

# LDEP Judging Recommendations

The Lincoln-Douglas Education Project believes that LD debate is primarily an educational activity. Because it is also a competitive activity, LD teaches by rewarding academic excellence with the incentives of speaker points, ballots, and tournament awards. Judges control these incentives and are therefore the most influential teachers in debate. The LDEP encourages the following practices by judge-educators to promote fair, academically constructive debate:

- 1. Model professional, respectful behavior at all times.** Treat all students, coaches, and other tournament participants with civility and kindness. Do not tolerate rude or disrespectful behavior from contestants, and report any such behavior to the student's coach and the tab room. Follow all announced tournament policies and instructions. Maintain appropriate professional distance from any students you are eligible to judge.
- 2. Recuse yourself from any possible conflicts of interest.** The following are examples of relationships to students that constitute conflicts of interest: past teammate, present or past coach, paid assistant, past summer workshop teacher, future summer workshop colleague, parent or other relative, personal friend. Notify the tab room immediately if you have a possible conflict of interest.
- 3. Judge the debaters on the quality of the arguments they make, not on your own personal beliefs or on the arguments you wish they had made.** Set aside personal biases as much as possible. Remember that the debaters do not get to choose their sides and that they cannot read your mind. They can respond only to the arguments their opponents actually make.
- 4. Prefer balanced, straightforward interpretations of the resolution to unfair or obscure interpretations.** If the debaters offer different interpretations of the resolution, make your decision on the basis of whichever interpretation better fits ordinary English usage and provides more equal grounds for reasonable public debate.
- 5. Weigh arguments only to the extent that the debaters make their relevance to the resolution clear.** The National Forensic League states that: "Each debater has the equal burden to prove the validity of his/her side of the resolution as a general principle. As an LD resolution is a general statement of value, there is no presumption for either side." A good question to ask as you decide each round is, "If I had no prior beliefs about this resolution, would the round as a whole have made me more likely to believe the resolution was true or false?"
- 6. Prefer quality and depth to mere quantity of arguments.** Reward students who present detailed, well-explained arguments. Judge the quality of arguments presented in the round as a whole. To promote substantive, serious debate, do not penalize students for failing to address frivolous or minor points due to time constraints.
- 7. Consider quoted evidence only as support for arguments explained by the debaters.** Well-chosen evidence may strengthen arguments. However, quoted evidence should not replace arguments by the debaters, and all evidence should be explained in relation to the resolution.
- 8. Treat clear communication as a major consideration.** Remember that LD is a speech communication event. Weigh arguments only to the extent that they are clearly explained. It is acceptable to discount arguments that are too fast, too garbled, or too jargon-laden to be understood by an intelligent high school student or a normal educated adult. Do not penalize a debater for failing to understand his or her opponent's unclear arguments.
- 9. Use the full range of speaker points allowed by the tournament to evaluate overall performance.** Rate student performance honestly and avoid point inflation. Points in the highest range should be rare. Points in the low range are appropriate for poor arguments or poor communication. Use points below the tournament's announced floor only to punish rude or flagrantly unethical conduct.
- 10. Write constructive suggestions for each debater and a thorough reason for decision.** The ballot should remain a valuable educational tool for students and their coaches long after the tournament is over. Even if you make oral comments after the round, use the ballot to provide a permanent record of strengths and weaknesses and of the specific issues that led you to decide as you did.
- 11. Pursue suspected dishonesty with students, coaches and tournament officials after the round.** If you believe a student is plagiarizing, fabricating, or otherwise misusing research sources, confront the student after the debate and follow up with coaches and tournament directors as appropriate. Do not unilaterally sanction a student for what you believe is academic dishonesty.
- 12. Communicate directly with coaches about student performance and conduct.** Coaches are educators responsible for the academic development of their students, but they rarely have the chance to watch their students compete. Clear lines of communication help to correct problems, prevent misunderstandings, and maximize the educational value of tournaments.