



Lincoln-Douglas Debate: An Introduction – Step Two

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Abstract: Now that you have the basics down, it's time to start getting into the particulars of LD Debate. This article will cover each debater's responsibilities in round, as well as an explanation of the purpose of each speech in the round.

LD Speaker Responsibilities: What Am I Supposed to Talk About for This Long?

Before we get into the details here, it is important to remember that you should expect to be a bit confused as to what should be going on until you begin debating. Learn the fundamentals, watch it being done, and then do it. Once you start debating, things will become very clear.

Types of Speeches:

In each debate, without fail, there are three kinds of speeches. The first is the constructive speech. In this speech, you should present your case for the affirmative, or the negative, side of the resolution. When you are affirmative, your first speech is dedicated entirely to your case, which means that there is not a rebuttal portion of this speech since your opponent has yet to make an argument. When you're negative, however, your first speech contains a constructive portion where you read your negative case, and a rebuttal portion where you answer the affirmative case. How you choose to divide those seven minutes is up to you, but it's important to remember that you must answer the arguments that the affirmative makes.

The second kinds of speeches are rebuttal speeches. During your rebuttal portion of the speech, you should be responding to arguments that were made and give the judge reasons to prefer your side based upon arguments in your case and arguments you make against your opponent case. After the first two speeches (1AC and 1NC) your remaining time will be devoted solely to rebuttal in which you defend your constructive (case) and attack your opponents.

The third kind of speech in LD is cross-examination (or CX). For the negative, this is the judge's first impression of you so you must make sure that you give them a positive impression and not look totally lost or confused, even if you are. In CX, it is your job to make sure that you understand your opponent's arguments, and set up your arguments that you will make in the next speech by exposing flaws in your opponent's argumentation (i.e., false assumptions, claims made without evidentiary support, etc.).

¹ In a debate, even if you feel like you are in over your head, or are very confused, FAKE IT UNTIL YOU MAKE IT. You may find that the judge is convinced by an argument that you are making, and not even know it; but if you give up because you are confused, you are signaling to the judge that your argument may not be as good as you claim it is.

The 1st Affirmative Constructive or 1AC

As outlined in the first introduction, the 1AC is six minutes long and it is the only totally pre-written speech in the round. You should have your affirmative case written before you even get to the tournament, and you should have given yourself enough time to review it and make sure you understand the arguments within it.

Negative's CX of the 1AC

After the affirmative finishes reading their affirmative case, the negative should stand up and prepare to cross-examine the affirmative. Very rarely will you want to use prep time, as the negative, before CX, and you certainly shouldn't use prep time as the affirmative before your opponent prepares to ask you questions.

For an idea as to how you should approach cross-examination, you can read the article, "The Art of Cross Examination."

Negative Constructive or 1st Negative Rebuttal

Before you start the timer, you should always begin your speech with a roadmap briefly detailing for the judge the order that your speech will take. For example, "By way of a roadmap, I will begin by reading the negative case, then I will move on to answer the affirmative case."

Then you should start your speech by reading the pre-written negative case that you should have prepared prior to the tournament. When reading your case, if your opponent defines a word in the topic in the exact same way that you do, you do not have to re-read your definition since you both agree on that term. Many times you will find that you and your opponent will have the same value. It may appear that this means you do not need to contest their value, however you will find that many times the same value is being applied differently because one side is affirming and one side is negating. An example of this is if the affirmative's value of justice is defined as giving each their due, and your conception of justice is one that maximizes the most amount of rights, you are both attempting to achieve justice, but have very different ideas as to what that means.

The next part of your speech, after you read the case, is the line-by-line argumentation. If you flowed correctly, you should be able to easily identify and address the affirmative's individual arguments and respond to them. When responding to them you should "signpost"²

Affirmative CX of the Negative

This cross examination is exactly like the cross examination that took place earlier, but instead the affirmative is asking the negative questions about the arguments that he or she just made. However, this speech is especially important for the affirmative because you should be using these 3 minutes to make up for the time disadvantage you are at with the 1AR being significantly shorter than the 1NC.

