Debate Activity

Developed by Martine Peters, professor at *Université du Québec en Outaouais*

Collaborators: Faustine André, Alexandre Bédard and Cathy-Anne Boiteau

[**1.1.1. Debate Benefits** 3](#_Toc194590516)

[**1.1.2. Debate Objectives** 3](#_Toc194590517)

[**1.1.3. Student Debate Guidelines** 3](#_Toc194590518)

[**1.1.4. Debate Timetable** 6](#_Toc194590519)

[**1.1.5. Debate Evaluation Criteria** 6](#_Toc194590520)

[**1.1.6. Resources** 8](#_Toc194590521)

[**1.1.7. Examples of Possible Debates by Field of Study** 9](#_Toc194590522)

**Information for Professors**

***Debate Benefits***

* Easy to evaluate (formative or summative assessment)
* Students can use Ai2 to prepare their arguments
* Active involvement
* Interaction in real time, encouraging authentic communication
* Healthy and constructive competition
* Intellectual and diverse dynamics
* Simple to organize and few resources needed
* Autonomy of participants

***Debate Objectives***

* Gain knowledge of the topic being debated.
* Improve oral communication by structuring and clearly expressing ideas in a compelling way.
* Develop critical thinking by analyzing and evaluating arguments logically and thoroughly.
* Increase research skills of identifying, synthesizing and using relevant information.
* Organize ideas by structuring arguments coherently and logically.
* Collaborate effectively as a team to develop collective argumentative strategies.
* Manage stress and emotions in a high-pressure public speaking environment.
* Improve mental flexibility by adapting arguments and reacting to unexpected circumstances.
* Develop creativity by generating new ideas or arguments to respond to opposing viewpoints.
* Develop active listening by paying attention to opposing viewpoints and responding to them respectfully.
* Make rapid decisions in formulating and revising arguments during debates.
* Increase persuasion skills to influence and effectively negotiate in an argumentative context.

***Student Debate Guidelines***

The goal of this activity is to develop your communication, critical thinking and research skills. You will work as a team of four to defend a position on a given topic and to counter arguments from the opposing team in a thorough and respectful way.

The two teams must choose a topic from the proposed list. Following that, teams will choose their position (Team A—For or Team B—Against) by way of a random draw or based on their opinions.

**Team Composition**

Each team is composed of four people. Each member must actively participate by presenting at least one argument or by responding to counter-arguments.

**Roles:**

* Moderator: This is a student who is not on a team, but who monitors time.
* Head Coach: Introduces the team’s position, presents key arguments.
* Assistant Coaches (2 members): Develop and refine central arguments.
* Rebutter: Responds to the opposing team’s arguments and concludes the debate.

**Debate Sequence (number of minutes may vary):**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Part of Sequence** | **Role** | **Tasks** | **Time** |
| Introduction | Moderator | Presents topic and mentions timing rules | 1 minute |
| Round 1 | Team A Head Coach | Presents arguments for | 3 minutes |
| Team B Head Coach | Presents arguments against | 3 minutes |
| Teams A and B | Team discussion | 3 minutes |
| Round 2 | Team A Assistant Coaches | Refines arguments for | 3 minutes |
| Team B Assistant Coaches | Refines arguments against | 3 minutes |
| Teams A et B | Team discussion | 3 minutes |
| Round 3 | Team A Rebutter | Responds to opposing arguments | 2 minutes |
| Team B Rebutter | Responds to opposing arguments | 2 minutes |
| Teams A et B | Team discussion | 3 minutes |
| Conclusion | Team A Rebutter | Brief summarizing conclusion | 2 minutes |
| Team B Rebutter | Brief summarizing conclusion | 2 minutes |
| Large-group discussion, with a vote to decide the winning team | | | 10 minutes |
| Total time | | | 40 minutes |

**Debate Rules:**

1. Respect for time: Each intervention must respect the allotted time. A signal will be given one minute before the time expires.
2. Taking turns: Each team must wait its turn to speak. Interruptions or interjections are not allowed.
3. Justification of arguments: Each team must support its arguments with facts, examples and reliable sources.

**Rules of Conduct**

* Respect and courtesy: The debate must be carried out in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Interruptions and personal attacks are forbidden.
* Plagiarism: All borrowed ideas or information from external sources must be properly cited. Students who plagiarize will be severely penalized.
* Use of IA: Artificial intelligence can be used to prepare your arguments, but the team’s job is to agree on the choice and development of arguments. Remember to be transparent about use of AI and please disclose it, because an evaluation criterion concerns this aspect.

**Preparation**

Research: You are required to conduct in-depth research on the assigned topic. Remember to use reliable and well documented academic sources.

**Team Strategy**

* Discuss as a team how to coordinate your interventions and structure your arguments. All members must fully understand their roles.
* Anticipation of counter-arguments: Try to predict the opposing team’s arguments and prepare strong counter-arguments.
* Each team member must be equally and actively involved in presentation of arguments and rebuttals.

**Helpful Tips**

* Time management: Practice respecting the time allotted for your interventions.
* Active listening: Be attentive to opposing arguments so you can effectively respond to them.
* Argumentation: Do not just give opinions; support your statements with concrete evidence and relevant examples.
* Taking notes: While the opposing team is speaking, take notes so you can better structure your rebuttals.

**Possible Variation for an Online Class**

Simultaneous online debate

* Put the various groups who are debating in different classrooms.
* Divide the spectators among those groups.
* Ask the moderator to record the debate (so the teacher can watch it).
* Spectators can also participate in evaluation.

