

DEBATE GUIDE: RESOURCE 4

Getting Debate Started: For Educators and Facilitators

In debate practice, strong facilitation should focus on helping people gradually build up their skills and focus on improvement goals that they identify, not you.

Instead of talking at people, it is important to help them learn debate by doing it, and you can help by chunking the experience to focus on specific things and avoid overwhelming people. Choose the right topics and teach the structure effectively so that everyone can participate.

Note: The suggestions in this guide are intended as personal checkpoints rather than used as a formula. Feel free to add steps or skip suggestions that do not work for you or the situation you are in—make it your own!

Support Literacy

- 1) Develop and regularly review a vocabulary list of major issues, concepts, people, philosophies, and policies. Use language cheat sheets to get people started.
- 2) Start with easier topics. Debating familiar topics while learning new vocabulary and doing research on new issues lowers literacy barriers.

Select Topics Wisely

- 1) Select relevant topics that provide even ground on both sides.
- 2) Word topics to avoid double negatives or having the pro side defend a ban.
- 3) Consider topics about “facts” (whether something is true), “values” (what we ought to do), or “policies” (what action to take).

Structure the Round

- 1) Figure out groupings (i.e. one-on-one, pair, or group debate).
- 2) Make sure there are opening speeches, questions, responses, and closings.
- 3) Decide the timing for each speech, informed by the purpose of each speech and what you know about the debaters’ capabilities.

Do a Practice Run

- 1) When teaching a structure, it is better to learn by doing. Practice the structure on an easy topic first.
- 2) As you do the practice run, stop and start to clarify the purpose of each speech and provide feedback and guidance.
- 3) Make sure people feel capable and secure before moving on.

Facilitate Preparation

- 1) If preparing in groups, make sure everyone has a role and that one person doesn’t dominate.
- 2) Make sure people are writing their arguments as they go to not forget.
- 3) Help people manage their time by giving them checkpoints for when to finish topic analysis, outlining speeches, and practicing delivery.

Redo with Better Delivery

- 1) Make sure to spend time redoing speeches to improve delivery skills like tone, gestures, and emphasis.
- 2) Help people identify specific goals for their redos, including improved summaries and explanations.
- 3) Create redo routines, so people make it a habit to immediately practice redos themselves.

