



NOT THE EASY WAY

Speak. Aspire. Take Action.

How to set up a Debate Club

Support from Senior Leadership

It will be vital to gain the support of the senior leadership within your school. This can be approached through demonstrating the advantages for the pupils who get involved, and for the school itself. Share resources which discuss:

- The importance of debate for developing critical thinking skills which will be relevant across the curriculum to improve academic performance as well as relevant to future study and lifelong learning.
- The importance of debate in promoting the mental health of children and young people.
- The role of debate in promoting the moral development of children and young people through the discussion of values.
- The role of debate in promoting an open and tolerant culture within the school where a diversity of opinions are welcomed.
- The benefits for pupils involved who will develop oracy and public speaking skills which will be valuable throughout their life.
- The benefit of involvement in being a member of, and leading a debate club, for older pupils in applying to university.
- The benefit for the school in the opportunity to enter national competitions with other schools thereby raising the school profile.

Note: The benefits for pupils of being in debate clubs is often available to pupils within the independent school sector and we should be seeking to widen the opportunities for the benefits of oracy skills, critical thinking, and confidence that debating can provide to all young people.

Practicalities

- You will need to decide when debate club will take place. E.g. Lunch times or after school.
- You will need to identify a space where debate club can be hosted. Ideally a space where pupils can move around, and seating arrangements can be moved to suit the activity.
- You will need to decide the age range for your club. You may want to wait and see how much interest there is in the club first; as the club grows you may decide to group Year 7-9 together and Year 10-13 together, with older pupils leading the club for younger pupils.
- You will need a minimum of 4 pupils for the club to operate.

(If you are a primary school teacher you can begin to introduce the skills and format for debating with your whole class and we will be producing some guidance for primary school teachers on this.)

Recruitment

- If your school has not previously had a debate club you will need to build some understanding for the pupils around what it is, what taking part will involve and how it could benefit them.
- Holding a short debate in an assembly can be a good way to showcase what a debate is. Followed by some information to let pupils know what will happen within the club and the activities that will be involved to help them build the skills demonstrated.
- It is important that pupils see the club as open to everyone, and somewhere which will be fun, supportive and where they can build skills. It is not a requirement to have the skills to join the club!
- Get support from other members of staff to introduce some debate club activities into form time so that pupils can get a taster of what being involved will be like e.g. Alley Debate, or Balloon Debate, group games which will be part of the club, or quick partner research activities.

First Session

First Session Plan:

1. Get to know you game
2. Introduce Speak Charter
3. Introduce Alley Debate with a fun topic
4. Introduce Where Do You Stand Debate with a fun topic
5. Alley Debate with a principle from the Speak Charter
6. Where Do You Stand Debate with a principle from the Speak Charter
7. Friendship Round

- Establish group cohesiveness in the first session. Ideas to do this include:
 - ❖ Making clear the shared purpose for attending the debate club.
 - ❖ Opportunities for the group to get to know each other.
 - ❖ Finding similarities across the members of the group.
 - ❖ Having fun together by playing games.
 - ❖ Working together towards a common goal.
- Start each session with a game or team building activity which can provide some elements of the above, especially helping young people to get to know each other (e.g. 2 minutes to find out 2 interesting facts about your conversation partner).
- At the first session our '**Speak Charter**' should be introduced.
- Then introduce the structure for an '**Alley Debate**' and a '**Where Do You Stand Debate**' (see explanations for these below).

Practise these structures with fun debate topics such as: Cats are better than dogs, or Housework should be banned, or I would want to live forever.

These formats can then be used to prompt reflections on the charter principles e.g. You could have an Alley Debate with one side arguing for: All opinions should be

tolerated, and one against, or a Where Do You Stand Debate on: Everyone should be treated with dignity and respect. These activities allow pupils to physically move around the room which creates energy and can help overcome inhibition within a new group.