***Debate Timetable***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Tasks | Week |
| Present guidelines and evaluation matrix (course plan) | 1 |
| Present teams and topic choices | 2 |
| Random draw for team presentation dates | 2 |
| Submission by each team of plan containing arguments and counter-arguments (formative assessment) | 4 |
| Team 1 against Team 2  Team 3 against Team 4 | 6 |
| Team 5 against Team 6  Team 7 against Team 8 | 7 |
| Team 9 against Team 10  Team 11 against Team 12 | 8 |
|  |  |

***Debate Evaluation Criteria***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Evaluation Criteria | Criteria Definition |
| Content Criteria | |
| Clarity of arguments | Ability to formulate ideas in an understandable, logical and concise way. |
| Quality of evidence | Relevance, reliability and diversity of evidence (scientific, professional, blogs, etc.) provided to support arguments. |
| Rebuttal of opposing arguments | Ability to respond effectively to opposing team’s arguments and to suggest strong counter-arguments. |
| Creativity of arguments | Originality of ideas; evidence of personal reflection. |
| Structural and Organizational Criteria | |
| Structure and organization | Clarity and logic in idea organization; fluidity of transitions. |
| Quality of conclusion | Ability to summarize arguments and conclude the debate in an impactful way. |
| Academic Integrity Criteria | |
| Citation of sources | Thoroughness and clarity in use and mention of sources. |
| Transparency in use of sources | Relevance and reliability of sources during the debate. |
| Behaviour and Performance Criteria | |
| Respect of time | Respect of time allotted for each intervention. |
| Respectful interaction | Respect toward opposing team, demonstrated by absence of interruptions or personal attacks. |
| Engagement and participation | Level of involvement of each team member in the debate. |
| Transparency and AI Use Criteria | |
| Transparency in AI use | Remarks in text about AI use, to explain which tool was used, how and where in the activity. |

| **Criteria** | **Level 1: Weak** | **Level 2: Fair** | **Level 3: Good** | **Level 4: Excellent** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Clarity of arguments | Vague arguments; difficult to understand | Understandable arguments, but sometimes confusing or underdeveloped | Well structured arguments, but sometimes a lack of specificity | Very clear, logical and well-articulated arguments throughout the debate |
| Quality of evidence | Little or no evidence to support arguments | Some evidence, but often unreliable or not very relevant | Evidence generally reliable and relevant, but lacking diversity | Strong and varied evidence, always relevant to support each argument |
| Rebuttal of arguments | Unable to rebut opposing arguments | Limited rebuttal; lack of compelling counter-arguments | Good rebuttal, but some weaknesses in responses to counter-arguments | Effective and relevant rebuttals; clear and compelling responses to counter-arguments |
| Creativity of arguments | Arguments copied or mainly inspired by external sources without modification | Arguments not very original or mainly taken from other sources with a few modifications, without personal analysis | Mainly original arguments, with some elements borrowed from external sources and well adapted | Completely original arguments, clearly thought out, with personal input based on in-depth research |
| Structure and organization | Lack of clear structure; ideas presented in an unorganized way | Structure evident, but awkward transitions or very little organization of ideas | Structure generally well defined, with some hesitations | Clear and fluid structure; well organized and logically connected ideas |
| Quality of conclusion | Missing or very weak conclusion; lack of summarization | Conclusion given, but incomplete or not very compelling | Good conclusion; well summarizes main points, but somewhat lacking in impact | Strong and compelling conclusion; perfectly summarizes main points and their impact |
| Citation of sources | No citation or sources not very reliable, non-verifiable | Some sources cited, but in an incomplete or questionable way | Proper citations of reliable sources, but sometimes lacking diversity | Accurate, complete and varied citations from reliable academic sources |
| Transparency in use of sources | Sources unmentioned or hidden, possible plagiarism | Sources partly mentioned, but lack of transparency in their use | Proper use of sources, mentioned in a transparent and explicit way | Sources clearly mentioned and integrated transparently throughout arguments |
| Respect of time | Allotted period frequently exceeded; or interventions that were too short | Partial respect of time with allotted period sometimes exceeded; or lack of content | Respect of time, but interventions sometimes too fast or slow | Complete respect of time, well-balanced interventions |
| Respectful interaction | Disrespectful interactions; frequent interruptions or personal attacks | Some disrespectful behaviours or interruptions | Overall respectful interaction; some minor interruptions | Respectful interaction; no interruption or personal attack |
| Engagement and participation | Very little involvement or active participation | Limited participation; unequal involvement of members | Good involvement; active participation by most members | Very strong involvement; active and balanced participation by all members |
| Transparency in AI use / Criteria not applicable if AI not used | No remarks to indicate which AI tool was used, how and where | Remarks that give few details about the tool and how and where it was used | Remarks that indicate which AI tool was used, with some details about how and where | Remarks that indicate which AI tool was used, with all details about how and where |

***Resources***

Bauschard, S. (2023). Debating in the World of AI. *Education Disrupted: Teaching and Learning in An AI World*. <https://stefanbauschard.substack.com/p/debating-in-the-world-of-ai?utm_source=post-email-title&publication_id=1673728&post_id=138620336&utm_campaign=email-post-title&isFreemail=true&r=2fm3lf&utm_medium=email>

Bauschard, S. (2025). Speech & Debate: The Ultimate Training for an AI-Augmented World. *Education Disrupted: Teaching and Learning in An AI World*. <https://stefanbauschard.substack.com/p/speech-and-debate-the-ultimate-training?utm_source=post-email-title&publication_id=1673728&post_id=156602138&utm_campaign=email-post-title&isFreemail=true&r=2fm3lf&triedRedirect=true&utm_medium=email>