

24th September 2012 LD Debate - Your First Case

Introduction

This article is aimed at helping novice Lincoln-Douglas debaters write their first case. There are many, many ways to accomplish this task and so, I advise any novice LD debater to first consult your coach and possibly team-mates. They are much more likely than I will ever be to help you meet the challenges you will face in your local districts because acceptable styles of LD will vary a lot depending on which circuit your team competes. For the purpose of this article I will adhere to a more-or-less traditional, conservative style of Lincoln-Douglas which I hope is compatible with the style seen in the NFL National Tournament in recent years. Very quickly as you gain experience, you will adapt to your regional style, I am sure.

Value Debate

Lincoln-Douglas is conceived as value debate. In other words, most of the time, you will be expected to argue for or against a resolution based on the premise the position you are taking (either Affirmative or Negative) upholds, promotes, protects or enhances some higher principle, such as life, justice, or freedom. Generally speaking, you must defend a concept which makes life worth living; qualities we, as humans, all strive to attain. In many ways, I think universality is one key to choosing good values. They are not just American values, or religious values, or modern values. They are qualities treasured by anyone, anywhere, at anytime just by virtue of the fact we are human beings. Therefore, you need to keep the goal of attaining or maintaining a value in mind as you begin to create your case.

Having said that, I should also mention that many times the value is not always one you freely choose from a broad list of ideals. Very often, the value is explicit in the wording of the resolution. For example, a resolution which uses wording such as "a just nation does such and such" very strongly indicates the debaters should value justice. This type of resolution is really good for novices. Probably the hardest task many novices have is deciding which value to defend. A resolution which specifies one, saves much agonizing and stress.

Generally speaking, the goal of your case will be to prove that by siding with your point of view the judge will be upholding, defending, or promoting your value.

LD Resources

Lincoln-Douglas debate has been around for a while, and because it is such a compelling category, in my opinion, it has enjoyed a lot of really worthwhile press. By that I mean, many intelligent and experienced individuals have written lots of useful information and offered excellent guidance about how to do LD, write LD as well as lots of criticisms and calls to modify this or that aspect of the genre. I advise you to seek out these articles and read them. Especially the guides directed to debaters from novice through advanced varsity.

I can tell you there are guides which explain very well the nature of the resolutions, how to extract and characterize the principle terms and the mechanics of case writing and the structure and timing of a debate round. I recommend you read these as I have no intention of parroting their words and guidance. I think I offer something, nevertheless, since I intend to take a broad swipe at the subject while still offering some practical advice to novice debaters.

Aff and Neg Case Differences

Lincoln-Douglas debaters (like any debaters) will be required to debate both sides of the resolution, so I think it is safe to assume you will write both an Affirmative and Negative case. For the most part, the approach to both will be identical. Each case should take an attitude of standing for a point of view. In other words, if you are writing your Neg case, it is not enough to simply stand up and offer a case which states the Aff is wrong. You must say why the Neg is right. The same, of course, applies to the Aff so it can be said that both sides have the burden of proof to show their point of view is correct. Of course, I know that sometimes debaters will simply refute the other side and win but I personally think your case will be stronger if you can carve out some ground and stand for something instead of only taking shots at the opponent.

One key difference in a Neg case is it is short. While the Affirmative opening speech will run six minutes, the Negative will need to allocate a portion of the seven minute speech time to refuting the Affirmative case, so most of the time the first Negative speech will consist of about 3-1/2 minutes of constructive and an equal amount of time for refutation. There is nothing precise about the amount of time in this division. It is simply a guideline so you remember to keep the prewritten Negative speech short enough to allow for sufficient attacks against on the Affirmative.

There are other differences as well. The Affirmative will likely spend some time on definitions, resolutional analysis, and framework. Often it is not necessary to offer your own definitions if the Affirmative definitions are acceptable to you. Of course, this means you still need definitions, I am just saying you may not need to read them. However, if Aff gives definitions which are overly limiting or restrictive or perhaps too broad in order to give some advantage to affirmative or place extra burdens upon the Neg, you will need to offer counter-definitions to protect yourself, hence the need to have definitions in any case. I could say, the safest approach for novices is always give your definitions even if they do agree with the affirmative. It is the best way to ensure you avoid some subtle trap however, not repeating definitions you could allow more time for attacking.

