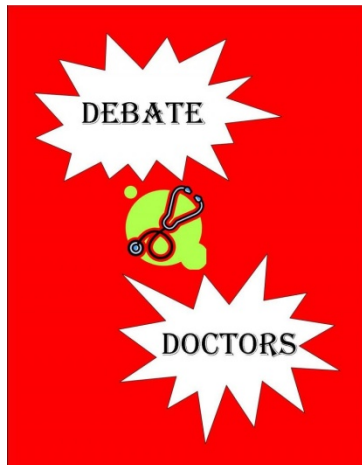


Debate Doctors Publishing

# Evidence in Lincoln-Douglas Debate



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There is a difference between logic and evidence. Logic is the reasoned argument from A to B. Evidence is a thing which one takes from the real world as an example of why one's argument is valid. One may use logical examples to back up one's argument. But to cite a philosopher or to quote a statistic is to engage in the use of evidence. One can expect some large statistics to be cited in cases both Affirmative and Negative. In fact, some cases will hinge on the huge numbers of citizens or nations affected by the collapse of the corporations. What do we do when confronted with statistical evidence that seems unbeatable? Several avenues exist.

First, the debater can simply offer her/his own evidence that contradicts the opponent's statistics. The two figures go head to head and will either cancel each other out causing the judge to move to other arguments on which to decide the debate. Or, perhaps your statistics are more recent and so your statistics win the point. This demonstrates the need to stay current beyond the acquisition of briefs. Statistics are going to be coming out daily concerning the current round of bailouts and keeping your eyes on the newspapers is a good idea.

However, sometimes your opponent is going to come up with some piece of evidence or a statistic that just seems too good. You can attack it in at least two ways. First in C-X you ask how the statistics were obtained by the source. Your opponent will most likely not know the answer to this question. They might make up something on the spot or they might be truthful and admit they do not know. If they are truthful, you can then assert that until the methodology and parameters of the study are known, the figures mean nothing. Thus the statistic that seemed so good is now a non-factor in the debate.

But what if the debater makes something up on the spot? The statistic is important to demonstrating the good (or evil) given to the citizens to prove the justness of the bailout. How do you counter this obstacle to your winning? The simple answer is to examine the card yourself and look for the qualifications of the individual reporting or looking for the source of the statistic. It might be that the source or writer is a biased source and so cannot be trusted. Or the evidence might be something from a blog that someone has written and not from a real expert. Or there may be no qualifications. These

are important and effective ways of discounting the importance of a piece of evidence. However, getting the card to look at may not be an easy matter. But before I go further with this you must allow me to digress.

Some coaches and some debate theorists would like to believe that debate is a “gentlemen’s sport” in which only the most honest of players participate. Those of us who have actually been in debate rounds know that debaters are not trusted individuals. Empirically this is true. To know that debaters are not trusted to be honest one only has to look at the door of any debate round and the large sign that warns the debater that entering the room without a judge present will result in disqualification. Believe it or not, there was a time back in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when those signs were not as prevalent as they are today. Why are they there now? They are there because debaters would go in and steal the cool things the teachers had left out in the rooms. Monday mornings would come around and the contest managers would be flooded with irate teachers complaining that things were gone and that next year their classroom would be off limits to the tournament. And so the signs appeared.

I have digressed into this bit of history to demonstrate that there is no gentlemen’s agreement in debate to be an honest individual. This brings me back to the problem of looking at that darn evidence card. There are sections of the state of Texas wherein asking to see a card is met with the same consternation as would be your asking your opponent to get naked and show you what they have. The opponent tells you they do not have to show you any evidence. The judge jumps in and says that you can’t ask for evidence. And you are left looking like some mad criminal who does not know your place in society.

The truth of the matter is that UIL (as well as TFA and NFL) has a rule that states plainly that evidence read in a debate must be AVAILABLE IN WRITING ON DEMAND. No matter how someone argues, the rule is there and you are within your rights to ask for the evidence. If the opponent can’t produce it, how do we know they didn’t make it up because they were losing? We already have evidence - with the sign on the door - that debaters can’t be trusted. The rules allow for penalties for failure to produce evidence read when demanded that range from disregard of the point in the round, forfeiture of the round, or elimination from the tournament. However, having the

rules on your side is not always enough. Often the judge is adamantly opposed to your seeing that evidence card.

Without going into great detail (a thorough discussion will be found this summer in a theory book from Debate Doctors publishing), I will point out that this idea that you cannot ask for evidence comes from a misunderstanding of what Lincoln-Douglas debate is. L-D was conceived as a philosophic debate in which logical arguments could be posited without the burden of reading a card to prove every point. In fact Debate Doctors September/October NFL brief had a negative position that used only logic. However, if the debater chooses to use a statistic or a source to substantiate her/his point, they have used evidence of their own free will. Once read, a piece of evidence should be available to the opponent to examine. And why not? No one forced the debater to use the evidence. If the piece is as good as the debater thinks - and it is real - it will not hurt them to show it in the round.

What constitutes the use of evidence? Citing a philosopher as stating a position can bring the question of where the philosopher stated the position. The next logical question would be if the debater had that statement with them. Anyone can say John Rawls said a thing. But to prove reliability one needs to produce the evidence card that proves John Rawls said that thing and where and when. This is why all those briefs you buy – including this one – provide citations for all the evidence they contain. Citing statistics is using evidence. Using any occurrence outside the hypothetical (that is using a real example of action or statistic) can be construed as the use of evidence. Evidence is not required in L-D but once used it is to be available in writing on demand.

But this will get you no closer to seeing that evidence card with some judges. I suggest that once your opponent refuses to show the card to you, you go to the next question (don't make a scene) and then in the next speech you simply point out that the opponent chose to violate the rules by refusing to produce evidence they read in the round and so that astounding statistic should be ignored in deciding the round. Then go on to the next point. This will serve several purposes: You come off as poised and confident - not whinny. It will make the opponent mad because you just said they broke the rules. It puts all the blame on the opponent not the judge. Finally, hopefully, the opponent will spend so much time harping on this that they will drop other strong

arguments you made and you can pull them in your next speech. Then you can point out that whether the statistic is weighed or not is irrelevant because your opponent dropped several other points just as important.

I would strongly suggest you go to the UIL(or NFL or TFA) website and download a copy of the Lincoln-Douglas rules to have handy in case your opponent, a judge, or contest director calls you on this. You cannot assert that the rules say a thing if you do not have the rules to show when asked for them. Remember: evidence in writing on demand goes for you also.

*\*This essay first appeared as part of a longer essay in “The Federal Governments and Bailouts” in Debate Doctors UIL Spring 2009 L-D brief\**