



Research and Evidence: Find, Cut and Cite Cards.

How to find good sources, turn them into debate evidence called cards, and cite them honestly. Written for students and for parents who want to supervise research.

What a card is

A **card** is a short excerpt of a published source, prepared so it can be read aloud. It has three parts: a **tag** (your one-sentence claim), a **citation** (who said it and where), and the **text** itself. The tag must match what the text really says.

PART	WHAT GOES THERE	EXAMPLE (FORMAT ONLY)
Tag	Your claim, one sentence	Extended library hours raise student use
Cite	Author last name, year, qualifications, source, publication date	Last name 2023, professor of education, Journal name, March 2023
Text	Exact words from the source, with the key lines highlighted	The full paragraph, unchanged

What NSDA rules require. When you read evidence aloud, you must at minimum say the author's last name and the year of publication. A full written citation must be available if an opponent or judge asks for it. To the extent the original source provides them, the written citation includes the author's full name, publication date, source, article title, date accessed for digital evidence, full URL, author qualifications and page numbers. Other leagues may differ, so read yours.

Finding good sources

- ♦ Start with school or public library databases, which are often free with a library card.
- ♦ Use university, government and research organization websites for studies and reports.
- ♦ Use news from established outlets for recent facts, and check a second source.
- ♦ Check who wrote it, what qualifies them, and when it was published.
- ♦ Prefer newer sources unless history is the point.
- ♦ Be cautious with anonymous pages, forums and sites that exist mainly to sell something.

Parent tip

Ask your student to show you the source page, not just the card. Can you find the quote there? That one habit prevents most evidence problems.

Cutting a card: step by step

- 1 Read the whole article first so you understand the context.
- 2 Copy the paragraph or paragraphs that support your claim.
- 3 Write the citation immediately: author, qualifications, source, date, and web address.

- 4 Highlight or underline the words you will read aloud.
- 5 Check that the highlighted words still make sense and say what you claim.
- 6 Write the tag last. It should describe the card honestly.
- 7 Save the file with a clear name and keep the link or a copy of the source.

Ethics: keep it honest

DO	DO NOT
Quote words exactly as written	Add, remove or change words inside the text
Include enough context that the meaning is fair	Cut out a sentence that reverses the author's point
Cite the real author and date	Invent or guess a citation
Share the source when the other team asks	Refuse to show where a card came from
Admit when you cannot find a card	Make up evidence to fill a gap

NSDA evidence rules name three violations: **distortion** (adding or deleting words so the author's conclusion changes, or failing to bracket added words), **non-existent evidence** (you cannot produce the original source, or the source does not contain what you cited) and **clipping** (claiming to read all the highlighted text while skipping parts). Internal ellipses are prohibited unless they appear in the original. If a judge finds a violation after a formal challenge, the team that committed it loses the round, and if the challenge is wrong the challenger loses instead. Rules differ by league and tournament, so read yours.

- ☐ Every card has a full citation
- ☐ Tag matches the text
- ☐ Highlighting does not change the meaning
- ☐ Source link or copy is saved
- ☐ I could explain this card to a judge in my own words

Want a plan built around your debater?

Scholar Coach can teach research skills that also help in school. 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, K. Adcock (uilitexas.org), evidence citation example. Rules change by league and tournament, so always confirm against your tournament invitation and current league rules.

NOTES

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