



How an LD Round Works: **Speech Order and Times.**

For new LD debaters and their parents. Learn who speaks when, what each speech is for, and how to use cross-examination and prep time, so the first round feels familiar instead of confusing.

The big picture

Lincoln-Douglas (LD) is a **one-on-one** debate about a question of what ought to be done or valued. One debater is the **Affirmative (Aff)** and argues the resolution is true. The other is the **Negative (Neg)** and argues it is not. A judge decides who argued better and writes a ballot.

Unlike team debates, there is no partner. You give every speech on your side, so you also decide how to spend your own prep time. Because LD resolutions ask whether something is just, moral or justified, rounds are built around **values** and **reasons**, not just facts.

Speech order and times

These are the times in the NSDA High School Unified Manual (2021-2022 edition), and the UIL judging instructions for 2024-25 list the same times. **Times can vary by league, state or tournament** (for example, middle school and novice divisions may differ), so always check your tournament invitation or rules page.

SPEECH	WHO	TIME	MAIN JOB
Affirmative Constructive (AC)	Aff	6 min	Read your prepared case
Cross-examination of Aff	Neg asks	3 min	Clarify and find weak spots
Negative Constructive (NC)	Neg	7 min	Present Neg case and attack the AC
Cross-examination of Neg	Aff asks	3 min	Clarify and find weak spots
First Affirmative Rebuttal (1AR)	Aff	4 min	Rebuild the AC and answer the NC
Negative Rebuttal (NR)	Neg	6 min	Respond to the 1AR and set up the win
Second Affirmative Rebuttal (2AR)	Aff	3 min	Final summary of why Aff wins

Add it up: constructives and rebuttals total 26 minutes of speaking for the round, plus 6 minutes of cross-examination, plus prep time. The Neg speaks 13 minutes in total (NC plus NR) against the Aff's 13 (AC, 1AR, 2AR). The Aff gets the first and last words.

Prep time

Each debater gets a bank of prep time to use during the round. NSDA and UIL rules both give each debater 4 minutes total, but **the amount can vary by league**. Confirm it with the tournament before round one, and ask the judge or timer to keep track.

What each speech is really for

Constructives (AC, NC)

Build your own argument. The AC is usually fully written in advance. The NC mixes a prepared case with live responses to what the Aff just said.

Rebuttals (1AR, NR, 2AR)

Few or no brand-new arguments. Pick your best points, answer the other side, and explain why you are ahead.

Cross-examination

A question-and-answer period. The speaker is answering, the questioner is in charge. It is not a speech and not a time to argue.

Using your time well

- 1 Before the AC.** Have your case in order and a pen and flow paper ready (see the flowing guide in this series). Do not spend prep before you speak unless you need it.
- 2 During the opponent's speech.** Flow everything. Mark which arguments you will answer and in what order.
- 3 During cross-ex.** Use it to set up your next speech. Ask short questions with a purpose.
- 4 Prep before rebuttals.** The Aff should save prep for the 1AR and 2AR, the shortest and hardest speeches. The Neg should save prep for the NR.
- 5 End of the round.** Thank your opponent and judge. Listen to feedback without arguing; write down the judge's comments.

COMMON MISTAKE	FIX
Using all prep before the first rebuttal	Plan a rough split, for example hold most for your last two speeches
Reading new arguments in the final speech	Only extend and weigh what you already raised
Arguing during cross-ex instead of asking	Write questions in advance; end each with a clear point
Running out of time mid-sentence	Practice with a timer; know your last sentence

Parent quick facts

- ♦ Rounds are public to observers in many cases, but **ask the tournament or judge** first. Many leagues limit observers.
- ♦ Under NSDA rules a timekeeper is optional. If there is none, debaters may time each other or the judge may keep time. Electronics rules differ by tournament, so check them.
- ♦ The speeches, cross-examinations and full prep add up to about 40 minutes (26 + 6 + 8), and one state league intro describes an LD round as about 45 minutes. Real rounds vary.
- ♦ Wins and losses matter less than learning. A good ballot comment is worth more than a trophy.

Want a plan built around your debater?

Scholar Coach works with LD students on cases, delivery and tournament strategy. Book a free consultation at the link below.

Built from public guidance: NSDA High School Unified Manual, 2021-2022 edition (speechanddebate.org) · UIL Judging Lincoln-Douglas Debate instructions, 2024-25 (uil.texas.org) · UIL Intro to LD Debate slides, E. Huber (uil.texas.org). Rules change by league and tournament, so always confirm against your tournament invitation and current league rules.

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