



Lincoln-Douglas Value Debate - Judge Reminders and FAQs

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What are the distinctive aspects of value debate?

Value debate challenges students to think critically about the ideals held by individuals and societies. It seeks to discover which values should drive decision-making rather than advocate for a particular course of action. For example, the question of the environment for value debate is not “what should we do to protect the environment?” but rather “should we value the environment above the economy?”

Debaters use different ways to structure cases and arguments, but you can anticipate that many rounds will feature the following categories of argumentation.

- **Precise definitions:** The words in a value resolution often have different nuances of meaning, and precise definitions may be required to support an argument. Therefore, the selection and quality of key definitions can be important.
- **Hierarchy of values:** Debaters will appeal to values or ideals that they will contend their side of the resolution best supports.
- **Criterion or standard:** Debaters may offer a defined way to help explain, measure or evaluate which arguments best support the preeminent value they have identified.

What should I expect from experienced value debaters?

- **Solid argumentation:** Debaters should explain the logical connections between their assertions and the resolution. They may do this through examples, analogies, precepts of philosophy, cited sources, their own analysis, etc.
- **Clash:** Debaters should engage with their opponent's most important arguments, and explain why their own arguments are superior. They may legitimately decide to agree with their opponent on some issues, but they should also identify areas of disagreement and refute their opponent's positions regarding those points.

What should I NOT expect of value debaters?

- **Perfect proof:** Positions on desirable but competing values cannot be absolutely proven as right or wrong, and debaters should not be expected to achieve complete proof for their position. They are responsible for proving their side of the resolution is more valid as a general principle.
- **A plan:** Value debate should not propose a plan for change but rather a defense of what should be most highly esteemed between two choices.
- **Answers to every argument:** With limited time, debaters must often choose which arguments to prioritize, so ignoring or "dropping" a lesser argument that is outweighed by a more important one should not necessarily be considered a losing move.

How do I choose the winning team in value debate?

Every round is different, and the deciding factors will vary. In close rounds, even experienced judges can disagree about who won, meaning that evaluating a debate round comes down to making judgment calls. We simply ask that you decide who was most persuasive to you. Considering the following factors may help you evaluate the round in a fair and reasonable way.

What to Consider

- **Reasoning:** Which debater made the best logical connections between key arguments and the values highlighted as most important in the round?
- **Focus on the resolution:** Which debater best addressed the central question(s) of the resolution?
- **Clarity:** Which debater was easier to follow and understand?
- **Quality of arguments:** Which debater presented the best quality and depth of arguments in favor of their position?

- **Support:** Which debater provided the best support for critical points? When debaters support their arguments by referring to expert sources, look for a verbal citation and direct quotation so that you can judge the quality and accuracy of the evidence.
- **Clash:** Which debater best addressed and refuted the opponent's arguments?
- **Proof of principles:** Which debater best supported their side of their resolution as a general principle by the end of the round?
- **Conduct and ethics:** A debater who plainly behaves in a deceitful or rude manner toward an opponent should not be granted a win.

What NOT to consider

- **Personal opinions or biases:** Remember that your evaluation should be based on what the debaters said in the round rather than on what you personally believe about a topic. Approach the topic with an open mind; debaters have been assigned their sides, and they debate on both sides throughout the tournament. Be open to being persuaded on either side of the debate. Feel free to apply a filter of common sense, but try not to give debaters credit for any arguments that they didn't actually make, and don't dismiss an argument only because you do not personally agree with it.
- **Partiality:** Set aside partiality based on competitor name recognition, known levels of experience, appearance, etc.
- **Late arguments:** Debaters should present all of their main assertions and lines of argumentation in the constructive speeches. Therefore, judges should set aside any completely new lines of argumentation that were raised in rebuttal speeches because the opponent is deprived of an adequate opportunity to respond.
- **Speaker points:** It is possible for a less eloquent and/or less experienced speaker to win a round based on critical points of argumentation but be ranked lower in speaker points.

Do speaker points affect who wins? How do I assign them?

Speaker point totals do not determine who wins a round. They are used for a separate set of awards in each tournament, and when necessary they are used to break ties between teams with equal win-loss records. Therefore, we ask that judges refer to the [speaker point rubric](#) and try to score as accurately as possible.



Where can I find helpful definitions for common terms used in NCFCA concerning debate?

[Helpful definitions](#) can be found in our [debate rules](#).

What are the debate round protocols I can expect?

When the round is ready to begin, the speakers will introduce themselves, and a speaker from the affirmative team may also ask about your judging experience or background. Feel free to share honestly about your experience or inexperience. However, we ask that you refrain from engaging in discussion or asking questions of the debaters about the round and that you not reveal your win-loss decision to anyone during the tournament.

We want to assure you that **debaters are responsible for explaining all that you need to know in the round**. If you are confused about something they say, that is their fault, not yours. They will also know their correct speaking order, keep track of their own time limits, and hold one another accountable for following rules.

If you have any questions about how to handle something in a round, you can reach out to tournament administration in person or through your judge dashboard.

Debate Evidence Review

If you would like to see a piece of evidence that debaters referred to in the round for clarification or accuracy, you may do so **at the end of the round**. (Please see the [evidence review guidelines](#).)