the material.
- **Always read or skim the last chapter or subheading.** Whether it is a book or a journal article you can never go wrong by reading the last chapter or subheading. Usually, this part of the text is labeled as “conclusions” or “lessons learned” or something equally appropriate. This is often where the author will offer a one-statement summary of the argument that captures the flavor of the entire article or a book. Also, reading the concluding chapter is a perfect way to see whether you've missed something in the process.

### *The Argument Sheet File*

This next step takes place when you get to the point in the book or the article where it looks like the author is arguing a point that provides an important clue to answering the underlying puzzle of the resolution. When this happens... **slow... down... read these paragraphs carefully and take notes.**<sup>5</sup> Although you are welcome to do your note taking in whatever style you choose in the next few paragraphs I have outlined an approach that has worked particularly well for me in the past. I call it the “argument sheet file” and it is a pretty straightforward and effective way to evaluate arguments.

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<sup>5</sup> Be prepared to do this a number of times as most authors are likely to present several useful points within a single article or book chapter.

Here is what you do: Take a sheet of paper and write the name of the book/article and the author you are evaluating at the top. Also note the pages where this argument may be found and whether it supports the affirmative or the negative take on the resolution. Finally, write down the answers to the following questions. I'll demonstrate on my own argument about researching on the Web.

1. **What is the author's main claim?** This is a quick summary of the argument. When you are answering this question brevity is key – two to three sentences should suffice. You just want to capture the gist of what the author is trying to prove.

*EXAMPLE – Djuranovic claims that browsing the World Wide Web should be left as a last step in the information gathering process. He argues that one should research books and journals first and only then turn to the Internet.*

2. **Why should anyone care or pay attention to this claim?** If this claim is of little or no importance why are we even arguing about it? This step involves finding out whether the author offers any commentary on the impact of the main claim. If the author doesn't talk about such effects try to discern some impacts on your own. Will acting upon this claim save lives? Will it create a safer living environment for everyone? Will it warn us of an impending disaster? Does it make it easier to do something we all want to do? These effects will not always be explicitly stated so you may have to draw the conclusions yourself.

*EXAMPLE – Djuranovic does not offer any explicit impacts for his overall claim but he does imply that fewer students will be confused and overwhelmed by the research process if they follow his advice about researching on the World Wide Web. As a result, more students will complete their research projects on time and the overall quality of their work will increase.*

3. **How does the author support the main claim of the argument?** This is a crucial step. You want to carefully read the paragraphs in question and see what information the author provides to bolster the main claim. Think of this way – what information has the author provided for those who do not agree with his main claim? How is he trying to convince those that do not agree with him that he is right? What information has he provided to induce them to change their mind? Most authors do not do this explicitly – they simply offer information that fits with their main point and sometimes address specific counter-arguments that may arise. Therefore, you will most likely have to paraphrase.

*EXAMPLE – Djuranovic offers three supporting observations. First, he writes that the assurances of quality are higher when it comes to books and scholarly journals because most information on the Internet does not undergo the same filtering mechanism as published books and articles. Second, he points out that there are no library assistants to help students who are browsing the Internet alone. Finally, he claims that students run a chance of wasting too much time browsing the web and not finding any useful information if they start off with the Internet.*

4. **Are there serious errors in the author’s argument? If so, does the presence of any of these invalidate or seriously impair the argument?** That is, are there instances of improper logic, misapplied data, assertions with no proof, statements that are simply not true, or relevant information that was omitted? Maybe the implications of the main claim are overstated? The answers to such questions can either be found in the book itself, your personal knowledge or other research you have done. Answer this question carefully – even if you find that certain inconsistencies exist it doesn’t necessarily mean the entire argument is unusable. With a little amending the argument could still be fit for use in a debate round. However, there are some arguments that suffer from serious deficiencies. It is better that you find these now than let your opponent point them out to you during the round.

***EXAMPLE** – Djuranovic does not provide any proof of his assertions. However, that is really not the issue on the first two claims as they are essentially true: There are stricter regulations on published books than websites and there is usually more help available at the library than beside a personal computer. However, with the third piece of supporting evidence the author does not mention whether the chance of wasting time on the Internet is high or low. He also doesn’t provide any information on how often students have wasted too much time on Internet searches and were therefore unable to complete their project or forced to turn in projects of lower quality. It may very well be that his claim reflects concern for a very low number of students. He also never mentions whether the chances of wasting time searching on the Internet are any greater than doing the same search in the library.*

*Overall, his argument stands but it should be modified to reflect special circumstances. There seems to be no good reason why a disciplined student who already possesses a list of useful websites on the topic, knows how to tell good arguments from bad ones and is proficient enough in collecting information on her own should not start her research by browsing the Web. It seems that in these special cases whether one starts with the World Wide Web or a trip to the library is irrelevant. To strengthen this argument further Djuranovic should mention that in special cases beginning one’s research on the Internet is acceptable – however, since so few students possess such high levels of experience or preparation good advice for the general audience should be to save the web browsing for the end.*

Notice that I took the time to improve on the original argument by suggesting how it can be fixed. You don’t have to do that for every argument you encounter, but you should at least consider it before you reject an argument – it may still be salvageable.

What was the purpose of this exercise? **When you have answered all four of these questions you will have created an argument sheet.** This argument sheet gives you a succinct way of organizing your thoughts and will play a huge part in writing your cases in the upcoming chapter. You should repeat the above process for all the readings you do. If you end up with no more than a half-dozen unique arguments you are doing well.

Once you collect all the argument sheets together you will have made your own argument file. This argument file is a synopsis of your research and a very useful tool in case writing, as you will see in the next chapter. The only thing left to do is look at each argument carefully and see whether it better



supports the negative or the affirmative position. For most arguments this classification will be pretty clear. But some arguments are not so easy to categorize. If you come upon this problem don't ignore it – your job in each round will be to defend a specific position and you will not benefit much from an argument that equally supports the affirmative and the negative. To tell you the truth, there really isn't much that you can do. Don't try to force the argument onto any specific side and don't try to apply it equally on both sides. Instead, put it aside and keep referring to it periodically at later times.

### ***Adding to the Argument Sheet File***

You can make your argument sheet file into more than just a collection of supported claims you found while researching. If you feel that you have some original ideas or arguments about the resolution, whether they pertain to the negative or affirmative position, make additional sheets that contain your own arguments. Just remember to analyze your arguments in the same way you analyzed published works. Write down your main claim on the sheet along with your supporting evidence and a brief discussion of whether there are any shortcomings or limits to your argument. Hey, it's only fair – the purpose of creating these sheets is not just to get you to remember the specifics of each argument but to get you to think critically about the works you have read. Breaking down the argument into its main claim and supporting evidence helps you organize your thoughts and allows you to see whether there are any shortcomings that you might have missed while reading.

This chapter concludes the portion of the handbook devoted to research. Although I tailored this approach to fit Lincoln-Douglas debate, I hope you realize how widely applicable the advice I gave you really is. All you have to do is substitute any other research project you are assigned for your L-D resolution – the procedures you would then need to follow are exactly the same. If you apply these approaches to your schoolwork, your grades and the quality of your research will rise.

And remember that practice makes perfect. No one was born a genius and it takes a while to get a knack for recognizing arguments and learning how to analyze them properly. If you remain honest with yourself and keep putting in the research hours, you will reap the rewards sooner than you think.

## **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

### **How to Research an L-D Resolution: Part 2**

- An argument is a claim supported by evidence.
- Create an argument sheet file by writing down and analyzing the arguments you encounter in your readings. An argument sheet should discuss the following:
  - The argument's main claim
  - The importance of the main claim
  - The evidence that is used to support the main claim
  - Any shortcomings in the supporting evidence
- Once you have completed your argument file separate the arguments into those that support the affirmative position and those that support the negative. Add to it any ideas of your own.

# Chapter Five

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## BEFORE THE ROUND: WRITING YOUR CASES

Starting with this chapter, the handbook takes a sharp turn away from research and addresses the specifics of Lincoln-Douglas debate. Whereas the majority of the previous section was devoted to teaching you research and analysis skills applicable to any topic, the next two sections focus primarily on showing you how to improve upon your success as a debater. If you have attended even one tournament you will probably feel right at home with the majority of the terminology and discussions contained in these sections. If you haven't, be prepared to go back in text and remind yourself of the different definitions of terms used in the text. One final warning: this is the most important, longest and most challenging chapter in the handbook by far. It may help you to read it several times.

The key to success in L-D debate on all levels and at every tournament lies in writing a solid case and showing the judge that you clearly understand the topic and the resolution. You will win many more rounds than you will lose if you can create a case with:

- **contentions strong enough to adequately support your main claim**
- **a value premise that clearly shows why your main claim is important**

While many rounds can be won with nothing more than a strong case, mediocre rebuttal skills, and a minimal amount of oratorical ability, it is very difficult to win any rounds with a weak case. In addition, most of the real learning associated with L-D debate does not take place during the round but before it, during the preparation process. Thus, the natural starting point of this section is a discussion of what you need to do to build a strong case.

There are many ways to build a Lincoln-Douglas debate case and I won't go into all of them here; instead, I'll show you a method that, in my opinion, naturally arises from the research you completed in the previous chapter. There are two main things you need to know about a Lincoln-Douglas case:

- **It is one long and coherent answer to the resolution's underlying puzzle.**
- **It is a central claim with a set of supporting contentions.**

Think of it as writing a research paper – your central claim is your thesis statement, your thesis statement is the answer to the prompt your teacher gave you, and your contentions are a set of developed lines of argumentation that support the main claim. The central claim is always the same because the affirmative and the negative each ultimately argue for the truth of their respective side of the resolution. In the “globalization vs. national sovereignty” resolution the affirmative's main claim is

that globalization ought to be valued over national sovereignty when the two are in conflict; the negative claims the opposite. These two facts do not change. Contentions and value premises, however, vary widely.

By convention, debaters start their cases by offering a quote from a respected source or an appropriate analogy or illustration that summarizes why their take on the resolution is the superior one. Next, the debater recites the resolution, word for word, and clearly states whether he or she is affirming or negating it. Then the debater proceeds to offer definitions of all relevant terms in the resolution. Next come the introduction and definition of the value premise and the value criterion (more on what these terms really mean later) and the presentation of the contentions that support the main claim. After reading the last contention, most debaters offer a quick recap of their entire case, usually by pointing out how their contentions support their value criterion and their overall value premise. In the Affirmative case this is where the speech ends; in the negative's case the debater proceeds immediately to attack the affirmative's case.

Some debaters really enjoy the process of writing their cases and I think a part of the reason is that writing a good debate case is an art form. Much like an artist you have to make a polished product out of pieces that do not fit together at first. If you ever get a chance to watch elimination rounds between top national circuit debaters, listen closely to their cases. Their cases often feature an interesting and creative mix of arguments that you never thought could fit under the same value premise – yet they do and they sound quite convincing.

The method outlined below is geared toward getting you to construct an organized and well-argued answer to the underlying puzzle of the resolution. You will start by getting a good understanding of what makes a value premise and a value criterion. Next, you will learn how to select a value premise and a value criterion and use them to create a basic one-sentence response to the underlying puzzle. Next, you will find out how to use your argument sheet file to build a strong set of supporting contentions that will branch out from that one sentence and comprise the body of your case. You will later connect these contentions together and link them to your value criterion. Finally, with your case all but finished, you'll top off the process by adding the opening quote, the definitions, and any observations that you deem necessary.

If you have done your research properly and you continue to think creatively and critically about your arguments, the case you create with the methods I illustrate below will be a difficult one to defeat and a fun one to debate. It will also be a marvelous creation that you can proudly show to others.

### ***Introduction to the Value Premise and Criterion***

Value premises and value criteria are by far the most misunderstood part of Lincoln-Douglas debate. This part of the chapter will clarify many of these misconceptions and show you how to properly find a value premise and a value criterion so that your entire case makes sense. I have tried to make this chapter as objective as possible but there are undoubtedly alternate views on using the value premise and criterion. The approach I outline below is sensible and gives you a fair chance of learning something valuable from debate as an activity and winning every round you ever debate.

**A value premise is a statement of some broad concept of great value that is specific to your case.** Justice is a value and so is morality, equality, liberty, progress and the concept of individual rights. To some extent, things like wealth, good health, and mutual love are values as well. However,

the items on this second list would not make good value premises in Lincoln-Douglas debate. What makes justice a better value premise than good health or love? Good health and love are expressions of specific desires we have about our own condition; justice is a broader value that reaches down to our deepest beliefs about the kind of world we would like to live in. Justice deals with questions of fairness and entitlement, like what minimum levels of good health and love we are all entitled. Therefore, when you are searching for a value premise, try to find a value that is encompassing and penetrates to the core of the human condition. Look for a value that doesn't just address only one facet of life's circumstance but instead focuses on broad arrangements and distributions that propose to satisfy many competing ideas.

You may be wondering how this discussion relates to Lincoln-Douglas debate. The short answer is that it all has to do with the overall importance of the arguments you are making while debating. If you take a look back to question #2 on your argument sheets, it asked you to determine why you should pay any attention to the main claim. That is the same motivation that should drive you to use a value premise. **The ultimate purpose of a value premise is to allow L-D debaters to prove the importance of their arguments by linking them to some concept or idea that is widely seen and accepted as valuable.** A value premise is supposed to provide a powerful answer to the "why should anyone care?" question. It is the greater end that both sides of the debate are trying to achieve. So if you claim that your take on the resolution conforms to the ideals of justice, it is obvious why people should take the time to listen to you – what you are proposing is just.

This is why we say that in Lincoln-Douglas debate we argue about values. Throughout the round you and your opponent will disagree on what constitutes some broad concept like justice or morality or progress. You will be arguing that the right/moral/just thing to do is support one side of the resolution; your opponent will claim the opposite. Unfortunately, many values are such nebulous and broad concepts that we need to find a more specific standard of judgment. In other words, you can't just claim that something is moral because you say it is – you have to provide some acceptable standard that can be used to determine whether an action is moral.