- *Debate club should be open to pupils of all abilities and so differentiation of approach and outcome will be important to ensure all pupils can take part in the activities. Examples of ways to do this can be through simplifying language when needed, providing additional models and prompts for pupils who need this, providing partner or buddy working for pupils who need additional support.*
- In the first session, introduce the central concept of **Point and Explanation**.

Prompt each time with **'why?'** to reinforce the need to state the point or position and to explain why they are taking this position.

Where pupils may be finding this hard to do, teachers can provide a sentence starter as a prompt or a model of a 'why' for their position.

This will be the central learning point and skill for the first few sessions.

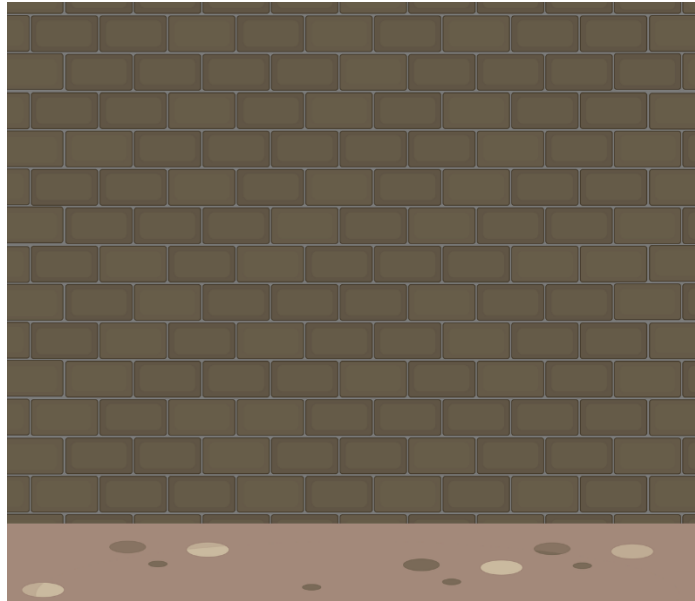
- Finish with a **friendship round**.

In the circle, each person comments on one thing the person to their left did well during the session.

This will be how every session ends and pupils may find this difficult initially but with practice will develop the skill of observing others during the session and finding something positive for each person each time.

Comments must be positive but can be around anything noted about the pupil and their contribution in that session e.g. *'I thought you did really well to join in today Kyle as I know you were nervous'* or *'I really liked the point you made Priya about factory farming'* or *'Sam I'm impressed about how much you know about films!'* or *'Omar you made me laugh so much today!!'*

Alley Debate:



Aim: To reinforce the need for justifying opinions.

Teaching prompt: Use the ‘Why? Because...’ prompt to reinforce this. Introduce the vocabulary of ‘Point + Explanation’, Because...’

