

How to Participate in a Debate

Most of us know the basics of having a good chat: talk, maybe listen a bit, and respond. Having an argument goes more like this: talk, don't listen, keep talking. Having a debate is a very civilised form of a discussion or argument: propose an idea, listen closely to what the other side is saying, respond politely to what they have said and make some more suggestions which then the other side can listen to and respond to politely.



The goal of a debate is to help you learn how to listen to, value, and address an opposing viewpoint. In addition, you will learn how they can find common ground and reach a consensus on challenging and divisive issues.

Debate guidelines

The general guidelines for conducting a debate are:

- each team will have at least 3 speakers
- each team member should speak for 2 minutes each
- other non-speaking team members should provide supporting notes and materials to speakers throughout the debate
- the teacher decides which team has won the debate.

Conducting the debate

1. Once you have established your debate teams, teams will have time to develop their arguments. The rules of the debate are as follows:

- listen to the other side with the aim of understanding their point of view
- take good notes. Use credible sources for evidence
- no shouting, no degrading remarks and no insults.

2. The first team will be arguing for the AFFIRMATIVE. They should:

- define the topic
- present the affirmative's team line
- outline briefly what each speaker in their team will talk about
- present the first half of the affirmative case.

As they present, the opposing team should take notes in support of their arguments and rebuttals.

Once complete, invite panellists and opponents to ask questions for clarification or about evidence that is provided.

3. The second team will be arguing for the NEGATIVE. They should:

- present the negative team line
- outline briefly what each of the negative speakers will say
- rebut a few of the main points of the first affirmative speaker
- present the first half of the negative team's case.

As they present the opposing team should take notes in support of their arguments and rebuttals.

Once complete, invite panellists and opponents to ask questions for clarification or about evidence that is provided.

4. Subsequent team members should reaffirm the team's line and rebut a few of the main points of the other team.

5. After both sides have rebutted the opposing argument, invite the panellists and team members to share whether any of the arguments presented in the debate made them want to change sides, and allow them to share why they did or didn't want to do this.

In addition, invite both teams to think about if any areas of common ground emerged during the debate. What were they?

6. Finally, all debate members should shake hands and congratulate themselves on a great debate.