Lincoln-Douglas Debate Ballot

Round / Flight ________     Room ________       Date _______      Judge ____________________________________ (name & affiliation)

Affirmative: __________________________________               Negative: ___________________________________ (name & code)

Points: ________       Points: ________

INSTRUCTIONS TO JUDGES

1) LD is a debate about a proposition of value (i.e., an evaluative claim, not a descriptive one). As such, debaters are expected to base their arguments on normative theories or principles. It is not necessary for debaters to present a specific plan of implementation, as it may be in other forms of debate.

2) Consideration of relevant evidence and examples is appropriate to support or refute a debater’s arguments, although presenting evidence is not required.

3) New lines of argumentation are not permitted in rebuttals, but new analysis (supporting or refuting existing arguments) is allowed and encouraged.

4) In LD there is not a presumption (i.e., a prescribed burden) in favor of either side. The affirmative must persuade the judge that the resolution is more likely true than false, and the negative must persuade the judge that the resolution is more likely false than true.

5) The points you assign should indicate the overall performance of the debaters (not merely their oratory skills) relative to the field of debaters in this division at this tournament. Use the whole range of points that is indicated by this tournament as appropriate.

Affirmative

JUDGE’S COMMENTS ON THE DEBATE

Please provide detailed constructive comments (positive & critical) designed to help both the debater and the coach — for example, suggestions on improving: delivery, case construction, refutations, etc.

Negative

Reason for Decision: (Provide a detailed justification of your decision, referring to specific issues in the round.)

Affirmative Constructive ................... 6 minutes
Negative Cross-examination ............... 3 minutes
Negative Constructive .................... 7 minutes
Affirmative Cross-examination ............ 3 minutes
Affirmative Rebuttal ...................... 4 minutes
Negative Rebuttal ......................... 6 minutes
Affirmative Rebuttal ...................... 3 minutes

Overall, ______________________________ presented the more convincing arguments demonstrating that the ___________________________ of the resolution is true. (affirmation / negation)

Judge’s Signature:  __________________________________

{Remember to assign points.}
The purpose of this document is to explain some of the choices that were made in developing this new ballot. These may not be exactly the same choices that you would have made in designing a ballot, but the choices that we have made do reflect a considerable amount of thought and discussion among our entire group. In light of this, we thought it best to share some of our rationale. Note that this ballot is intended to work together with the LDEP Judging Recommendations handout and the LDEP Introduction to Judging handout. (Both are available on our website, listed below.)

**Basic Layout:** We have provided ample room for the reason for decision, along with two large blocks of open space for constructive comments directed at each debater. We believe that this will elicit better comments than smaller boxes that request comments on specific components of the debate, because judges often have a lot to say about some components and little to say about others. Moreover, having several small boxes tends to invite several short (& less helpful) comments.

**Point Location:** Points are assigned right next to the debaters’ names so that it is less likely that they will be accidentally reversed by a judge who is in a hurry.

**Judge Prompts:** We have tried to be clear in emphasizing the need for detailed comments in both areas of the ballot, while distinguishing the purposes of the two areas. The top area explicitly asks for constructive comments, which will help the debaters to improve, and it suggests various components of debating for the judge to comment on. The bottom area is intended to justify the decision of who won and it instructs the judge to refer to specific issues in the round, rather than vague generalities.

**Instruction #1:** This is intended to distinguish LD from other kinds of debate that require plans, such as policy debate. It explicitly calls for debaters to appeal to normative theories or principles in their arguments (i.e., to go beyond facts and to use premises concerning values). The concept of a normative theory or principle is broad enough to include the relevant logical foundations for arguments that establish that an LD resolution is true or false, and yet this instruction provides some guidance in encouraging debaters and judges to pay attention to the key general principles that ground normative argument. This instruction also makes clear that specific plans for implementation are not required in LD.

**Instruction #2:** Evidence is neither always appropriate nor always inappropriate in LD. This instruction is intended to make this explicit so that debaters will avoid misguided stock arguments about the blanket propriety of offering evidence in LD. This will encourage useful debate about the relevance of the evidence offered, which is often worth arguing about.

**Instruction #3:** This helps to clarify the crucial issue of what kinds of arguments are permissible in rebuttals. Any new argument, example or analogy (i.e., any new analysis) that is offered in a rebuttal is permissible if it is directly responsive to a line of argumentation that began in either debater’s constructive speech. It is impermissible to offer any analysis that begins a new line of argumentation in a rebuttal speech. In other words, an argument that affirms or negates the resolution in some novel (i.e., independent) manner is not permissible in rebuttals. However, we must encourage debaters to offer new directly responsive analysis, for otherwise judges would simply be listening to a repetition of what had already been said. Instruction #3 helps to clarify this key point.
Instruction #4: The LDEP believes, for many reasons, that Lincoln-Douglas debate has no inherent presumption in favor of the affirmative or the negative. Unlike policy debate, each debater has an equal burden to convince the judge that his or her side of the resolution is more likely to be true.

Instruction #5: Points are complex and controversial, so we will justify each element of this instruction separately. (LDEP ballots are available with & without the point scale in a variety of different paper sizes from our website, listed below.)

The ballot instructs judges to assign points that reflect the overall quality of the debating done by the two students, as opposed to using points to judge merely their oratory skills. This is because the primary function of points on a debate ballot is to allow the tab room to break the inevitable ties in the win-loss records of debaters. When these ties happen, the goal is to sort, for example, the better 4-2 debaters from the worse 4-2 debaters, perhaps to see who will break. Points are the primary means of breaking these ties, so they are very important means of sorting better debaters from worse. Therefore, we want higher points to be assigned to someone if and only if they were a better debater overall (not just in one aspect of their debating). If points were used primarily as an indicator of simple oratory skills, we would be unfairly privileging one component of good debating (oratory skill) in breaking ties by using points that reference only that one component. Therefore, we believe that points should be assigned commensurate with the overall debating skills of each student.

The ballot instructs judges to assign points relative to the (approximate) skill level of the debaters at that tournament. In other words, we recommend that a 29 at a local novice tournament should not mean the same thing as a 29 at a top national varsity tournament. This is primarily because the least experienced (local) judges are unlikely to be aware of the full range of skills represented on the national circuit, and so cannot be expected to use a scale based on that knowledge, but they can quickly gain a sense of the range that exists at their local tournaments. At the same time, the experienced judges should be able to adapt their scale to the tournament and won’t be significantly put out by our approach. Moreover, failure to relativize the points also tends to compress the entire scale.

The ballot instructs judges to use the whole range of points, according to whatever range the tournament director has deemed to be appropriate.

Decision Section: The wording of the decision section is consistent with and reinforces the principles that support instruction #4. The judge’s attention is again focused on the question of whether the resolution or its negation is true, and specifically on whether the arguments presented in that debate convinced him of one more than the other.

Speech Times: Standard LD speech times are listed in the corner for less experienced judges.

We encourage all tournament directors to adopt this new ballot at their earliest convenience (after they have used up all their old ballots). Because we hope that this ballot will be a part of a genuine change in LD and yet we recognize that many judges ignore what is written at the top of the ballot, we strongly recommend that tournament directors clearly and forcefully announce to their judging pool that these instructions should be taken very seriously. Doing this will help to reduce any unfairness created by a transition from the wide range of individual judging practices to this more uniform set of standards.