This is where a value criterion comes in. **A value criterion is a focused standard that your audience can use to determine whether you have provided adequate support for your value premise. It essentially defines your value premise.** If your value premise makes the implicit claim that your argument is important because it upholds an idea most people greatly admire, your value criterion sets up a way for an impartial observer to determine whether this is really true. Anyone can say that his argument will lead to justice – but how can we know that this is true? That's the job of the value criterion.

Students often have trouble with these two concepts as they are difficult to grasp and even more difficult to learn to incorporate into a case successfully. I have tried many methods of explanation but I've found that the best one is by way of a precise, step-by-step model that clearly shows you which piece of the puzzle fits where. The only way to understand the importance of the value premise and criterion in a debate case is to see how they are inextricably tied to the underlying question of the resolution. That is what the box on the next page is intended to do. And if it looks like something you might find in your math book, I sincerely apologize. When you read it, study it slowly, and practice on Type 4 resolutions in the Appendix.

## Understanding the Basic Structure of Your Case: A Model

Since they are the simplest to understand and the most frequent, I will use a general Type 4 resolution. Most underlying questions of these resolutions boil down to the following format where (X) and (Y) can stand for virtually any course of action or some concept:

*Why should (X) be valued above (Y)?*

Let's look at the affirmative's answer to this question. It takes this form:

*(X) ought to be valued above (Y) because only (X) will lead us to "something good."*

The negative, on the other hand, would respond in the opposite manner:

*(Y) ought to be valued above (X) because only (Y) will lead us to that same "something good."*

That "something good" is your **value premise**. It is a concept, idea, or condition important enough to warrant valuing X over Y. It is the answer to the "so what?" question. It also leads to the next question:

*How will we know whether (X) or (Y) lead us to "something good?"*

And the subsequent answer:

*(X) or (Y) will lead us to "something good" if it leads us to an "important aspect of something good."*

The answer to this question and that "important aspect of something good" is your **value criterion**. As you can see, the possibilities are even greater on this level. This is part of the reason why the standard of judgment that you pick is so important – and also so challenging. But it is also what makes the activity fun – learning to tailor your arguments to different value criteria is an exciting intellectual challenge.

Now that you understand the place and purpose of the value premise and criterion, it is time to see where the contentions would fit in. The affirmative and the negative each pick up the burden of proving that their side leads to an "important aspect of something good" and offer reasons for why this is so. As a result, the general stance of each side would take the following forms:

### **The affirmative's answer to the resolution's underlying question:**

*Only (X) – and not (Y) – will lead to an "important aspect of something good" – and thereby to "something good" – because of (Aff. Contention 1), (Aff. Contention 2) and (Aff. Contention 3).*

### **The negative's answer to the resolution's underlying question:**

*Only (Y) – and not (X) – will lead to an "important aspect of something good" – and thereby to "something good" – because of (Neg. Contention 1) and (Neg. Contention 2).*

By now you are probably wondering how you will ever find a value and a value criteria. Well I won't lie to you – it is difficult. However, you are not completely alone as there are two very useful sources for finding a value premise and a criterion: the resolution itself and your argument sheet file. Generally speaking, looking at the resolution will allow you to select a value premise and using your argument sheet file will help you find an appropriate value criterion. Let's start with the value premise.

## Finding a Value Premise

There are two main places to locate a value premise. You should first look at the resolution structure and then examine your argument sheets. The ordering here is important because about half the resolutions you will ever debate demand that you use a specific value. For most of the other half you will get a general sense on which value you should employ. The key lies in examining the resolution's underlying question. Here are some examples:

- Capitalism is superior to socialism as a means of achieving economic justice. The mandated value is economic justice. The evaluative term is “superior,” and the affirmative's burden is to prove that capitalism has a better chance of achieving economic justice than does socialism. How do you know this? Look at the wording of the resolution: “achieving economic justice” already tips you off that this will be the goal of both the affirmative and the negative.
- The possession of nuclear weapons is immoral. This is another clear-cut case. The value premise here is morality. The affirmative is asked to show that mere possession of nuclear weapons is incompatible with morality. The negative's burden is to prove that morality and nukes can go hand in hand. If you have trouble seeing this, just think of the resolution's underlying question: “Why is the possession of nuclear weapons immoral?” Any attempt to answer this question will ultimately make some appeal to morality, either by showing that nuclear weapons and morality are perfectly compatible or that they are not.
- Colleges and universities have a moral obligation to prohibit the public expression of hate speech on their campuses. The obvious value premise is morality again. And while it may be easy to prove that prohibiting public expression of hate speech is moral, the resolution asks something different – it asks the affirmative to prove that hate speech is so injurious that the very definition of morality obligates university authorities to squelch it. The negative's claim is not to prove the morality of hate speech but to prove that there is no moral obligation to stifle it. So what are the two sides debating? The flavor of morality within a college campus and its relation to hate speech.

You probably noticed that whenever the words *moral* or *just* appear in the resolution, I suggested either morality or justice as value premises. What really makes justice and morality the most appropriate value premises in these cases are the structures of the resolutions. **Most Type 1 and 2 resolutions and some Type 3 resolutions will clearly specify which value premise you should use.** If you are debating one of these resolutions, don't waste your time trying to find another value premise when a very appropriate one has already been suggested by the resolution's format and its underlying puzzle. Otherwise, you are taking a great risk that your entire position will be non-topical.

But not all resolutions are this straightforward. **Many Type 3 and virtually all Type 4 resolutions have a broad (but still limited) pool of relevant values from which you can pick your value premise.** A few examples:

- The individual ought to value the sanctity of life above the quality of life. Here is what would not be a good value premise: sanctity of life or quality of life. Clearly these values are too biased to offer anything useful to the debate – they are the two values in opposition and the crux of the debate! Claiming that sanctity of life should be valued over the quality of life because it better supports the ultimate idea of the sanctity of life in essence says that you should win the round because you support your side of the resolution better than your opponent. Clearly you need to appeal to some higher source and the most obvious of these would be morality. Liberty could be an interesting value, especially if the debate focused on the real-world example of euthanasia. Again, look to the underlying question: Why should an individual value sanctity of life over quality of life? There could be many reasons but many of them are all likely to involve some individual right or benefit – a true sign of a good value premise.
- Capital Punishment is justified. Your value premise here can be anything that offers a reasonable justification of capital punishment. If you believe that a decline in criminal activity is “something good” that can be reasonably achieved by both the negative and the affirmative, that would make for a fine value premise.
- The public's right to know ought to be valued above the right to privacy of candidates for public office. You have more freedom to pick your value premise here. Why value the public's right to know over the candidate's right to privacy? Although a bit broad, societal welfare could be good value premise for this resolution. You could also go with something like the *integrity of the democratic process* or just *democracy*. However, it is clear that your value premise should have something to do with either democracy or the overall good of the society. Values like *peace* or *quality of life* would not make appropriate value premises for this topic. Even *morality*, which many debaters believe to be mandated by the use of the word “ought,” wouldn't fit in very well because discussions over privacy rights of public officials aren't usually connected to questions of morality. So even though you have more options for a value premise with this resolution you still don't have free reign to pick any value you like.

Since you have more freedom to choose your value premise on Type 3 and Type 4 resolutions you can (and should) turn to your argument sheet file as a guide. Under question #2 on each of your argument sheets – for both the affirmative and the negative – you already wrote an answer to why the author believes his ideas are important. Look at the various answers to this question and try to notice a pattern between these claims. Do they all make mention of a similar standard of action? Do the sources of your arguments continue to appeal to the same concept of vision? If so, that can be your value premise and the main part of your answer to the underlying puzzle of the resolution.

If you can't seem to find an appropriate answer in your argument sheets, go back to the original book or article and see if you missed something. Ask your friends, your coaches, your fellow classmates or debaters from other schools that you've met during tournaments. You can even go back to the library

and see if there is any easily accessible and direct information on your value premise. Finally, if you're really stuck, consider the possibility that you're thinking too hard about this and you're throwing away very appropriate value premises. If all else fails simply stop thinking about it actively and pick up something else to do – homework, watch a movie, go out, play a video game, anything to get your mind off the resolution. You'll be surprised how suddenly a solution will strike you when you least expect it.

One final rule for finding a value premise is this: **Since a value premise is meant to serve as a yardstick of relevance for all arguments in the round it should be fair to your opponent.** Your opponent should be able to uphold the same value premise so that whoever wins the round does by proving that they uphold the accepted standard of the round better than their opponent. Note that this also makes for a very good test of whether your value premise is biased to your side of the resolution.

Here is a brief checklist of what makes a good value premise.

#### A good value premise...

- Answers the “who cares?” and “so what?” questions.
- Links various arguments on the truth of the resolution to a concept widely believed to be of great value, thereby helping to prove the arguments' importance.
- Is either explicitly mandated or at least suggested by the topic's structure and wording.
- Provides fair standard to which the judge can hold both you and your opponent.

### Finding a Value Criterion

Now that you have your value premise squared away it is time to give it some focus by choosing an appropriate value criterion. I will tell you straight away that this is probably the most difficult part of case writing. **Your main goal in looking for a value criterion is to somehow find a way to construct a strong link between your arguments and your value premise.** Remember, the idea here is to answer the questions: “How do we know whether the affirmative or the negative stance on the resolution will ultimately lead us toward the value premise?” and “What standard should we use?”

When I was first trying to wrap my mind around this concept, I found it helpful to think in terms of visual imagery and analogies. I might help you to think of the value criterion as a bridge between two very different worlds separated by a large chasm – on one side you have a nebulous concept that is your value premise while on the other side you have your well-supported and logically rigorous arguments from the argument sheets you prepared in the previous chapter. These two worlds are far apart and it's your job to connect them. Your value criterion is that bridge. Go out and build it.

That brings us to the next question. From which side should you start building your bridge? This may seem like a trivial point but it isn't – it is very important. Remember, **your value criterion serves as a judgment standard for your value** (which is why in some parts of the country it is referred to as a judgment criterion). For everyone in the round, and especially the judge, the criterion determines whether the arguments in your case or your opponent's case will ultimately lead toward the conditions



specified in the value premise. Therefore, to continue with the bridge-over-a-chasm analogy, the bridge should start from the value premise side of the chasm and stretch out towards the arguments side. What does this mean in plain English? It means that **you should primarily look to your value premise to find a value criterion**. If you try to come up with a value criterion by looking at your arguments, all you will do is set up a loop – you will come up with a great way of judging the value of your arguments by looking to see what judgment criterion best fits your arguments. Needless to say, that’s not helpful.

So if you can’t look in your argument sheet file, where can you look? Your possibilities are virtually endless – which is both good and bad. It’s good because, unlike with value premises, there are likely to be a dozen or more suitable value criteria somewhere out there. It’s bad because it means you have to find at least one of them and you don’t have much to go on.

Your first stop should be books and journal articles that specifically talk about your value premise. There are likely going to be many such sources so try to focus on books that attempt to define the value premise or explain some specific condition for it. This is why debaters are often encouraged to read introductory texts about political philosophy or popular philosophical works about justice – these are tremendously helpful sources of acceptable value criteria. Your teachers, friends and other debaters can also be of use. And a good session of hard thought about the value premise never hurt anyone either. Think of real-world instances that would constitute violations of your value premise and work backwards from these. What these violations infringe upon that makes them so wrong? But don’t settle for the most obvious answer either because you run the risk of ending up with another nebulous concept that doesn’t really clarify anything.<sup>6</sup> Remember, your value criterion should be some specific condition of your value premise that is relevant to the topic at hand.

I mentioned that this is the most difficult aspect of L-D debate and you can probably see why: no one can give you a formula for finding a great value criterion even if your value premise is a famous one like justice. You have to find one that fits the topic. If you feel frustrated please don’t think that it’s because you are not making progress. Every second that you spend thinking about what would make a good Value Premise/Criterion combination is a moment well spent because you are learning how to think analytically and practicing working through problems methodically. The more you practice it, the better you will get at it. And THAT is the real purpose of L-D debate – to get you accustomed to thinking and analyzing. The little help I can offer is to suggest some possible value premise/criterion combinations. Also, for most resolutions I post a few paragraphs on my website that point you in the right direction.

- The United States has a moral obligation to mitigate international conflicts.
  - VP – *Morality*; VC – *Net Reduction of Human Suffering*. The idea here is that one relevant characteristic of morality is a net reduction of human suffering. The affirmative argues that mitigating international conflicts reduces net human suffering and that the US is therefore morally obligated to act in such a way. The negative challenges this notion and points out all the ways in which mitigation of international conflicts does not reduce net human suffering. Note how broad concepts like morality and moral obligation have been reduced to something slightly more tangible – a net reduction of human suffering.

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<sup>6</sup> It is not a good idea to use another value premise as your value criterion as it is more likely to confuse than clarify. What does it really mean to say that we judge whether something is just by seeing whether it protects individual rights? What are these rights? How are we to know who possesses them? Is it ever just to curtail them or take them away?

- When in conflict, the letter of the law ought to take priority over the spirit of the law.
  - VP – *Societal Welfare*; VC – *Preservation of Peace or Trust in the Legal System*. One key aspect of a well-ordered society is that it is at peace or that its citizens believe in its laws. The affirmative argues that peace is best preserved when everyone knows the rules and obeys them even if it doesn't always provide for the most desired outcome. The negative contends that peace is best preserved when the intent of an action is taken into account and no one is punished for acts that the law clearly never meant to punish. The negative could also counter by pointing out that people lose faith in the legal system when they see judges hand down sentences that violate common sense.
  
