

ESU TEACHING RESOURCE



SETTING UP A DEBATE CLUB

A debate club gives students of all abilities a fun way of developing their oracy skills. You can use different activities to help students with their critical thinking and confident communication. The club could also help students to become more informed about political and global affairs, or provide a venue for students to train for debate competitions with local school, or at a national level.

Most existing schools debate clubs rely on older students to help to organise the club, or to advise the younger students. If you're starting a new club, you can quickly involve students by asking them to suggest topics for discussion, do research and give presentations on areas they are interested in, recruiting other students to the club and giving feedback on their favourite club activities.

MY FIRST SESSION

Recruiting students

Assemblies

Holding debates in assemblies can be a great way to get students involved in debating - inviting in students from a local university; pitching pupils against teachers or asking students to vote for topics in advance can all help you to drum up interest.

Spreading the word

Once you've got a core group of a few interested students, involve them in the advertisement of the club. Students can make posters, give announcements and spread the word about the activities of your club.

Form-time activities

Finding some time in the school day to give everyone a chance to take part in some introductory activities can be a great way to find unexpected faces for your debate club.



WHAT DO I NEED?

Debate clubs don't require lots of special resources. All you really need is at least four enthusiastic students to take part: at the start of your club, you may find a small group of around sixteen easiest to manage. Later on, as your club grows, students can help to organise or judge activities and debates, making it easier to run a club for larger numbers of students.

CHECKLIST

- **A classroom to debate in:** ideally the club will take place in the same place each week, so students always know where to go. For many activities, you'll need a clear space where students can move around, as well as some desks for writing speech notes: a "horseshoe" or u-shaped set up is often best.
- **Pens and paper** (of course, students could bring their own!) - index cards for speech notes can add a nice sense of occasion for special debates
- **A list of topics for debates or activities:** you can find a list below, or search online
- **Stopwatches to time speeches:** most students can use their phones to time speeches, but dedicated stopwatches can reduce distractions








MY FIRST SESSION

What to do

A brand new club should strike a balance between short activities that give everyone a chance to speak and participate, and full debate formats that may require week-by-week turn-taking. Try one of these plans, or use the activities to make a plan of your own.

A QUICK 30 MINUTE PLAN

Having only thirty minutes will limit the kinds of debates your club can take part in. For example, a debate in the ESU Schools Mace format, with two speakers on each team, typically takes 45 minutes. However, students can still take part in lots of great debate activities.

	Group size: 4-30
	Classroom set up: a clear space for students to move around
	Time: 30 minutes

Introduction (10 minutes)

Welcome the students and introduce the debating club

Motivate students by highlighting key events throughout the year - perhaps you hope to end the term with a show debate in assembly, a competition in school, or a trip to a local rival or politics/debate themed location.

Give students an opportunity to discuss debate-events from their own experience - perhaps they have seen some political debates on TV, seen a show debate at school, or been to a local school or university to watch some debates. Link this experience to the goals of the club.

Warm-up activity (5 minutes)

Stranded on a desert island

Students form pairs.

Set the scene: we are all going on holiday. Students should select one thing that they would pack, and tell their partner.

We are going to travel by boat. We are on a ship in the middle of a big ocean when suddenly there is a huge storm and the boat sinks. Disaster! Luckily, we can see a desert island nearby. We must swim to safety.

In pairs, students should choose one of their two items to save and bring to the island, where we will have to survive until we are rescued.

Ask a few pairs to feed back to the group. Remark on "because..." statements: we are making arguments here!

First debate (10 minutes)

Alley debate / Balloon debate for < 6 students (plans below)

Plenary (5 minutes)

Conclude the session by congratulating students on their first debate, and explaining what is planned for the next week.

TOP TIPS

Remember to plan topics for the alley debate, or themes for the balloon debate in advance. Both plans have a list of example topics that you could use.

Some students may need prompts or sentence starters to help them out. For many activities, students can work in pairs to generate **reasons** using: Why? Because...

Practise using Why? Because... with simple statements, e.g. "My cat is a great pet. Why? Because..."

If you have a large group of students, some activities may get very noisy, with lots of pairs talking at once. Try clapping a call and response rhythm to regain their attention - practise it first though!





ALLEY DEBATE

Learning objectives:

To be able to structure an argument using a point & explanation.

Understand that debates have a for/against structure.

Introduction: (5 minutes)

Recap the need for justifying opinions. Use the 'Why? Because...' prompt to reinforce this. Introduce the vocabulary of 'Point + Explanation', linking them to 'Why? Because...'

