



Perfecting the Crossover: Bringing Policy Arguments Into LD

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Abstract: Although two different events, there are inevitably some overlaps between Cross-Examination, or Policy Debate, and Lincoln-Douglas Debate. Unfortunately, many debaters are unfamiliar with how to effectively take advantage of these overlaps, creating confusion amongst the Lincoln-Douglas community, and creating a stigma toward Policy arguments that are just as effective and applicable to Lincoln-Douglas as they are to Policy. The purpose of this article is to help you learn the art of properly incorporating Policy arguments into your LD rounds.

Why Are Policy Arguments Frowned Upon in LD?

One of the biggest complaints that many people in LD have is that Policy arguments have no place in Lincoln-Douglas Debate. These complaints arise from a few different things:

First, people implement these arguments incorrectly. Counterplans probably don't solve the affirmative's deontological arguments, so you shouldn't make that argument. You must understand the nature of all forms of Policy arguments to implement even one. If you do not understand how fiatting the passage of a plan affects Obama's political capital, or whom is in control of the passage, etc., then you will not be prepared to implement these advocacies correctly.

Second, people implement them poorly. You can't just say that your disadvantage outweighs on magnitude because lots of people die. The belief that all cards in Policy Debate are awful is a) false and b) irrelevant. You should not hate policy arguments because you think there are problems with the way they are run in Policy. If you believe the cards should be better, then cut better cards.

Third, people often recycle generic arguments. People don't do their own research. If your uniqueness evidence is three months old, from a blog, and you found the citation on some random Policy teams' wikipage, then you're doing it wrong. People read from back files, and those cards are actually pretty awful. If you're finding Policy files online, you're almost certainly finding their camp files which tired, young debaters who aren't looking for tournament quality cards produce.

Fourth, most LD resolutions do not specify an actor. If you're going to make Policy arguments, you must be willing and ready to defend the theoretical legitimacy of your implicit, or explicit, specification. If you're affirmative, and you want to say that the United States Federal Government will do something, be ready for theoretical objections about why you should not be able to limit the resolution to a specific actor. This is one of the main reasons people are opposed to Policy arguments in LD. They believe that artificially narrowing the topic is simply not okay, and if the resolution had wanted you to do that then it would have been stated in a manner that set up that interpretation.

Why Would We Even Want Policy Arguments in LD?

An argument is just an argument, regardless of the shape, size, or form that it comes in. A disadvantage, for example, is just another reason why what the affirmative does is bad. A plan is just a specific instance of the resolution being proven true. Topicality is just a burden that the affirmative has to meet to win. Just because we couch these arguments in fancy Policy terms does not mean that they don't have any place in LD Debate.

It is important to realize that you can make certain Policy arguments in front of judges who view the resolution as a statement of truth, as opposed to a comparison of two different worlds. A plan, however, is an example of one argument that probably will not fly in front of these kinds of judges.

Policy arguments have several positive benefits. First, they encourage, if not demand, in-depth research into the topic at hand. They can be substantive positions, and depending on how much research you do, can catch your opponent off guard. This isn't meant to be tricky or avoid substantive debate, but to force debaters to delve into the vast amount of literature on the topic that you are debating. Moreover, Policy arguments force your opponents to be ready to debate several different kinds of positions, and if they aren't ready, they may have to rely on generic arguments, which you can prepare for, so you're in a very strategic position.

Making Arguments Appealing to Everyone

It's just a statement of fact that there exists a large group of people in LD Debate today who do not want to see Policy arguments proliferate throughout this activity. But, these people's hopes to remove Policy arguments from debate, I believe, are based on false conceptions they hold. These people do not want the bad implementation of these arguments to proliferate, but they really don't have much of a problem with these arguments if they are run well and framed in an appropriate manner.