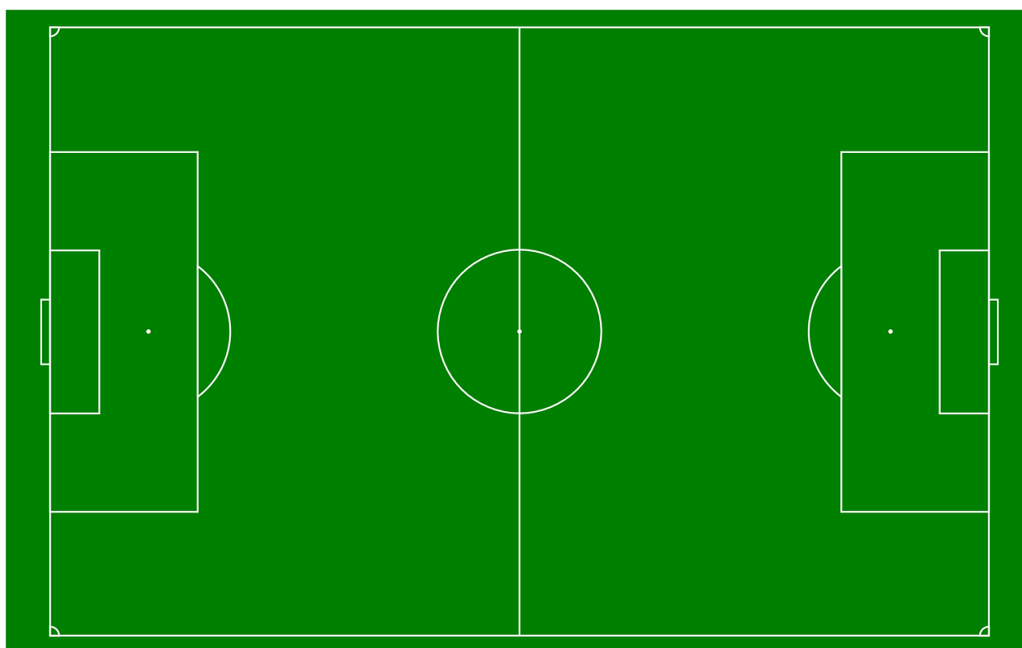
Format: The pupils should form two lines of equal length, facing each other (an easy way to ensure the lines are equal is to ask everyone to high-five the person opposite them, and adjust as needed). Explain that one line is “for” the statement they will be given; the other is “against”. You are not allowed to change lines!

(Here you are also introducing the idea that it is a skill to be able to understand and explain opinions even if they do not align with your own!)

Give the pupils a topic for the debate. Explain they now have 1 minute to think about a short statement in defines of their side of the debate. It should have a point and an explanation. Demonstrate with an example if needed. Starting with the “for” team, ask one pupil in turn to give their argument, alternating between “for” and “against” until you reach the end of the alley.

To extend this debate approach when you have time and pupils are confident with the format, you can ask pupils to reply to the person who spoke before them, before giving their argument. “They said... but I disagree because... My own argument is...”

Where Do You Stand? Debate



Aim: To be able to structure an argument using a point & explanation.

Teaching Prompt: Use 'Why? Because... ' as a prompt and a model.

Format: Pupils should form a line in the middle of the room. Assign one end of the room as "For" and the other as "Against". Pupils are currently standing "on the fence", where you are neither for nor against.

Give the pupils a topic. If they agree, they should move towards "for"; if they disagree, they should move towards "against". The more strongly they feel, the more they should move. When they have decided on their position, ask a few pupils to explain to the group why they are for or against, using a point and an explanation. After each pupil has spoken, ask the whole class to take one step towards for or against to show whether they were convinced. Make this accountable by following up, asking pupils why they moved one way or the other.

Balloon Debate:



Aim: To be able to structure an argument using a point & explanation

Teaching Prompt: Recap the need for justifying opinions. Use the 'Why? Because...' prompt to reinforce this. Introduce the vocabulary of 'Point + Explanation', linking them to 'Why? Because...'

Format: 4-6 volunteers should come to the front of the class/find a clear space. Each one should choose a person that they will play during this game. You may want to restrict them using a theme, e.g. "famous people from history" or "characters from Harry Potter". Now set the scene: all these people are in a balloon, but unfortunately it is leaking. To save ourselves, we will have to throw someone overboard! Each student will now give a 30 second explanation of why their character should be allowed to stay in the balloon, using a point and an explanation. After these arguments, the rest of the group should vote on one person to throw from the balloon. This should be repeated until only one person remains in the balloon.

Session 2

Plan:

1. Group Game
2. Introduce Structure for format Debate
3. Model a formal Debate
4. Pairs begin research work on a given topic
5. Alley or Where Do I Stand Debate
6. Friendship Round

- 1. Group Game:** To continue to build group cohesiveness, allow all to be involved and have a chance to speak.
- 2. Introduce structure for a formal debate:** Use the same debate format each time you debate so that pupils can quickly become familiar with the rules and structure of a debate. Developing this familiarity also allows pupils to focus on developing their arguments rather than the format or structure.

