

conducting contemporary research on the resolution, you can develop a sense of the values advanced on both sides of the controversy.

DEFINING TERMS

The outcome of any Lincoln-Douglas debate is often determined by deciding whether the affirmative or negative examples are more central to the resolution. The framers of Lincoln-Douglas resolutions are careful to avoid words like *always* or *never* in the wording of the resolution. We are not debating whether “life is *always* more important than liberty” or whether “judicial activism is *never* appropriate.” Instead, we have resolutions such as the following: “Resolved: On balance, institutional censorship of academic material is harmful to the educational development of students.” This means that it should never be enough for the affirmative to show one instance where censorship was harmful (perhaps pointing to an instance where a school board banned the reading of Harry Potter books). Neither would it be enough for the negative debater to point to a single instance where censorship was justified (perhaps referring to a decision of a high school librarian to refuse to subscribe to *Playboy* magazine). This censorship resolution calls for an on-balance evaluation of institutional censorship. Even if the resolution does not contain the words *on balance*, it is understood that the affirmative must prove that the resolution is true in the most important instances; similarly, the negative must prove that the resolution is untrue in the most important instances.

So what does all this have to do with the task of definition? By carefully defining key terms in the resolution, the affirmative can predetermine which things are most essential. Consider the example of the censorship resolution discussed in the previous paragraph. The negative will seek to characterize censorship as the normal decisions teachers and librarians must make in choosing materials. Does a teacher engage in censorship when he decides not to include creationism readings in a biology class? If the affirmative debater allows censorship to be defined as merely choosing what is academically worthy, then the debate is already lost to the negative. Success for the affirmative requires that censorship be seen in the context of school board decisions to ban well-respected books such as *Huckleberry Finn* or Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*.

The affirmative would prefer a definition of censorship such as the one found in the *Columbia Encyclopedia* as “official prohibition or restriction of any type of expression believed to threaten the political, social, or moral order” (available at www.answers.com/censorship&r=67). The affirmative would point out that the resolution refers to “institutional” censorship, meaning the decision to restrict the