Lincoln Douglas- Voters

Whilst there are several legitimate ways to give “Voting Issues” (as proven by the National Forensic League Judging Form where it asks a judge’s preference for such), and different judges will be more adapted to different styles, I shall explain my preference and then go over the second distinct pattern for doing so. A Voting Issue is a major idea that a debater wants the judge(s) to remember after the round but before they sign their ballot. Usually concepts or arguments that a debater’s side has won without a doubt, or flaws with the opponent’s that are bad enough that they should lose the round, are what Public Forum Debaters would call “The Final Focus” in a more structured format.

First, the Voting Issues should be given at the last possible moment because they are what one wants the judge to remember the most. For Negative Speakers, leave a few (2-3) minutes at the end of the six-minute speech to deliver voting issues. For those on Affirmative, I would devote the entire three-minute speech to them. Judges can be simple-minded sometimes (and even for those who are not, it is nice to make the decision simple for them), so they ALL will respond well to clear-cut reasons to give the ballot in one’s favor. A person who makes a lot of good arguments may be the better debater, but when both sides win some select arguments the judge is still left asking, “Why should I vote for you and not your opponent?” This can be especially true at high-level competitions or in close rounds, so keep it in mind that Voting Issues are often what the Judge really does vote on.
When deciding what arguments are Voters, it is important to make sure that one has the right amount. Whilst in most cases in Debate where the more arguments the better, this is not the case here. It is better to have them short and concise. However, at the same time leaving too few voting issues can pose the problem that there might not be enough good reasons to vote against the opposing side. A good average is 3-5, though I usually always stuck to 3. There will always be reasons to give judges as to why they should vote for YOU as long as one was doing well in a debate. It is important to pick the right arguments. If there are many, lump some together and a debater can make multiple arguments under the tagline of a single Voting Issue.

One Voting Issue should invariably be the “Value Clash” or the “Value-Criterion Clash.” This is an immutable rule that should always be followed. That is the key thesis to Lincoln-Douglas Debate, and thus one of the reasons that one should always win is that one’s Value is more important than the opponent’s for whatever reason the resolution asks. If both sides have the same Values, focus on the Criterion (the same is true if an opponent has a generic Value-Criterion that everybody agrees to but oneself—disagree with his interpretation or standard for his Value). I would probably leave this Voting Issue until last but make sure to spend the most time on it (so leave some time). At least thirty to forty-five seconds should suffice to make a strong Value argument.

When deciding what other issues to bring up as Voting Issues, a good idea can be to look at contradictions within an opponent’s case or opponent’s logic. These are big highlights of the round because a contradiction is a huge debate “no-no.” I often would put this as the
first Voting Issue because it does not pertain so much to the arguments of the round or proving the resolution true/false, though it does weaken an opponent’s stance. (The same goes with Debate Theory arguments--start with them in case the judge does not really care about those, that way a speech can end with the arguments that everybody likes and listens to in rounds.) Misapplication of evidence should be brought up towards the beginning of Voting Issues as well (if the opponent took something out of context or, more commonly, the philosopher they are talking about actually supports YOUR side of the resolution). Towards the middle, I would talk about a key argument or more. Good examples include statistics, that are very important to the round, where one’s clearly beats the opposition (an example might be that if arguing the legitimacy of the death penalty, and a crux of the opponent’s arguments was that the death penalty deters crime, bring up a more recent or more comprehensive study) or analogies that came up within the round that speak to judges well and prove an argument. Another good strategy is to make these issues revolve around the contentions and attempt to combine both sides’ arguments to show the dichotomy between the two. Finally, one last idea which I used in every round at the NFL National Tournament was to make one Voting Issue the idea of “taking a step back from the resolution” and analyzing the question in the two main fields of thought: the means and the ends--if it can be proven that BOTH support YOUR side. This only works with certain topics, but do so if is possible because judge’s love this.

When looking at how I explained Lincoln-Douglas Debate, I run my Voting Issues in a simple manner where I present the main Voting
Issues and go across them 1-2-3. An equally acceptable (to some judges) way to present these is to merely mention them while going down the flow. For example, when attacking my opponent’s Value I might say, “Judge, this is the first Voting Issue for why you need to vote for the Negative in today’s round: ______.” It can be effective if used properly, though I have never actually used that myself.

Regardless of strategy, make sure that the judge is left with thoughts on why he or she should vote for YOU. A good way to make a Lay judge remember one’s points is to make each Voting Issue begin with a letter to spell out an acronym. Flow judges will hate it, but what parent to a debater is not going to remember points when a debater says that voting for them is as easy as A-B-C and then give a Voting Issue beginning with each letter? Good luck and make the points stick!