Finally with regard to differences, I will say that while the Affirmative case could have three, four or more contentions the Neg will have far fewer. As a rule of thumb I think it is best to have at least two contentions. I have heard many one-contention cases and some comprised of multiple subpoints and these can work, but I am a firm believer the more arguments you can make in favor of your case, the more difficult job your opponent will have refuting you. Of course, each argument must follow the basic argumentation structure I have discussed in several other posts on

this site (see links at the end of this article).

Topic Analysis

Before one can write a Aff and Neg cases, there must be a detailed analysis of the resolution. Take the time to define each word or phrase of the resolution. This must be done with common sense. For example, it makes sense to define a term like "due process" rather than define "due" then "process". The goal is to have a thorough understanding of the definition of the resolution as well as possible alternative meanings. You should try to get a grasp on what the framer of the resolution intended the debate to be about and set down some possible Affirmative points of view and Negative points of view.

I think it is best, at this point to isolate some values. This is probably one of the more difficult objectives for novices and there are many techniques for doing it. There are different kinds of resolutions and so different techniques for analysis and your coach may explain this in detail. There are also handbooks and guides on the Internet (see reference below). Doing a thorough analysis of the resolution is helpful to understand how the positions should be evaluated and many times yields a value in the wording of the resolution itself. As I said before, the resolution may use terms like "a just nation" so revealing justice as a value, or "prefer individual rights" revealing individual rights as the value. Quite often, advanced debaters feel they can do better by not picking the explicit value in the resolution and they choose others. Fine, if you can make it work. For novices, until you get to be advanced, I suggest if a value is stated in the resolution, go with it because there will be much less work involved in trying to justify why you have chosen a particular value to defend.

When the value is not explicit, there are other ways of determining good values and perhaps it is useful to novices to choose from a laundry list of values such as: life, justice, liberty, individual rights, autonomy, happiness, well-being, quality of life, governmental legitimacy, morality, democracy, etc. But this does not mean, thinking, "oh, I like happiness so I choose that as my value". It is better to look through the list after you have identified possible positions for your Aff and Neg and think: by urging the judge to support this point of view, will life or justice, or happiness, etc. be preserved or enhanced or greater? If so, how? You need to find some connection between the position and the value and more times than not, that connection can serve as the value criterion. For example, this position improves the quality of life because it reduces the threat of terrorist attack. The value can be quality of life, the criterion we choose to achieve an improved quality of life is reduction of fear or minimizing terrorist threats.

Outline the Case

After you have collected your research, learned the main issues, and chosen a value and criterion you can begin to outline the cases. The basic outline will look something like this:

I. Introduction

A. Attention grabbing remark

- B. Resolution
- C. Definitions
- D. Interpretation (optional)

II. Observations / Framework

(the value/criterion goes in this section)

- A. First observation
- B. Second observation

III. Contentions

- A. First contention
- B. Second contention
- C. (optional additional contentions)

IV. Conclusion

- A. summary

The Introduction

This portion of the constructive may be brief. It often begins with an opening remark or quotation which is sympathetic to your point of view. A brief remark from a historical figure, author, philosopher, etc. You will typically follow this with a remark which presents the resolution, "because I agree with ...author of the quotation... I affirm the resolution, Resolved:". It is good practice to repeat the resolution for the judge's clarification.

Following the opening, statements, you should present the definitions of the terms in the resolution to eliminate any ambiguity or uncertainty about how you interpret the resolution. In fact, it is important many times to specifically explain your interpretation of the resolution after defining the terms, "therefore the resolution requires ..." or "is asking us to consider ...".

When writing the Neg case, since the case will be much shorter, much of the introduction is sometimes omitted. Many simply begin with, "I negate the resolution, resolved: ...". followed by any alternative definitions as required.

The Observations/Framework

In this part of the speech, the framework is built. In most circuits, both sides are expected to have at minimum, the value/criterion framework. In other words, somewhere within this section of the speech you will declare the value you have chosen and the criterion used to achieve the value and you will explain, as succinctly and clearly as possible how the resolution, value and criterion are related. For example, in a resolution related to terrorism, "I choose the value of quality of life. The threat of terrorism causes people to live in fear and forces them to move about their daily lives with caution and watchfulness. Jan Blankslate of Hashtable University stated "the number one weapon of terror networks is fear..." By reducing the threat of terrorism, we deprive them of their most effective weapon and improve the quality of life of their intended victims. Therefore, my criterion in today's round is reduction of fear".