- In the United States, federal control is the best way to improve public education.
  - VP – *Improvement of Public Education in the US*; VC – *Increased Standardized Test Scores*. First off, this is a bad topic. I include it here to show you what a bad topic looks like and why it is a bad topic. Although it has little to do with morality or justice that's not what makes it a bad topic. What makes this a bad topic is that it is essentially a question of which approach has the best chance of improving public education – a very policy-specific, largely utilitarian undertaking that clearly places upon the affirmative the burden of proving the effectiveness of federal control. I offered standardized test scores as one benchmark of improvement in public education because I think the SAT tests students' skills pretty fairly, but this stance would likely ruffle some feathers and be a point of debate. And I shudder to think it, but the only approach on this L-D topic as the negative would be to come out with an actual plan that doesn't involve the federal government. As the affirmative you would obviously have to present evidence that federal control has the potential to raise students' scores.

I haven't done the research to vouch for these combinations but they should give you some sense of just how much your value premise and criterion could vary from one resolution to another. In the end, whichever value premise and value criterion you choose the one thing that you should NOT do is pick a value premise and a value criterion because they worked really well on your previous case. Each resolution requires that you think about your value premise and criterion anew. Following the steps outlined in these pages should at least make that process more focused and hopefully more productive. And pat yourself on the back – you just read the most intellectually challenging part of the handbook. In terms of difficulty, it's all-downhill from here.

This concludes the series of sections on the value premise and criterion. Physically plugging the value premise and criterion into your case is quite simple. State your value premise and criterion, define them, and offer a sentence or two on why you chose this combination, how it further develops your case and why you believe that this particular arrangement is legitimate. In essence, answer the underlying question of the resolution.

## ***Building Your Contentions***

What is a contention? By now you probably already have some idea. Your case is the main claim that you are making and your contentions offer support for your main claim. **A contention is a single sustained argument that offers some compelling reason for why the resolution should be either affirmed or negated.** Take a look at the example below from the affirmative position on Resolution 4.

**The Aff. Main Claim**                                    - *Globalization ought to be valued above national sovereignty when the two are in conflict.*

**An Aff. Contention**                                    - *Valuing globalization over national sovereignty leads to greater economic prosperity and increases human welfare across the globe.*

This affirmative contention gives us one good reason why we should accept the affirmative's main claim. Of course, it is up to the negative to challenge this statement and point out the dangers and costs of globalization. And that's how debate ensues....

Since your contentions are the foundation of your case think about them carefully. If there are serious flaws within your contentions, there is little reason for anyone, including the judge, to believe your main claim. If this happens, you will most likely lose the round. Similarly, if you create a strong contention that clearly proves a unique benefit on your side of the resolution and defend it throughout the round, chances are high that the judge will see this and award you the ballot.

The best way to create a strong contention it is to consult one or more self-contained arguments located in your sheet file. This is why making a sheet file was so essential in the previous chapter – creating a contention is now a matter of picking and choosing which sheets from your argument file to use. In this file you already have summaries of arguments that offer support for both the affirmative and negative side of the resolution. In fact, the secret to building strong contentions lies in your argument sheet file. If you did a solid job researching the topic and analyzing the arguments when you were taking notes, these next few steps will be easy.

The only problem you might encounter is a case where you found more than three affirmative and two negative unique arguments and now have to decide which ones to exclude. As a general rule, you should not fit any more than three fully fleshed out arguments into an affirmative case and two into the negative case. If you present an affirmative case with four contentions not only do you have to fit them all into your six-minute affirmative constructive but you also have to defend them and attack your opponent's case during the 1AR, which is only 4 minutes long. In that situation, it is better to have only two or three contentions that you fleshed out fully in the affirmative constructive. So if this happens you want to make sure that your cases feature only the strongest arguments. There are several tests for determining the strength of an argument:

- Consult your Argument Sheet File – Usually the arguments that have the least deficiencies, need the least altering, and speak to the topic in a clear and direct way are the best ones to make into contentions. All these factors are already noted on the sheets in the file because you performed this analysis when you first came across these arguments.

- Test the arguments' compatibility with your value premise and criterion – This test is crucial. Take the time to look at your arguments and see whether they conflict with your value premise or criterion. For those that do, lay them aside – you simply can't have a case where your ultimate value is sanctity of life but your second contention's main claim focuses on the economic benefits of supporting your position (your opponent would rightfully point out that your second contention has no place in a case whose ultimate justification is that it conforms to morality). But if you find that your value premise or your criterion is causing you to reject too many of your arguments, even some of your best ones, you may have a bad value premise or an inappropriate criterion. If that is the case, go back to the original steps of finding your value premise and criterion and see if you may have made a mistake anywhere in the process. Whatever the situation, you cannot have any conflicts between your value premise, your criterion and your contentions. For your case to hold water, these three must be in unison. Although this rule may force you to abandon some of the arguments you spent a sizable portion of your time researching, don't think of it as a step backwards. Think of it as a filtering process – you realized that this particular take on the topic simply does not fit in with this resolution – and move on. It's a lot like putting together a jigsaw puzzle – what makes completing it so rewarding is that all the pieces do not fit together immediately. It's the same with writing L-D cases. This is why I think it is crucial to follow the outline of this handbook – first find the value premise and the value criterion and then start putting together your contentions. The sooner you see that there may be a compatibility problem between your value premise and your arguments the better off you'll be.
- Pit the arguments against each other – If you are evaluating an affirmative argument, take a look at some of the corresponding negative arguments. Do any of these invalidate your affirmative argument? If so, find another affirmative argument – it's better that you do this now than to let your opponent do it for you in the round. You want to find the strongest argument possible, one that you can defend throughout the round from your first speech to the last. On the other hand, you're not looking for a "perfect" argument – just one that is solid enough for you to defend for the 13 minutes of speaking time that is allotted to you.
- Keep asking questions – This is one of my favorite tests, because it simulates a good cross-examination. What you want to do here is very similar to what you did when you were analyzing the resolution. That is, take the main claim of your argument and keep asking increasingly pointed questions that prompt you to explain your position further. Keep stressing the "why?" questions for arguments that claim the importance of something (*Protection of individual rights is important because justice cannot exist without them*) and throw in the "how?" questions for procedural arguments (*Enforcing the letter of the law leads to a greater respect for the legal system*). Repeat this process several more times until you are satisfied with the final answer. Also, remember to write down these responses and hold on to them – you will need them later when preparing for your rebuttals.

Once you have your strongest arguments selected, it is time to start building contentions. A contention can take two forms: it can either be a single argument sheet from your file or it can be a combination of two or more sheets. Which of these forms you select should be determined by the type

of supporting evidence you have. If your sheets are for the most part stand-alone arguments, then a single-argument contention for each one is probably appropriate. On the other hand, if you have multiple arguments that all tie into a single claim you should consider gathering a few arguments into a single contention. Here are two examples:

- On the resolution “Capital punishment is justified,” one common argument was that capital punishment deters other potential criminals from committing such heinous crimes in the first place. In this case, the argument should be made into its own contention along with the appropriate supporting social science research.
- On the resolution “Civil Disobedience is justified in a Democracy” there are a number of negative sheets from different authors who each argue that civil disobedience is no different than any other illegal act. While some authors dismiss the notion that it is justified to break laws for the purpose of complying with a higher moral calling, others argue that accepting the forthcoming punishment still does not justify the crime. Since each of these arguments is too minute to warrant a full contention by itself you could consider packaging all of them into a single contention to support a broader claim that civil disobedience should be regarded no differently than other instances of breaking the law. If you do choose to take this approach, make sure that the arguments you’ve chosen to present together do not conflict or contradict each other. That would be bad.

Whether you decide to mix and match arguments or only make one argument per contention is up to you. If you have a lot of evidence for one particular argument and you believe that this is one of your strongest arguments, by all means develop it as such. The best contentions I remember hearing all started with a single claim at the beginning and then proceeded to offer a lot of convincing evidence in support. Offhand, I would say that most good debaters I have judged provided only two contentions but supported them with good evidence and sound analysis. Overall, I’ve found it’s best to present as much solid evidence as you think you need to make your point. Just remember – you have to fit it all into a six-minute affirmative speech.

This brings up an interesting question: how much of your allotted time should you devote to your contentions? This is mostly a matter of personal preference, reading style and which position you will be arguing. If you are the affirmative your contentions should take up no less than four and no more than five minutes of your allotted six minutes. If you are arguing the negative, your contentions should take up between 2:45 and 3:15 minutes of your total constructive time. How much is that in words? It’s tough to tell. Time yourself while you are speaking and then convert this into words – if you find out that it takes you four and a half minutes to read three pages of text then use that as a guideline.

As an aside, it is generally not worth your time to try to speak faster than your normal reading rate while you are presenting your constructive. Think quality over quantity – it is more important that the judge and your opponent fully understand your arguments. Actually, it is even more important that you get into a habit of speaking and reading at a pace that everyone can understand and follow. Debate is ultimately an activity meant to better your communication skills. If you ever have to give a timed speech in a public setting – a city council meeting or on a televised program – speaking faster to present more arguments within the allotted time will not be an option. And if you do attempt to speed-read in such a setting, the general public will not only fail to comprehend what you are saying but they

are likely to wonder aloud whether you have a serious anxiety disorder (why else would anyone speak so fast in a public setting?). So how fast is too fast? Ask a friend who knows nothing about debate. He's likely to be young enough and bright enough for you to know that any aversion he may express to your reading speed is not due to a lack of intelligence or a generation gap but to the fact that you are simply speaking too fast. You could also ask your coach or other members of your forensics team, but try to find individuals who have no experience with fast-speaking events like policy debate or L-D.

Once you know how much space you have to work with it is time to write the first draft of each of your contentions. Let us suppose you picked out three argument sheets from your sheet file and you want to expand each of these into a contention. The first thing you want to do is take a look at the main claim on the argument sheet – it should be the answer to question #1 on the sheet. This is a good place to start. Just write: “In my first contention I claim that [insert claim from argument sheet].” In the very next sentence, explain how this argument relates to the resolution at hand.

The next step involves offering support for your claim. Take a look at what you have written on your argument sheet under questions #3 and #4. That is, see what support you have for this claim (question #3) and whether this supporting evidence needs to be modified any further (question #4). Now, work these two answers into the rest of your contention. If you did it correctly you should end up with a few flowing paragraphs that start by presenting a specific claim which is then developed further by introducing all the necessary supporting evidence. If you believe that they will illustrate your point better throw in a few examples – the news stories you read at the start of your research process are usually a good source of these. Don't focus too much on making this part of the case polished, as you'll do some revising later – just make this draft clear enough to understand.

In essence, that is how you create the main component of a contention and it is a process that you need to repeat step-by-step for your other two contentions. If you were careful and meticulous when you were making your argument sheet file, building contentions is not hard at all.

We're almost done – there is one trap you have to keep in mind. Make sure that your contentions do not contradict each other. Don't just look for contradictions on the top level – take a closer look at your evidence. You don't want to support your claim in the first contention with a piece of information or a line of argument that directly interferes with a point you are trying to make in your third contention. That would also be bad. So if you are satisfied with how your contentions sound and you've determined that they do not conflict with each other, it is time to start wrapping up your case.

### ***Opening Quote***

Compared to the previous pages this part of your case is easy and you shouldn't spend too much time on it when writing your case. When it comes to the opening quote, the news stories you read at the beginning of your research process will probably be the most useful. You can scour them for real-world examples that illustrate your position. If you don't find anything you like in the stories, you can always just offer a quick quote or a summary of an argument sheet from your file. You really shouldn't spend more than thirty seconds of your speech on the opening quote. If you can find some way to incorporate

your opening quote or story into the flow – like referencing it during later speeches to show what happens if we accept (or reject) your main premise – that would be an effective use of your time.

At the same time, don't underestimate the importance of the opening quote either. This is the first real impression that you are leaving on the judge and you want to make it a good one. Although the opening quote may not win you the ballot, it does affect the way the judge looks at you and the rest of your case. A stale and clichéd opening that everyone else is also using will probably get the judge to roll her eyes while an interesting and captivating one will make her listen more intently. Finally, a good opening quote is often a small signal of a good debater. Believe it or not, most judges can probably determine with some certainty how successful you are as a debater just from listening to your opening quote. An interesting story or a precise citation to open your case offers proof that you spent some time researching the topic and that you likely know what you are talking about. And leaving that sort of an impression on the judge can only help you.

### *Definitions*

Definitions are the next part of your case if you are arguing the affirmative side of the resolution. This is another case of the plug-and-chug – simply reference the definitions you obtained when you were analyzing the topic and substitute them into the case. I already discussed definitions in Chapter Three but I believe the topic should be re-visited now.

You should make sure that you provide respectable and fair definitions of your judgment criterion and value premise so that everyone can be on the same page. A sentence or two about how your value criterion and your value premise fit together should also be included so that everyone knows why you picked this combination. If you are the negative, definitions are not as important but they should not be ignored. Listen carefully to the affirmative's definitions and be prepared to rebut any definitions that are either unfair or incomplete with your own definitions.

And this will happen. Novice or unprepared debaters will often attempt to gain an upper leg in the beginning of the round by offering definitions that severely limit their opponent's position. Whether on purpose or by accident, some debaters even go as far as offering definitions that flatly define their opponent out of the round. Finally, some debaters purposefully use secondary and tertiary or alternate meanings of words to surprise their opponents with approaches to the topic that are technically accurate but obviously not within the spirit of the resolution. This last practice is often referred to as "squirreling." **All these practices are abusive debating.** Although determining what the spirit of the resolution calls for is a subjective judgment, it should suffice to say that a great majority of judges and opponents tend to adhere to one general interpretation of the resolution. Using definitions that avoid this perceived clash or provide little to no room for your opponent to debate is a practice to be avoided. Even if such tactics can bring occasional success early on in one's debate career, I still advise you not to do this – not only does it make for a particularly sloppy and uninteresting debate but also it will never work against a more experienced debater. Most importantly, it goes against the purpose of debate as an activity and teaches you nothing of value.

