

## Glossary of Key Debate Terms – The Jargon Explained

Here are some common terms that debaters use a lot. For a very thorough explanation of how to judge (both in and out of a nutshell), see <http://members.aol.com/menick/judge.pdf>.

### Tournaments

LD – Lincoln-Douglas, a type of one-on-one value debate over a resolution that changes every two months.

Debate season – no, not time to kill debaters. It's usually September – March, unless you go to States in April or TOC's in May.

TOCs – Tournament of Champions. It's like über-States. You need \_\_\_ bids to get there.

States – New York State Championships. You need a “qual” to get there.

Qual – short for ‘qualifier,’ which means placing at a certain level among a certain number of debaters. See [here](#) for further details.

### Leagues in which Texas Schools Participate

CFL – Catholic Forensic League, part of the NCFL (see their [site](#)). Basically, a CFL tournament is similar to an MHL, only it's held at a Catholic school - like Regis in New York City.

NFL – National Forensic League. See their site [here](#). An NFL tournament, like Districts at Hen Hud, is also similar to an MHL. Districts tournaments have their own set of rules, called the District Tournament Manual. The 2005 edition of the detailed 21 page Manual is available [here](#).

### Scoring

Low-Point Win – When the winning debater has lower speaker points than the losing debater.

Speaker Points – Points awarded to debaters. Some ballots list them as on a scale from 0 to 30, but it's a general rule that speaker points are on a 22-30 scale. Anything less than 22 is effectively horrible – e.g. throwing food at the judge or opponent. 30 = the best you'll hear today, 29 = Superior, 28 = Excellent, 27 = Very Good, 26 = Good, 25 = Decent, 24 = Okay, 23 = Fair, 22 = Improve. (taken from Menick's [How To Judge](#) page)

### Tournament Process

Suit – an essential piece of equipment for every debater. If you are female, skirts should be below the knee. The idea is to look like a conservative lawyer, whether you’re a flaming liberal or not.

Schematic, or Schem – A list of who debates whom, in which room and with what judge. These are usually printed out right before rounds start. Those holding copies of schems are quickly swarmed by crowds of debaters and judges (follow them). Debaters are listed by school and code (initials). For example, Horace Greeley KB.

Flight – A full debate consisting of half of a round. In practice, most tournaments are “double-flighted,” meaning that there are two debates per round - an “A flight” and a “B flight.” Each debater only debates for one flight, but judges usually have to judge both. This method of setting up tournaments is good for debaters, because they have “off flights” in which to pre-flow, eat, etc. Hence, a judge at a standard 3-round MHL will see 6 debates if the tournament is double-flighted.

Breaking – Making it into an elimination round, such as “double-octos,” “octos,” “quarters,” “semis,” etc. For example, “I broke to quarters” is debate-speak for making it to the top 8 places in a given tournament. See [here](#) for further details.

Ballot – a piece of paper, often in triplicate, on which judges write who wins the debate and comments about the debaters. Judges get them from Tab or a clearly marked ballot table.

Tab – short for tabulation, this is where the organizers of the tournament create schematics and make decisions (usually with a photocopier nearby). Sometimes it may be near the judges’ lounge, sometimes not. If judges have any questions, arguments, or issues, Tab is the place to get answers.

Pre-Flow – To outline one’s arguments right before one debates. Say you’re a debater arguing the Aff side of the resolution. Right before you begin your round (or hopefully earlier), you outline your arguments on your flow, instead of doing this during the round (that’s flowing).

## **The Debate**

Resolution – the topic being debated. In LD, it’s usually along the lines of “Community vs. national standards,” “Anarchy vs. Tyranny,” “Strict separation of church and state best serves democracy,” etc.

Case, or constructive – a set of reasons, supporting facts, and arguments that shows why we should affirm or negate the resolution. Most debaters type them up (or handwrite parts on the bus).

Cross-examination, or CX – an opportunity for one debater to ask the other questions. They can be about anything, but they should be relevant and designed to get admissions or concessions from the other. CX is one-way in LD debate.

Rebuttal - refuting by offering a contrary contention or argument.

Value or value premise – the overall standard by which the round should be weighed. It should be something inherently good, like Societal Welfare, Justice, Individual Welfare, Democracy, Quality of Life, Quality of the Future, etc. “Free Speech” isn’t so great as a value because it can be bad, like in wartime (for more info, go look up the Supreme Court cases Shenck v. U.S. and Abrams v. U.S.).

Criterion or value criterion – How you get to, measure, or define your value. For example, a value might be Societal Welfare, and the criterion could be Preservation of Rights. Or: Democracy (value) via Accountability (criterion).

Contention – a large argument or set of smaller arguments that supports a case. They often have subpoints, flowed like this, with abbreviations

C1

Subpoint A or just (A)

(B)

(C) and so on.

