

# Creating Online Debates Using Kialo Edu

By Charity Butcher  
Kennesaw State University

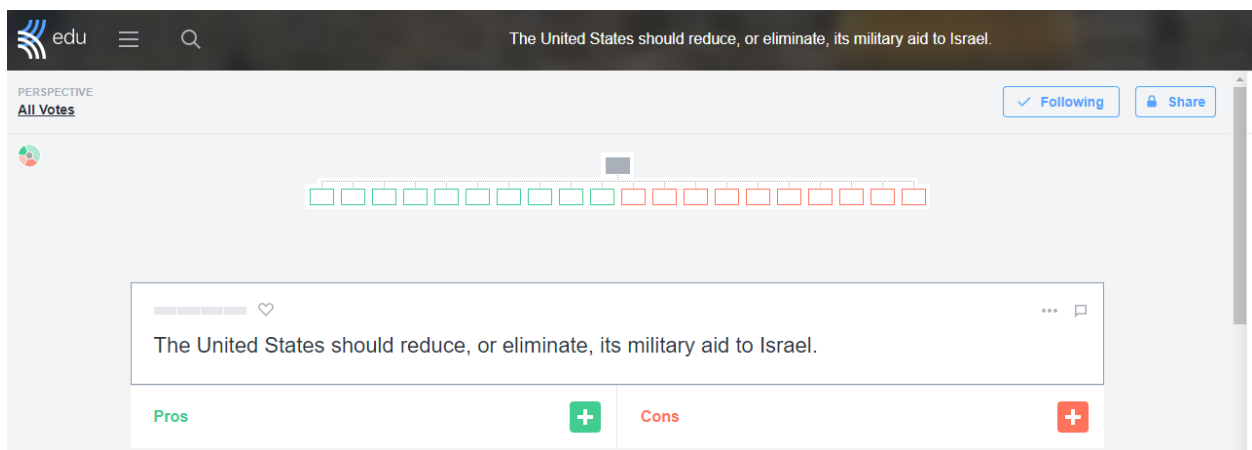
## Debates as an Alternative to Traditional Discussion Boards

Peer-to-peer interaction is an important part of the online classroom environment. Students learn not only from interacting with the material and the instructor in a course but also through their interactions with other students in the class, who have different perspectives and ideas to bring to the table. Peer-to-peer interaction also helps build a sense of community in courses – something that is particularly important in an online environment.

It is common for online classes to include discussion boards, often with students answering questions provided by the instructor and then being required to respond to posts made by their classmates. Debates offer an alternative to traditional discussion boards, providing students with the opportunity to critically engage with the material from the course while also engaging with their classmates.

## Kialo Edu

Kialo Edu ([www.kialo-edu.com](http://www.kialo-edu.com)) is specifically designed for classroom use and can allow professors to conduct fully online debates. It uses a structured argument map for visually representing arguments. Within Kialo, students make arguments and counterarguments for the Pro and Con sides of a debate. Professors have full control over the topic of each debate and can choose topics that fit with their course objectives and content. Professors can view a tour of Kialo at <https://www.kialo-edu.com/tour>. The tour demonstrates more clearly how debates are structured. The screenshot below also gives you a general idea of a simple Kialo argument map.



## **Tips and Reminders for Using Kialo**

Below are some tips and reminders for professors wanting to incorporate Kialo debates into their classes:

1. Be sure to have students use their full name (first and last) as their username when they sign up for Kialo. If students do not do this, it will be very difficult to grade students on their participation.
2. There is a small learning curve to using the Kialo-edu website. As such, debates will become stronger as students become more familiar with the site and its structure. I would recommend assigning multiple debates throughout the semester.
3. While utilizing multiple debates is encouraged, I would also caution against using too many of these assignments. I would suggest perhaps one debate every other week, or every three weeks. This provides students with some variety without them becoming bored with the format.
4. For grading: If you click on “Activity” on the right-hand side of your Kialo screen (under “Notifications”) you can filter by participant. This will allow you to see all the posts from each individual user and will aid in grading.
5. Each Kialo entry is limited to 500 characters. For more advanced students, this might feel limiting. At the same time, it forces to students to be succinct with each argument they make. You may want to remind students of this limit and encourage them to break larger points into smaller ones and to be efficient in their writing.