There is one final note on definitions. Regardless of how fair you think you've made your definitions, you will come across opponents who dispute them and refuse to come to an agreement. Unfortunately,

it only takes one unwilling party to unravel a debate round in this way and there is little you can do about it. You can corner your opponent during cross-examination but that tactic can backfire on you if you fail to extract any useful information and the judge doesn't seem to be bothered by what you view as abusive definitions. So aside from pressing the issue during cross-examination, the most you can do is make sure that you are not the offending party and do your best to distinguish between definitions that are abusive – unfairly limit the opponent's ground – and ones that are creative and legitimate. On this last topic you will have to use your own judgment and proceed on a case-by-case basis. The only advice I can offer you is to keep asking yourself “why?” Why would you or your opponent want to interpret the resolution in a certain manner? Is it to make the debate more biased towards one side or is it to provide an even ground, throw out the extremes, and create a better debate?

### ***Observations***

Observations are not crucial to your cases. An observation is not an argument but an aside that clarifies some relevant rule of debate or signals your intentions in what you wish to argue and how you wish to debate. Debaters often use observations to clarify burdens of proof in the round or point out the special nature of an uncommon resolution wording. In general, observations tend to only take away valuable time from your constructive and I do not recommend that debaters use them. However, if you keep noticing that debaters and judges misread your contentions or debate matters that you believe are non-topical or abusive, feel free to add an observation reminding your opponent of the limits set upon this round. For example, if you want to talk about the structure of the resolution and what it asks the debaters to do, you are welcome to try – just don't spend too much time on it.

### ***Putting Your Case Together***

After you have completed all these steps it is time to pull your case together and create one complete speech. Add in transition phrases where they are needed, play with the specific wording of your contentions and values, and find some interesting way to cap off your constructive – even if it is nothing more than a sentence that once again quickly shows how your contentions support your overall value and prove that your take on the resolution should prevail. Re-read your entire case, see if it flows and work on it until you feel that it does.

This is a good place to review the overall process of what you had to do to write your case. You started by analyzing the topic's terms and structure. You determined the underlying puzzle of the resolution and proceeded to research it. The majority of your research focused on a few good scholarly books and articles – it was supplemented with your own opinion, background news stories on the topic and relevant websites you found on the Internet. After you collected some useful information on the underlying puzzle of the resolution you analyzed your sources in order to make an argument sheet file. Each of the sheets in this file had four key pieces of information on the argument under analysis – the main claim, the overall importance of the main claim, the evidence used to support this main claim, and the overall quality of the evidence used to support the main claim. When it came time to write your case you started by picking a value premise and an appropriate value criterion – you did this by looking at the resolution's structure and by consulting the answers to question #2 on each of the argument sheets. Finally, you narrowed down your arguments to two or three best ones and used them to create



your contentions. You then topped off the case by adding an interesting opening quote and the necessary definitions.

Once all these steps are completed you can look back at your case and complete this final checklist:

- ✓ Does your opening quote capture the judge's attention?
- ✓ Do you clearly state whether you affirm or negate the resolution?
- ✓ Does your case answer the underlying puzzle of the resolution?
- ✓ Are your definitions fair to both you and your opponent?
- ✓ Do you directly state your main claim early in the case?
- ✓ Do you explain how your value premise is mandated by the resolution or highly relevant to the topic?
- ✓ Does your value criterion serve as a clearer definition of your value premise?
- ✓ Do you explain how your contentions link to your value premise and criterion?
- ✓ Are there no conflicts between your contentions?
- ✓ Does your case flow smoothly?
- ✓ Is your case short enough to allow you to read it within the allotted time?
- ✓ Does your case end with a persuasive conclusion that clearly restates your claim?

If the answer to these questions is “yes” then you deserve a hearty “Congratulations!” It is now time to see how good your case really is. The best way to do this is to put aside your ego and let other people read your case and see whether they have any good suggestions. You should also show the case to your coach and other debaters on your team to receive their comments.

If you want to see an example of what a great L-D Debate case looks like you can browse several debate websites and the case exchanges. A good example of a solid affirmative and negative case can be found at this address [www.victorybriefs.net/web-ld/lawnhtld.asp](http://www.victorybriefs.net/web-ld/lawnhtld.asp). Both cases were written by Joe Ross of Nova High School (they are a part of a general article on L-D Debate by Alan Lawn, also of Nova High School). Ross clearly shows how to use the same value premise and criteria to approach the resolution from two very different standpoints and his research is impressive.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

### Before the Round: Writing Your Cases

- The key to winning any Lincoln-Douglas debate round is to present a solid case that shows you clearly understand the topic and the resolution. You do this by writing a case that has contentions strong enough to adequately support your main claim and a value premise that clearly shows why your main claim is important.
- Select a value premise and a value criterion by finding a common higher goal or purpose that is central to the resolution as well as your contentions.
- Build your contentions by expanding on the strongest arguments from your sheet file. In most cases, one such argument will equal a single contention.
- Put the finishing touches on your case by adding an opening quote, definitions, observations (if necessary), and transitions between the contentions to make it all flow smoother.

# Chapter Six

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## BEFORE THE ROUND: PREPARING FOR THE TOURNAMENT

It is cliché to say that preparation is the key to winning. And that's because it really is. Since you have put a lot of time and energy into writing your cases and becoming knowledgeable on the resolution it only makes sense for you to practice translating this knowledge into tournament wins. The purpose of this chapter is to help you prepare a number of last-minute details before you head off to the tournament.

### *Rebuttal Preparation*

Preparing your rebuttals is a great way to help organize your thoughts during the round. It's not just that you will save yourself valuable preparation time with such planning but also that you will be more confident when delivering your speeches later in the round. Anticipating your opponent's arguments and having prepared responses with which to counter will certainly translate into smoother speeches. The idea is to prepare rebuttals that will further strengthen your arguments and pick out a few solid points that can be used to counter some common opposing positions.

When you were building your cases, you selected your strongest arguments, polished them and transformed them into contentions. The process of preparing to defend these contentions is very similar to the process of creating them. When you had to select your strongest arguments you asked a series of "why" and "how" questions and wrote down the responses. Find that sheet of paper and re-read it – these responses will serve as a valuable resource during rebuttals.

Now, take a look back at your contentions – but this time from the opposite standpoint. That is, ask yourself how you would attack these affirmative contentions if you were the negative. Write down your responses on a sheet of paper. Now, take a look at these responses and see how you would respond to these attacks and build back your contentions. Write these down as well. Repeat this process several times just to be sure that you have covered the issue in some depth.

This technique can generate enough ammunition to get you through just about any round. Whether you wish to prepare your rebuttals further is really up to you. Some debaters only bring sheets of paper where they brainstormed and evaluated their arguments. Other debaters prefer to prepare written rebuttals to the standard opposing objections and attacks. Which of these you choose is up to you.

## ***Practice Rounds***

If you have the luxury of being on a team with dedicated debaters who meet regularly during or after school, you should definitely schedule some practice rounds before each tournament. If you are on the National Forensic League schedule where the topics rotate every two months, practice rounds are especially useful before tournaments in early September, November, January, March, and NFL Nationals where you will debate brand-new resolutions.

If you do participate in a practice round, make sure that both parties take the process seriously and simulate the real conditions of a debate round at a tournament. Preparation time should be limited, speeches should be timed, and there should be no interruptions. The coach or other debaters will preferably serve as critics by flowing the round and offering their suggestions at its conclusion.

## ***Speaking***

Despite a heavy emphasis on research and argumentation L-D debate is an event where presentation and speaking ability matters. Although the content of your speeches should be your primary focus you should not ignore this important aspect of the activity either. After all, one of the primary purposes of debating is learning how to become a more effective communicator.

As you no doubt know, there is a huge literature on oratorical skills and public speaking. I will stay away from any attempts to address this issue thoroughly and instead only offer the bare minimum that any L-D debater should know about speaking. Take my lack of confidence to write with authority on this issue as an impetus to go to the library and find some good books on how to improve your speaking ability.

The first thing you should know is that in the majority of cases research and proper preparation are the best methods for improving your speaking ability – period.<sup>7</sup> You have probably already noticed in your life that most people speak clearly and with fewer pauses when they know what they are talking about. The “umm” and the “err” sounds usually only come out when we are confused, nervous or unsure of our responses. Therefore, one good way to help you speak with greater clarity is to devote additional time to understanding the intricacies of the position you are arguing. This greater understanding will also translate into confidence that will help keep you from getting nervous.

Still, if you are like most of America, all the preparation in the world may not be enough to keep your palms from getting sweaty when you get up to give a speech. This is quite normal and natural – speaking before a crowd is not a skill that most high schools students have had a chance to practice. If you notice that you keep getting very nervous at the start of each round, the next page contains some tips to help you keep the butterflies in your stomach under control. Some of these worked for me when I was a debater. In fact, I used to get slightly nervous before every single round regardless of where I was or with whom I was debating.

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<sup>7</sup> Obviously this comment doesn't hold true for everyone. If you have a speech impediment you may have to deal with a serious limitation that affects your delivery. However, while this may limit your speaking ability it certainly does not place any limits on your ability to become a great debater – it is very difficult to defeat sound analysis by speaking eloquently.

- **Read your cases out loud several times before the tournament.** You want to get comfortable with the sound of your own voice and you want to get used to your case. That way, each round will start in a familiar manner.
- **Don't think about your fear.** If you feel afraid when you start speaking, ignore the feeling and focus on the task at hand – reading your case or giving your rebuttal. It sounds a bit too simple but it certainly beats the alternative – thinking about the fear of speaking while trying to give a speech never helped anyone. Before you know it, your fear will subside and you won't even notice it anymore.
- **Don't try to give a perfect speech.** When you make a mistake while reading your case or delivering your rebuttal, don't fret – simply correct yourself and move on. Notice that I didn't write “if” but “when.” You can be sure that during any given debate round you will trip over a word, mispronounce a term, lose your train of thought, leave a sentence unfinished or throw in several “umm” sounds while you are presenting your argument. While the general idea is to minimize such mistakes, no one is expecting you to deliver perfect speeches every time.
- **Get some sleep the night before.** This is often a difficult task, as debate tournaments tend to represent the first time many students have taken overnight out-of-town trips with their friends from school, and pressure is high to stay up late. Also, since many rounds begin early in the morning, getting a full eight hours of sleep may not be possible even if you forego the partying. Still, this doesn't mean that you should get no sleep at all – try to squeeze in as much shut-eye as you can. Speaking clearly, keeping your concentration and thinking on your feet all become impossibly difficult tasks when your body is sleep-deprived.
- **Ask your coach for help.** Many students forget this simple option. Your coach has seen you debate before and probably knows better than anyone how anxiety affects your speaking ability. Moreover, it is very likely your coach has dealt with such challenges before and can share with you other students' successful methods of dealing with nervousness.

## ***Flowing***

*Flowing* is a debate term for note taking. The reason it is called “flowing” is that it tracks arguments as they “flow” through the round. There are two terms here: *flowing*, which is the act of note taking, and a *flow sheet*, which refers to a sheet of paper that houses these recorded arguments.

How you structure your flow is up to you – whatever makes the most sense and allows you to organize your thoughts is probably best kind of flowing method for you. However, you should remember that the important thing is that your flow allows you to track direct responses to specific arguments. One key assumption in debate is that if you offer no response to a certain argument you are implicitly agreeing with it. For this reason, it is important to keep track of all the major arguments in a round – if someone challenges the relevance of your contention, you have to offer a response. I suggest you use a flow outline similar to the one on the next page – the negative's speeches are shaded.

<b>Affirmative Constructive</b>	<b>Negative Constructive</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Affirmative Rebuttal</b>	<b>Negative Rebuttal</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Affirmative Rebuttal</b>
Your notes about the affirmative constructive go here.	The negative's attacks on the affirmative case are written here.	Jot down notes about the affirmative's defense of the affirmative case here.	Negative's response to the affirmative's defense goes here.	Since the affirmative only has three minutes for this speech, what usually happens is that instead of covering every argument on the flow, the affirmative simply selects a small number of points to re-iterate. Jot them down here.
You can use this space to record possible questions to ask during the cross-examination.	This space contains notes about the negative case.	The affirmative's attacks on the negative's case go here.	The negative's responses to the affirmative's attacks go here. Also, any final points of summary can be recorded here as well.	

As you can tell from looking at this example, there is limited space for taking notes. The first consequence of this is that you should not try to transcribe the entire round on your flow sheet – instead, just focus on the main points. Also, to alleviate the problem of space and assist you with being able to jot down the essence of what your opponent is saying, you should use abbreviations. For example, civil disobedience can be shortened to “CD.” while justice can be reduced to a circled letter “J.” However, don’t go overboard with this process as you don’t want to make your flow chart look like a collection of hieroglyphs that need translating. Another trick that many debaters use is to write in two different colors – affirmative arguments in blue and negative arguments in red, for example. This color difference allows them to clearly distinguish between original arguments and their responses on a flow that can get rather messy and crowded toward the end of the round.

This chapter concludes the section on preparing for the tournament. The next two chapters will offer you step-by-step descriptions of what to do during each speech in an L-D debate round.

# Chapter Seven

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## DURING THE ROUND: DEBATING

This chapter will guide you through every minute of a typical debate round and show you what to do when you are arguing the affirmative and negative positions. It may surprise you how short this chapter is, considering the build-up and the amount of explanation it has taken to get to this point. You should take this observation as another sign that the key to winning in debate lies in careful preparation before the tournament.

Before the first speech begins you should check to see whether everything is in order. If you arrived to the assigned room on time this should not be a problem. Make sure that your pens work, that you have enough paper to flow the round, and that the materials you prepared for the round, such as any sheets with pre-printed rebuttals, are easily accessible. Also, having some water available may be a good call in case your mouth gets dry.

### *The Affirmative Constructive (AC)*

If you are debating the affirmative side, the AC is an easy time for you. All you have to do is get up in front of the room and read your case within the allotted six-minute. That's it. When you are done, your opponent will get up, stand next to you and commence the cross-examination.

