

DEBATE GUIDE: RESOURCE 12

Moral Judgment Debate Format

Moral Judgment Debate is a classroom method that offers a hybrid between debate and discussion.

It does not exist in competitive high school or university tournaments. Use this format whenever you want to debate philosophical questions. For a longer, more structured form of philosophical debate, look at “Lincoln-Douglas Debate”(or “LD”), which is a 40-minute long format used in academic debate competitions. This guidance sheet is for beginners getting started or for those interested in incorporating debate as an activity or exercise.

Protocol:

The goal of this style of debate is to explore multiple sides to a philosophical question. It takes place in groups of three, where one person represents the “pro” side, another represents the “con” side, and the final person is the “judge”. Unlike other forms of debate, the judge has a speaking role in this format and gives a speech in the middle of the speech as well as the end of the speech, in addition to asking elaboration questions. By giving a speech in the middle of the debate, the judge has to “reveal” or articulate current thinking, which challenges the debaters to adapt to focus their closing speeches on issues most central to the judge’s decision. In total, this debate is 15 minutes in length (25 minutes total with preparation time).

Preparation of Opening Speech – 10 minutes (or longer prep days or weeks ahead of time)

- Affirmative (Pro) Opening Speech (with two points) – 2 minutes
- Cross-Examination (with “tell me more” questions by the judge) – 1 minute
- Negative (Con) Opening Speech (with two points) – 2 minutes
- Cross-Examination (with “tell me more” questions by the judge) – 1 minute
- Cross-Fire (Pro and Con ask questions to each other, starting with Pro) – 2 minutes

Judge Prepares Reveal Speech – 1 minute

- Judge Reveal Speech (starting with “Here is where I am right now”) – 2 minutes
- Preparation Huddle (both sides think about closing situation or issue) – 1 minute
- Affirmative (Pro) Closing Speech (focused on a specific situation or issue) – 1 minute

- Negative (Con) Closing Speech (focused on a specific situation or issue) – 1 minute
- Judge Closing Decision (with reason for decision) – 1 minute

Moral Judgment Topics:

Topics in this format are always worded as a question. Some examples include:

- Is it possible to cure poverty?
- Is stealing ever okay?
- Does equal opportunity exist in sports?
- Is violence ever the appropriate response to injustice?
- Is war ever necessary?
- Do people who commit violent crimes deserve the death penalty?
- Should student evaluations determine teacher job security?
- Is it okay for teachers to play favorites?
- Is it okay to block websites in schools?

In addition to searching for “philosophical debate questions” for more topics, you can also specifically focus on different types of morality. These philosophies are obviously much more complex than articulated here, but can include:

- Utilitarianism: What is good for the greatest number of people?
- Virtue Ethics: What is just inherently good in principle?
- Deontology: Was the intent of the action good?
- Rights-Based Ethics: Does the action protect rights?
- Ethical Egoism: Which action is good for me?

Opening Case Example:

The structure for an opening speech is similar to most styles of debate, including the Parliamentary Debate format, except that it focuses even more on defining key values:

Case Outline	Examples
An introductory explanation about why this is an important topic.	“Today we will be discussing the issue of... This is an important issue because...”
State the exact wording of the topic and state your side.	“Therefore, the topic for today is.... We take the affirmative/negative side.”
State the definitions of key terms.	“We would like to define...”
Describe your “value” for the round, or how you define what is good and right.	“This round should be judged based on which side achieves the value of...”
State your first argument and prove it with reasoning and an impact.	“Our first contention is....” “This is true because...” “This is important because...”
State your second argument and prove it with reasoning and an impact.	“Our second contention is....” “This is true because...” “This is important because...”
Close your speech by reminding us what is most important in the round.	“Judge, we have shown that we are able to achieve the most important goal of...” “For all these reasons, we urge your affirmative/negative vote.”

