

# Debating For All – teaching ideas for students aged 11-18

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Debating can help students of all ages to develop a number of important skills. These include the ability to work as a team, to reason logically, to understand both sides of an argument, and to speak engagingly and convincingly. Debating is particularly relevant to Thinking Skills and to the Key Skill of Communication.

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## Taking it further

CEWC-Cymru offers a range of opportunities for schools that wish to get involved in debating. These include:

- The **Wales Schools Debating Championships**, an annual competition open to every school and college. 5 individuals are selected from the competition to represent Wales at the World Schools Debating Championships each year.
- **Debate Training Days** preceding the Championships, which include demonstration debates and practical workshops.
- **Debating workshops** in which staff visit your school and work directly with students. This service is free to member schools.
- **In-service training** on debating (some courses are delivered in conjunction with the Wales Debating Federation).
- A **Debating Handbook**, with guidance on good debating, on judging debates and on setting up a school debating society.

For further information, visit [www.cewc-cymru.org.uk](http://www.cewc-cymru.org.uk) or e-mail [cewc@wcia.org.uk](mailto:cewc@wcia.org.uk).

## Useful websites

<a href="http://www.idebate.org/debatabase">www.idebate.org/debatabase</a>	Information about many debating topics
<a href="http://www.walesdebate.org.uk">www.walesdebate.org.uk</a>	Wales Debating Federation: voluntary organisation that promotes debating at both school and university level
<a href="http://www.britishdebate.com">www.britishdebate.com</a>	Information from the English-Speaking Union
<a href="http://www.schoolsdebate.com">www.schoolsdebate.com</a>	World Schools Debating Championships
<a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk">news.bbc.co.uk</a>	Recommended as a source of facts and figures to improve students' speeches
<a href="http://debate.uvm.edu">debate.uvm.edu</a>	Portal to many useful debating websites

## Curriculum links

Debating can help support many aspects of the school curriculum, including speaking and listening aspects of subjects such as Welsh, English, Geography, History and Science. It can also assist colleagues delivering the following:

### Key Skills

Developing the skills of Communication, Working With Others and Problem Solving.

### Personal and Social Education

*Skills* Listening and responding appropriately; communicating confidently their feelings and views; working both independently and co-operatively  
*Knowledge* Social Aspect: recognise expressions of prejudice and stereotyping  
Community Aspect: developing global awareness of contemporary issues  
Moral Aspect: identify a set of values and principles by which to live  
Learning Aspect: manage time and organise themselves effectively

### Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship

*Concepts* Recognising the importance of individual responsibility; acknowledging a range of possible approaches to global citizenship issues

### Welsh Baccalaureate

Wales, Europe and the World theme: understanding political/social issues

## Debating glossary

<b>Adjudicator</b>	Someone who judges a debate using categories such as Style, Content and Strategy. Not all debates need judges, but they are required for most competitions, and it could be helpful to have students judge each other's performances.
<b>Chairperson</b>	A neutral person who sits in between the two debating teams. They have the job of welcoming the debaters, judges and audience, introducing each speaker, and ruling on Points of Order.
<b>Motion</b>	The topic to be debated, usually in the form of a statement (see "This House").
<b>Point of Information</b>	A chance for a debater to interrupt the speaker who is currently speaking, usually by standing and stating "On a point of information". The speaker can choose to accept or reject the point before it is made.
<b>Point of Order</b>	If you think your opponent has broken the rules of the debate, you should state "Point of Order" and explain why. The Chairperson will decide whether the rules have indeed been broken.
<b>Proposition/Opposition</b>	The Proposition is the team defending the motion; the Opposition's job is to prove the motion wrong.
<b>"This House"</b>	The words usually used at the beginning of a motion, e.g. "This House would increase tax on holiday flights". The phrase derives from the British House of Commons.

## Activities

The following are introductory activities which teachers can use to develop students' skills. Some ideas were provided by CEWC-Cymru, the Wales Debating Federation, the English-Speaking Union and BBC Radio 4. If you would like guidance on the rules and structure of a formal debate, contact CEWC-Cymru.

### Beginners' activities

*These activities can be used as warm-ups before a longer debating session, or when you have a few spare minutes in a lesson. They are very flexible and can be applied to any subject area.*

#### ► Agree/Disagree Line

Make a statement such as "It is sometimes OK to steal" or "It is acceptable to experiment on animals". Ask students to stand at any point along an imaginary line, where one end is "Agree" and the other "Disagree" (you may wish to stick up these words on the classroom walls). Invite students to justify where they are standing, and explain that it is OK to change your mind and move to another point along the line, if someone says something that affects your opinion.

**Note:** if it isn't possible to form a line, you could ask students to stand on different sides of the room – although this allows for fewer 'shades of grey' in the opinions expressed.

#### ► Complete the Sentence

Sit students in a circle, then announce randomly the opening words of a sentence to different students. They must complete the phrase. This will help develop their ability to think quickly.

E.g. "Sometimes politicians..."  
"Clean water is important because..."  
"Parents..."  
"I get really angry when..."  
"Dogs and cats..."  
"Children should be able to vote because..."

#### ► I Couldn't Disagree More

Everybody in the room should arrange themselves into a circle.

The teacher begins by stating an opinion on a controversial issue, and explaining the position with an argument in a single sentence, e.g.: "I think *Big Brother* is a great TV programme because it's democratic. It allows ordinary people to become famous, just by being themselves."