Allotting time within the constructive was discussed in Chapter Six in the section on writing your cases. Here is the suggested format once again. A star (\*) denotes optional components.

<i>Opening Quote</i>	15-30 seconds
<i>Definitions</i>	15-30 seconds
<i>Observations*</i>	15-30 seconds
<i>Value Premise/Criterion Explanation</i>	30-60 seconds
<i>Contentions</i>	1-2 minutes each
<i>Conclusion</i>	15-30 seconds

If you are the negative, you should be listening intently and taking notes – the general advice for all subsequent occasions when your opponent is speaking. Listen carefully to the opening quote, definitions, and observations and flow them only if they contain an argument – that way you will know you have to rebut it later.

The first thing you should definitely write down when you are the negative is the affirmative's value premise and value criterion. If you can, try to signify how they are defined, but don't write down the entire definition, as you'll likely run out of space and time.

Second, jot down the affirmative's contentions. Most affirmatives will name their contentions (remember, your opponent also wants an easy way to note the arguments on the flow sheet), and these usually provide a good summary of the entire argument. As you write down the title listen for the remainder of the contention. If it is a standard argument that you have heard many times before and your opponent is not offering any new evidence or novel analysis, feel free to jump to the next block on your flow sheet and jot down a possible response or two. However, don't get carried away with doing this either – your primary purpose during the AC is to accurately note down the structure of your opponent's case. Also, if you hear that your opponent is misusing a piece of evidence or providing a faulty analysis note that down and immediately to the right note that there's something wrong with this part of the argument. The most useful way to do this is to develop your own shorthand symbol, like an asterisk, so that you'll remember to address it later.

When the affirmative finishes presenting the contentions, there is usually about 10-15 seconds where the affirmative is wrapping up the speech – use this short time so start thinking about what you can ask during the cross-examination. As you can see, seconds are precious in Lincoln-Douglas debate and you really have to think on your feet – that is why the activity requires such intense focus.

### ***Cross Examination***

The process of cross-examining your opponent is the same regardless of whether you are the affirmative or negative – you both get the same three minutes to work with and your goals are virtually the same. If there is any advantage it lies with the affirmative because the aff. cross-ex comes after the negative has already presented one rebuttal.

Cross-examination can be the most exciting and the most frustrating part of the round. But unlike a cross-examination conducted by lawyers, cross-examination between debaters should resemble a probing discussion. The purpose is not to trap your opponent in a lie but instead to explore thoroughly every facet of his position and point out any inconsistencies or unwarranted assumptions. Therefore, the key to using your cross-examination time effectively lies in knowing what types of questions to ask and how to ask them. But before getting into this discussion there are some basic rules of decorum that you should know.

- **Don't look at your opponent during cross-examination.** Instead, face an imaginary spot on the back wall of the room and converse with your opponent by standing next to each other. This makes the conversation look a lot less confrontational and it also makes people feel less pressured. Conversely, don't be a statue either. Look at the judge, glance at your flow as needed, and even feel free to look at the audience, if there is one. You should especially make eye contact with the judge from time to time to see what her reactions are. If she rolls her eyes at one of your questions or frowns at your opponent's answer, these can be useful clues to what the judge finds most convincing.

- **Be polite but firm.** If you are heading a cross-examination remember that this is your time to use. Many opponents will try to squirm out of your questions by giving you very vague or overly verbose answers. If this happens, don't let them – simply say “thank you” and either move to the next question or re-emphasize that you want to hear a more brief or topical answer. With that said, there is no reason to raise your voice at any time during this process or show frustration.
- **Answer fairly and honestly when your opponent is cross-examining you.** There is really no reason to hide behind vague answers – if you are clear on what you are arguing there is little danger that you will agree to something that will irreparably damage your position. If you are asked to re-state your position in a sentence, do so. If you don't know the answer to a question, just say that you don't know.
- **Think before speaking.** Don't blurt out every answer like you're on a game show or you may pay later. On the other hand, don't take more than a few seconds to think about your responses, as time is limited.
- **No question should be limited to a yes/no response** – Your debate round is not a courtroom and you are no lawyer. This isn't “The Practice” or “Law and Order.” Debate is an intellectual exchange, not a wrestling match – you don't get points for pinning or cornering your opponent. Thus, you should think of cross-examination as a conversation with your opponent about the topic – not an all-out war to see who can extract the most concessions. Don't try to lead your opponent down a tricky path of yes/no responses that will eventually trap him into an indefensible position. More likely than not, such a tactic will fail. Even if it does work, your opponent can easily clarify any statement during one of the rebuttals. Similarly, if your opponent requests a yes/no response only, do not oblige – just say that it's a “qualified yes/no” or respond that the matter is not that simple and that you cannot answer a question with such limits.

The first thing you should know in addition to these basic rules is that your cross-examination should be influenced by your assessment of your opponent. If you know that you are debating a successful debater whose case is obviously well written and shows evidence of research, your cross-examination should be very different than a situation where your opponent is an inexperienced novice. The reason for this difference is that in many cases novice debaters' cases already come with serious flaws in the case's argument structure so that all you need to do is get your opponent to articulate his position to you and point out the flaws. However, if you were to try to do this with a more experienced debater whose case is solid such an approach would do nothing but provide your opponent with more time to articulate her position.

The best way to approach your cross-examination is to decide what you want to achieve in the three minutes that have been allotted to you. Whether you will be able to achieve this goal is not something that you can always control – if your opponent is being particularly evasive you will never have enough time to ask all the questions you want to ask. Don't let this bother you – just do the best you can and see what happens. Here are some suggested goals and sample questions of how you can achieve them:



1. **Agree on a standard of judgment to be used during the round** – This is a good place to start because it gets you talking about the overall case structures. If you and your opponent have similar value premises and criteria, this conversation may be a matter of no more than a few quick exchanges. From that point on, the judge knows that you have both agreed on a standard in the round and that the winner will be the debater who best upholds this standard. If this happens you can transition right into a discussion of burdens of proof. Since you have agreed on the same value premise and a criterion you should also be able to agree on what each side has to do to win the round. Unfortunately, you will be in many rounds where such agreement is not possible – many debaters will simply refuse to agree to a same value premise no matter how much sense it might make for both of you. Others will have legitimately different views on which value should be ultimately upheld or how such a value should be judged. Whatever the case, if your opponent is not budging on this issue simply move on. Do not let this discussion of values occupy more than 30-45 seconds.
  - *If I can successfully prove that individual rights are better protected on the negative, should I win the round?*
  - *Our value premises and criteria are different but would you consider accepting my value premise and criterion as the standard for the round – they are both quite fair to both sides of the debate? If not, what do you think should be the standard for the round?*
  
2. **Get your opponent to state his main position in one or two brief sentences** – The purpose here is two-fold: you want to have a good starting point to offer criticisms of your opponent’s case and you also want to fully understand your opponent’s position. I think that this is best achieved by asking your opponent to provide you with the main claim of his case summarized into one or two sentences – no more! Get him to tell you why he believes the resolution should be affirmed or negated but make sure that he doesn’t take any more than a sentence or two to do this. You certainly don’t want to let your opponent ramble on about his case as a result of this question. If he does start to do this, politely cut him off and reiterate your request. Don’t let this process go on for more than 30 seconds.
  - *Please tell me briefly the main claim of your case.*
  - *Please summarize your reasons for affirming/negating the resolution in a single sentence.*
  
3. **Start asking the “why” and “how” questions**. Remember the questions that you used to evaluate your own contentions? Well it’s time to put them to use! This is perhaps the most effective cross-examination tactic you can ever employ because it clearly exposes your opponent’s position and any weaknesses. If there are missing links between the value premise and any of the contentions those will also become apparent. In more than half of the rounds you will ever debate you can all but secure a victory with such a line of questioning. Take as much time as you need to complete this process. Ask clarifying questions first.
  - *In your first contention you claim that individuals should have the right to disobey the laws they find morally repugnant. But wouldn’t that prevent the punishment of unlawful behavior? Wouldn’t that make laws moot?*

However you choose to achieve these goals – or even if you decide to formulate your own goals for cross-examination – remember that your main purpose is to understand your opponent’s position. Thus, don’t be afraid to ask your opponent to clarify a contention, re-state the value premise and criterion or even explain a crucial concept that you simply don’t understand. Even if it takes you the full three minutes of your cross examination to get your opponent to fully explain a certain argument to you, your most important goal is to make sure that you understand what your opponent is arguing. Otherwise, how will you ever be able to respond and attack your opponent’s position?

In the end, don’t stress too much about cross-examination. Although it is an important part of the round it is very volatile and unpredictable. Sometimes it will go very smoothly and you’ll get a lot accomplished. At other times it will be like pulling teeth and you’ll be relegated to making points in the rebuttal speeches that you would have otherwise used to ask your opponent a specific question. I assure you that there will be times when the cross-examination will slip out of your control.

### ***Preparation Time***

Preparation time is between three to five minutes long, depending upon the tournament. You have the option of using your preparation time before any speech you give during the round. In general, you should use this time to jot down quick responses on your flow to the major arguments advanced by your opponent. However, since you have very little time to do this, don’t try to write down your responses word-for-word. Instead, put down a few words to remind you of what you want to say during your rebuttal.

There are only two steadfast rules you should follow when it comes to preparation: Don’t use it before cross-examination<sup>8</sup> and be quiet during your opponent’s preparation time.

Aside from these two rules, preparation time is yours to use however you wish. If you are the affirmative, you will probably want to use about one third to one half of your preparation time before your 1AR to decide which arguments to emphasize. The other one half to two thirds you can use before your 2AR to decide how to put a finishing touch on the round and pick out the arguments that you believe you have won during the round. If you are debating from the negative position, your best bet probably lies in following a similar time split: your negative rebuttal will have to be good enough to stay fresh in the judge’s mind and overcome anything the affirmative might present in the 2AR.<sup>9</sup>

Some debaters request that the judge call out preparation time as it expires in thirty-second increments. This keeps them from getting too carried away during preparation time and using up too much of it. You may also want to carry a stopwatch and also time yourself in case the judge gets carried away with writing the ballot.

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<sup>8</sup> You can use preparation time before cross-examination if you want but there is really no need, as all the questions that you would ever want to ask your opponent should be derived from your flow sheet.

<sup>9</sup> Some experienced debaters don’t use any time at all before their 1AR or NC – all the information they need is on their flow sheet. They then take the full three minutes before their final speech to pull together all the arguments in the round and come up with a really effective closing speech.

## *Negative Constructive (NC)*

The negative constructive is a seven-minute speech that is really two speeches rolled into one. In essence, the negative constructive is a combination of the negative's case presentation (the constructive) and negative's first rebuttal. You should treat this speech as such – two separate mini-speeches with completely different approaches.

The negative constructive is the speech that lends itself to most strategy because it is completely up to you how you portion out your time between the presentation of the negative case and the rebuttal. You can have a short constructive and a long rebuttal or you could go the other route, with a long case and a short rebuttal. The one thing that you should not do is adopt the extremes such as a seven-minute rebuttal or a seven-minute case. The disadvantages of not directly rebutting your opponent's arguments at all are pretty clear – you will lose the round because you likely offered no specific criticism of most ideas the affirmative advanced. However, the disadvantages of not having a negative case may not be as clear and will be discussed below.

A negative constructive without a negative case is not a sound debating strategy. Although it may seem like delivering a seven-minute rebuttal to your opponent's case would give you an advantage this is hardly the case. Seven minutes is a long time and you certainly don't need all of it to counter your opponent's arguments. Even if you think you do, you will most likely find yourself reverting back to the same examples and arguments from round to round. Keeping this in mind, wouldn't it make more sense to present these examples and arguments in a tight and focused manner at the beginning of the speech instead of extemporaneously referring to them during the rebuttal?

Second, your position is not as strong if you do not present a negative case. Your opponent is offering a focused set of arguments whose importance in the debate and relevance to the resolution are clearly tied to a value premise. Straight rebutting without offering your own value premise and criterion is not likely to leave a lasting impression on the judge.

Finally, the advantage of delivering a seven-minute rebuttal is really an illusion. To see this, all you have to do is look ahead to the upcoming cross-examination and first affirmative rebuttal. The affirmative will have three minutes to question you about your take on the resolution and will then also receive a four-minute block of time to devote solely to responding to your arguments. For most affirmatives who are used to defending their entire case in two minutes or less, this task will be fairly easy. So, in the end, choosing not to present a negative case only weakens your central claim and muddles your main position. Clearly, your advantage lies in presenting a negative case.

Here are some suggestions for apportioning time within your negative case presentation. A star (\*) denotes optional components.

<i>Opening Quote</i>	15 seconds
<i>Counter-Definitions*</i>	15 seconds
<i>Observations*</i>	15 seconds
<i>Value Premise/Criterion Explanation</i>	15-60 seconds
<i>Contentions</i>	1-1½ minutes each
<i>Conclusion</i>	15 seconds

The total reading time of your negative constructive should be between 3 and 4 minutes – anything outside of this range threatens the balance of your speech. Also, as you can see, the negative constructive saves time by shortening the definitions, observations and the opening quote. Additionally, the part of your negative case where you discuss your value premise and criteria should be flexible. If you have the same value premise and criterion as your opponent there is no reason to re-state these – simply say that you accept your opponent’s proposed value and criterion and move on. You will save yourself a valuable thirty seconds.

As the amount of time you have left yourself to attack your opponent’s case will vary, so will your overall strategy. But regardless of whether you have three or four minutes to do it, the basic point of this mini-rebuttal should remain the same – to instill in the judge’s mind serious doubts about the your opponent’s overall position. As you begin to rebut your opponent’s claims, it is imperative that you signpost throughout the process. That is, tell your opponent and the judge which arguments you are attacking. That is, clearly explain where this argument is located and what you are rebutting – usually mentioning the contention where the argument is located should prove to be enough. And as an extension of signposting, it helps not to jump all over the flow. That is, try to analyze the first contention before you get to the second contention, because it makes more sense and makes it easier for the judge to follow along.

