



LD Research, Ethics and Tournament Day.

How to find the current topic, research responsibly, cite honestly, adapt to your judge, and walk into your tournament prepared. Includes a parent checklist for the big day.

Find the current topic

LD topics change during the season, and how often depends on the league. NSDA rules say districts must use the current LD topic for the month of the tournament, and UIL, for example, uses two topics a year. **Do not rely on a printed list.** Instead:

- 1 Visit the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA) website and look for its topics page.
- 2 Check your state or local league's website, since leagues may use different topics or formats.
- 3 Ask your coach or tournament organizers which topic applies to your event.
- 4 Write the exact wording of the resolution at the top of your notes; small word changes matter.

Research basics

SOURCE TYPE	GOOD FOR	WATCH FOR
Academic and think-tank articles	Strong arguments and data	Check author's qualifications and date
News outlets	Current examples	Separate facts from opinion
Government or nonprofit reports	Statistics and policy details	Note the organization's purpose
Encyclopedias	Background and definitions	Not usually citable as final proof
Social media	Leads only	Rarely appropriate as evidence

- 1 Start with a question, not a conclusion.
- 2 Collect sources for both sides.
- 3 Record the author, source, date and exact words for each quote.
- 4 Summarize each source in one line in your own words.
- 5 Check at least two sources before trusting a surprising fact.

Ethics

Three rules

Never invent or change evidence. Quote accurately and cite the source. Make clear what is a quote and what is your own idea. Under NSDA rules, when you read evidence you must at least say the author's last name and the year, and you must show the original source to an opponent or judge who asks.

- ♦ Do not cut a quote in a way that changes its meaning.
- ♦ If asked for a source, show it or admit you need to check.
- ♦ Treat opponents and judges respectfully, in and out of the room.
- ♦ Follow your tournament's evidence and electronics rules. NSDA rules prohibit using devices to receive help from coaches or other non-competitors during a round, and the penalty can be disqualification.

Judge adaptation

Your judge may be a coach, a parent or a community volunteer. Check the tournament pairing sheet or posted judge information if available, and ask your coach about the judge.

JUDGE TYPE	ADJUST BY
New or parent judge	Slow down, avoid jargon, explain your value in plain words
Experienced judge	Keep clear structure, show how arguments clash, weigh carefully
Unknown	Start moderate in pace and ask in a polite way if there are preferences

Tournament-day checklist

- ☐ Confirm the schedule, location and check-in time the night before.
- ☐ Pack printed cases, pens, flow paper, a timer (if allowed), water and a snack.
- ☐ Dress professionally and comfortably.
- ☐ Arrive early and find the posting area for pairings.
- ☐ Read rules for electronics and observers.
- ☐ Parents: be supportive, avoid coaching mid-round, and let your debater lead.
- ☐ After each round, write down one thing that went well and one to improve.
- ☐ Thank the judge and opponent.

Want a tournament-day plan?

Scholar Coach can help with research, mock rounds and prep. Book a free consultation at the link below.

Built from public guidance: NSDA High School Unified Manual, 2021-2022 edition (speechanddebate.org) · UIL Intro to LD Debate slides, E. Huber (uilitexas.org) · UIL Intro to LD Debate slides, K. Adcock (uilitexas.org). Rules change by league and tournament, so always confirm against your tournament invitation and current league rules.

NOTES

Want a plan built around **your** debater?

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