

12. Holding debates

A debate can help to make us aware of various opinions about a topic and to understand the advantages and disadvantages of controversial issues. In order to hold a debate, there needs to be a controversial question that can be answered with a yes or a no. In a democracy, there is always more than one solution or one opinion.

Two opinions – a debate

Here's how it works:

- Divide your class into two groups. One group is “for” (in favour of) the issue, the other group is “against” the issue.
- Each group finds possible arguments⁵ to support their opinion. They should also put together arguments that go against the opinion of the other group.
- Note down your argument using key words.
- Each group designates two speakers.
- The debate is organised in three parts: the opening round, an open debate, and the closing round.
 - The opening round: Each speaker briefly explains his or her argument. The “pros” group and the “cons”⁶ group take turns presenting.
 - The debate: the speakers present their arguments and try to counter the opposing side's arguments.
 - The closing round: this round has the same procedure as the opening round. Each person has the opportunity to summarise his or her opinion.

The time keeper

Choose someone from your class who is responsible for keeping the time during the debate.

- The opening round should last no more than eight minutes (each person can speak for two minutes).
- The debate should last no more than six minutes.
- The closing round should last no more than four minutes (one minute per person).
- If somebody goes over the allotted time, a bell is rung.

Observers

Students who are not speakers during the debate observe what happens. After the debate, they say what they noticed using the following points as a basis:

- Which arguments were presented?
- Who will implement what and how?
- Was each speaker allowed to speak or were they interrupted?
- How did different speakers try to get their message across?
- Which arguments were convincing?
- What examples of good arguments were presented?
- Which words were used frequently?
- How did the speakers speak (using body language, were they loud enough, with inflection)?

5. Argument: a statement that is formulated to support a claim.

6. Pros and cons: this means “for” and “against”.