In terms of order, the starting point for attacking your opponent’s position should be the top of the affirmative case – the value premise and criterion. Of course, if these are the same as your own, say so and move on. If they are not the same but similar, try to offer a sensible middle ground that you can still defend. Also, if you addressed this issue during cross-examination, all you need to do is refer to the agreement you and your opponent reached.

Finally, if your premises and criterion are vastly different with no hope of a compromise, offer a quick reason why your value premise/criterion combination addressed the resolution’s topic better. If you are going to engage in any sort of a debate about the value premise and the criterion, it should only be over which combination is more appropriate to the resolution in question – there is no sense in debating the actual relative worth of such values. Overall, no matter what happens, do not spend more than 30 seconds on this process, because it is just not worth it.

Once you have addressed the value premise and the criterion, move on to the contentions. The remainder of your rebuttal time should be spent responding to the arguments the affirmative advanced during the first speech of the round. Here is a list of things to look for when attacking your opponent’s case – pay careful attention to these tips, as they are the basis all effective rebuttal speeches.

- **Point out missing or inadequate links between the value premise/criterion and the contentions.** This is an effective method in just about every round you will ever debate. What you want to do is take a close look at whether your opponent’s contentions are relevant to the case’s value premise and criterion. If your opponent has offered a certain standard for the round the logical thing to do is to hold him up to that standard. If the contentions do not meet this self-imposed standard in your opponent’s case, point it out and question whether such arguments even belong in the debate round. However, don’t let this be your only objection to a contention, because some judges do not consider such links to be as important.

- **Expose any unwarranted assumptions or assertions.** Notice that the point here is to expose unwarranted assumptions, not all assumptions. If your opponent assumes that most human beings want to live in a just society, that is a valid assumption – simply looking at human behavior gives us the needed proof. However, assuming that all human beings would value equality over liberty is an unwarranted assumption, as there are plenty of examples to counter this proposition. Similarly, if your opponent claims that capital punishment is justified because it saves lives by deterring criminals, ask to see proof of this claim. Although Lincoln-Douglas debate is not about holding debaters accountable for specific plans, you should point out that the activity does not allow for pure assertions with no supporting evidence, especially on issues that are the subject of empirical studies in the real world. The best way to attack such arguments is not just to point out that your opponent does not offer any evidence to prove such a point but to also present empirical data that proves the contrary.
- **Clearly indicate the impact of any dropped arguments on the entire round.** If your opponent did not address one or more of your major points or responses, that is considered a “drop.” Point this out in the round. However, do not just leave it at this. Instead, re-iterate your original point and show the total impact of dropping this argument on your opponent’s case. Do not gloat over your opponent’s omission but just point out that your argument still stands. But be fair – do not make wild or vague claims that your opponent did not adequately address your point. Not only does that not fly with judges who are flowing the round but it gets you away from the main purpose of the debate – to learn how to defend your arguments and discuss some value-laden dilemma.
- **Do not “straw-man” your opponent’s arguments.** The term *straw manning* refers to weakening your opponent’s argument by purposefully altering what he or she has said. When you’re setting a straw man, you are essentially changing your opponent’s argument into something you can defeat. Here is an example: Let us suppose your opponent claims that capital punishment is a fit response to a heinous crime. Responding that capital punishment is not a proper response for all crimes, especially petty ones like shoplifting, is an example of straw-manning the opposing argument. That is not what your opponent was arguing. Some debaters do this on purpose but others do it unintentionally. The best way to make sure that you are not engaging in this unfair practice is to thoroughly understand your opponent’s position. If you are not sure, ask your opponent during cross-examination.
- **Point out any arguments that are biased due to selective use of evidence.** Take a close look at your opponent’s explanations and arguments and see whether there is a factor of considerable influence that your opponent has not included in the argument – especially if this factor of influence runs contrary to your opponent’s claim. For example, if one were to argue that United States’ involvement in conflicts in the Gulf and Bosnia proves the country’s willingness to mitigate foreign wars, it would be appropriate to point out a dozen places around the world currently embroiled in conflict where the US hasn’t sent any troops. Look for these types of mistakes whenever you hear arguments about some form of a causal mechanism (Event A causes Event B) or about individual motivations to commit a certain action.

- **Pay attention to the source.** Ultimately, in L-D debate it doesn't matter who said it as long as it makes sense. Whether the quote comes from Aristotle or your debate coach, it is an equally valid argument if it fits the topic at hand and holds together logically. However, the strength of some arguments or quotations depends on the authority of the source. While it would be appropriate to quote the U.N. Secretary General on the dangers that biological weapons pose to world peace, a quote by some college dean on the psychological damage caused by hate speech is more suspect. Does the college dean have a degree in psychology? Is this dean quoting a scientific study or offering her expert opinion? If she has no academic credentials that would give her expertise on the subject and if her data is purely anecdotal, there is little reason to accept the assessment as any more valid than the opinion of any other educated individual.
- **Point out the incomplete nature of your opponent's arguments.** On the resolution dealing with capital punishment, many debaters claimed that capital punishment is justified because it deters would-be criminals from committing such crimes in the first place. But an interesting question to ask was this: If public torture were proven to deter further crimes would it then be justified? Apparently, there is more to justifying capital punishment than the question of whether it is an effective deterrent or not.
- **Offer sound examples, evidence or arguments that imply the opposite of what your opponent is claiming.** This is probably the most common rebuttal method. If your opponent offers an example where foreign intervention by the US military stabilized a region, counter back with an example where such intervention only made the situation worse. However, pick your battles carefully – if you don't have the evidence or analysis to back up a counterclaim, don't offer it. That would only serve to strengthen your opponent's position.
- **Attack the absolutes.** Whenever you hear your opponent use terms like “always,” “never,” “all,” or “none,” a red flag should go up in your head. In L-D debate, there are hardly any absolutes – in the great majority of the situations you can find a counterexample or a case where the absolute standard does not apply. For example, while taking away or seriously curtailing someone's liberty is usually an unjust act, that's not always the case – few people have serious objections to imprisoning hardened criminals.

This list is not exhaustive by any means, but it is fairly broad and serves as a great starting point for figuring out how to attack your opponent's case. I suggest that you copy down the gist of these main points and keep them near you when you are debating. Keep glancing at this list during preparation time to see whether these approaches are appropriate responses to your opponent's arguments.

As you are addressing your opponent's arguments do not forget to contrast them with the ones you presented in your constructive speech, especially if a piece of evidence or analysis you presented earlier helps you with the refutation. If you believe that a specific part of your case directly counters some part of your opponent's case go ahead and say so. In L-D jargon, that's called “cross-applying.” But **if you are going to cross-apply arguments, make sure to clearly point out why your argument is superior.** It is not enough for you to just say that you claim something different in your case – you have to prove to the judge that you do a better job of supporting your claim.

Finally, make sure that your attacks on the affirmative's case are substantial, direct and difficult to ignore. The affirmative will be pressed for time during the 1AR and will look for any opportunity to handle your entire counter-argument with a quick one-sentence response or group your responses together. You should do everything you can to deny your opponent a chance to do this. If you can offer up multiple counter-examples (but make sure they are valid), do so. If you see that there is more than one problem with a certain argument, pick out the most glaring problems with the contention and point them out. You have to be relentless at this stage because the affirmative has a built-in advantage by having the last word. This ability to focus on the details and deliver substantial criticisms is your advantage, so use it well.

As you are responding to your opponent's case try to finish your analysis with at least 15-30 seconds to spare. Get into the habit of using these remaining seconds of your allotted time to re-iterate one or two main points from the flow that you believe should figure heavily into the judge's decision.<sup>10</sup> For example, you may want to remind the judge that your value premise is more topical and a fairer standard for the round or that one of your opponent's contentions has some serious flaws that you have already pointed out. But more than that, you want to leave the judge with a lasting image of your position and your main argument; you want to present your position as cogent and thought-out. Therefore, the issues you pick out should be central to the debate or you will find yourself clarifying minor points of little importance.

### ***First Affirmative Rebuttal (1AR)***

The 1AR is an exciting and crucial part of the round, as more rounds are lost during this speech than any other. There is a simple reason for this – the 1AR separates varsity debaters from novice ones and requires well-developed time management skills. The affirmative's task during the 1AR is daunting, indeed. You have to cover the flow in four minutes and in the process defend your case, attack your opponent's case and begin to set up your 2AR by starting to focus on the more important arguments in the round. This is difficult to do and requires much practice.

In terms of argumentation, the affirmative's method for attacking the negative case is no different than the approach that was outlined in the previous subsection for the negative – debaters should look for the same types of mistakes and deficiencies in the negative case as they did with the affirmative. The only difference is that during the 1AR the affirmative should spend no more than two and a half minutes attacking the negative case. That mandates using arguments that are specific and concise and examples that are brief and precise.

However, the rebuttal style during the second half of the 1AR is a little different. The best way to describe it is "damage control." The negative most likely spent somewhere between three and four minutes attacking your affirmative case. Now, you have no more than two minutes to defend against these attacks and pull through several main points from your first speech. This is a task where you simply cannot afford to linger too long on any one specific example or contention – say what needs to be said in defense and move on.

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<sup>10</sup> You may often hear debaters refer to this process as crystallization. It's a good visual image – this is the point in time in the round when your position is starting to solidify and take its final form.

Thus, the key to an effective 1AR lies in picking which of your opponent's arguments will receive the longest response. Again, since you will most likely begin your analysis with the value premise and criterion, it is imperative that you resist the temptation to offer anything more than a 15-30 second defense of your value and criterion. If you do, it is very likely that you will run out of time before getting a chance to fully respond to an argument about your contentions – and that will be more damaging to your chance of winning the round. Similarly, because you may not be able to tackle every objection to every part of your contentions, be prepared to defend your contentions as a whole and reiterate the links to your value premise and criterion. A good rule of thumb is that the points that require your response are the ones that are most damaging to your overall position.

In this process, the key method for saving time is to refer to analyses you provided in your case instead of offering them anew. For example, if you feel that your opponent misinterpreted one of your contentions, quickly reiterate your original point and refer the judge to the location of your original argument. As you are doing this, take no more than a sentence or two to explain why your opponent's objection has nothing to do with your underlying argument.

While there is much more you could learn about the 1AR that would move the discussion toward realms too specific for this chapter. But by this point in the round the arguments that will require your response are unique and specific enough that giving out general advice becomes quite challenging. If you have done the research and prepared rebuttals to some common objections and attacks on your position you will find yourself well prepared.

But it will not be smooth sailing all the way. Delivering an effective 1AR is an acquired skill that takes many rounds of experience and practice to master. In the beginning, you will lose many rounds not because you are not prepared but because you cannot think fast enough on your feet or explain your key concepts in few enough words to get under the 1AR's four-minute time limit. If this happens, accept it as the steepest part of L-D debate's learning curve and work on your time management skills outside of class. Just don't give up – debate would be no fun if it weren't challenging.

### ***Negative Rebuttal (NR)***

I think that the negative rebuttal is the toughest speech to give in Lincoln-Douglas debate, including the 1AR. In six minutes you have to cover not only the entire flow but also to end your speech with a message powerful enough to overcome anything the affirmative may present in the 2AR.

The strategies for defending your own case were discussed in the previous section on the 1AR – they are virtually the same for the negative. Similarly, the best approach to launching a second attack on the affirmative's case involves essentially repeating the steps that you utilized during the latter part of the NC when you attacked the affirmative case for the first time. However, there are some important differences between your attacks on the affirmative case in the NC and your attacks in the NR.

One rarely discussed advantage of the negative is that you get two chances to deliver substantial criticisms of the affirmative case. The first comes during the NC and the second during the NR. The affirmative does not have this advantage as it can only address the negative case during the 1AR, which is already a hectic enough speech as it is. Although the affirmative does get a chance to attack the



negative case in the 2AR, the logistics of the round virtually mandate that the affirmative devote the majority of the 2AR to other matters. The negative rebuttal is the time to capitalize on this advantage.

No doubt the affirmative's rebuttal during the 1AR was limited in scope and depth – at best, the affirmative offered valid responses to your criticisms of the major points in the affirmative's constructive. If you want to win the round you have to exploit this lack of detail on the affirmative's part. Since this is your last chance to speak, your goal in the NR should be practically to end the round when you finish speaking and allow the judge to all but begin writing the ballot in your favor. You want to invalidate the affirmative's main claim as much as you can and force the affirmative to spend the majority of the 2AR defending and rebuilding the constructive.

The way to use this advantage on the negative is to look past the affirmative's responses during the 1AR. This doesn't mean that you should ignore what the affirmative said but that you should press on with your attacks and objections. If the affirmative claimed that you misunderstood a key point, go ahead and attack the newly explained version of the point. Also, don't be afraid to claim that your opponent misunderstood your objections and criticisms if that's what really happened. If you offered multiple objections to a contention, re-evaluate it in light of the affirmative's defense and reiterate your objections if you don't find the affirmative's response adequate. If the affirmative failed answer to some of your attacks, make mention of this fact and clearly explain to the judge how these criticisms impact the overall validity of the affirmative case.

Once you are finished with this process, it is time to crystallize the round for the judge and make it clear which issues you believe should decide the round. Effective crystallization does not entail bringing up new arguments – it involves building on the points you have already made, wrapping up your take on the resolution, and making it clear to the judge how and why you won a number of key points in the round. Obviously, you should pick the points that you feel you have won and you should link them back to your value criterion and premise. Also, eloquence and persuasive ability at this stage of your speech is crucial because you want the judge to still remember your points five minutes later when the round is over. And, as always, your time allocation is up to you, but you should try to leave at least one full minute of the speech reserved for crystallization.

### ***Second Affirmative Rebuttal (2AR)***

This speech is a strange one. Sometimes, if the round did not go your way and you made some key mistakes in your 1AR, this speech will be all but completely irrelevant and the judge will have already decided on the winner of the round. At other times, all you may have to do in the 2AR is pull through and reiterate the arguments you made in the 1AR.

