



Debates

What is debate?

Debating is structured way of exploring the range of views on an issue. It consists of a structured contest of argumentation, in which two opposing individuals or teams defend and attack a given proposition.

Why use debate?

Debate engages learners in a combination of activities that cause them to interact with the curriculum. It:

- forces the participants to consider not only the facts of a situation, but also the implications
- encourages participants think critically and strategically about both their own and their opponent's position
- encourages engagement with and a commitment to a position, by its competitive nature
- encourages students to engage in research
- develops listening and oratory skills
- provides a method for teachers to assess the quality of students' learning.

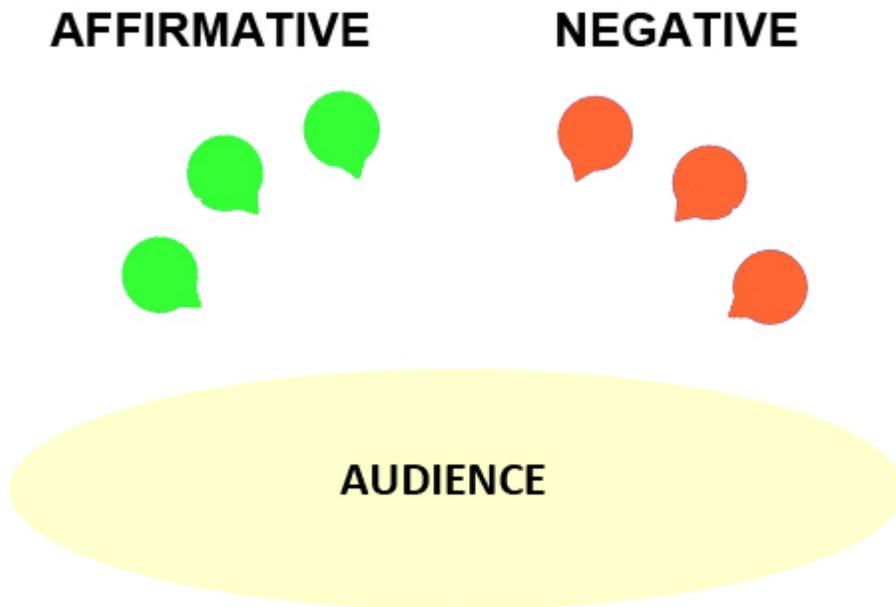
Debates are also an opportunity for peers to be involved in evaluation.

How to achieve effective debating

Debates range from formal 3-per-side affirmative and negative teams with established roles of first speaker, whip etc., to more informal but structured arguments for or against a proposition. Here is one method that works:

1. **Brainstorm** topics and have the students present them as statements with a strong and clear point of view. For example: *If introduced, capital punishment would solve the crime problem. Jobs are more important than the environment.*
2. Divide the class into teams of 6 (3 in favour of the motion, 3 against it). To start with, it is best if the students debate their own point of view. Spare students can take on the roles of time keeper, adjudicator, chairperson.
3. Allow sufficient preparation time. It may be best to set the task and allocate positions in advance
4. Set the room up appropriately. The illustration below shows one way this can be done.
5. The chairperson introduces the debate.

6. Debaters speak, in the order (i) Affirmative 1 (ii) Negative 1 (iii) Affirmative 2 etc., for an agreed time, which would vary according to experience and age.



As the group gets more experienced

As the group gets more experienced, it is worth renegotiating many of the "rules" to suit their evolving method of debating. For each team:

1. Introduce topic, team's argument and team. (Speaker 1 in the negative can rebut also.)
2. Rebuttal and continue team's case
3. Rebuttal and summary of team's case

Judging should be equally divided between:

- Matter (the content) /10
- Manner (how the content was presented) /10, and
- Method (how well they worked as a team) /10

How can I adapt debating?

Introduce peer adjudication.

Use brief, 3-minute debates to practise the skills with less experienced or reluctant students:

1. 1. Students work in groups of four for each topic. Each side has one presenter and one coach to assist in preparation
2. Preparation time is brief, a maximum of 5 minutes to start with
3. One side presents an argument, followed by the other side
4. The class votes on the winning argument through a show of hands.

How can debate be used to evaluate students' learning?

The following can be assessed through debating:

- knowledge of content
- social skills in working with others
- contextual understanding
- speaking and listening
- research skills

Example: Class Debate Ratings Sheet

CRITERIA	LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE			
	1	2	3	4
Organization and Clarity: viewpoints and responses are outlined both clearly and orderly.	Unclear in most parts	Clear in some parts but not over all	Most clear and orderly in all parts	Completely clear and orderly presentation
Arguments: reasons are given to support viewpoint.	Few or no relevant reasons given	Some relevant reasons given	Most reasons given: most relevant	Most relevant reasons given in support
Examples and Facts : examples and facts are given to support reasons.	Few or no relevant supporting examples/facts	Some relevant examples/facts given	Many examples/facts given: most relevant	Many relevant supporting examples and facts given
Rebuttal: arguments made by the other teams are responded to and dealt with effectively.	No effective counterarguments made	Few effective counterarguments made	Some effective counterarguments made	Many effective counterarguments made

Presentation Style: tone of voice, use of gestures, and level of enthusiasm are convincing to audience.	Few style features were used; not convincingly	Few style features were used convincingly	All style features were used, most convincingly	All style features were used convincingly
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