The students should form two lines of equal length, facing each other (an easy way to ensure the lines are equal is to ask everyone to high-five the person opposite them, and adjust as needed).

Explain that one line is "for" the statement they will be given; the other is "against". You aren't allowed to change lines!

The Alley Debate (5 minutes)

Give the students a topic for the debate. Explain they now have 1 minute to think about a short statement in defense of their side of the debate. It should have a **point** and an **explanation**. Demonstrate with an example if needed.

Starting with the "for" team, ask each student in turn to give their argument, alternating between "for" and "against" until you reach the end of the alley.

If you have time for another topic, this time, ask students to reply to the person who spoke before them, before giving their argument.

"They said... but I disagree because... My own argument is..."

ESU RESOURCES:

One or two topics to debate

Other resources:

Pens and paper

Time: 5 – 10 minutes per debate

Group size: up to 30

KEY VOCABULARY:

Point – A short sentence that explains why you support/oppose a topic

Explanation – How and why your point is true.

DIFFERENTIATION:

For less able students you can provide some suggested points that they can provide explanations for.

Students can work in pairs to generate arguments before the debate.

HINTS & TIPS:

Suggested topics:

Should everyone have a pet in their home?

Should we have to wear school uniforms?

Should people take part in violent sports like boxing?

Do celebrities make good role models?

Should your parents be able to secretly check what you are doing on the internet?





BALLOON DEBATE

Learning objective:

To be able to structure an argument using a point & explanation.

Introduction: (5 minutes)

Recap the need for justifying opinions. Use the 'Why? Because...' prompt to reinforce this. Introduce the vocabulary of 'Point + Explanation', linking them to 'Why? Because...'

Balloon debate (5-10 minutes)

4-6 volunteers should come to the front of the class/find a clear space.

Each one should choose a person that they will play during this game. You may want to restrict them using a theme, e.g. "famous people from history" or "characters from Harry Potter".

Now set the scene: all these people are in a balloon, but unfortunately it is leaking. To save ourselves, we will have to throw someone overboard!

Each student will now give a 30 second explanation of why their character should be allowed to stay in the balloon, using a **point** and an **explanation**.

After these arguments, the rest of the group should vote on one person to throw from the balloon.

This should be repeated until only one person remains in the balloon.

ESU RESOURCES:

Theme for the balloon debate (if you're using one)

Other resources:

A clear space in the classroom

Time: 10-15 minutes

Group size: up to 30

KEY VOCABULARY:

Point – A short sentence that explains why you support/oppose a topic

Explanation – How and why your point is true.

HINTS & TIPS:

Mix things up with some different rounds. Instead of defending their own character, students could **respond** to another character's defense.

"You argued that... but I disagree because..."

Keep large groups involved by including rounds where people outside the balloon offer defenses of the characters, or ask questions to everyone in the balloon.

Themes

Characters from a book the class is reading

Famous scientists

People from a historical period the class is studying



WHERE DO YOU STAND?

Learning objective:

To be able to structure an argument using a point & explanation.

Introduction: (5 minutes)

Recap the need for justifying opinions. Use the 'Why? Because...' prompt to reinforce this. Introduce the vocabulary of 'Point + Explanation', linking them to 'Why? Because...'

Students should form a line in the middle of the room.

Assign one end of the room as "For" and the other as "Against". Students are currently standing "on the fence", where you are neither for nor against.

ESU RESOURCES:

List of topics

Other resources:

A clear space where students can move around.

Time: 15-25 minutes

Group size: up to 30

KEY VOCABULARY:

Point – A short sentence that explains why you support/oppose a topic

Explanation – How and why your point is true.

Where do you stand? (10 - 20 minutes)

Give the students a topic. If they agree, they should move towards "for"; if they disagree they should move towards "against". The more strongly they feel, the more they should move.

Give students 30 seconds to ask someone standing near them why they chose to stand there.

Ask a few students to explain to the group why they are for or against, using a **point** and an **explanation**.

After each student has spoken, ask the whole class to take one step towards for or against to show whether they were convinced. Make this accountable by following up, asking students why they moved one way or the other.

Keep the discussion fresh by introducing new topics when needed.

HINTS & TIPS:

Encourage listening by asking students to comment directly on arguments other people have made.
"Do you agree with X? Why?"
"X said... why did/didn't that affect where you are standing?"

Encourage development of more complex ideas by asking students to build on each other's contributions.
"X said... can someone who agrees add an example of that?"
"X said... would anyone like to add to their explanation?"

Add challenge by swapping "for" and "against", and asking students to defend the opposite of what they believe.



