

DEBATE GUIDE: RESOURCE 14

Activity Examples: SPAR and Extemporaneous Panels

To improve debate skills, it is important to practice frequently and strategically.

Running entire debate rounds can be helpful to practicing all of the different elements of argumentation, but it is also important to break down the skills into smaller, shorter exercises. Short, easy debates and discussions can help isolate particular skills, while also giving time for more frequent practice. Selecting easy, fun topics can also make it possible for all students to fully participate and feel capable of being successful at debate.

What is the purpose of these activities?

1. Students practice taking an assigned position, quickly outlining arguments, posing questions to the other side, defending their points, and summarizing key takeaways.
2. These activities can be done in small groups for a faster, more low-stakes version, but can also become more high-stakes presentations when done for the entire group.
3. The overall level of difficulty depends on the nature of the topic -- in terms of learning debate skills, easy, silly topics can be as useful as more complex current event topics.

How do these assignments connect to Common Core Speaking & Listening Standards?

- **Debate is one of the most comprehensive speaking formats for addressing the majority of standards.** The standards listed here are only a few examples, but debate also addresses standards under “Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas” and can be supplemented to include more preparation and/or digital media to meet additional standards.
- The anchor standards across all grade levels for “Comprehension and Collaboration” require students of all ages to “prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1).
- Anchor standards for all ages also require students to “evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.3)
- Starting in Grade 1, the anchor standards for “Comprehension and Collaboration” require students to be able to build on others’ talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.1.B).
- Starting in Grade 2, the anchor standards for “Comprehension and Collaboration” require students to be able to build on others’ talk in conversations by linking their comments to the remarks of others. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.2.1.B).
- Starting in Grade 4, students need to follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles (CCSS.ELA-

LITERACY.SL.4.1.B).

- Starting in Grade 8, students need to engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, building on other’s ideas and expressing their own clearly (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1).
- In Grades 11 and 12, students need to respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D).

What do these assignments look like?

Extemporaneous Panels:

Students get into groups of 4. Give each group 4 index cards, labeled with different roles, “Facilitator”, “Supporter”, “Critic”, and “Alternator”. Students draw a card to decide what role they will be taking in a 25-minute mock panel. The facilitator runs the panel, while all other roles are the panelists. Regardless of their actual opinions, students have to take on the role that they are assigned.

- Give a controversial question to the class inspired by current events OR ask a student to choose a prompt from a list of questions. For topics, search for “extemporaneous practice questions”.

- Explain the panel protocol and start the activity (25 minutes total with preparation time)
- Everyone: 10 minutes of preparation time for the facilitator to come up with questions and for the panelists to outline their remarks
- Facilitator: 1 minute to pose question to the panel and why it is interesting
- Panelists: 3 minutes total, 1 minute per person to present their initial point of view
- Everyone: 7 minutes total for the facilitator to pose different questions for a free-form discussion with all of the panelists
- Panelists: 3 minutes total to summarize their final words
- Facilitator: 1 minute to summarize key takeaways

SPAR:

This activity stands for “Spontaneous Argumentation”. As an easy, mini-format for debate, SPAR is highly flexible in terms of timing, topics, amount of preparation time, and grouping size.

- Write on the board: _____ vs. _____ and write an example like “Giants vs. A’s”. Get more suggestions from students of possible topics (up to 8).
- Take a vote from the class, where they have 2 votes for topics they want to debate.
- Narrow it down to the top 3 and have the class vote again, but only 1 vote.
- Split people into pairs for 1 vs. 1 debates, small groups for 2 vs. 2 debates, or just split the class in half for group vs. group debates.
- Assign people to either pro or con.
- Give everyone 5-10 minutes of preparation with people on their side. Tell each side to elect a group leader who takes notes on the 2-3 arguments that support their side.

- Explain the debate protocol and start the activity:

2 minute Pro speech

(followed by 1 minute of questions by the Con side)

2 minute Con speech

(followed by 1 minute cross-examination by the Pro side)

1 minute Con closing

1 minute Pro closing

- If you think it promotes learning, you can determine a winner; that said, as an easy debate format, the purpose is more about being able to complete the exercise than actually winning the round.

