

Debating

Secondary resource pack

What's in the pack?

This pack contains ideas and activities to develop your students debating skills, and help them structure well though through arguments for formal debating.

Includes:

- Quick debates
- Developing debating skills
- Formal debate steps
- Planning frame
- Moderating a debate
- Glossary



Quick debate: Vote with your feet

Get your class moving with this quick decision-making activity.

Assign one side of the classroom as 'For' and one 'Against' – this is similar to the 'division' process which is used to make decisions in the House of Commons and House of Lords. Call out each proposal (adding anything relevant to your group/area). Ask students to move to the side of the room they agree with. You could then ask some students to justify their snap decision.

No one under the age of 16 should be allowed to use social media	It should be illegal not to wear a helmet while cycling.
School uniform should be compulsory in all schools.	Private car ownership should be banned.
You should have to pass a test in order to be allowed to own a dog.	Supermarkets should stop using plastic packaging for all their products.
Everyone over the age of 16 should be able to vote in parliamentary elections.	Supermarkets should have to close all day on Sundays.



Quick debate: What's in the news?

Get your students thinking about current local and national issues.

Group students into groups of 3-4 and give each group a copy of a newspaper. Give the groups 5 minutes to choose 3 stories from the paper that raise good topics for debating and work out the question the stories raise.

The groups should then choose one of these questions and have 5 minutes to make a table of arguments 'for' and 'against', before deciding on one side as a group.

Allow 5-10 minutes to feedback, encouraging students to think about the methods they used to make the final decision – did they vote, and if so, was it secret? Did they make a random decision (such as tossing a coin)? Invite students to consider the implications of these methods.

Quick debate: Soundbites

Encourage your students to carefully consider their choice of words.

Soundbites are short snappy phrases which are memorable and get a message across. You may wish to use recent, relevant examples from current news to explain this concept.

Working individually or in groups ask students to create a sound bite for a topic or issue they are interested in.

Remind them that a sound bite should:

- Be short and easy to remember
- Give the essence of your message
- Provoke a response from the audience

Encourage students to test their soundbite out loud because it is important that the phrases sound good as well as looking good on paper.

3, 9, 27 rule

Professionals trying to get a message across use the **3, 9, 27 rule** to create snappy soundbites. These are great for opening debates.

The rule is a soundbite should:

- Cover 3 main points
- Take 9 seconds to say
- Include no more than 27 words

Example 'Women are under-represented in Parliament; they make up half the population but are hugely outnumbered by male MPs. Equality matters: we need deeds not words!'

Developing debating skills

Show students debates from the House of Commons or House of Lords as examples of formal debating. Live and recent debates can be found on www.parliamentlive.tv or shorter clips can be found on UK Parliament's YouTube channel.

Discuss:

- The style, rules and language of the debate
- The role of the Speaker in the House of Commons or the Lord Speaker in the House of Lords
- The techniques used by those speaking

Convince me

The activity enables students to develop their confidence speaking in small groups, in preparation for larger audiences.

Set up:

Students should be in groups of 5 or 7. In each group allocate one or two speakers 'for' and 'against', ensuring there are at least 3 'deciders'.

You should also choose a topic for debate. You may wish to choose 2 or 3 topics if you would like to incorporate research time, so every student can be 'for' or 'against' something.

The task:

Give students time to prepare. If you are trying to encourage quick thinking this could be a couple of minutes, or you could allow time for research in groups with others arguing the same thing.

Returning to the original groups, students should make short statements arguing for or against their topic, followed by a vote among the group.

This could be turned into a class competition by collating the results of each research group.

Balloon debate

This debating game is a fun introduction persuasive speaking and voting.

Set up:

All the speakers are in a balloon basket which is losing height – a speaker will need to be thrown out of the basket in order that the others remain safe!

Choose 5 students to act as the speakers. Allocate each of them a character – these could be made up, famous people, or even themselves.

