

# Debate Guidelines

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



## Debate guidelines

- 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

**Step 1.** Present the class with a statement that they will be debating. Alternatively, present the class with several statements and invite students to vote on the statement they would most like to explore through the debate.

**Step 2.** On the board create three columns. Label these columns as 'AFFIRMITIVE', 'NEGATIVE' and 'NEUTRAL' – the 'NEUTRAL' column can be used for any students who don't want to engage in the debate. These students will form the panel that the two debating teams will present to. This means the teacher/instructor can stay focused on facilitating the debate.

**Step 3.** Invite students to approach the board and add their name to the column representing the side of the debate they wish to join. Each team needs at least three speakers and additional team members to provide supporting notes and materials to speakers throughout the debate.

**Step 4.** Invite students representing the 'AFFIRMITIVE' to move to one side of the room, the 'NEGATIVE' students to the other side of the room and the 'NEUTRAL' panellists to the front of the classroom.

Allow each team 10-15 minutes to discuss and research key points and make notes about their positions. While they do this, the 'NEUTRAL' panellists can create a working document to list arguments that may be raised by both sides. This document can be added to throughout the debate and shared with the class as a summary of the debate.

This is also an opportunity for the teacher to rearrange the furniture in the classroom, with tables and chairs on either side of the room for teams to use and chairs at the front for panellists.

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**Step 5.** Explain the rules of the debate to the students:

- Listen to the other side with an aim at understanding their point of view.
- Take good notes. Use credible sources for evidence.
- No shouting, no degrading remarks and no insults. Remind students of the class guidelines you set at the start of this lesson.

**Step 6.** 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.

**Step 7.** 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.

**Step 8.** Subsequent team members should reaffirm the team's line and rebut a few of the main points of the other team.

**Step 9.** 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?

Consider using any common ground to guide further inquiry. You could work with students to develop questions around these points of common ground and use these to guide your zoo visit.