The Mace Format is recommended for beginner debaters. It is an easy format to start with as debates are quick and the audience can get involved in the floor debate. In this format, there are two teams with two speakers for each team. One speaker on each team will speak twice (once as a summary speaker). It does not matter which speaker takes on this additional role. Each speaker gives a speech of up to 7 minutes (for first-time debaters, shorter 'maximums' can be given). The first and last minute are protected, but between these times 'points of information' may be offered. The first four speakers give their speeches, alternating between 'proposition' and 'opposition'.

The debate is then opened to the floor for audience members to address questions to the speakers. However, speakers do not respond directly to the questions: rather, these will be responded to during the summary speeches. After the floor debate, one member of each team gives a four-minute speech, with the opposition going first, summarising their case, rebutting the other side and responding to questions from the audience.

3. This structure can be modelled and the language and terminology used introduced and explained by members of staff or pupils familiar with debating. Use a topic which will be interesting your group but not overly complex so that attention is focused on structure rather than following complex argument.

The Mace format is commonly used in inter school debate competition hosted by the English-Speaking Union <https://www.esu.org/competitions/schools-mace/> so as your club develops you can introduce a competitive structure within school and look to involving your school in national competition.

4. Introduce research and prep:

Research skills and preparation for debate will be an important part of involvement in debate club and should be introduced in this session. Place pupils into teams of 2 and give teams a proposition or opposition position on a topic. Allow time in the session for the pairs to work together on researching their topic and position and plan their debate. You can provide a template for notes which will allow them to structure their argument. Depending on the age and ability level of the pupils in the club, they may be able to spend time preparing further during independent study time, or you may need to allow further time during club time for preparation. You will need to judge the level of support the pupils in your club require and adjust expectations accordingly.

5. Ally/Balloon or Where Do you stand Debate.

6. Friendship Round

Session 3

Plan:

1. Group Game
2. Planning or recap time in pairs
3. First two teams present their Mace Debate
4. Alley/ Balloon/ Where Do I Stand Debate
5. Friendship Round

1. **Group game for club cohesion and involvement** – Familiar games may emerge as favourites with the group, games do not have to be novel each time, group preferences for familiar shared activities can be bonding. You could also ask a pupil to plan and prepare to lead a game each week for the next session.
2. **Research, Recap and Planning Time** – Allow time for the teams to get together to do some research, recapping or planning or their debate. As above the amount of time and adult support teams will require for this will vary.
3. **Team Mace Debate:** two teams present their debate using the Mace format above. Use prompts to guide them in the structure and language required.

Before the end of the session provide these teams with a new debate topic and identify the teams which will present at the next session

4. **Alley/ Balloon/Where do you stand debate.**
5. **Friendship Round**

Future Sessions:

As the sessions progress you can utilise the plans above to adjust the sessions to ensure progress at the rate appropriate for your group. Below we outline some skills that can be introduced and developed once the format and structure is established. As the format is established you can look to introduce the complexity and contentious nature of topics debated, obviously appropriate for the age and ability level of your group.

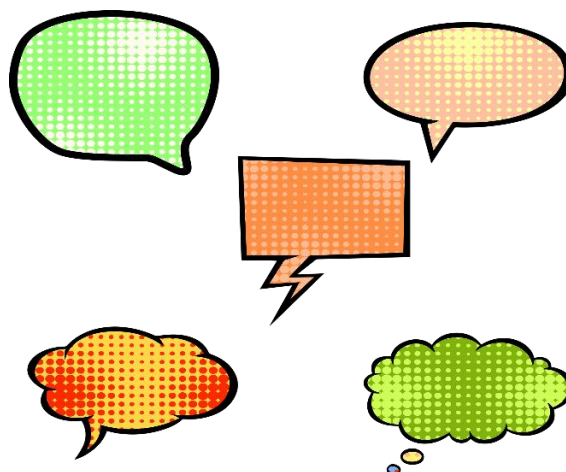
Once the structure is established and skills are developing you may choose to introduce a competitive element into your debate club. This can be very motivating for pupils and can increase focus and drive for development. Once a competitive element is established within school you may wish to look into how your school could become involved in inter school debates and national competition. This level of debate will be particularly motivating for older and more able pupils, it will raise the profile of the school, and provide pupils with excellent evidence for university applications.