The task:

Each Speaker must make a one-minute statement explaining why they should remain in the balloon. The audience then votes for who they would like thrown out of the basket.

Repeat this process until only one person is left in the basket: this is winner.

Hold a formal debate

Use this step by step guide to run a House of Commons style debate.

The debate begins

In the House of Commons, the Speaker starts the debate by saying 'Order, Order'.

The motion (proposal) for the debate is put to the House

This speech should give an overview of the question and why it is important.

The Speaker announces the question

'The question before us is...' Ask the opposing Member to speak.

The Member opposing the motion speaks

This speech should give an overview of the main arguments against the motion.

Other speakers give speeches

The Speaker invites other speakers to make speeches, ensuring balance between speakers 'for' and 'against'

Closing Statements

A Member on each side sums up the strongest arguments

The Speaker announces the question and vote

In the Parliament, votes are taken through 'divisions' where members have to move to opposite sides of the chamber.

'Tellers' count the number of people voting each way and tell the speaker.

The Speaker announces the result

Preparing for a debate

Planning frame

Motion

Are you arguing for or against the motion?

I am arguing that...

Your introduction

Are you arguing for or against the motion? Give 2 main reasons for your view.

1.

2.

Developing your argument

Give your supporting arguments

List your facts and evidence

Preparing for a debate

Planning frame

Keep track

Use this section to keep track of the main arguments put to you by the opposition.
How can you counter them?

Developing your summary

Use this section to develop a strong concluding statement

In conclusion, let me stress that...

I have presented clear evidence that...

I have listened to the opponent's view. I agree that...
However, I take the view that...

Finally, I urge you to support me because...

Moderating a debate

If you're moderating a debate, your role is like the Speaker in the House of Commons or the Lord Speaker in House of Lords. Your job is to ensure the debate is fair, on topic and a range of opinions are expressed in the time allowed.

Stay on topic

To help you do this:

- Make sure the motion for the debate is clear and specific
- Research the topic yourself so you have an overview of what may be said. If the debaters move off-track, intervene as soon as possible.
- Know who is on which side: find out who will be proposing (putting forward) and opposing (defending against) the motion. This will help you choose who to speak.

Know the rules

It's best to keep the rules as simple as possible, you can decide on them as a group before you start.

- Agree how long the debate will last and how long each individual can speak for.
- Decide how debaters should show they would like to speak. In the House of Commons, MPs stand up to get the Speaker's attention.
- When the Speaker of the House of Commons needs to address all the MPs, they said 'Order!'. What will you say?

Be fair

Your job is to ensure the debate is as fair as possible, so you need to be impartial by not showing what your own opinion is. Also think about:

- Choosing speakers who have different views – you could even ask the debaters to group themselves into 'for' and 'against' to help you choose evenly.
- Challenge any language which is inappropriate, points which are off-topic or people speaking out of turn.

Glossary

Abstain	To choose not to vote for either side.
Argument	A statement or reason for or against.
Debate	A formal argument with agreed rules on a specific topic. A debate usually has a way to decide which side of the argument has won, such as a vote.
Loaded Question	A question designed to trip up a debating opponent because it has a limited range of possible responses. For example when asked, 'Is this the first time you've made up the facts?', either a 'yes' or 'no' answer will have negative implications.
Moderator	The person who ensures the debate runs fairly and the rules are kept. In the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the moderator is known as the Speaker.
Motion	The question that the debate is addressing is known as a 'motion', or sometimes a 'resolution'.
Opposer	Someone who speaks against the proposal.
Proposer	The person putting forward the subject of the debate.
Rebuttal	Answering an opponent's arguments, demonstrating why you believe they are incorrect.
Secunder	Someone who backs up the proposer or the opposer.
Strategy	Planning to give yourself the best chance of winning the debate. For example, having facts ready to rebut a challenge and considering in advance arguments the opposition may use.
Summary	Giving the main point of your argument at the end of the debate in a concise and clear fashion.
Vote	System by which those involved in the debate choose which side they support.