

Course Topic: Teaching Speaking**Course Instructor:**

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Course Synopsis:

Debating, a formal process to follow to argue a point or position, is an effective communication task to include in speaking classes in order to give students the opportunity to work on key speaking skills. These skills include offering opinion, agreeing, disagreeing and persuading. In this session, we look at how to use debates in our speaking classes to fully exploit student experiential learning.

Course Agenda:

1. What is a Debate?
2. Debating in the Language Classroom
3. Debate Logistics, Structure and Content
4. Language for Debating
5. Debating Activities

1. What is a Debate?

An argument is a disagreement which is unplanned, informal, and more emotional.

An argument can also be a statement or fact supporting a position.

A debate is a planned, structured, formal argument involving two opposing viewpoints, an affirmative and negative side of a proposition.¹ The two sides take turns speaking on the issue under discussion, presenting their supporting points and rebutting their opposition's points. A few other characteristics of a debate are:

- Participants are on a team and cannot contradict what their team members say
- Each person on the team is given a specific amount of time to speak
- The subject of the debate is decided beforehand so that each team can plan what they will say

2. Debating in the Language Classroom

While formal debates typically only take place in a classroom, competition or formal setting, introducing debates and debating skills into the language classroom is beneficial. Most English-speaking countries have individualistic cultures, in which the ability to argue objectively and express and support a position is valued. Further, debating skills give students the opportunity to learn:

- How to build a logical and structured argument
- How to rebut an argument
- Formal phrases for expressing opinion
- How to use facial expression, eye contact, body language and gestures to be persuasive
- How to use speaking speed, volume, word stress and intonation to be persuasive

3. Debate Logistics, Structure and Content

Debates vary in terms of length, how many participants are involved, and how long each participant speaks. One possible format, which involves four participants per team, is outlined below.²

Time	Team A		Team B	Time
1 min	Debater #1 introduces position		Debater #1 introduces position	1 min
2 min	Debater #2 argues position		Debater #2 argues position	2 min
2 min	Debater #3 rebuts team B's points		Debater #3 rebuts team A's points	2 min
1 min	Debater #4 offers concluding remarks		Debater #4 offers concluding remarks	1 min

Besides debate team members, you require a moderator, a timekeeper and one or more judges. Teams will have to develop two sets of content for a formal debate—their argument and their rebuttal.

¹ www.dictionary.com

² From Lance Appleford. 2005. *The Great Debate*. Workshop, Pusan, Korea.

The **argument stage** starts with an introduction that outlines the main points the team will be making. Next, team members will make different key points supported by details.

Language that students use in delivering their argument includes:

- Sequence markers (First..., Second..., Third..., Then..., Finally...)
- Opinion markers (It is our position that..., We believe that..., We favour... argument...)
- Cause and effect connectors (Therefore..., Because..., Thus...)

In the **rebuttal stage**, teams can argue that their opponent’s position and key points are factually, morally or logically flawed. Language that students use in rebutting their opponent’s position includes:

- Sequence markers (First..., Second..., Third...)
- Perspective markers (From a factual perspective..., Morally speaking..., If we look at the logic....)
- Phrases of disagreement (I have to disagree with..., I question the point that...)

4. Language for Debating

<p><u>Expressing Opinion</u> I think that... I believe that... It seems to me that... It’s my feeling that... In my opinion,... If you ask me,... From my point of view, I... I feel that... I’m convinced/sure/positive... I think/believe/feel... I tend to think... I’m inclined to feel...</p>	<p><u>Agreeing</u> I agree and... Yes... Of course, and... Absolutely... You’re right... You are absolutely right. I agree with you. I think so too. That’s a good point. That’s right. / You’re right. I feel the same way. That’s exactly how I feel. That’s just what I was thinking.</p>	<p><u>Disagreeing</u> I don’t agree with that statement... I disagree. Have you thought about... instead? Or... And if you consider... I agree with you, but I also think that... I see what you mean, but... You have a point, but... That may be true, but... Maybe, but don’t you think that...? I’m afraid I disagree with you. I’m sorry, but I can’t agree with you.</p>
<p><u>Sequence Markers</u> First... Second... Third... Fourth... Next... Then... Finally...</p>	<p><u>Paraphrasing</u> If I hear what you are saying... If I understand you correctly... So what you are saying is that... So basically... What you mean is... Let me repeat what you said...</p>	<p><u>Summarizing</u> To summarize... Let me restate the main ideas... Here are the key points...</p>

5. Debating Activities

Formal debates do not work with every class. They work best with classes at an intermediate level or higher and for fairly focused and motivated students. If your class does not fit this profile, do not discard the idea of debates altogether. There are many different activities based upon debating that you can do with your students in order to build their debating skills. These can be used on their own, or as a build-up to a formal debate. Here are some possible activities:

Argument Brainstorming

Objective: To brainstorm points to support an argument or position.

Time	Procedure
15-20 min	The teacher writes a controversial statement on the board. Students are divided into groups of four. Each group is assigned a position (agree or disagree). They have ten minutes to brainstorm as many points as possible to support their position. They write their ideas on chart paper. The teacher should direct them to support their position with basic logic, worked examples, statistics, and quotes. After ten minutes, each group switches with a group supporting the opposite position and add additional points to the chart paper they have just acquired.

Rebuttal Practice

Objective: To practice using phrases that are typically used to rebut an argument.

Time	Procedure
5 min	The teacher elicits phrases that are typically used to start a rebuttal sentence, such as “While I understand your point of view....”, “That may be true, however....” “I have to disagree...” and so on.
10-20 min	The teacher puts a controversial but fun statement on the board. Students are divided into groups of 6. They stand in a circle. One student starts with a statement supporting the statement on the board. That student points to another student who then has to rebut the argument, using one of the statements generated in the first stage of the activity. This continues for about 5 minutes. The teacher changes the statement on the board and students continue with the activity. The teacher can change the statement as many times as they want. To make the activity more fun, instead of pointing, have students throw a ball or other light object to select the next student to rebut the argument.

Mini Pair Debates

Objective: To build student fluency in constructing and rebutting an argument.

Time	Procedure
15-20	The teacher writes a controversial statement on the board. Students work in pairs. One partner is assigned to agree with the statement and one to disagree. Students <u>must</u> argue

min	the position they are assigned. Partners take turns arguing their position and rebutting their partner's position. They debate for approximately five minutes. The teacher calls "time" and writes another statement on the board. And the process gets repeated. Note that not all of the topics need to be serious. For example, the students can debate "Dogs are better pets than cats". As another variation, have students argue with a large distance between themselves and their partner. This will force them to speak more clearly.
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Thanks for participating!

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