The other parts of the framework, which may be in the form of observations or a narrative, serves to justify your approach to meeting your criterion. A good

framework will give the judge standards which explain how your approach is the only one that can achieve the value and why the Neg can not.

The Contentions

These are the major claims you will use to prove you meet your criterion. These claims are derived directly from your research. They should possess all of the qualities of good argumentation, including warrants and impacts and the connection to your value or criterion should be stated or at least self-evident. For example:

"Contention 1: Threat of terrorism has negative impacts on society

Threat of terrorism casts a shadow of fear over a society which affects the quality of life. A Department of Security study cited reductions in the amount of traffic in lower Manhouston in 2003 demonstrates the reluctance of people to move about openly in the weeks following a threatened attack. Moreover, according to the Wallmart Journal, following terror threats in 2008 and 2009 the prices of fuel and food increased 21%. ... "

"Contention 2: Threat of terrorism instills fear of others

Professor of Philosophy, Knowen Hardly writes, 'the nature of terrorism engenders a kind of paranoia in the society in which every person is a suspect to be feared. It creates a quality of life conforming to Hobbes' state of nature, a perpetual war of everyman against everyman..."

"Contention 3: The rhetoric of terror extends the fear

"According to Rollin Apples, it is the rhetoric of counter-terrorism which perpetuates fear. By describing networks as shadowy, nebulous entities like the ghosts and dark spirits which created terror in the minds of children. Terrorists are characterized as undercover operatives, elusive and unknown until they spring from the shadows to strike... The rhetoric creates a fear with is greater than the actual threat...."

The Conclusion

Finally it is necessary to link everything together into a nice neat package and conclude with a narrative showing how the case ultimately achieves the value by meeting the criterion you established at the very beginning. One of the biggest problems I see with novice cases is the lack of that common thread which weaves the entire case together from resolution to value to criterion to claims. The conclusion is the last opportunity to bind it all together.

The Sanity Check

Finally I will conclude this article with an idea they may help any LD debater write a slightly better case. A case is a lengthy speech with lots of backing and explanation and I realize it is necessary to provide all of this detail to drive home your point in a convincing way. If you are thinking: there will be time in cross examination or the following speeches to fill-in the details or clarify the points, it is a clear indication the main speech is lacking. A good constructive should stand entirely on its own and when it's finished, the judge should understand completely how it all ties together.

I think a good way to check the consistency, completeness and logic of your case is to perform a "sanity" check. simply go back your outline, write down the major claim in each section of the outline as a single sentence and read it to someone. If

they get the overall major premise, the case passes the sanity check. For example:

(I. Introduction)

Resolved: The war on terrorism is unjustified.
Terrorism is the use of fear to achieve a political purpose

(II. Observations / Framework)

Living in fear reduces the quality of life.
Reducing fear preserves the quality of life.

(III. Contentions)

The threat of terror harms many aspects of society and instills paranoia
The language we use to define terror increases the fear
The fear is worse than the actual acts of terror

(IV. Conclusion)

Governments use the threat of terror to justify the war.
But the threat of war degrades the quality of life.
Therefore:
Reducing the rhetoric of threat, reduces fear, which improves life and takes away the justification for war.

If above makes logical sense and the claims clearly lead to the conclusion, the case passes the sanity check, otherwise you need to improve it.

Reference:

The Ultimate Lincoln-Douglas Handbook, Marko Djuranovic, 2003.
<http://www.lddebate.net/thirdedition.pdf> [<http://www.lddebate.net/thirdedition.pdf>]

Sanity Testing, wikipedia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanity_testing [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanity_testing]

Posted 24th September 2012 by [James Kellams](#)



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yup

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Anonymous [September 26, 2014 at 5:20 PM](#)

This explains some very interesting points

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Thanks for providing this, it's quite the helpful guideline.

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Anonymous [September 17, 2016 at 4:59 PM](#)

It's my first year in debate and doing LD, so this was really helpful. Thanks so much!

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This honestly saved my life. Thank you so much!

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This is really helpful this is a great debate example, no frivolous ideas all helpful!!

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Rachel V. [February 23, 2017 at 8:23 PM](#)

This is so very helpful! Thank you!

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