Basically, the 2AR should consist of two parts: responding to your opponent's crystallization and offering your own take on why you should win the round. That is, address your opponent's take on the main voting issues of the round and then emphasize a few important arguments that you believe you have won. The key to succeeding in this speech is to show that you have successfully defended a certain key argument throughout the round. You also want to connect this main idea back to your value premise, thus proving its importance.

It is difficult to give you time suggestions in this speech because the depth of your opponent's crystallization points plays a very large part in this equation. However, **the one thing that you should not do during the 2AR is present new arguments**. Since this is the last speech of the round, your opponent will not have a chance to respond to anything that you say – bringing up brand new arguments is therefore not acceptable.

Once the affirmative finishes the 2AR, the round is over. Shake hands with your opponent, thank the judge for participating, and exit the room. Some judges like to give brief oral critiques after the round. If this is the case and you have a few minutes to spare, stick around and listen to what the judge has to say. **The key word here is “listen.”** Too many debaters think the oral critique is a last-ditch effort to change the judge's mind or insert one last jab about why they should win the round. Although the judge may very well be completely wrong, it is highly unlikely that anything you say after the round is over will make its way to the ballot. The best way to approach an oral critique is to listen politely and ask the judge for clarification if you do not understand something. Learning comes first, winning second.

# Chapter Eight

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## DURING THE ROUND: SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

No matter how I tried to organize this book, there was a lot of useful information that just didn't seem to fit within any specific theme. This chapter is the resting place for all such smaller points. While none of the following strategies are crucial to participating in Lincoln-Douglas debate they will help you understand the activity better. They will also increase your overall levels of learning and enjoyment. Needless to say, since this chapter deals with specific debating strategies, those with tournament experience will feel more at home in this section.

I should mention that, more than any other section, what you read here will at times be a matter of opinion and preference. There is much discussion within the broader L-D community about the proper place of evidence and philosophy – what you will read below is only one person's opinion. Although I have offered good reasons to support my views, it is likely that your coach will disagree with at least some of what is written in this section. If that happens, you should ultimately respect the decision of your coach who is better aware of debating standards in your neck of the forensic woods. Enjoy.

### *Philosophy in L-D Debate*

When you engage in Lincoln-Douglas debate you are engaging in philosophical discussion. Therefore, does it not logically follow that you should lean heavily on utilizing seminal philosophical writings when writing your cases and do your best to quote their famous authors?

Not at all. I'll say it again – not at all.

There is no such thing as a textbook of justice or morality. Unlike mathematics or the natural sciences, philosophy as a discipline is infinitely more complicated because we do not experience it in easily discernible statements of fact. In mathematics, you were first taught how to add and subtract. Then you were taught how to multiply, which is a shortcut for adding. After that, you were taught increasingly more complex operations that each built upon your existing knowledge. Moreover, in each of these steps all you had to do was look at the real world to see these mathematical concepts at work – dividing one apple in two gives you two roughly equal halves. Unfortunately, there are no such examples in philosophy. It would be hard for anyone to take you outside during class and show you justice at work (you may have better luck finding an injustice though).

Take, for example, the discovery of the value of pi (3.14...). Thousands of years ago, mathematicians figured out that there is a specific relationship between the circumference of the circle and its radius. This relationship is always true – you can run tests all day long and you will always end up with the same result. Numerous explanations and calculations depend on knowing the value of pi. Calculating the area of a circle, sphere or a cylinder all depend on knowing the value of pi.

However, in philosophy, no such discovery has ever been made. In fact, no one has ever come close. Although John Stuart Mill and John Locke, to name two famous philosophers, gave us breakthroughs in modern thought that have allowed us to think more precisely about values like liberty and property, their importance in the overall scheme of philosophy is not nearly as great as knowing the value of pi is in mathematics. So, to put it in very blunt terms, you can formulate your own opinions about broad concepts like liberty and justice without reading any of these seminal works. None of them are “required” readings in the sense that you will never understand the concept of liberty if you don’t read Mill’s writings.

However, you should by no means ignore these writings either. Not only do they have an important historical value but they can help you form more thorough and sound opinions about the very values you will be debating. Furthermore, it is quite likely that reading these works will prompt you to think more clearly and carefully about issues that you face in everyday life.

So how should you then utilize famous philosophers and their works in Lincoln-Douglas debate? Either very carefully or not at all.

**The first and most important question that you should ask yourself if you are considering incorporating a specific definition or theory attributable to a famous philosopher – or any philosopher for that matter – is whether it addresses the underlying puzzle of the resolution.** If it doesn’t, don’t use it. It’s that simple. Following this step alone will eliminate the majority of philosophers and their works from inclusion in your case on a given resolution.

Second, you want to see whether a certain philosopher’s ideas help explain your value premise or criterion. This is the tricky part, and it is often easier said than done. There are some great theories of justice out there and there is no question that they can give you a better appreciation of the concept. But the question still remains whether an L-D debate round is a proper place for such a theory.

Forty minutes is not a long time. In fact, you only have thirteen minutes of total speaking time and three minutes of cross-examination. Such tight time constraints virtually require that any explanations of your value premise and criterion be delivered in no more than a few sentences. This means that if you wanted to use Rawls’ theory of justice you would have to explain it to someone not trained in philosophy in about thirty seconds. While it isn’t impossible, it is difficult.

This time constraint really is a serious issue. Unfortunately, what most often happens is that in an attempt to fit a certain philosophy or philosopher’s work into the round, debaters will simplify the theory beyond recognition. Both as a judge and a debater, it has been my experience that this action tends to at least muddle the underlying clash present in the resolution and at most make the round painful to judge.

Finally, if this wasn't enough to discourage you from plugging your favorite philosopher into every case you ever write, here is a quick review of what has to happen in order to make the use of a complete philosophy in a debate round useful and acceptable.

1. You must understand the philosophy itself thoroughly enough to defend it against your opponent's attacks. This is a task that requires, at the very least, reading the original work and most likely several other essays that have been written about this work.
2. You must also be able to explain the philosophy lucidly enough for everyone to understand. An added challenge is that you must do this in no more than two minutes if you are using the philosophy as a contention and no more than thirty seconds if you are using it to explain your value premise. This is not an easy task.
3. Both you and your opponent should have some basic understanding of the philosophy. If either of you does not, a great portion of the round is likely to be spent explaining the theory to your opponent or arguing about what the author was actually trying to say. Even worse, if the judge does not have some understanding and knowledge of the philosophy you will have to be very clear when explaining the basic tenets of the philosophy.
4. Alternatively, you should hope that the judge does not know too much about the philosophy already. If she does, it is very likely that she will be very sensitive to any misinterpretations or inaccurate statements. Judges are very reluctant to award a win to a debater who misstates their favorite philosopher's theories.

Now, consider that most debaters know very little about political philosophy to begin with and that you usually do not know before the round how much your opponent or your judge knows. If you ask me, the odds are stacked against you.

**The bottom line is that when it comes to researching or writing your cases, you should stay away from using general theories of famous philosophers unless they are extremely relevant to the resolution.** You should treat the philosopher's specific arguments as you would any other claim that is relevant to the topic at hand – by incorporating it into the argument sheet file. In the end, what truly matters is not the author's level of fame but how well the argument fits into your case and supports your overall claim.

So what are you then supposed to do when you want to define a broad concept like justice? One option is to use a commonly accepted, if somewhat vague, definition that describes justice as some conception of fairness. What that conception of fairness entails can be explained by using a value criterion that is relevant and specific to the resolution. Remember, the point of the value premise and the criterion is to get your opponent to agree to some commonly accepted and fair standard for the round – the simpler you make this standard, the higher the likelihood that you and your opponent will reach a consensus. I know it's hard to believe but Rawls, Mill and Locke do not have to be a part of this process at all.

Finally, I want to be very clear about one thing. I am not discouraging you from learning more about the famous philosophers and reading the works that form the foundations of modern philosophy. Nor

do I deny that reading these works will make you a better debater – it most certainly will. In fact, if you want to truly succeed in debate you will have to eventually gain a basic understanding of the popular and influential philosophies so that you can argue with confidence when other debaters bring them up.

How do you do that? It's surprisingly straightforward – by carefully reading the following two books. They are available on Amazon.com (there is a link on my website in the “Resources” section) but your library should have them as well.

- Readings in Social and Political Philosophy by Robert M. Stewart (Editor). Oxford University Press, 1996.
- The Individual and the Political Order, Third Edition by Norman E. Bowie and Robert L. Simon (Editors). Rowman and Littlefield Publishing, 1998.

If these two collections whet your appetite and you find yourself particularly interested in a certain philosophy, feel free to explore the author's original works further. However, if all that you are interested in is a book that gives you a basic understanding of the common philosophies you may encounter during a debate round, there is no need to go beyond these two books. As such, these two titles make for a great summer reading list.

### *Evidence in L-D Debate*

The use of evidence – facts, figures, charts, statistics, expert testimonies, survey results and published studies – in Lincoln-Douglas debate is a very contentious topic. There are many coaches and judges who believe that because L-D debate was formed as a response to the evidence-heavy debating styles of policy debate, the activity should be free of evidence. Some also believe that L-D debate topics are not compatible with evidence use because the topics of discussion are values that cannot be quantified.

**I believe that evidence does have a place in L-D debate when the argument at hand is pragmatic in nature and relevant to the topic.**

It is a commonly accepted rule that L-D debaters should not be held responsible for plans and counter plans to the resolution. That is, L-D debate is not about the minute details of implementing a certain plan or policy. However, this rule is sometimes stretched too far and debaters invoke it to defend proposals that have little basis in reality. There are resolutions that ask debaters to consider principles with pragmatic dimensions and allow for the use of evidence. Here are three examples:

- Capital Punishment is justified. One of the main affirmative arguments on this resolution was that capital punishment deters criminals from committing heinous crimes, thereby saving more lives. This is a perfect example of an L-D argument that requires the use of evidence. The claim here is a pragmatic one and it can be tested: does capital punishment really deter crime? If so, we should be able to find discernible variance in patterns of criminal behavior in places that have the death penalty versus those that do not. And this has been the subject of many studies. How do you know that a deterrence argument should have evidence? This argument does not deal with a normative claim about the way things should be – instead, it makes a statement from which one can infer testable hypotheses.

- Colleges and universities have a moral obligation to prohibit the public expression of hate speech on their campuses. In this case, many affirmatives rightfully presented evidence, such as quotes from well-known psychologists and scholarly studies, to prove that hate speech brings with it serious harms. Without this type of evidence, many negatives rightfully questioned the affirmatives on whether hate speech carries any harms at all. Again, the key here is the condition of psychological harm from expressions of hate – there is something testable about this assertion.
- Capitalism is superior to socialism as a means of achieving economic justice. On this resolution the definition of the word “economic justice” determines how much evidence debaters can bring into the round. Although complex economic models would probably not be a very good bet, economic data that presents the overall prosperity of capitalist nations compared to socialist nations could come useful in a round. A comparison between poverty levels between socialist and capitalist nations, controlling for other factors, could be a strong and relevant argument that capitalism “works” by some strictly utilitarian standard

A good rule of thumb is this: **if you feel that some piece of evidence helps you make your point and boosts the overall strength of your argument or disproves and seriously undermines an opposing argument, use it.**

In the end, if you really want to become a successful debater you should not discriminate between evidence that takes the form of charts, graphs, published studies, statistics and expert testimonies and evidence that is presented as logical proofs and appeals to commonly accepted standards. **Your ultimate goal is to find as much support for your main claim as possible. The specifics of that main claim should dictate your choice of evidence.**

### *Delivery Speed and Word Economy*

While there are many differences between a varsity and a novice debater, perhaps the most impacting and noticeable one is that varsity debaters have a better combination of clarity and delivery speed. The term *delivery speed* signifies the rate at which debaters speak during the round.

This is a very real difference that becomes painfully obvious in a round where one debater speaks slowly and the other one speaks fast. If both debaters have similar levels of intelligence and preparation, the faster-speaking debater has the advantage because he can present more argumentation and analysis in the same amount of time. The best way to see the importance of delivery speed in L-D debate is to think of it as a time compression device – literally. For the faster-speaking debater, it is as if he were given an extra thirty seconds to use during a rebuttal.

Extra time would not be such a big deal if it weren't for a widely held belief in L-D debate that uncontested arguments are interpreted as signs of implicit consent and therefore automatically recorded as “mini-wins” on the judge's flow sheet. Thus, what decides many novice rounds is not a debater's ability to respond to all of his opponent's arguments but the ability to do it within the allocated time. In

most cases, debaters who speak too slowly simply run out of time to respond to all the important arguments in the round and subsequently lose the ballot.

In an attempt to cope with this problem – or take advantage of it – some debaters develop a skill to speak extremely fast while retaining the clarity of their words. That is, they practice speaking very fast in a way that can still be understood by the judge and the opponent. Then, using this lightning-fast speed, they present as many arguments as possible during the round, wait to see which ones the opponent leaves unanswered and finally emphasize these arguments in their last speech.

Ultimately, this is not a very effective debate strategy, as it only works against inexperienced debaters – and even then with mixed results. Experienced debaters can quickly counter such a strategy by focusing on the links between the multiple arguments and the value premise, as well as grouping many of the similar-sounding arguments together and delivering the same criticisms. More importantly, this strategy of trying to “spread” one’s opponent out of the round is completely antithetical to the purpose of debate – bettering the participants’ communication and analysis skills.

I think the best way to deal with speed in L-D debate is to counter it with word economy – learning how to express oneself with clarity in as few words as possible. Unlike talking very fast, the ability to speak in clear and direct terms is an invaluable tool in pretty much any profession or walk of life. But the real question is how to develop this skill. Here is one practice drill – you should ask your coach to help you with the specifics of your situation.

