

## DEBATE PROJECT

### DEBATE OPTIONS

- A: Form pairs, choose sides and prepare only one side. You pick the topic. This is the easiest because you only have to work with one person: you.
- B: Impromptu debate: You are given a topic and five minutes to prepare. This is wild. How quickly can you think on your feet? How knowledgeable are you about current events. In some ways this is easiest because you needn't prepare formally. But don't fool yourself, the better prepared you are, the easier this will be.
- C: Large group: At least two persons on each side. This can be done with the entire class. This is the hardest. It requires leadership and planning.

*What do I have to do?*

- A. Research a controversial topic.
- B. Prepare an argument.
- C. Prepare a set of questions.
- D. Prepare an outline summarizing your position.
- E. Speak clearly and confidently.

## *So you want to Debate?*

A debate is a logical argument, not an emotional one. Logically there must be at least two sides to an issue or it is not debatable. Therefore you should be able to debate either side. Your emotions must not interfere. You will lose points for emotional arguments.

Decorum: Conduct during a debate: You must respect your opponent and your opponent's position. You may attack faulty logic, poor and incorrect information, and emotional argument.

You may speak only during your turn. You will lose points for speaking out of turn. During team debate, a team will lose points if any but the designated speaker talks.

Audience. It is sometimes difficult not to jump in with your own comments. Don't. Remember debate is a contest. The winner is determined by logical argument, not by the number of people who agree. The team whose side you seem to support will be penalized points.

## *Structure of debate*

Opening arguments from each side: A then B

Cross examination from each side: B then A

Organization time: Sides confer and prepare rebuttal

Rebuttal from each side:

A then B

Closing statements from each side: B then A

### **I. OPENING ARGUMENTS**

Side A is always the affirmative: They are always for the change called for in the resolution. They must establish that a significant goal will be met by the change they are calling for. The resolution is really the conclusion to their position. They must prove that the change is needed.

Resolved: Students at Lincoln should be allowed to chew gum.  
Goal: Reduced tension between students and teachers provides a better learning environment.  
Prediction: Permitting gum chewing will ease student/teacher tensions.  
Conclusion: Therefore we should allow gum chewing at Lincoln.

Side B is always the negative: They are for the status quo (the way things are now). Their job is to show that there is insufficient reason to believe the affirmative's prediction will be proved true. They should attack the logic.

*The affirmative claims that permitting gum chewing would relieve tensions; however, there is no evidence to show that this would be true. In fact, since the disruptions created by gum wads in hair and on clothes, it could just as easily be claimed that teachers would be more frustrated rather than less so.*

If the burden of proof is not established, the negative needs to do nothing. The status quo always wins in the absence of a reasonable expectation that the proposition will achieve its goals. **There is no reason to change if there isn't a reasonable expectation of success.**

## II. CROSS EXAMINATION:

This is the fun part. The negative gets to question the affirmative first. During cross-ex only one person at a time may ask a question of the opposing side. Anyone designated by the attacked captain may answer but only the questioner may rebut (only once). The attacked side may not ask questions.

The goal of cross examination is to bring out the holes in the affirmative's plan. The affirmative has probably tried to avoid these points in the opening argument. Now is the time for the negative to become aggressive.

*Isn't it true that the rule against gum chewing reduces the number of students chewing gum?*

If the answer is yes:

*Then eliminating the rule will increase the number of gum chewers which will increase the problems gum causes.*

*Is this what you mean by reducing tension?*

If the answer is no, proceed to a new line of questioning or rephrase:

*Would you say we have no problems with gum in the carpet, under tables, or in hair now?*

The affirmative cross examines last. They should attempt to shore up their position by either asking questions that will lead the negative to agree with their position or by challenging the negative's status quo.

*Would you say the rule against chewing gum prevents students from chewing?*

### **III. ORGANIZATION TIME**

The organization time is most useful when a team is debating. It offers time for the members to conference and decide their strategy. They should decide what the opponents' strongest argument is and how to attack it in the next round of cross examinations.

### **IV. REBUTTAL AND FINAL CROSS EXAMINATION**

This is like the first round except by now the arguments have been pretty much explored. You should now be leading the questions to your conclusion. Try to take over. Don't allow lengthy answers. Therefore try to ask yes or no questions. You may begin with rebuttal remarks before asking further questions.

### **V. CLOSING STATEMENTS**

The closing remarks should be a response to the way the debate has gone. You may outline a rough closing statement, but keep it flexible enough to allow you to deal with surprise arguments the opponents came up with.

### *Time limits*

The time limit will depend upon which debate option you choose.

Opening and closing: 1 to 5 minutes

Cross examination: 4 to 7 minutes

Organization time: 1 to 2 minutes

### *Scoring*

#### **POSITIVE SCORING: 1 POINT FOR EACH**

Opening: Establish a burden of proof or cast doubt on the prediction.

Each piece of evidence offered in support or attack.

Cross examination:

The askers: question unanswered or poorly answered

The asked: question answered

Closing statement:

each argument recalled and refuted

Participation: 1 point for each member of the team making an active contribution.

#### **NEGATIVE SCORING: 1 POINT LOST FOR EACH OF THESE INFRACTIONS:**

Speaking out of turn

Each team member not contributing at least once.

Each interruption by a member of the audience costs the team supported 1 point.

Speaking too quietly, sloppy posture, discourteous behavior.

### *Preparing for your Debate*

Unless you are doing impromptu debate, you will want to prepare well in advance. Here's what you must do.

- i. **Select a topic**
- ii. **Decide who has which side**
- iii. **Prepare an opening argument:** This may be written out or read from note cards but is more effective if delivered rather than read.
  - (1) **Affirmative:** This needs to be a piece of persuasive writing outlining the goals to be met, the prediction, and the resolution.
  - (2) **Negative:** This needs to call into doubt the workability of the prediction or propose a better solution than the resolution.
  - (3) **Gathering evidence:**
    - (a) Someone should visit the library to make notes on facts that will support your position. **(Probably ought to pay at least as much attention**
    - (b) Conducting surveys may provide you with supporting opinions. It is not proof, but it is comforting to say 80% of students agree that . . .
    - (c) Expert witnesses. You may want to interview an expert. Since you did the interview, your opponent will have had no chance to prepare for this testimony. (Library sources are equally available to both sides.)

(i) **Note:**

**Save some points to be made during cross-ex.**

- (4) **Prepare an outline for cross examination.**
  - (a) What questions will you want to ask? Who will ask which questions? For teams it might be worth while to designate one person expert on one aspect of the argument.
  - (b) Who will answer which questions: You should cross examine each other as practice for the actual debate.
  - (c) It may be wise to save some important facts or arguments to present in cross-ex.
- (5) **Organization time:** During Organization time the team confers to decide strategy for the next cross-ex period. Did the opponents do what you expected? How will you refute their arguments? Who will lead the questioning?

(6) **Closing statements:** Have prepared before the debate an outline that summarizes your position and answers the anticipated arguments against it.

(a) Be able to insert into this outline any new points that have resulted from the debate.

(b) Be able to make this statement without a written speech.