

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHETHER YOU WILL BE AFFIRMATIVE OR NEGATIVE?

In each round of debate there is an affirmative debater and a negative debater. The affirmative debater says yes to the resolution, while the negative debater says no. Suppose the resolution is “Resolved: A just society ought not use the death penalty as a form of punishment.” The affirmative team must support the resolution and the negative team must oppose it.

All Lincoln-Douglas debate competition involves switching of sides, meaning that each debater must be prepared to debate both affirmative and negative. You won’t know whether you will be affirmative or negative in the first round of the tournament until a few minutes before the tournament begins. The debate tab room (meaning the persons assigned by the sponsoring organization to administer the tournament) post a schedule shortly before the round begins. This round schedule lets each debater know whether she will be affirmative or negative, which opponent she will debate, the name of the judge, and the room in which the debate will occur.

By the end of the preliminary rounds of the tournament, you will have been assigned to the same number of affirmative as negative rounds. If you do well enough to qualify for elimination rounds, sides are determined in a slightly different manner. If the two debaters meeting have not previously met in preliminary rounds, a coin toss determines who is affirmative and negative. If you win the coin toss, you are allowed to choose affirmative or negative. If you have already met the debater you are assigned to debate, you switch sides in the second meeting.

WHAT IS PREPARATION TIME?

Each debater in a round of Lincoln-Douglas debate has a set amount of preparation time. For National Forensic League tournaments, the preparation time is four minutes per debater. Many state and local tournaments specify different amounts of preparation time, so be sure to check the tournament invitation.

If the preparation time is four minutes, this does not mean the speaker receives four minutes before each speech; it means the debater has four minutes of total preparation time. If all four minutes are used before the first speech, no preparation time is left for the remaining speech. This means you are expected to rise to speak immediately after the previous speaker takes her seat. If you are not ready, your speech time still begins immediately.