## **Sample Assignment 1**

Kialo has a sample assignment (<https://support.kialo-edu.com/hc/en-us/articles/360034499512>) on their website where the class is divided into groups of six. In each group of six, three students are assigned to the “Pro” side and three are assigned to the “Con” side. In the first step, students each make five initial claims. In the second step, each student reads through the arguments from the opposing side and writes at least two Cons to those claims and at least one Con to a claim on their own side. The sample assignment also includes suggestions for adaptation, including adding in a revision phase, adding a voting phase, and adding a reflection phase.

## **Sample Assignment 2**

Below is an example of a Kialo debate assignment that does not require the professor to initially divide the class into smaller groups. This assignment provides two topic options for the class and allows students to decide which debate to participate in. Instead of assigning students to a specific side of the debate, students are required to provide arguments for BOTH sides of the debate. In addition, the debate takes places over the course of a week, the typical time-period of an online “module.”

This second sample assignment has several advantages over the first sample assignment provided on the Kialo website. First, it requires less prep by the professor prior to the debate, as there is no need to assign students to groups or sides. Second, it is less dependent upon specific students on each side of the debate, and thus there is less problem with freeriding or with students not completing the work. A debate with only three students on each side could break-down if one or more of those students does not participate. Third, students are forced to think more fully about both sides of the debate, since they are fully contributing to each of these sides. Finally, it provides students some agency over the debate topics that they participate in.

Below is an example of a specific assignment I give to students. Professors can take this assignment “as is” or can adapt it to meet the needs of their specific class. The topics in this assignment are specific to an American foreign policy course, but professors can change the debate topics to fit their own course objectives and content.

### ***Debate Assignment***

#### *Purpose*

The purpose of this assignment is to encourage you to think critically about the topics in the class and to interact with the material and your classmates in a fun and engaging way.

#### *Assignment Details*

For this assignment, students will be choosing between one of two different debate topics. Once you have chosen your debate topic, you will be providing two “Pro” claims for the debate and two “Con” claims for the same debate, for a total of four claims (two “Pro” and two “Con”). Students will have 4 days to post these initial claims (thus, they will be due at 11:59pm on Thursday, Day 4 of the Module).

Once this four-day period is over, students will be required to post at least one “Con” to a claim made on each side of the debate. Thus, students will make one “Con” statement to a claim made on the “Pro” side and one “Con” statement to a claim made on the “Con” side of the debate (for a total of two additional claims). These additional statements should not just reiterate your initial points but should move beyond these points and contribute new information and/or evidence to the debate. These final two claims are due at 11:59pm on Sunday, Day 7 of the Module. When students have completed the debate, they will have contributed a total of 6 claims.

Students should note that all debate claims are limited to 500 characters. I encourage you to be succinct and efficient in your writing. You can also break larger points into smaller ones and post each smaller point separately.

Choose one of the following debates to participate in:

Debate 1: Resolved: The United States should reduce, or eliminate, its military aid to Israel.

To participate in this debate, go to Kialo and sign up if you haven't already. Make sure that you use your full name – first and last name – as your username.  
Link to this particular debate and Kialo: [PROFESSOR WILL INCLUDE LINK HERE]

Debate 2: Resolved: The United States should join the International Criminal Court (ICC).

To participate in this debate, go to Kialo and sign up if you haven't already. Make sure that you use your full name – first and last name – as your username.  
Link to this particular debate and Kialo: [PROFESSOR WILL INCLUDE LINK HERE]

To reiterate, once you have selected the debate you would like to participate in, you will be doing the following:

1. Write two claims/arguments for the "Pro" side – be sure to support your argument, providing evidence when necessary. You should not repeat arguments that have already been made (Due on Thursday at 11:59pm, Day 4 of the Module).
2. Write two claims/argument for the "Con" side – be sure to support your argument, providing evidence when necessary. You should not repeat arguments that have already been made (Due on Thursday at 11:59pm, Day 4 of the Module).
3. Provide a "Con" to one argument on the Pro side (Due on Sunday at 11:59pm, Day 7 of the Module).
4. Provide a "Con" to one argument on the Con side (Due on Sunday at 11:59pm, Day 7 of the Module).
5. Overall, you will be providing 6 total claims posts. Have fun!

### ***Grading Criteria***

Each claim will be graded on the following criteria, receiving one point for each criterion. As such, each claim is worth 5 points, for a total of 30 points for the debate. If students post more than these six claims, their highest scoring claims of each type will be used.

1. The claim was submitted on time.
2. The claim improves the argument being made on that side of the debate.
3. The claim includes supporting evidence when appropriate or otherwise includes a logical argument.
4. The claim is clear and concise.
5. The claim is grammatically correct and easy to understand.