

Use of In-Class Debates as a Teaching Tool to Improve Student Research and Analytical Skills

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Debate Directions

A debate is a verbal argument that occurs within a specific framework. It should be an argument based on facts, not on opinions and emotions. Below is the framework that we will utilize for our in-class debates.

Debate Framework

- I. Explanation of Position (7-10 minutes) – Pro side will present first followed by the Con side
 - Opening statement – Gather the arguments into a few introductory statements. This should not provide data supporting those arguments, just introduce what your stance is (1-2 minutes).
 - Data presentation – Present the main arguments including data from scientific sources to support those arguments
- II. Time to Confer (10 minutes)
 - During this time the group must decide what rebuttal points they want to make. You should work to counter the arguments presented by the other side.
- III. Rebuttal (5 minutes) – Con side will present first, followed by the Pro side
 - Answer the arguments presented by the other team using facts and data to counter their arguments
- IV. Time to Confer (5 minutes)
 - During this time the group should organize their key points for the closing statement
- V. Closing Statement (1-2 minutes) – Pro side will present first, followed by the Con side
 - Repeat the main idea of your argument along with a few key points that were delivered during the debate.

Debate Preparation

Your group should meet outside of class time to analyze the research everyone did and organize your arguments as a group. You should decide who will participate in which portions of the debate (all students must participate). You should name:

- 1 person to give the opening and closing statements
- 2 people to present the data during the explanation of position
- 2 people to present the data during the rebuttal (these people should take notes during the other teams explanation of position)

During debate preparation you should look at the data obtained by each group member and decide which points most strongly support your argument. The group should decide which talking points to use and how best to frame them into their argument. You will also want to look at the points you think the other side will present (because you have researched both sides of the issue) and examine if you have rebuttal evidence for your arguments.

You will be allowed 5 minutes to confer as a group after both sides have presented their explanation of position. During this time you should decide what data you want to utilize to try and respond to the arguments provided by the other side. The group should decide what points to argue and how to argue them.

Debate Rules

- Only one person may talk at a time
- While one team is talking the other team must remain silent
- Respect the topic, remember there are two sides to the argument. You should be arguing facts and not emotions
- When time is up you must stop talking so be sure to make your most important points first
- All team members must participate in the debate

DEBATE RUBRIC

| Criteria | Excellent | Average | Poor |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Opening & Closing Statements | - Well-organized and complete presentation of arguments and evidence - Opening statement successfully frames the issues; closing statement summarizes many arguments made in the debate | -Organized and generally complete presentation of arguments and evidence - Opening statement outlines or lists arguments and evidence but does not generate interest; closing statement does not reflect remarks made during debate. | -Arguments are unorganized, incomplete, or completely lacking in evidence -Opening statement and closing statements do little more than state the position of the team |
| Rebuttals | - Responds to issues raised by opponents with concise, accurate, logical answers - Effectively challenges the arguments made by opponents with evidence | - Responds to most of the issues raised by opponents with generally accurate answers - Offers arguments, but no evidence, to counter the arguments made by opponents | -Is unable to respond to issues raised by opponents in a meaningful or accurate way |
| Effective use of scientific data | - Demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the issues, events and facts relevant to the topic -Demonstrates thorough and accurate understanding of details as well as the ability to make original connections and interpretations | Demonstrates a generally accurate understanding of relevant issues, events and facts, but may exhibit minor confusion or misunderstandings seem to understand general ideas, but do not support their ideas with relevant facts; OR, seem to understand facts but are unable to connect them into coherent arguments | -Demonstrates an inadequate understanding of the history content relevant to the topic -Supports statements with vague or irrelevant information, or no information at all |
| Performance | - Exhibits confidence and energy in the course of the debate -Maintains respectful tone - Uses preparation materials effectively | - Appears nervous, yet somewhat confident, during the debate - Maintains respectful tone - Use of preparation materials does not distract from the presentation | -Demonstrates little or no preparation -Fails to maintain respectful tone |