

CHAPTER 14

NEGATIVE STRATEGY IN LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATE

The negative constructive speech involves two components—the presentation of the negative case and the response to the affirmative case. Unlike the situation in policy debate, the negative does not have the advantage of presumption in Lincoln-Douglas debate. It is not enough for the negative to raise doubt about the truth of the resolution; to win the debate, the negative must show that the resolution is generally untrue.

CHOOSING THE NEGATIVE CASE

The procedure for writing the negative case is nearly identical to the affirmative; the key difference is that the negative case is shorter—generally less than two thirds the length of the affirmative case. The reason for this brevity is that at least one third of the seven-minute constructive speech must be reserved for responding to the affirmative case.

Begin your negative analysis of the resolution by thinking of specific examples in which the resolution would not be true. Consider the following resolution: “Resolved: When in conflict, globalization ought to be valued above national sovereignty.” After researching this topic, you would discover that that opponents of globalization focus on three key themes:

- It advantages rich nations over developing countries.
- It undervalues the protection of the environment.
- It produces the homogenization of cultures.

You could focus your negative case on any one of these themes. In each case, consider the value premise that underlies your position. If you are focusing on harm to developing countries, your value premise is likely to emphasize social justice or fairness. Philosopher John Rawls, for example, claims that the criterion for justice is that an action should protect the least advantaged. If you are focusing on harm to the environment, you might choose safety as your ultimate value. The criterion could be that we must always use the precautionary principle, taking care not to undermine the environmental web that sustains life on planet earth. If you are focusing on the homogenization of cultures, you might choose community as your central value, arguing that whatever undermines indigenous culture impoverishes all of humankind.