

# WHY NOT TRY DUO?

by Tony Figliola

About a decade ago, I was asked to be on a committee that would draft the ballot and constitutional guidelines for Duo Interp, an event the NCFL had tried on an experimental basis, and one that, due to its popularity, begged for permanent status. Since that time, Duo has become a favorite among contestants, judges, and observers at local tournaments as well as at the NCFL Grand Tournament. Without question, it has many built-in advantages, both theoretical and pragmatic:

(1) It provides the reticent speaker with a partner to lean on until confidence is sufficiently built.

(2) It affords each performer the chance to respond to the genuine emotions and rhythms of another.

(3) It enables the audience to experience the nonverbals of the listening character.

(4) It permits the genuine overlapping nature of conversation that solo dramatic/humorous precludes.

(5) It invites the actor to immerse him/herself totally into a character, sustaining a unique physical, intellectual, and emotional makeup, and taking it through a scene's development.

(6) It, as well, affords more students the opportunity to experience national competition.

(7) It encourages students to join our activity. When my duo teams perform for my speech classes or for our entire student body, tens of kids want to learn more about forensics.

(8) It allows, through use of manuscript and off-stage focus, the scene to be created in the minds of the listeners. Removing from the performers the burden of lugging around props, donning costumes by way of quick change, and blocking in-

tricate movements in unpredictable spaces.

Perhaps the NFL will reconsider the adoption of this event. In the meantime, I offer these tips to those who would like to try NCFL style duo.

## Choice of literature

The literature can be humorous, serious, or a combination of both.

Selections can be from plays, stories, or poems. Most, however, are from plays.

Each actor in the Duo can play only one character; however, if the duo has narration, each actor may narrate in addition to playing one character role.

## Character creation and vision

Each actor must portray a character. Each character must have a distinct

--OUTSIDE (stance, body carriage, manner of gesturing, look, voice)

--INSIDE (personal history; emotional, social, intellectual, psychological, moral makeup, and the like)

It is the actor's responsibility to transform into another unique self, fully equipped with clearly defined outer and inner existences, and be able to render them consistently and potently.

## Character reaction

The dialogue between characters must seem *real*, and not rehearsed or mechanical. The actors-as-characters must *listen* to each other and *react* to each other. The result should be a *genuine sense of conversation*.

Sometimes the verbal exchange should be quick-paced, with characters almost overlapping their lines. Sometimes the verbal exchange will be slow-paced, with lots of pauses

thought--time, before their lines. Evaluate if the tempo and pace, the rhythms, of the dialogue exchange are appropriate given the specific characters and situations.

As well, the actors should *physically respond* to each other. While Joe is talking, Jim is reacting (his face is angry, his torso is tense, he occasionally looks away because he cannot believe what his former friend is saying) with his entire body.

Note also, that some easily employed choreography is permitted. If Jim belts Joe in the mouth, Joe should feel the blow--the force of it, and the pain and blood resulting from it. Characters must react to non-verbal cues.

## Development of character and conflict

Good scenes have interesting conflicts. Characters cordially or not so cordially "butt heads" over people, situations, things.

Both actors in the duo pair should demonstrate that their *scene--relationship--is developing* toward a subtle or overt climax.

The characters should somehow *affect each other* as the scene progresses. One might undergo a major change in attitude; one might change in minor ways; one might not change at all, and remain even more obdurate.

## Focus and locus

When looking straight ahead, character Jim sees character Joe, eye to eye. But he also sees Joe's frame. By looking down, he sees Joe's feet, by raising his eyes from the feet to the waist, he sees Joe's belt. The actor/character must convince the audience that s/he sees the (Figliola to page 15)

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value debater to pinpoint the source of a criterial argument if proposed by the philosopher. Enables you to check your references to check the validity of the value criteria. If the debater can not answer, ask for the context of the criteria; e.g. what led up to the establishment of this criteria?

6) "Is that criteria absolute?" "Is that value absolute?" "Under what conditions might your criteria or value be non-absolute?" *Why asked:* Forces the debater to admit to absolute values, against which you may have prepared some relativism arguments. Otherwise, it forces the debater to admit conditions for limitation, which can set up your case and refutation.

7) "Does this mean that the resolution is limited to considerations of only this value?" *Why asked:* You need to determine whether the core value debater is putting an unnecessary limitation on the resolution. Usually, a core value criteria does not appropriately coincide with the full jurisdiction of the resolution.

8) "Is there a difference between value criteria and voting criteria?" *Why asked:* Sets up the distinction between criteria for fulfillment of a valued principle and the criteria for affirmation or negation of the resolution.

9) "Is a core value the basis for debate a merely a method of application?" *Why asked:* Forces the debater to distinguish. If the core value debater answers, "The basis," you need to respond with, "According to who?"

10) "Are you claiming that your value should be the basis for all discussions of any value resolution?" *Why asked:* Forces the opposing debater to tone down an extremist position. If the extreme position is maintained, be prepared with arguments of relativism.

For additional support, refer to the following excerpts. These are from value theorists,

not just some run-of-the-mill Lincoln-Douglas Debate writer:

But it seems arbitrary to insist that all particular valuations must either promote or instantiate an abstract value. I can see no reason to accept the claim that one can explain a specific and/or relatively unimportant attitude only by showing that it flows from one's central and important ones. Nothing in attitude theory suggests it must be so. Intuitively, it seems more the mark of a fanatic to let one's abstract or general commitments determine all one's attitudes. It certainly strikes me as implausible to insist that, if I value a smile from my infant daughter, the full exposition of this valuing must, necessarily, turn on the claim that it promotes or instantiates an abstract value such as "being loved by my children," "happiness in babies," or whatever. (Gaus, Gerald F. *Value and Justification: The Foundations of Liberal Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990.)

Justifying any statement of value is a process of deducing it from one or more premises. All justifying is deducing. The converse is not true. All deducing is not justification. Only if the premises of the reasoning are acceptable does the deduction justify the conclusion. (Wellman, Carl. *Challenge and Response: Justification in Ethics*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1971.)

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other actor/character, that s/he sees the other actor/character's expressions, verbal and nonverbal.

Joe should not always stare intensely at Jim--at the focal point. Most normal folks never stare incessantly, eye to eye, at another with whom they are conversing. When thinking, for example, Joe might look down, his eyes trying to remember something, and then look back toward Jim, the focal point, as he recalls the answer he was looking for.

The actors should consult the script, but expect that they will be attending much more to each other than to the pages in their binders.

Incidentally, it is customary for both actors to turn pages at the same time.

### Cuttings

A cutting from a play may be continuous, without pauses or breaks.

A cutting from a play may also be episodic, consisting of several scenes, the former ones leading logically into the later ones. At the end of each scene it is customary for the actors to freeze and to turn their pages, both indicating that a new scene is beginning. As well, to designate scene shifts, actors sometimes slightly alter their off focus angles, sometimes playing them more inward, sometimes playing them more outward.

Both types of cuttings are acceptable.

### Movement

Present NCFL rules only permit pivoting to designate entrances, exits, and aversions. Within this guideline, the actors may have their characters use their bodies fully, from feet to foreheads.

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