



Lincoln-Douglas Debate: An Overview

Lincoln Douglas debate centers on a proposition of value, which concerns itself with what *ought to be* instead of what *is*. Values are ideals held by individuals, societies, governments, etc. Neither side is permitted to offer a *plan* (a formalized, comprehensive proposal for implementation); rather, they should offer reasoning to support a general principle. Debaters may offer generalized, practical examples or solutions to illustrate how the general principle could guide decisions. Hallmarks include:

- 1. Parallel Burdens:** No question of values can be determined entirely true or false. This is why the resolution is debatable. Therefore neither debater should be held to a standard of absolute proof. No debater can realistically be expected to prove complete validity or invalidity of the resolution. The better debater is the one who, on the whole, proves his/her side of the resolution more valid as a general principle.
 - *Burden of proof:* Each debater has the equal burden to prove the validity of his/her side of the resolution as a general principle. As the resolution is a statement of value, there is no presumption for either side.
 - *Burden of clash:* After a case is presented, neither debater should be rewarded for presenting a speech completely unrelated to the arguments of his/her opponent.
 - *Resolutional burden:* The debaters are equally obligated to focus the debate on the central questions of the resolution, not whether the resolution itself is worthy of debate. Because the affirmative must uphold the resolution, the negative must also argue the resolution as presented.
- 2. Value Structure:** The debater establishes a value structure (or framework) to serve two functions: a) to provide an interpretation of the central focus of the resolution, and b) to provide a method for the judge to evaluate the central questions of the resolution. The value structure often (but not always) consists of:
 - *Definitions:* The affirmative should offer definitions, be they dictionary or contextual, that provides a reasonable ground for debate. The negative has the option to challenge these definitions and to offer counter-definitions.
 - *Value Premise/Core Value:* A value is an ideal held by individuals, societies, governments, etc. that serves as the highest goal to be protected, respected, maximized, advanced, or achieved. In general, the debater will establish a value which focuses the central questions of the resolution and will serve as a foundation for argumentation.
 - *Value Criterion/Standard:* Generally, each debater will presents a standard, used to:
 - ❖ explain how the value should be protected, respected, maximized, advanced, or achieved.
 - ❖ measure whether an argument protects, respects, maximizes, advances, or achieves the value.
 - ❖ evaluate the relevance and importance of an argument in the context of the round.

The relationship between the value premise and the criterion should be clearly articulated. During the debate, the debaters may argue the validity or priority of the two value structures. They may accept their opponent's value structure, prove the superiority of their own value structure, or synthesize the two.
- 3. Argumentation:** Debaters are obligated to construct logical chains of reasoning which lead to the conclusion of the affirmative or negative position. The nature of proof may take a variety of forms (e.g., a student's original analysis, application of philosophy, examples, analogies, statistics, expert opinion, etc.). Arguments should be presented in a cohesive manner that shows a clear relationship to the value structure. Research should be conducted and presented ethically from academically sound and appropriately cited sources.
- 4. Cross-Examination:** Questioning should clarify, challenge, and/or advance arguments in the round.
- 5. Delivery:** Effective oral communication requires clarity of thought and expression. Arguments should be worded and delivered in a manner accessible to an educated non-specialist audience. This communication encompasses:
 - *Written:* Cases and arguments should be constructed in a manner that is organized, accessible, and informative to the listener. The debater should employ clear logic and analysis supported by topical research.
 - *Verbal:* The debater has the obligation to be clear, audible and comprehensible, and to speak persuasively to the listeners. Additionally, debaters should strive for fluency, expressiveness, effective word choice, and eloquence.
 - *Non-verbal:* The debater should demonstrate an effective use of gestures, eye contact, and posture.

Throughout a round, debaters should demonstrate civility as well as a professional demeanor and style of delivery.