Possible Topics for Debate:

- Should we have any junk food, like chips or chocolate, in our schools?
- Should we still have a monarchy?
- If a child gets into trouble, should their parent be punished as well?
- Should celebrities get harsher punishments than ordinary people?
- Men's sport should get more time on TV than women's sport.
- Should children have to do chores to earn pocket money?
- No one in a company should earn more than 20 times what other people in the company earn.
- No one should have cosmetic surgery unless they need it.
- All zoos should be banned.
- We should ban violent computer games.
- Children should strike for climate change.
- Children should choose what they study in school.
- It is bad to be famous.
- Teachers should not pupils who they vote for.
- International adoption should be banned.
- Surrogacy should be banned.
- Animal testing cannot be justified.
- Childhood obesity is due to bad parenting.
- University should be free for everyone.
- Home education is bad for kids.
- Pupils from lower income families should have lower grades to get into university.
- Religious schools should be abolished.
- Britain leaving the EU was a bad idea.
- Freedom of speech in society is important.
- Juries are the best way of deciding court cases.
- The UK should have open borders.
- 16 years olds should be allowed to vote.
- Voting should be compulsory.
- There should be IQ tests to decide who can vote.
- The UK should get rid of its nuclear weapons.
- All jobs should have 50/50 men and women.
- Animals deserve the same rights as humans.
- The sale of fur should be banned.

- Reality TV is harming society.
- Space exploration is a waste of time.
- Abortion should be against the law.
- Social media is responsible for poor teen mental health.
- Private schools should be abolished.
- The death penalty is justified for some crimes.
- Euthanasia should be legalised.
- Recreational drugs should be legalised.
- A minimum wage is essential.
- Tourism is bad for the environment.
- Everyone should be vegetarian.
- All farms should be organic.
- Democracy is the best form of government.
- Gay couples should be allowed to adopt children.
- Children should decide their own gender.
- Vaccination should be compulsory.
- Healthcare should be free to everyone at the point of use.
- Children should read more books.
- Healthy people should have their taxes increased.
- It is good to live together before you get married.
- Parents being married is good for children.
- Family is the most important thing.
- Men are stronger than women.
- Women are kinder than men.
- Women should look after children.
- Men should talk about their emotions more.



Skill Development Areas and Teaching Points for Debate:

Debate:

Use the Power of Three

State the 3 points you are going to make (Do not have more than 3).

- Introduce first point: Amplify and expand.
- Repeat for point 2.
- Repeat for point 3.
- Remind everyone of three points.

Identify the Big Ideas

Most issues will have a central underlying principle which is at the heart of the debate. Often it is that two principles 'clash' and the debate hinges on the quality of the argument and the weight given towards one fundamental principle. Identify 'The Clash' or the central principle before you start, establish what is the central point of the disagreement, do not get distracted by marginal issues, refer to it repeatedly, and in your summary, it is your central point.

Examples of frequent 'big ideas' or underlying principles:

- Freedom vs security.
- Individual freedom vs the common good.
- Individual freedom vs government control.
- Free markets vs governed markets.
- Rights vs responsibilities.
- Absolute values vs relative values.