Subpoint – exactly what it sounds like. That is, a point that is a part of the larger umbrella contention.

(we’re lazy, so we don’t hyphenate it)

Prep time - time to write down some responses in preparation for the rebuttal; total prep time can be 3-5 minutes depending on the tournament)

Flow – a piece of paper with many rows and columns on which you write down an outline of what the debaters are saying. Also can be used to refer to a written outline of all the arguments in a debate: see next.

“Going down the flow” – just what it sounds like, that is, responding to arguments starting at the “top” or beginning of the previous speech and going to the “bottom” or the end. This what good debaters do: they respond to arguments in a linear or line-by-line fashion, rather than jumping “all over the flow.”

Signpost – to indicate where one is on the flow. For example: “In my opponent’s second contention subpoint A, he/she said [tagline]...” Second contention subpoint A can be abbreviated C2A.

Tagline – the one-sentence summary of a contention or subpoint. For example: Community standards have a “chilling effect” on teachers which is detrimental to the education of high school students. Or, “the chilling effect.”

Claim – an assertion. Example: cheese is good.

Warrant – a reason why an assertion is true. Example: cheese has nutrients.

Impact – explains the *importance* of the warranted claim. Example: It’s important that cheese is good, because its nutrients, especially calcium, contribute to a healthy body.

Link – a connection between the impacted claim and the value. Example: Since cheese contributes to a healthy body, my value of Individual Welfare is upheld.

Card – a piece of evidence, usually a quote from an expert, that proves a point. NOTE: cards should be self-warranting. For example, it’s not enough that Professor John Nash of Princeton University makes an assertion, like “cheese is good,” for it to be true (which is actually a fallacy

Fallacy – “A statement or an argument based on a false or invalid inference”  
([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com))

Examples – Naturalistic Fallacy, *reduction ad absurdum*, *ad baculum*, *ad populum*, *ad hominem*... Good summaries are:

[http://www.cuyamaca.net/bruce.thompson/Fallacies/fallacies\\_grid.asp](http://www.cuyamaca.net/bruce.thompson/Fallacies/fallacies_grid.asp)

<http://www.nizkor.org/features/fallacies/>

Harm – something bad that happens because of the position one side takes. For example, if Aff is advocating that democracy is better than anarchy, Neg might point out the harm that democracy makes people pay taxes. (The obvious response Aff would say is that we get more benefits from paying taxes than the comparatively small harm of losing income.)

Non-unique – a harm or benefit that can happen on either side and is therefore a wash.

Wash – nullification of harms/benefits, as when they’re equal on both sides, so they cancel out. (Kind of like in a math equation.)

Non-resolutional – just what it sounds like – when a point does not pertain to the resolution. It can also mean something that goes beyond the duty or burden one side has to prove (e.g. a supererogatory action).

Supererogatory – superfluous, unnecessary, or otherwise performed or observed beyond the required or expected degree ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)).

Drop – When a debater does not address or respond to a subpoint or argument. In other words, they didn’t refute it, so they implicitly agree with it. NOTE: drops must be impacted to count. It’s not enough to say your opponent didn’t refute your argument – you must say why it matters (impacting – why that point is so important, and the fact that your opponent agrees with you means you win the round).

Dropping – as in, dropping a debater (not down a flight of stairs!). This means that person lost.

Picking Up – winning. Opposite = dropping.

Grouping – usually used in the context of “Group these subpoints together.” It’s just what it sounds like – the debater is addressing several points at once by responding to the underlying idea behind them. This is most common in the 1AR, when there’s only 4 minutes for Aff to cover everything (a tough speech).

Voting issue, voter, or crystallization point – why you win the round. It can be an impacted drop extended across the flow in both rebuttals; it can be anything, as long as the debater makes an argument and calls it a voting issue/voter/point of crystallization. Example: I win this round because [argument]. Usually, crystallization is done during the last 2 minutes of the 2NR and 2AR, or for the entire 2AR.

Extend – to carry across the flow. I’d recommend literally drawing an arrow from one speech to the next to indicate that the same point is being argued in both speeches.

Sliming – when a debater brings up a new point in the second rebuttal, to which the other debater does not have time for nor is obligated to respond. Usually happens more often or is more egregious in the 2AR than 2NR.

Crystallize down the flow – instead of crystallizing at the bottom of the second rebuttal, some debaters choose to argue down the flow and then make certain points voting issues. This can be confusing if it’s not signposted well.

Timer – an essential part of debate, whether you’re a judging or debating. Be sure to have one – any ordinary kitchen timer will do (I use an egg timer myself). Don’t be stuck using the clocks on the school wall, as they are notoriously inaccurate.

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