

STUDENT VIEWS

HOW TO WIN AT LINCOLN DOUGLAS

From Wake Forest to NFL Nationals Lincoln Douglas usually follows the same format:

Introduction quote, resolution, definitions, Value Premise, observations, contentions.

This list provides the basis of the style I practice. Of course, small changes are always present. I must warn you though, that I can not guarantee that you WILL win, just that you OUGHT to win.

Definitions are vitally important?

Definitions are the basis of our understanding. All of our ideas are based on the definition we assign them. If we lose the value, the definition, of words then the words themselves become empty. Empty words are just that -- empty. They are valueless. Let me explain using a previous topic, Freedom of Speech versus Political Correctness. What is your definition of Freedom of Speech? It is limitless? How about Political Correctness? The Affirmative should say that Political Correctness is, "Language used to appease a minority group." The Negative should disagree, offering "Non-abusive language." See the difference? The affirmative with their definition could use Majority Rule and appeal to the American Way. But, the negative could talk about the American Way with their definition. American Way appeals to the judge. The key in the Negative argument is the word abusive. We as a society have decided through our laws that abuse is wrong, so equating Political Correctness with avoiding abuse is a strong advantage.

Ok, so it is important....how do I win the argument?

If you can find the definition you want from a well known source then all the better. Black's Law Dictionary is perhaps the most famous, but dig a little deeper, and bother the Extempers for their file on the subject. News magazines are also a source for they often define terms that they use. Next on the hierarchy of sources is professors, Congressmen, and people with lots of letters after their name. If you can use any of these then by all means take advantage of your resources.

If you decide to make up your own definition, have analysis to support it. Lastly, state that your definition is more reasonable than your adversary's. Remind the judge that reasonable means it derived from reason; here is where your analysis is crucial. If you win the reasonableness argument, then you have won the definition advantage.

So what if I win it? How does that help me?

Winning the definition argument forces all observations, values, and contentions to be subject to your definition. If this invalidates the opponent's entire case, well... too bad for them. In essence, it limits the debate to what you want to talk about, shutting out your opponent.

Sounds like Team to me....

Well, they use this technique also, but can you blame them? Lincoln-Douglas has its share of squirrel cases. If you let a squirrel definition pass, it will come back to haunt you. Anyway, most of these topics aren't pure philosophy, but instead philosophical questions on actions happening today.

I guess you're going to tell me how to win the VP?

Sure, but first let me show what winning the Value Premise does in the debate. All contentions are built upon your VP. If the building block is destroyed, then all contentions are deemed to be invalid. Here is an example.

On the highest level, math merges with philosophy. So equate the structure of your argument with a math problem. If you divide by zero at any point in a problem, what happens? The entire problem AFTER that division is null and void. If you lose your VP, then everything AFTER the Value Premise that relies on the VP is declared null and void. I don't care about Contention 283, subpoint S.

But how do I win the VP?

First, you must relate your value to the topic. This is why definitions are so important. If you are talking about Aesthetics and it has nothing to do with the topic, you lose. Draw a DIRECT LINK FROM THE TOPIC TO YOUR VALUE. You

might hear this referred to as a "causal link." Make sure you avoid the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* error. That is, x follows y so y caused x.

Next, remember you assert that your value is of more importance than your opponent's. This does NOT assert that your opponent's value is empty, or even not important. You are saying that it may be important and great, BUT your value is OF MORE IMPORTANCE. This is of paramount importance. If it is Life versus Quality of Life, and you are the negative, say, "Life is important, granted, but the Quality of that Life is of more importance."

Have pages of analysis. Be careful of introducing complex theories; you have limited time. Sophisize.

Should I have contentions then?

That is for policy. Use "areas of justification," instead of any policy words. For your answer: Yes. Why? If both sides are using the same VP then it comes down to which is related to the topic and the areas of justification better. Make them concise. I would not suggest having more than three. Three is the maximum number you can convey completely while maintaining a decent pace. I do NOT suggest spreading. Spreading is something started in Team and shouldn't even be there.

What about Cross Examination?

Ask closed end type questions. Ask clarification questions first; finish your flow. If you don't understand a case, you can not defeat it. That's simple.

If your opponent twists your words, state as much. Do not argue, just answer, "you are twisting my answer." Put yourself above petty bickering.

Anything else?

I'd like to thank my coach Dale McCall, Mother of Lincoln-Douglas; my parents for letting me live this long; my brother for always being there to disagree with.

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