

Lincoln-Douglas debate

One debater against another, arguing about values: what is right or wrong, just or unjust. Named after the 1858 Lincoln and Douglas debates.

1 vs 1

Affirmative and
Negative

5

speeches, plus 2
cross-ex

13 min

speaking time each

4 min

prep per debater

5

NSDA topics a year

Speech order

- 1** Affirmative Constructive (AC) 6 min
- 2** Cross-ex: Negative asks 3 min
- 3** Negative Constructive (NC) 7 min
- 4** Cross-ex: Affirmative asks 3 min
- 5** 1st Affirmative Rebuttal (1AR) 4 min
- 6** Negative Rebuttal (NR) 6 min
- 7** 2nd Affirmative Rebuttal (2AR) 3 min

Prep: 4 minutes per debater under NSDA rules, used between speeches. Some leagues and invitationals set a different amount. The Affirmative speaks first and last.

Tips and common mistakes

- **Link every contention** to your criterion.
- **Never drop the framework debate.**
- **Affirmatives:** practice the 1AR; group answers.
- **Negatives:** plan how to split the 7-minute NC.
- **Cross-ex:** short questions, then use the answers later.
- **End with voting issues:** two or three reasons you win.

Value and criterion

Value: the big goal the round is about, such as justice, morality or well-being.

Criterion: the standard for measuring the value, such as "protecting human rights". It tells the judge how to see who achieves the value better.

Contentions should show how they meet the criterion. Winning the framework alone rarely wins the round.

Topics

Set by the NSDA for Sept/Oct, Nov/Dec, Jan/Feb, Mar/Apr and Nationals. Example: "Resolved: The United States ought to guarantee the right to housing." (Sept/Oct 2023)

Prove your side is more valid as a general principle, not true in every case.

Before the round

- ☐ Affirmative and Negative cases ready
- ☐ Value and criterion for each side chosen
- ☐ Answers to likely frameworks prepared
- ☐ Cross-ex questions written
- ☐ 1AR practiced against the clock
- ☐ Asked the judge about their preferences

What each speech does

AFFIRMATIVE

Affirmative Constructive

A prepared case: definitions, value and criterion, and contentions showing the resolution is true.

NEGATIVE

Negative Constructive

The Negative's own case and framework, then attacks on the Affirmative case.

AFFIRMATIVE

1st Affirmative Rebuttal

4 minutes to answer 7 minutes: defends the Aff case and attacks the Neg case.

NEGATIVE

Negative Rebuttal

The Negative's last speech: answers the 1AR, extends the best arguments and weighs.

AFFIRMATIVE

2nd Affirmative Rebuttal

The last word: 3 minutes of voting issues. No new arguments.

BOTH DEBATERS

Cross-examination

The debater who just spoke answers; the other asks, to clarify and set up later arguments.

STYLES

Traditional and progressive

Traditional LD uses a value and criterion at a normal pace for a general judge. Progressive (circuit) LD may use fast speaking (spreading), plans, counterplans, theory and kritiks. Same speech times; ask the judge and adapt.

How judges decide

Judges decide only on the arguments made in the round and vote for the debater who, on the whole, proved their side more valid. New arguments in rebuttals are disregarded; new evidence for an old argument is fine.

POINTS	MEANING ON THE NSDA BALLOT
29 to 30	Outstanding
27 to 28	Above average
24 to 26	Average
20 to 23	Below average
Below 20	Unethical or inappropriate behavior

The win and the points are separate (a "low-point win" is possible). Panels decide by majority.

Key terms

Value

The big goal a side says the round is about.

Contention

One main argument in a case.

Spreading

Very fast speaking to fit in more arguments.

Criterion

The standard for measuring the value.

Voting issue

A short closing reason for why you win.

Kritik

An argument against the assumptions behind a case.

Flow sheet

Note each argument as it is made, and the other side's answer next to it. Print as many copies as you need.

AFFIRMATIVE ARGUMENTS	NEGATIVE RESPONSES	WHO IS WINNING IT?