

How to Judge and Write a Ballot for LD Debate

Rule 1: Do Not Intervene

As a judge it is important to remember that you must be completely unbiased. The Greek term “tabula rosa” means blank slate. This is exactly what you must be when you walk into a round holding a debate ballot. You must leave all personal feelings once you enter the room. You must also not refer to any knowledge you have about the topic when making your decision. The only information you can use when filling out the ballot is the information presented by the debaters. If one debater makes an inaccurate claim that you know is false but the opponent says nothing against it, you cannot intervene and not accept it. If you were to intervene than the debater would be unfairly debating you rather than the opponent. You may write a criticism of the argument on the ballot so the debater can rectify the argument for future rounds but you should not vote against it without some form of refutation by the opponent.

Limited tabula rosa: you do not have to accept outrageous claims. The argument should be sound enough to stand on its own. If a debater makes the claim “The world is flat” without any proof, you do not have to accept it.

What to Look For

The affirmative is trying to prove the resolution (topic) to be true while the negative is trying to class and disprove the affirmative’s position. Each debater will present standards that will be proven with contentions (main arguments).

Standards:

- **Value Premise** – the motivational theme behind the case’s position. We are motivated by values in everyday life. If we go to war, we say it is in the name of *freedom, democracy, or life*. If we attend school, we say it is important because we value *knowledge, and security* (I want to have a good job).
- **Criterion** – the guideline or means of achieving the value/s. We can say we value something but it is difficult to prove that we are achieving it or have achieved it unless we set a standard that we can use for measuring. If we use the value of *democracy* as our reason for going to war, how do we know when it is achieved? We must set a criterion, such as, *the disempowerment of our enemy who threatens democracy* to explain how the value will be achieved. The debater can contend he or she should win the round if he or she proves affirming or negating the round through the use of the criterion will achieve the value.

Contentions:

Each debater will prove his or her standards with arguments that will prove the criterion. In each main argument there must be a **claim** (a simple sentence expressing the argument’s position), a **warrant** (analysis and evidence proving the position to be true) and an **impact** (analysis indicating why the position is important and how it proves the criterion).

Each debater will present his or her standards and contentions in the round. Both debaters must attack the opponent’s contentions and defend his or her contentions while arguing for which standards should be used for judging the round. Go with the standard you feel has been argued the strongest in the round and reference the contentions that persuaded you to make your decision.

What to Write:

Try to breakdown your critique of each debater by focusing on **presentation**, the **logic of the case** (did it make sense), **argumentation** (how well the debater attacked and responded to attacks) and **conclusion** (did they provide an overall summary of what was important in the round).

A judge must also rate each debater on his or her presentation based on a scale of 1 to 10. The **speaker points** should reflect the overall presentation (fluency, poise and persuasiveness) of each speaker and should not pertain to the win/loss decision. A losing debater can be awarded higher points than the winning speaker.