

LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATE

Lincoln-Douglas debate competition began in American high schools in the late 1970s. The competition gets its name from the famous series of debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas when they were campaigning for an Illinois Senate seat in 1858.

Lincoln-Douglas competition uses resolutions of value, such as “Resolved: The individual ought to value the sanctity of life above the quality of life.” The use of value resolutions means debaters are encouraged to familiarize themselves with major philosophical systems—concepts such as John Stuart Mill’s marketplace of ideas, Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative, and John Rawls’s theory of justice.

The resolutions used in Lincoln-Douglas debate are selected by committees appointed by the National Forensic League (NFL) or by individual state associations sponsoring the tournaments. The NFL Lincoln-Douglas topics change every two months during the debate season.

Lincoln-Douglas debate is one-on-one debate as distinguished from the team debate formats of policy debate and public forum debate. Lincoln-Douglas competitors do not have a partner, but compete individually against competitors from other schools.

Each round of Lincoln-Douglas competition requires about thirty-five minutes to complete—less than half the time for a round of policy debate. A Lincoln-Douglas round consists of five speeches and two cross-examination periods.

PUBLIC FORUM DEBATE

Public forum debate is the most recent addition to competitive debate formats; the first national competition in the event was in 2002. Public forum debate has also been called *Controversy debate* and *Ted Turner debate* (so-named because CNN founder Ted Turner was one of the early sponsors of the event).

The topics for public forum debate are selected by a committee of the NFL, and they change monthly. The NFL committee selecting public forum topics places great emphasis on finding topics “ripped from the headlines”—meaning they try to find the “hot” national topic for that month. Some public forum topics have been resolutions of fact: “Resolved: The United States is losing the War on Terror.” Some topics have been resolutions of value: “Resolved: The costs of legalized casino gambling in the United States outweigh the benefits.” Most public forum topics are, however, resolutions of policy: “Resolved: The United States should issue guest worker visas to illegal aliens.”