

RESPONDING TO THE AFFIRMATIVE DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

When you are negative, you can choose whether you want to accept the definitions offered by the affirmative or want to offer your own. In some situations you might be confident that you can show the superiority of your case even working within the affirmative's own definitions. Usually, however, you will want to offer counter-definitions and show why your definitions offer a better understanding of the resolution.

Consider the following topic: "Resolved: Democracy is best served by strict separation of church and state." The affirmative has defined *democracy* as "a system of government marked by broad participation." The affirmative claim is that the injection of religious values into government functions serves to marginalize the participation of minority groups. Although the affirmative definition offers one way to view *democracy*, a far more common definition is a system of "majority rule" in which "the will of the majority outweighs the wants of a minority." This resolution does not ask whether separation of church and state is *desirable*; instead it claims that democracy (meaning "majority rule") is advanced by a strict separation of church and state. In this example (and in many other instances in Lincoln-Douglas debate), the selection of definitions is critical to the outcome of the debate round.

RESPONDING TO THE AFFIRMATIVE CORE VALUE

As a negative debater, you must choose whether you want to accept the value premise offered by the affirmative or offer an alternative. Suppose, for example, you are debating the following topic: "Resolved: In matters of collecting military intelligence, the ends justify the means." The affirmative case advocates the importance of safety, arguing that the detention and interrogation of terrorist suspects is the best way to protect against future terrorist attacks. In this affirmative case, the criterion for safety is the uncovering of information that will prevent future terrorist attacks.

You might choose to counter the value of safety by advocating justice and the rule of law. You would argue that it is more important to follow international law, including the dictates of the Geneva Convention, than any benefit to be gained by torturing terror suspects.

Another strategy is to accept the affirmative value—in this case safety—but offer a different criterion for weighing this value. The negative might argue that the standard for safety is to minimize the likelihood of future terrorist acts. By torturing terrorism suspects and maintaining Guantanamo-type detention camps, the United States might