First Affirmative Rebuttal or the 1AR

² To signpost is merely to state which argument you are addressing or where you are on the flow in relation to certain arguments.

The 1AR is considered one of the hardest speeches in LD because you have four minutes to answer 7 minutes of negative argumentation. That being said, time management and strategic argument selection are very important skills. Other articles will get into more detail on how to effectively give 1ARs and make smart choices when picking which arguments to discuss (Issue Selection: How to Pick a Winner), but for now it's just important to keep those two things in mind.

Depending on the decisions made by the negative, you may decide that you want to defend your case first and then answer the negative case. If, however, you are unsure as to which may be more strategic to address first, here is a good formula to follow. First, start on the negative case and answer their arguments in line-by-line fashion (similar to what the negative did to your case). You may find that strategy may take too much time at which point it may be strategic to “group”³ arguments.

When answering the negative case, at a minimum, you need to make arguments against their value and criteria, make a few good arguments against all their contentions, and use your arguments in the affirmative case to undermine arguments in the negative case.

Second, you should go to the affirmative side of the flow and answer every argument that the negative makes against your case that they could use to win the debate. When you get into more detailed refutation (see video lecture: “Refutation: Debate’s Holy Grail”) you will learn that not every single argument has to be answered, but when you start of it’s important to make sure that you are not conceding negative arguments that could be used against you.

2nd Negative Rebuttal or NR

Although you have more time in this speech than the affirmative did in the 1AR, it’s still important to make sure that you are effectively managing your time. If you are unsure how to start this speech, go to your case first and then to the affirmatives. In this speech, since it is your last, it is your job to make sure that there are arguments from your case being pulled through and explained to the judge as reasons to vote for you. This requires making strategic decisions about which argument you want to make your voting issues. After you have dealt with the affirmative arguments on your case, and given the judge well-defended arguments from your position, move on to the affirmative case.

On the affirmative case you must make sure that you shut the door on any affirmative arguments they may use against you in their final speech. Since you do not have the ability to answer the 2AR, it is important that you preempt what arguments the 2AR may explain to the judge (which you should know based on the arguments they make in the 1AR), and prevent them from being able to adequately defend those arguments. This is also the time to explain to the judge any arguments you may have on the affirmative case that could be framed as reasons to vote for you.

The final part of your negative rebuttal (which should be no less than 45 seconds to a minute of your speech time) should be dedicated to giving the judge specific reasons why they should vote for you based upon the

³ Grouping arguments just means that you combine multiple arguments that rest on common assumptions, reach the same conclusion, etc. and answer them at one time so that you do not have to spend time repeating the same argument that you have already made.

arguments presented and extended throughout the round. These are called voting issues because they are reasons why the judge should vote for you. In this portion, you should be filling out the ballot for the judge by explaining exactly why they can vote for you and why your opponents arguments do not warrant voting for them.

If you use this six minutes strategically, you can put a lot of pressure on the affirmative and make it incredibly hard, if not impossible, for them to win.

Second Affirmative Rebuttal or the 2AR

Your goal in this speech is to make sure that you do not totally muddle the round while giving the judge very coherent reasons to vote for you. There are a variety of ways to strategically approach the 2AR, but at the beginning you should approach it like this.

Initially, until you have a very good handle on time management, your 2AR should almost always consist mainly of voting issues. This doesn't mean you ignore your opponents arguments, but rather than going line-by-line as in previous speeches, you want to answer their arguments while explaining why your arguments are better.

Explain to the judge that you are winning your value and criterion, and why, as well as what arguments you are winning because the negative didn't answer them, answered them incorrectly, etc. When you are giving voting issues, you can't just say, "This is my first voting issue..." you must explain to the judge WHY they should care about that argument. This is true regardless of whether or not you are affirmative or negative.

Conclusion

In LD, each speaker has a unique set of responsibilities that they must remember in order to most effectively debate that round. If you can remember what your 2NR or 2AR should look like in the abstract, it will make a lot of sense in a debate round as to what arguments you need to deal with and how you should structure your speeches to make the most of your time.

