

# In-Class Debates

## Purpose

The purpose of a class debate is to engage the students in an active learning process by giving them the experience of researching and presenting two sides of an issue and promoting their oral communication skills. The format presented here is designed to take place in one class period. The format could be adapted to an online activity in which the students present their arguments in writing.

## Intent

Before the debate, it is important to clearly define the issue, the debate parameters, the timeline, and your expectations for presenting factual information and informed opinions about the issue. On the day of the debate, set up the room with two groups of desks facing each other. Put one desk in the middle for the facilitator.

## Method

Divide the class randomly into a “pro” side and a “con” side for the topic you have selected. Further divide each side into debate teams of three members each; each member will have a role to play. (One small team from each side will debate in turn, so that the activity comprises multiple debates.) Give the teams time to research the issue and their assigned side before the debate.

Have each small team identify which member will play one of the following roles for the team:

- **The stater:** This is the person on the team who is responsible for stating the position taken by the group. The stater also summarizes the points made to support the group’s position at the end of the debate.
- **The prover:** This is the person on the team responsible for citing and defending the research gathered by the team.
- **The attacker:** This is the person on the team responsible for asking probing questions of the opposing team. The attacker should be familiar with the position of the other team.

In addition to the debate team roles, invite one nonparticipating student to serve as the facilitator of each debate and another to serve as the timekeeper. (These roles will rotate as each team participates in a debate.) The students not involved in the current debate become the audience, asking questions, evaluating the performance of the debate teams, and possibly serving as judges to decide the winner of each debate.

## Debate Format

1. Give the teams time at the beginning of the class to discuss their approach for the debate and to finalize who will serve in which roles for the team. You may want to write up a roster on the board to indicate which small teams will face off in the first debate, the second debate, and so on.
2. For each debate, each side will give an opening argument lasting 5 to 8 minutes.



3. Each side will then rebut the opponent's argument for a maximum of 5 minutes.
4. Each side will then present a second rebuttal or final statement of 3 to 5 minutes.
5. Allow time for students not currently debating to ask questions and offer comments.
6. At the end of each debate, ask the audience to vote on the winning team.

After all of the debates are finished, conclude by engaging the students in a large-group discussion about what their own positions are about the issue and what new information they learned to support or refute their positions.

