

Want to Facilitate a Debate in *Your* Class?

In a classroom debate, a proposition is stated and students make arguments for or against it. Students must research and prepare arguments to participate in the debate effectively, they are required to think on their feet to respond to the opposing side's counterarguments, and they benefit from hearing a range of perspectives on an issue.

Why should *you* facilitate a Case Study?

Possible learning goals: Have students conduct research to form an argument. Have students practice quick critical thinking to respond to counterarguments. Have students practice written and oral communication as they construct arguments. Have students acknowledge a range of perspectives on an issue.

How-To Guide

Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Break students into two groups – For and Against• Assign or let students chose roles in the debate• Be explicit about the sources or types of evidence you want students to use to support their claims
During	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write the proposition on the board• Monitor time limits and debate structure• Monitor participation
After	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Open up the debate for comments form all students• Haves students vote to indicate which side presented the most convincing argument

Prep

Prep Break students into two groups—For and Against:

- Students either choose or are assigned to argue a particular side in the debate.
- It may present an extra challenge, but it can be a positive learning experience for students to argue on the side of the debate they don't actually believe in. Some instructors flip a coin and let the winning team decide whether they will argue in favor of or against the proposition.

Assign or let students choose roles in the debate:

- Possible roles include: opening speaker, rebuttal speaker, concluding speaker, researcher, organizer, debate moderator, leader, and speech composer
- Depending on the size of the groups, students may take on more than one role

Be explicit about the sources or types of evidence you want students to use to support their claims:

- Possible sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, books and manuscripts, magazines and newspaper articles, websites, and interviews with experts on the topic.
- Tell students they should avoid or limit claims based on personal experience or opinion, and explain why these are considered less valid sources of information in a debate.

During

Write the proposition on the board:

- The proposition is a statement that affirms or denies something. For example “Affirmative action policies should be banned”.
- The proposition may also be written as a question (e.g., “Should affirmative action policies be banned?”)

Monitor time limits and debate structure:

- There are countless variations of the exact format of debates but, traditionally, debates follow a similar structure:
 - Pro position (5 minutes) [Pro Team]
 - Rebuttal (3 minutes) [Con Team]
 - Con position (5 minutes) [Con Team]
 - Rebuttal (3 minutes) [Pro Team]
 - Teams question each other (5 minutes/team) [Both teams]
 - Closing statements (3 minutes/team) [Both teams, in the opposite order from opening statements]

Monitor Participation:

- Particularly if a student is filling the moderator role (and thus keeping track of time), you can keep track of students’ contributions to make sure that everyone participates

After

Open up the debate for comments from all students:

- After each side has presented their concluding arguments, you may want to let the rest of the class weigh in, ask questions, or present new evidence

Have students vote to indicate which side presented the most convincing argument:

- Ask students to raise their hands in favor of the arguments made by the For or Against sides. You may want to ask if anyone’s mind has been changed by the debate—ask them to share what changed their thinking.

Reference: Keller, T., Whittaker, J., & Burke, T. (2001). Student debates in policy courses: promoting police practice skills and knowledge through active learning. *Journal of Social Work*, 37(2), 343–55.