

Debate in the Classroom

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Why Debate?

Students

- Develop important career skills
- Opportunity to participate in class
- Combine individual and group work
- Engaging and exciting activity
- Learn material for exams, papers, other assignments

Teachers

- Help meet your learning goals
- Motivate students to prepare for class
- Discuss controversial issues in a structured setting
- Enjoyable and interesting to watch
- Raise student evaluations

Choosing a Debate Topic

Propositions or questions should:

- Have at least 2 sides that can be reasonably supported with evidence
- Be relevant to students and course material
- Be simple enough to debate, yet complex enough to build multiple arguments
- Be worded in neutral language

3 types:

1. Fact (disputed)
"Computers are capable of thought."
2. Value
"Slang damages the English language."
3. Policy
"The government should ban gambling."

7 Tips for Debating

1. When deciding what type of debate to use, consider your goals and resources (e.g. do I want all students to debate at once? Is my classroom large enough to accommodate multiple teams?)
2. Explain the debate process ahead of time to put students at ease with the method and give them time to prepare for the debate. Be clear in your expectations and how you will grade their work.
3. Consider randomly assigning teams the day of the debate. This will encourage students to prepare and evaluate both sides and to represent a perspective that may or may not align with their own.
4. Provide a reading to base the debate on and ask students to conduct additional research to support/critique both sides of the debate.
5. Come prepared with additional questions for the debaters.
6. Keep time during the debate. Give non-verbal time cues to the debaters.
7. Encourage students to focus on the evidence for or against arguments rather than emotional appeals or personal opinions. You may also want to prepare a list of debate guidelines and etiquette "rules" to ensure focus and order during the debate.

Common Debate Styles

Full Class Debate (30 minutes)

Divide the class into two debate teams.

10 minutes: Prep

5 minutes: Opening Statement (Side 1)

5 minutes: Opening Statement (Side 2)

3 minutes: Rebuttal (Side 1)

3 minutes: Rebuttal (Side 2)

2 minutes: Closing Statement (Side 1)

2 minutes: Closing Statement (Side 2)

Debrief

Three Question Debate (40 minutes)

Three questions related to a single topic.

Divide the class into two debate teams.

Alternate which team delivers main points first.

10 minutes: Prep

3 minutes: Team 1 Main Points (Q1, Q2, Q3)

3 minutes: Team 2 Main Points (Q1, Q2, Q3)

2 minutes: Team 1 Rebuttal (Q1, Q2, Q3)

2 minutes: Team 2 Rebuttal (Q1, Q2, Q3)

Debrief

Small Group Debate (40 minutes)

Generate two debate teams of 2-5 students.

Often done multiple times per semester until each student has debated.

5 minutes: Prep

5 minutes: Opening Statement (Side 1)

5 minutes: Opening Statement (Side 2)

5 minutes: Rebuttal (Side 1)

5 minutes: Rebuttal (Side 2)

15 minutes: Audience questions both teams

Debrief

Chain Debate

Divide the class into two debate teams.

Present a topic and alternate between teams.

Each person must:

Present a new supporting or opposing argument

Attack an argument that has been presented

Defend an argument that has been attacked

Extend an argument that has been presented

“Spar” Debates/Chain Debate II

Ensures full participation; may be practice debates.

Present multiple items to debate from one or more topics.

Students debate one-on-one for each question

5 minutes: Prep

90 seconds each: Opening Statements

1 minute each: Cross Examination

1 minute each: Closing Statements

Debrief

Town Hall

Assign students roles to represent.

Introduce topic

2 minute persuasive speeches

Council/presider deliberates

“Citizens” vote

Online Debate Platforms

Sakai: Students post debate responses on the Forums tab individually or on teams (Private)

Createdebate.com: Create your debate online and email students the link (Public)

Build Your Own Debate

Class: _____

Question(s): _____

Debate type: _____

Potential Debate Components:

Mini-Quiz
Individual Work Period
Group Work Period
Opening Statements
Mid-Debate Work Period
Rebuttals
Debaters Cross-Examination
Professor Cross-Examination
Audience Cross-Examination
Closing Statements
Deliberation
Voting
Announce "Winner"
Debrief

Potential Student Roles:

Debater
Town Hall Council Member
Audience Questioner
Debate Process Observer
Note Taker
Media Reporter

Notes: