

Judging Lincoln-Douglas Debate

Above all things, LD debate is a clash of values and morality. In any round, the debaters will present you with an analysis of the resolution at hand; the resolution, the topic issued by the National Forensic League, is phrased as a statement of fact, that something is true. The affirmative (AFF) is charged with the duty, or burden, of arguing that the resolution is true and with presenting substantive reasons for you to agree with him or her. The negative (NEG) has no other burden than to argue that the affirmative is wrong; this is called the burden of clash. Both debaters must meet this burden.

To judge LD, you need to determine which debater, AFF or NEG, does a better job of persuading you to their position, regardless of your personal views on the subject. It is of critical importance to set aside your opinions on the matter being debated; the students do not choose the topic and they do not choose which side of the debate to support, as this is all pre-assigned and they will have to be capable of arguing both sides of the resolution.

There are several ways to determine which debater wins the round. Often, the debaters will present some test or standard that they must uphold in order to win the round, arguing that whichever debater can uphold the standard the best should win. If this is the case and the debaters both accept this, you simply have to take the test as a hypothesis and see which does better. It may run something like, "to win this round, it must be shown that the position respects and maintains the rights of the people in question." In this example, you would ask yourself after the round, which debater, AFF or NEG, offered a position that respected and maintained the rights of the people. The winner of that standard would win the round.

In the absence of a provided standard, you as the judge determine how to weigh the round. The most important points in the round are the Value Clash and the Criterion Clash. Both debaters will offer a Value, such as Justice or Societal Welfare, that must be achieved above all other things under the resolution. Similarly, they will each provide a Criterion designed to show you how they achieve that Value. A great deal of time and effort will be spent in most rounds arguing which debater's value is the one of paramount importance and who upholds each better. The winner of that argument typically wins the round. Slightly less importantly, they will argue the same about the Criteria. A victory here is also of major importance for determining who wins the round.

Those are the critical arguments of the round. It is typical that the winner of the important arguments wins the round, but some judges place more significance on winning a greater quantity of the arguments in a round. This is also an acceptable method of judging. You ask yourself after the round who won more of the arguments and give the win accordingly.

LD is judged on quality of argument, of reasoning. You may take into account how well each debater presents his or her arguments but this should never be the sole reason for decision.

When judging LD, there are no ties. You must always determine a winner, even in a very close round. After you determine which debater wins, you then assign quality points that reflect the skill of the debaters and usually, the margin of victory. Points range from 30 to 11 in LD, but you generally should refrain from giving points lower than 16 to avoid discouraging new students from the event. A 30 reflects a flawlessly argued round and should be given rarely. Most rounds will earn points in the lower- or mid-20s. The winner must always be given more points than the loser. Take into account how commanding the win was; if it was a clear, decisive victory, there should be a differential in points

between the debaters to reflect this, and in the event of a close round, a one or two point difference will show the debaters that it was a narrow victory.

As the judge, you are responsible for the keeping of time in a round. Your time is the official time. Your say is the final say (even if you are wrong). Many debaters may keep their own time, but you will still need to time them to maintain an official record.

The timing of the round proceeds thus:

AFF: 6 minutes, only the AFF speaks

Cross-Examination: 3 minutes, the NEG asks questions of the AFF, AFF must answer and may not ask questions

NEG: 7 minutes, only the NEG speaks

Cross-Examination: 3 minutes, the AFF asks questions of the NEG, NEG must answer and may not ask questions

AFF: 4 minutes, only the AFF speaks

NEG: 6 minutes, only the NEG speaks

AFF: 3 minutes, only the AFF speaks

When timing, give the debaters signals to show how much time remains in the speech. For three minutes, show three fingers, for two minutes, two fingers, for one minute, one finger, for thirty seconds, a finger bent into a hook, for no time remaining, a closed hand. When time expires, allow the debater to finish his or her thought or to complete his or her answer to the question. If a debater takes advantage of this and rambles onward, you may cut them off. This is at the judge's discretion.

In the last AFF speech, the AFF may not introduce new arguments. They may only respond to existing points in the round. If they introduce new arguments, use your discretion; you may ignore them or you may penalize the debater in your decision. Under no circumstances should new arguments in this speech be factored into the decision in a positive way. It is not fair to the NEG, who does not get an opportunity to respond to them.

This is all you need to know to judge a round of LD.

One final warning, do not believe everything that debaters say. They lie. Frequently. If a debater tells you that his or her opponent forgot to argue something or twists his or her words, be skeptical. Ignore arguments based on lies or penalize the debater in the decision. This is dangerous territory, though. You must be careful not to allow your opinions or knowledge to intrude into the round; this is a competition between two students, not between you and the students. Only refuse to consider an argument if you are absolutely positive that it is deliberately misleading or nonfactual. When in doubt, count the argument in your decision making process.