

CHAPTER 4

CHOOSING THE DEBATE FORMAT THAT IS RIGHT FOR YOU

Three major types of competitive debate are practiced in American high schools: policy debate, Lincoln-Douglas debate, and public forum debate. This chapter provides a brief overview of each type of debate. No one style of debate is better than another, but each has characteristic advantages and disadvantages.

POLICY DEBATE

Policy debate is the oldest form of competitive debate in American high schools, dating from the early 1900s. For the first eighty years of the twentieth century, it was the only form of debate competition. Policy debate is called *team debate* in some parts of the country, even though public forum debate also involves a two-person team. In other parts of the country, policy debate is called *CX debate* (short for cross-examination), even though all three forms of competitive debate have cross-examination.

Policy debate gets its name from the types of resolutions (topics) that are debated. Debate resolutions can be questions of fact, value, or policy. A resolution of fact would be something like “Resolved: O.J. Simpson murdered his wife Nicole.” Court cases usually deal with questions of fact. A value resolution might say, “Resolved: Civil disobedience is justified in a democracy.” Policy resolutions suggest action; an example is “Resolved: The United States should change its foreign policy toward the People’s Republic of China.” The use of policy resolutions means that debaters are encouraged to become thoroughly familiar with current events and matters of public policy.

The resolutions in policy debate are selected through a process administered by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) where every high school sponsoring policy debate has an opportunity to influence the topic selection. After the resolution is selected, however, schools throughout the nation debate the same topic for an entire year.

Policy debate is team debate, meaning each school must have at least one two-person team to compete. Some schools enter numerous two-person teams into competition.

Each round of policy debate requires eighty minutes to complete, consisting of eight speeches and four cross-examination periods (during which the debaters ask questions of the members of the other team).