Take any argument from either of your constructive cases. Time yourself with a stopwatch as you deliver a response to this argument. When you are done, re-deliver the rebuttal but try to shave off some seconds from your total time. Do your best to take off the seconds not by speaking faster but by rephrasing your rebuttal. The trick is to get comfortable with delivering a response in the allotted time, which is sometimes as short as 15 seconds. As you keep repeating this procedure, try to notice patterns in unnecessary words that you use in your explanation – these are the ones that you should attempt to eliminate from your speeches.

You should also remember that nothing gives you more word economy and increases the speed of your delivery than knowledge on the subject. The more you know about the underlying puzzle of the resolution, the easier it will be for you to respond to your opponent’s arguments in a direct manner.

### ***Balanced Negatives***

On resolutions that ask debaters to weigh two competing values, it is possible to run a balanced negative. A common interpretation of a resolution is that the affirmative defends the value mandated by the resolution’s wording while the negative upholds the other value. A balanced negative challenges this interpretation because this type of a case does not weigh one value over another but, instead, simply claims that either the values are never in conflict or that the two values are equal in importance.

Here is an example: on the resolution that “a just social order ought to value the principle of equality above that of liberty” a balanced negative would not claim that liberty should be valued over equality but, instead, that the two values should be held in equal regard.



Technically speaking, there is nothing inherently wrong with a balanced negative if the resolution does not specify a limit like “when in conflict” or “on balance.” However, one should look past the technicalities to the overall purpose of debate as an activity. **It is my opinion that balanced negatives add little more than confusion to the debate round and ultimately weaken the negative position. As such, they should be avoided.**

On the first point, it should be said that the resolution clearly pits the values of equality and liberty against each other and guides debaters toward discovering important arguments that this age-old conflict has spawned. The learning experience here lies in discovering the appeal of both sides of the conflict and in defending each position from sustained attacks by the other side. When the negative elects not to play a part in this debate the educational value of the experience is lowered.

Second, a balanced negative significantly weakens the negative position. In most cases, the negative is not presenting a set of its own arguments but is simply countering the affirmative’s points. Even if the negative does decide to present a case that outlines the reasons why liberty and equality deserve to be held in equal regard, it is unlikely that the arguments contained therein will be as strong as a well-designed defense of liberty. This is because any successful negation of the affirmative on this resolution still depends on a sustained defense of the value of liberty. So by sheer design, a balanced negative’s approach will not be as strong as that of a traditional negative.

Add to these factors with fact that some judges reject all balanced negative positions a-priori as an improper debate strategy, and the drawbacks of running a balanced negative outweigh the benefits.

### *Team Cases*

For debate teams that have enough serious varsity debaters, the option of a team case should be considered by all means. In essence, a team case is a standard set of affirmative and negative arguments that each debater from the team presents during a round. Although team cases can get rather boring and repetitive for a judge and other debaters at small tournaments, they do present some distinct advantages that should not be ignored.

For one, a team case is a team product and is often superior to individual efforts. Can you imagine the research power of a dozen individuals? As an example, a team approach to research allows a single debater to focus solely on finding relevant examples from news stories. This is an especially useful tool for novice debaters who can progress in their research assignments as they gain debating experience. While a novice debater may start by researching background topic material, as she gains experience she could eventually progress to constructing arguments and designing contentions for the entire team.

Additionally, a team case has endured hours of heated discussion. Most team cases emerge not because their debaters all think alike but because, through collective discussion, the team’s members have agreed that a certain combination of arguments offers each of them the best chance of winning.

But there are drawbacks to running a team case as well. One of these is the boredom of judges at small tournaments with lots of entries from the school that is running a team case. By the end of the

day the judge may have heard more than half-dozen different debaters read the exact same case. It is quite likely that by then the judge is not paying attention to the small changes an individual debater might make.

Second, a team case has the potential to shortchange most of the students when it comes to the full research experience. Although the process of researching for an L-D case on their own is a daunting task for most novice debaters, there is much value in letting them find arguments on their own. The team case increases a debater's dependence on the research ability of fellow teammates.

Ultimately, the decision on whether to utilize the team case strategy or not rests with a coach. The team case is likely to turn into a positive experience for everyone if there are talented and motivated debaters who are willing to work together and vary their research assignments as the topics change. However, if the team is small or lacks a talented core of dedicated debaters, the process of writing a team case can fall apart and leave everyone with inadequate research material and discussion to write a solid defense of their position. Thus, I think the decision on whether to run team cases on a certain resolution should be left to the debate coach and the top varsity debaters.

### ***Judge Adaptation***

Not all debate judges are created equal. In fact, no two debate judges are created equal. Keeping this in mind, you should learn to adapt your debating strategy and style to the specific type of judge who will render the final decision in the round.

But before getting into the specifics of judge adaptation, there are some things you should know about judges. They are human. Just like you, they suffer from a lack of sleep and growling stomachs that are not satisfied with cafeteria foods. Moreover, judges have their own opinions, political belief systems, and interpretations of the resolution. They may have been raised with a very different conception of debate than the one you were taught. And although none of these factors should come into play when the time comes to circle the winner of the round on the ballot, they often do. Judging is not an exact science. The sooner you accept this fact, the happier you will be.

For the most part, judges prefer to be non-interventionist in their approach to the round. They try to be as impartial as possible and open to the ideas presented in the round. They want the debaters to sort the issues out between themselves and leave them with easy decisions. But this is easier said than done. In too many instances, debaters do not do an adequate job of rebutting each other's arguments and leave numerous unresolved issues. When the time comes for the judges to decide the winner of the round, they must carefully weigh all the remaining arguments and pick the winner. If there was little clash during the round, the judge is left with no choice but to individually decide which arguments he or she finds to be the most reasonable. In this last step, it is next to impossible to avoid personal bias. Perhaps the most difficult decision to make is when both debaters assert that their opponent did not provide adequate analysis of a certain contention or issue – and leave it at that, without providing any standard of judgment. In this instance, the judge is forced to weigh the arguments according to some personal standard of judgment. If this happens it's a 50/50 split as to who will "win" the round.

During your debate career, you will disagree with the judge's logic and decision on numerous occasions. In some cases, your point will be valid. However, in many cases, you will think that you made your point clearly and logically whereas the judge will disagree. If that is the case, you should not fault the judge but instead work to correct such miscommunication in future rounds. After all, your primary purpose in the round is to convince the judge that you defend your side of the resolution better than your opponent – and you apparently failed.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the logical thing to do is to make sure that you communicate clearly with the judge. In general terms, you should watch the judge for body language: facial grimaces, puzzled looks, whether they are writing down what you are saying, etc. Many judges will assist you in this process by nodding their head when you make a good point or giving you puzzled looks or furrowed eyebrows when you go off on a tangent.

If the judge has little experience with L-D debate – which is usually the case with parent judges at smaller tournaments – you should be extra clear when you argue your points. Go easy on the debate jargon and lean toward using examples rather than complex analysis. In terms of speed, you do not have to speak slowly during the entire round, but you should make sure the judge can understand you. If the judge looks lost or has trouble understanding you, slow down. Your points are no good if the judge has no time to understand them and note them down.

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<sup>11</sup> Obviously, there are exceptions. It is quite possible that your judge was not paying attention while you were speaking. It is also possible that the judge holds a certain bias on the resolution that he is not aware of. However, I have found that although such things do happen their incidence is much lower than many debaters would like to imagine.

# Conclusion

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## AFTER THE TOURNAMENT

The final round has come to an end. The awards have been passed out. It's time to go home. So what is the first thing you should now that the tournament is over?

The first thing you should do at the conclusion of the tournament is to sincerely thank your coach. He or she is most likely not paid nearly enough for the Herculean effort needed to manage a debate team. In addition to their day jobs as teachers, debate coaches also give up valuable time with their friends and families to travel with you to the weekend tournaments. They do it for love of the activity and because they want to see you learn and succeed in life.

Next, if there's time, see how many of your fellow debaters and friends you can round up and go out to dinner before everyone disperses and goes home. The fellow students you meet at debate tournaments are some of the most diverse and pleasant individuals you will ever encounter in your life. We are a strange crowd indeed – traveling on weekends, waking up at 7 am on Saturday mornings, and spending most of our free time reading books and thinking up ways to defeat each other's arguments. Enjoy this eccentricity and celebrate it to its fullest.

I thought about how I could end this handbook for a long time. Scores of analogies, last minute tips and alternate ways of explaining a concept came to mind. But no matter how many times I try to rewrite this handbook there will always be room for improvement. In addition, there are some things that you will just have to find out for yourself – it's a lot more fun that way. L-D debate is a complex and intricate activity that will surprise you with some new insight or experience whenever you take part in it. So I opted for a simple, unadorned ending – a glimpse into the reality of L-D debate.

It may seem far away to you now but you will eventually debate your final round. When that time comes, you won't care so much or even remember which rounds you lost to bad judges, how many times you bungled your 2AR, or what place you took at your seventh tournament during your junior year. Instead, you will care about a rival from a different school who eventually became one of your best friends. You will remember the jokes you cracked about another coach between the rounds. And you will remind yourself of how good it felt to walk up to the front of the room and culminate two months of research into 13 minutes of speaking.

Ultimately, this "ultimate" handbook is not just about L-D debate. It was designed with a broader goal in mind: to give you an opportunity to experience the power and beauty of trying to answer unanswerable questions and to show you how much fun learning can be. If I succeeded in this endeavor even a little, I would very much appreciate hearing from you.

# Appendix

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## PAST RESOLUTIONS ORGANIZED BY STRUCTURE TYPE

The list below separates all the L-D resolutions debated in the last ten years into the four structural types I outlined in Chapter 2. Modifications that make it difficult to discern the resolution type are noted in the footnotes. I obtained the resolutions from [www.lddebate.org](http://www.lddebate.org).

**Type 1** (*Use of a specific evaluative term to link a concept or an action to a desired goal*)

- Capitalism is superior to socialism as a means of achieving economic justice.<sup>12</sup>

**Type 2** (*Assertion of moral obligation. A limit is sometimes specified*)

- Colleges and universities have a moral obligation to prohibit the public expression of hate speech on their campuses.
- Violent juvenile offenders ought to be treated as adults in the criminal justice system.
- In the United States, a journalist's right to shield confidential sources ought to be protected by the First Amendment.
- Individuals with disabilities ought to be afforded the same athletic competition opportunities as able-bodied athletes.
- When called upon by one's government, individuals are morally obligated to risk their lives for their country.

**Type 3** (*Assertion that some action is either compatible or incompatible with a certain value*)

- The possession of nuclear weapons is immoral.
- That establishing a safe educational environment in grades K-12 justifies infringement of students' civil liberties.<sup>13</sup>
- The intervention of one nation in the domestic affairs of another nation is morally justified.
- Inaction in the face of injustice makes an individual morally culpable.
- The use of economic sanctions to achieve U.S. Foreign policy goals is moral.
- Human genetic engineering is morally justified.
- Capital punishment is justified.
- Civil disobedience is justified in a democracy.

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<sup>12</sup> This is a slight twist. Instead of asking you to decide whether capitalism is the best path to reaching economic justice this topic wants you to contrast it with another economic system, socialism. Note that the resolution does not want you to debate whether capitalism is better than socialism, but which one achieves economic justice. You do not need to prove that capitalism is the best path to achieving economic justice, merely that it is better than socialism.

<sup>13</sup> On this topic the motive of the action is also specified. Think of it as: "Infringement of students' civil liberties to establish a safe educational environment in grades K-12 is justified."

- Limiting constitutional freedoms is a just response to terrorism in the United States.<sup>14</sup>
- Laws which protect citizens from themselves are justified.
- Terminally ill patients have the right to die when and how they choose.<sup>15</sup>
- The protection of domestic order justifies the curtailment of first Amendment Rights.<sup>16</sup>
- On balance, violent revolution is a just response to oppression.
- The pursuit of feminist ideals is detrimental to the achievement of gender equality.
- On balance, institutional censorship of academic material is harmful to the educational development of students.

**Type 4** (*Weighing of two values or courses of action against each other within a specified limit*)

- When they conflict, respect for cultural sensitivity ought to be valued above commercial use of free speech.
- The individual ought to value the sanctity of life above the quality of life.
- In the United States' justice system, due process ought to be valued above the pursuit of truth when they are in conflict.
- A just social order ought to place the principle of equality above that of liberty.
- Global concerns ought to be valued above conflicting national concerns.
- An adolescent's right to privacy ought to be valued above a parent's conflicting right to know.
- The public's right to know is of greater value than the individual's right to privacy.
- On balance, individuals ought to have a greater obligation to themselves than to their community.
- In United States policy, the principle of universal human rights ought to take precedence over conflicting national interest.
- When in conflict, a business' responsibility to itself ought to be valued above its responsibility to society.
- When in conflict, society's goal of eliminating discrimination ought to transcend an individual's right to participate in exclusive, voluntary associations.
- When in conflict, American cultural unity ought to be valued above cultural diversity.
- An oppressive government is more desirable than no government.
- When in conflict, the safety of others is of greater value than the right to privacy of those with infectious diseases.
- When in conflict, community standards are of greater value than individual liberty.
- An individual's freedom of expression is of greater value than political correctness.
- When in conflict, protection of the innocent is of greater value than prosecution of the guilty.
- The public's right to know is of greater value than the right to privacy of candidates for public office.
- The principle of majority rule ought to be valued above the principle of minority rights.
- When in conflict the spirit of the law ought to take priority over the letter of the law.
- In the criminal justice system, truth seeking ought to take precedence over privileged communication.

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<sup>14</sup> Here we have a limit and a specific act. Think of it as: "Limiting constitutional freedoms in response to terrorism in the United States is just."

<sup>15</sup> Think of this topic as "Euthanasia is justified," except that the resolution wants debaters to argue whether there is such a thing as the right to die.

<sup>16</sup> See footnote 16, it's the same concept.