And for the people who are truly ideologically opposed to Policy arguments, there are several ways that you can hide the fact that you are using Policy-esque arguments. Here are a few of those ways:

First, you can argue that you don't just defend the 1AC in the specific instance that you talk about, but that you will defend any and all generic disadvantages that the negative would normally be able to make if you had not made some specifications within your case.

Second, you can explain why proving the one example you are talking about is sufficient to generally affirm the topic because that one example makes up such a huge portion of what the topic is talking about, or that it can be generalized to most of the topic. For example, the TOC topic for the 2010-2011 season was "Resolved: Economic sanctions ought not be used to achieve foreign policy objectives." Although the resolution did not specify whom the sanctions would be used against, at the time of the topic one of the major discussions going on in the political realm was whether or not we should levy sanctions against Iran. Debaters then used this as a starting point, and empirical proof, for their argument that Iran was the focal point of the topic, thus it still affirmed the resolution to only talk about Iran. This is one approach that you can take to justify your specificity, but you want to be careful when doing so that the argument actually has some weight.

To some degree, every judge is the exact same; they just want the best arguments to be made in any given debate. While judges have differing opinions on what the best arguments are, that is what they are most concerned with seeing. Every judge, regardless of the school of thought, or paradigm, they subscribe to wants to see arguments compared, weighed, and interacted with one another.

What Does This Mean For You?

The first thing it means is that you should be giving overviews. If you do not spend time on giving overviews of the round in your speech, then you are going to lose the judge who is not great at flowing, or note taking, and is opposed to Policy arguments. You may also lose the judges whom you think are really good judges for you in a round where you are debating someone who is also good at making Policy-esque arguments.

Your overviews should contain a few things. First, they should contain a short, catchy explanation of the arguments that you are attempting to extend in the debate. Second, the overview should contain weighing relative to your opponents potential offense. What this means is that you are going to have to preempt whatever arguments your opponent might bring up in their next speech, arguments that they'll use to win at least, and interact your offensive arguments with theirs.

You want to make sure that these overviews are focused on the big picture and not on the line by line because then you will just lose the judge by causing them to think that you're answering specific arguments when in reality you're just framing the debate for them.

The second thing you must do is COMPARE. Most of the judges who hate Policy arguments hate them because kids just read as many cards as they can as fast as they can and don't even mention their opponent's evidence or arguments. These debaters are impossible to judge even for the best judges. You have to weight your argument. If two of you have an argument that ends in nuclear war, for example, you can't just say that your disadvantage outweighs on magnitude and timeframe because your impact happens quicker.

Instead, your weighing should sound something like this (and this is obviously an example, you should change it up based on what kind of arguments you are comparing): "My politics disadvantage outweighs the affirmatives hegemony advantage. The first reason why is timeframe. My uniqueness evidence from this week indicates that Obama's political capital is on the brink. Passing the affirmative's plan would tank his political capital and set off a chain of events that culminate in disastrous consequences. This occurs much quicker than the affirmative's hegemony advantage because hegemony can always be supplemented with soft power or diplomacy, but Obama's political capital is finite and takes a much longer time to recover."

Third, you should have weighing overviews for your disadvantages that should be specific to each disadvantage. These overviews should summarize the story of the disadvantage and begin your weighing, or at least give the judge a brief idea as to what is going on with your argument, in general terms. Then you will have to come up with unique arguments to compare your disadvantage to the affirmatives arguments and impacts. This isn't something that can be spelled out in a paper as it depends on the arguments that are being made in the round. The most important thing to remember is that this should NOT supplant the line-by-line debate, but compliment it.

Conclusion

If you can remember these things, then there isn't a judge who will refuse to listen to what you have to say. Remember, an argument is just an argument, regardless of what form it takes. There are tons of judges who are very good judges and are willing to listen to these arguments when they're implemented and framed correctly. The obligation, then, is on you to explain these arguments in such a way as to appeal to the preferences of your judge, which is not a strenuous requirement at all. If you follow the tips given in this paper, then you should have no problem doing that.

