

WEIGHING AND IMPACTING IN LINCOLN DOUGLAS DEBATE

by
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As an institute staff member and judge, I have arrived at a new appreciation for the intricacies and strategies of debate, one grounded in a understanding of the activity clearer than that I professed as a competitor and reflected in every paper I write, speech I make, and intellectual argument in which I engage. Most of this new understanding revolves around proving why arguments matter: though arguments may be convincing and believable, essential to their credibility and force is proof of WHY its worth it for the listener to believe or be convinced. Weighing and impacting strategies, critical to proving why arguments matter, are strategies I thought I executed effectively four years ago, but have since learned I often misapplied and misunderstood.

Central to my misunderstanding was the belief that arguments must be impacted EXCLUSIVELY to the value premise/criteria structure of my own case. This problem still plagues many debaters, especially those wed to (and rightfully so) the value premise and criteria links in their case. Too often debaters tell me that their claims only matter because they carry them to justice, or because they benefit the entire society, or because they protect individual rights, any one of those impacts being either the value or a criterion. Though such strategies make cases fit nicely together, they allow debaters no flexibility in rounds. That is, once one limits the impacts of his/her case arguments to his/her own value structure, s/he precludes the possibility that those same arguments, likely the most thorough and evidenced ones given that they are in case, might also win him/her some of the benefits that the opponent professes. Put simply, if a debater impacts exclusively to his or her own value premise, s/he significantly reduces the likelihood that s/he will be able to turn any of her/his opponent's arguments. This is not to say, at all, that debaters should avoid impacting to their value structures. Instead, my claim is that debaters should impact not only to their own value structure, but also to other things, particularly

anticipated opponent value structures and claims.

a) Anticipated opponent value structures. When affirmative or negative value ground is clear, debaters should make every effort to include in their own cases arguments that might turn the thesis of their opponents' cases. If I anticipate that my opponent will defend justice, I should construct arguments and make in case (in constructive!) impacts to justice in addition to those I make to my own value.

b) Anticipated opponent claims. Debaters should attempt to include arguments in their cases that preemptively turn arguments they expect their opponents to make. If misused, this strategy backfires, especially on affirmatives, who sometimes make arguments for their opponents well before the INC. In executing it, then, it is not necessary for affirmatives to state an argument and then turn it. Instead, it is only necessary for them to create an argument, complete with claim and warrant, about why exactly they win an argument that they expect their opponents to make. For example:

Resolved: In the US justice system, due process ought to be valued above the pursuit of truth when the two conflict.

If I expect that my opponent is going to argue that citizens have faith in a government that pursues truth and locks criminals behind bars, even at the expense of due process, I should argue that people will actually have MORE faith in a government that adheres to its own written laws. As an affirmative, I have made no argument for the negative, but have simply made one for my own position that I reasonably expect that they'll make for theirs.

Such impacting—external impact-

ing—a) relies on one's ability to impact in case, b) invites further weighing and impacting in rebuttal and c) if not done properly, exposes one to easy attack in rebuttal.

The mechanics of impacting effectively in case are simple and clear, but often elude debaters. At the risk of sounding basic, debaters should highlight their impacts. "The impact is" or "This matters because" or "As a result, x number of things happens" are all acceptable phrases. This is particularly important for debaters who speak quickly, as judges will often otherwise miss the transition from premise (claim and warrant) to impact. The impact should come immediately before or directly after the link to the value premise and criterion, for otherwise, it will seem misplaced.

Impacting in case invites counter-impacting and weighing in rebuttal, as it gives one's opponent an early idea about key points in the round. THIS IS A GOOD THING. It will make better debate, and will create a more informed argument. Debaters too often think there is something to win with muddled or one-sentence impacts early on that magically clarify themselves in the final minutes of the round. This strategy is not only deceptive, but also is likely to undercut the force of the argument, maybe so much so that it is not able, at the last minute, to overcome an opponent's claim. In any event, counter-impacting should either 1) turn the impact or 2) attempt to outweigh it.

Both impact turns and outweighing strategies should be thought of at home: it is entirely possible to conceive turns and trumps to impacts well before they are mentioned, if only one puts in enough time and thinks hard enough before arriving at the tournament. In fact, pre-conceived impacts and arguments are more likely to be successful than those shot off with just a few seconds of thought. Pre-conceived does not mean canned, however; arguments can be (*Manasco to page 54*)

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thought about and responses devised without particular words or phrases being applied every single time, although such strategies may be useful.

Outweighing impacts, unlike turns, **REQUIRES** comparative language. If debaters expect to weigh effectively two competing claims, they must make clear both the framework in which they are to be weighed and exactly how one rises above the other. That is, if the agreed-on value in a round is justice, debaters must make clear how their claim is more, more likely to be, more long-term, more immediate, etc. just than their opponents claims. Black-and-white claims about justice are ineffective; instead, claims that tell **HOW** one argument is **BETTER** than an opponents are forceful.

If in-case impacting is not done properly, opponents will find it unnecessary to turn or outweigh impacts. Instead, they should (and likely will) focus only on explaining that the case impacts are based on flawed premises, or worse yet, that the case is all impact and no premise. To avoid this problem, debaters should pay close attention to their claims and warrants, and seek specific, well-respected evidence to make them logically sound. To exploit this problem, debaters should pinpoint one or two problems with their opponents' logical premises and explain that if s/he cannot win the premise, then s/he cannot win the impacts either. Such strategy should conclude with a statement about what this means in terms of the value and criterion.

So, understand what I didn't, and do your judges a favor. Make clear for them not only what your arguments are, but also why they matter. Remember to impact not only to your own value, but also to your opponent's value and arguments. Impact early on—in case—no sense in waiting for rebuttal! Attempt to turn or outweigh your opponent's impacts. And, don't ever forget: one must win the premise to claim the impact. Both premises and impacts are necessary conditions for a valid, meaningful argument, but neither premises nor impacts are sufficient conditions for a valid, meaningful argument.

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