Lincoln Douglas- How To Flow and Refute Your Opponent’s Case

In Lincoln-Douglas Debate there are countless methods or strategies that one could use to attack an opposing case. One could attack the arguments in matters of importance, lump arguments together, or go straight down the flow (attacking each argument as the opponent said it). With this explanation, I am not attempting to say the “right” way to go about defending against opponent’s arguments. All I intend to do is explain my strategy for doing so. Do not simply follow these rules as if they are universal laws. Watch videos of the Final Rounds of NFL Nationals. See what people do that is commonly accepted on one’s local circuit. Combine what is liked and what is thought will work well from the different sources seen. Adaptation is the number one rule of any Speech or Debate event. I am just going to walk through the entire Affirmative Constructive and how I would respond to that as the Negative.

First, we will look at how I would flow the arguments (write them down for reference). Sometimes, an opponent might give an introduction to their speech. If it is important to the round (the vast majority of the time it will not be), I might jot down three or four words about the general meaning of it. If not, ignore it and get ready for the meat of the issue. Throughout this beginning of the speech, many definitions will get thrown out. If there is a definition that is disliked or one desires to speak about, write it down. Try to get down any definition for “justice” or “moral” if one has a word like that in the resolution. When it comes to the Value, write that down, and make sure to get
their explanation to it as well. As they explain it more (which they invariably will--hopefully YOU get the point a lot sooner than the judge does so there is more time to work with), start thinking of responses to this. Write any and all down to the right of their Value. I think it is handy to number all responses but some people do not like that. But really, just a few words to jog the memory. Nothing more than necessary or information will be missed. After the Value, make sure to get their Value Criterion and any explanation of this. While writing responses for that to the side, make sure to have a firm understanding of what they are talking about. Is there a clear link between these two standards? Do YOU know what the line of reasoning is? If not, be sure to get that clarified in CX or get ready to tear it up in one’s speech if it is a mistake on their part.

As opponents go through their Contentions, make sure to write their tagline (and be on the lookout for hidden arguments not mentioned in the tagline as well) in a few words at most. Similar contentions should be seen over and over again so paraphrasing should be pretty simple as the tournament progresses. Some judges/coaches might KILL me for saying it, but, for the most part a debater can listen to the first two sentences of a piece of evidence and know what it is saying. Keep an ear ready because if there are statistics or a brand-new concept there, those are things that need to be written down. Otherwise, use the time where they are reading evidence to find one’s own or think of attacks for everything.

When it comes to giving the 7-minute speech, I would generally read the Negative Case first (about 3-4 minutes long). I would then say something along the lines of “now let’s look over at my opponent’s
case;” which is important because it signals (even to Lay judges) the fact that a debater is going on the attack. Which requires a far different mindset for the judge to have while one is speaking. First, I would have addressed their definitions (if I had any problems with them) when I provided my definitions earlier during my Case. If there is a contradiction with any logic on their definitions, point it out here (their definition of Justice could be “Giving each their due”- ends based, while their Value-Criterion could be means based). If not, get to the crux of the debate--the Value and Value-Criterion. Spend the vast majority of the time on these. Do not forget to number responses. Attacks one could make (the list is infinite): 1) Always explain why one’s V/VC are better than the opponents to measure the standard set in the resolution--make theirs seem crazy with analogies if possible, 2) A contradiction between their V/VC, 3) If they do not prove why their VC should be the measuring stick for their V, 4) If they present a philosopher, attack that person or show how he/she actually supports YOUR side, 5) If the VC is vague, explain that the VC could/should support one’s side, and 6) If one has the same V, explain why it is better seen on YOUR side.

The list goes on, but that is the general idea. If there is evidence that the opponent’s V/VC are bad or a philosopher mentioned here is bad, read it. It always helps to have support, even it is not necessary in L-D.

Before attacking Contentions, think about making any of these arguments: 1) Any case structure argument such as an unfair standard they are holding one to or how it does not actually make sense because one argument contradicts another argument, 2) Burden
of Proof/Debate Theory argument--their arguments do not actually prove their side fully or whatever theory held to in rounds, 3) Something they leave out in the round, and 4) Not meeting the standard set in their V/VC.

I usually go through each Contention one at a time. Address the argument they made (but do not go too into detail otherwise there might be reinforcement of the opponent’s arguments to the judge) and then quickly explain one major flaw they made. If one has evidence to read, do it but make sure to explain the argument before and after reading the evidence--bringing up a philosopher is good. Arguments that could be made here: 1) Any reason their argument does not logically make sense, 2) The evidence they read is by an author who supports one’s side or who is not qualified/biased for some reason; I would not worry about dates though, 3) Respond to all statistics with some that can be proven to be better or prove why theirs are not important, 4) Use analogies that take their arguments to the logical extreme, and 5) Repeat quotes in their evidence that might contradict their entire thesis--little problems for them usually exist.

The list goes on and on but by following a structured analysis in attacking the case, no matter how much they try to build it up, the judge might not buy what they say. Pace oneself and only make arguments that there is time to make, and do not speak faster than the judge wants. No matter what.