

Lincoln-Douglas debate focuses on a proposition of value. A proposition of value concerns itself with what ought to be instead of what is.

A value is defined as an ideal held by individuals, societies, and governments. Lincoln-Douglas debaters develop argumentation based upon a values perspective. Accordingly, debaters should focus on reasoning to support a general principle instead of offering particular plans or counterplans. Debaters may, however, offer examples to illustrate how a certain value would play out in practice.

The hallmarks of Lincoln-Douglas debate include:

1. parallel burdens
2. value structure
3. argumentation
4. cross examination
5. effective delivery

PARALLEL BURDENS

Parallel burdens means that both the affirmative and negative have the responsibility to show that their side of the resolution is more desirable as a general principle. The affirmative side does not have some absolute standard of proof that it must meet to prove the resolution is always true. The topics selected for Lincoln-Douglas debate are chosen precisely because they are controversial; such questions of value can never be shown to be entirely true or false. Good value resolutions are debatable. Neither debater should be held to a standard of absolute proof. Neither debater will be able to prove the complete validity or invalidity of the resolution. The better debater is the one who, on the whole, proves her side of the resolution more valid as a general principle.

The burden of proof in Lincoln-Douglas debate means that each debater has the responsibility to provide proof in support of the value claims they make. There is no presumption for either side in a value debate resolution. Both the affirmative and the negative debater have a burden of proof.

The burden of clash means that each debater has an equal responsibility to answer the arguments made by the other side. Judges are instructed that they should not reward a debater for presenting a speech that completely ignores the arguments made by her opponent.

The burden of the resolution means that each debater has an obligation to argue the resolution as it is. The question of whether the resolution is worthy of debate is irrelevant to the outcome of a given round of competition. Negative debaters should not