Use Illustrative Examples

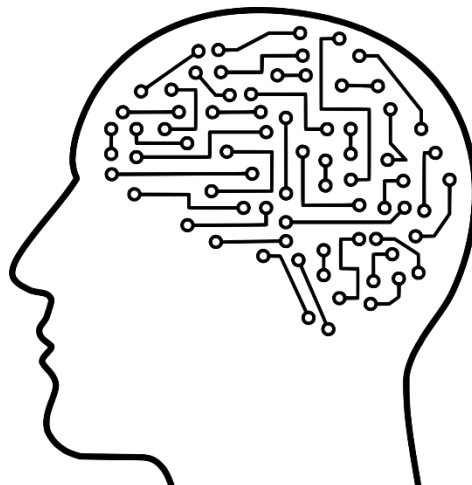
- Try and pick examples or analogies that you think are appropriate, relevant, and impactful for your audience. An example which may impact on them will be more powerful, or one which has impacted on people or a community close to them, individual stories can be more powerful than statistics, examples which create a strong narrative and visual image are powerful influencers.
- Use illustrative examples as an introduction to focus attention on the importance of the issue and in closing so that people are left with string emotions from your argument.

Use Soundbites

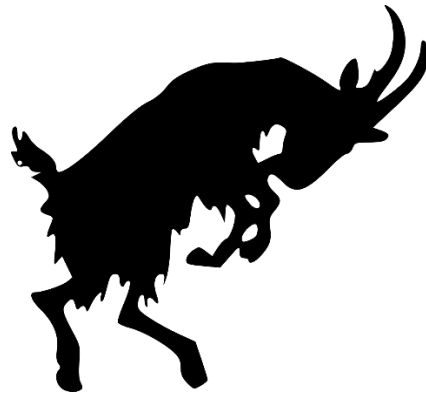
- Soundbites are short phrases which convey a message in a direct and attention-grabbing way. If you can identify a soundbite which summaries your central point use it repeatedly to embed your point into the minds of those listening.

Logical Reasoning

- Consider the various reasons and the facts and data around this for your position. E.g. what are the advantage or disadvantages, what are the costs, efficiency, other practicalities, who is affected, what are the principles, how does it impact other factors, is this the best time etc.
- Decide which are the factors most central to your argument, which will have the most impact on your audience, which are linked to the 'big idea', which have the best examples you can use. Select 3 points, find facts and data to support these.



Planning Your Rebuttal



During a debate, rebuttal is the name given to the responses by each team to their opponent's arguments. It is an opportunity to listen carefully and plan a response.

Questions to think about when planning your rebuttal:

Does their argument make practical sense and can it be attacked for its impracticality? (Is it too expensive, infeasible, unpopular etc.)

Even if your opponents have *tried* to prove their arguments, it is still often really effective to argue against these attempted proofs.

- **Have they proved the premises of their case?** (e.g. if they want to solve a problem have, they proved that the problem exists, if they want to protect animal rights have they shown that animals have rights to start with etc.)
- **Have they proved that their case will achieve what they want it to?** (e.g. if they are worried about global warming, have they shown that their plan of congestion charging will help?)
- **Have they established all of their logical links?** (e.g. if they are for censoring rap because of gun crime, have they proved a link between rap and gun crime? If they want healthy eating in schools to combat obesity have they shown the link between the two?)
- **Can I attack their individual arguments** – benefits, principles, advantages etc? Or do I need to show that they are irrelevant/insignificant etc?
- **Can I attack their examples?** (Either by showing that they are factually wrong or by showing that they do not support the argument)
- **Have they contradicted themselves or anyone else on their side?**
- **Have they changed the case either by making it more or less extreme than it was to start with?**

We have developed our guide from a variety of sources and adapted elements to fit with our aims and charter.

Below are organisations which promote debate and speech in schools and classrooms, which may be useful for further information and guidance for development and which supported the development of this guidance.

- <https://outspokenela.files.wordpress.com/2017/02/the-oxford-union-guide-to-schools-debating-copy.pdf>
- <https://www.esu.org/resources/>
- <https://noisyclassroom.com/debate-clubs/>
- <https://debatingmatters.com/what-to-set-up-a-program-for-debate/>
- <https://www.debatingforeveryone.com/2019/09/how-to-set-up-debating-club-in-your.html>

Enjoy Debating!



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