

DEBATE GUIDE: RESOURCE 15

Class Project: Debate Scrimmages

A Note to Teachers



This assignment is intended as a longer 1-week experience following 1-2 weeks of instruction on debate. While the description below has been adapted so the scrimmage takes place during regular classroom time, scrimmages are originally designed to take place in a 2 to 4 hour block of time (usually outside of school). Outside of school, scrimmages can be used to conduct practice debate rounds with other schools; in the classroom, they also work well as an assessment of students' debate skills and improvement. The decision to conduct a scrimmage should be considered carefully, since it inherently involves competition. Based on your knowledge of your students, the timing of a scrimmage should line up when students feel ready and have participated in a few practice rounds, as it is important to avoid shutting down more timid students.

As you facilitate the lead-up to the final assessment, it is best to have completed: 1) fun exposure to debate in general; 2) lessons to familiarize students with the debate format; 3) warm-ups, exercises, and drills for unpacking key skills (including how to give good feedback); 4) lessons to get familiar with unfamiliar topics and improve literacy and background knowledge; and 5) practice rounds in small groups with feedback and peer coaching on a variety of topics.

For the scrimmage, make sure you prepare: 1) scrimmage schedule; 2) 4 topics; 3) scrimmage "pairings" (or who is debating who); 4) outside judges, if any; 5) ballots or judging sheets; 6) tabulation system for recording results; 7) awards or certificates, if any. If you are running multiple rounds at once, you will also need a plan for rooms/spaces for the debates to take place. In terms of the schedule, you can either run all 4 rounds in one half day or you can spread them out over 4 days, with one round per day (schedule is highly variable based on time and space available).

Scrimmages can be either a graded or ungraded assignment. If graded, then make sure the grade is based on: 1) win or loss record; 2) points on content; 3) points on delivery; 4) quality of written feedback when judging others; 5) teacher discretionary points for noticeable effort or improvement.

Debate Scrimmage Assignment Sheet

Debate is a great way to practice advocating for different sides of a position and defending your arguments. This assignment highlights your ability to think on your feet, structure clear arguments, respond with logical reasoning and passionate delivery, and summarize the heart of an issue. It also gives you a chance to see what it is like to participate in debate competitions and gain experience with spontaneous speaking in a public event.

What is the purpose of this assignment?

- To demonstrate your understanding of debate skills and practice applying debate techniques to argue effectively about multiple controversial issues

What does a scrimmage look like?

- A scrimmage is made up of 4 rounds of debate competition using the Parliamentary Debate Format. You will have a debate partner who stays the same during all 4 rounds, so the debates will be 2 vs. 2. You will have a mixture of peer judges and/or outside judges.
- Each round will take place on a different day and everyone will have a chance to be a judge. In total, you will be debating for three rounds and judging for one round.
- During the round, you will not be debating in front of the whole class. Instead, you and your partner will face one opposing team in front of one judge. All of your other classmates will be debating or judging at the same time as you. For instance, in a class of 30, there will be 6 rounds of 4 people each going on at once, with the 6 remaining students as judges for each round.
- Rounds will be judged based on a points system that accounts for both the quality of your argument content and the quality of your delivery. You will also have a win/loss record based on the judge's decision.
- When it is your turn to judge, your grade will be based on the quality of your written feedback.
- Each round will have a different topic. Once the topic is announced, you and your partner will have 20 minutes to prepare your arguments. You may use the Internet and other resources during this time. There is no preparation time allowed in the middle of the round.
- You will not find out if you "won" until the end of all four rounds. Judges should not reveal their decision, but instead record their thoughts through written feedback.

How can I prepare?

- To prepare for the scrimmage, it is important to be familiar with the latest current issues. Make sure you are clear about the different types of topics, including fact topics, value topics, and policy topics. Practice debate warm-ups and drills to improve your ability to outline quickly, take notes efficiently, and justify your reasoning.
- Improve your skills by practicing redoing your speeches from previous practice debates. Get a partner to give you feedback on your content and delivery. Film or record yourself to see if there are any distracting habits that you should avoid.
- You will know your partner in advance of the scrimmage, so it would be good to work out a system for how you will approach the 20 minutes of preparation time and how you plan to work together. Get to know each other's strengths and areas of expertise.

When is it due?

- The scrimmage will take place during class time during the week of _____.
 - Each round will take place on a different day, so you will have one preparation day followed by four days of the scrimmage.
 - Absences count as a loss and there will be no make-up options for the scrimmage.
 - The scrimmage will be graded with an emphasis on effort and improvement, in addition to the win/loss decision and total points on content and delivery from your judge. The quality of your written feedback to your peers will also factor into your overall grade.
 - The scrimmage is worth ____% of your grade.
- Good luck!