The second person in the circle should begin by saying "I couldn't disagree more..." and then state the opposite opinion, and explain it with an argument in a single sentence. The third person repeats this, disagreeing with the second person. This process continues until the whole circle has contributed, or until students have run out of arguments. Then the next person in the circle should think of a new issue (or be provided one by you), and explain it with a single sentence.

## Developing Arguments

*These activities focus more closely on debating techniques. Students are asked to think what constitutes an argument, and how arguments should be logically presented. The success of these activities doesn't rest on stylish presentation, but on clear reasoning.*

### ► Reasons

Pick two debate topics (use topics that are in the news, look at the list on [www.idebate.org/debatabase](http://www.idebate.org/debatabase), or ask students to suggest ideas then vote for their favourites). Divide the class into four groups, and give each a large piece of paper. Give the first topic to the first two groups, naming one group as agreeing with the motion (Proposition), the other as disagreeing (Opposition). The second topic should go to the remaining groups, again with one agreeing and one in opposition.

Initially, each group should write down all the ideas that come to mind for their side of the topic. By the end of the activity they should decide the top two reasons why their position is correct. This allows them to compare the different ways in which one might support a position. (Note: initially the groups might require quite a lot of support; you should consider the debates yourself prior to the lesson, and make a few notes as prompts to help each group.)

After 15 minutes each group should present their reasons (it isn't necessary for these to be presented as formal speeches), and the group as a whole should discuss which are the most convincing.

**Extension activity:** looking again at their list of points, each group should consider which are arguments (i.e. main reasons for supporting their side of the debate) and which are examples (i.e. facts which support those reasons).

**Alternative activity:** work as a whole class, considering one side of the debate at a time. First, brainstorm everybody's ideas and write them on the board. Then start to consider which are arguments and which are examples, and which points can be linked together to form one argument (to make this clear, you might want to label the points with different symbols). Once the class has agreed on three key arguments, write each argument on a balloon and blow it up. Then ask students to think of examples (some might already be on the board) to support each argument, and attach these to the balloons in the form of stickers. If you later debate the topic formally, vote at the end on which arguments have been defeated, and pop those balloons.

### ► Balloon Debate

*Note: this activity can either be done in detail, following research by the students, or it can be done as a short, impromptu fun activity in which they 'think on their feet'.*

Five or more people should be chosen to take part in the debate, each one then choosing (or being given by you) a famous or historical person to "impersonate", i.e. to explain and defend themselves.

Standing or sitting together in the room, ask the five to imagine that they are in a sinking hot air balloon. To save the others, one of the characters must be thrown overboard.

Each character should give a speech of no more than two minutes, arguing why they should stay safely in the balloon: what is particularly important or endearing about their character? After all have spoken, the audience votes and the losing character is disqualified. You may carry on eliminating one character at a time, on the basis of further brief speeches from each person, until there is a single 'survivor'.

**Extension activity:** see CEWC-Cymru's *Skills for Democracy* resource (accessible via [www.cewc-cymru.org.uk](http://www.cewc-cymru.org.uk)), which includes a further 'character' based debate, this time on the issue of Fairtrade.

### ► Make your arguments REAL

When developing arguments, encourage students to use the **REAL** structure: give a **R** Reason; provide an **E** Example that supports it; provide some **A** Analysis (more detailed argument) and **L**ink back to the motion. The following example provides one argument for the motion "This House supports the construction of new nuclear power stations in the UK":

**R Reason** Nuclear power reduces our reliance on polluting fossil fuels.

**E Example** Finland recently began construction of new nuclear power stations, and believes this will enable it significantly to reduce carbon emissions from fossil fuels.

**A Analysis** The UK recognises that it has a duty to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and one of the best ways of achieving this is to readdress the way that we produce electricity for industry and homes. In fact, it would be completely inconsistent for the government to say that it is committed to fighting climate change, while at the same time continuing to rely on outdated fossil fuel technology which contributes heavily to our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

**Link** The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, therefore, is one reason to support the construction of new nuclear power stations.

**Note:** depending on the length of speeches you require, debaters might need to provide further examples or more detailed analysis. The REAL structure can also be helpful when writing essays or opinion pieces for English, History and other subjects.

## Speaking Up

*Activities to help students feel more confident in standing up and speaking, and to develop aspects of style.*

### ► Just A Minute

*Stopwatch and timekeeper required, plus bell or whistle.*

Choose four competitors, or use the whole class for a slightly more chaotic session.

The aim is to speak on a given topic for a full minute **without repeating words** (except the words of the topic itself, or very common words such as "the" or "and"), **without hesitating** (including "um...") and **without going off the topic**.

You should announce the topic. This can be a word or phrase of any sort, e.g. *bananas, why the world is round, over the top, the greatest story I've ever heard*.

As the first speaker begins the stopwatch will start. If the speaker repeats a word, hesitates or talks about something other than the topic, then they can be challenged by the other competitors.

To challenge, another competitor should raise their hand. When they do so the stopwatch is stopped, and you should ask them to explain their interruption. If everybody in the audience seems to agree with the challenge, then the challenger should take over from the speaker and the stopwatch will start again (with only the remaining time to be allocated). At the end of the minute, the timekeeper should ring a bell or blow a whistle.

Every correct challenge gets a point for the challenger; every incorrect challenge gets a point for the speaker. The student speaking at the end of one minute will also get a point.

The winner is the competitor with the most points after four topics.

### ► **Make It Sound Good / Make It Sound Bad**

This activity helps students focus on using persuasive language.

**Quick version:** Ask for two volunteers to come to the front of the class. Give them a neutral statement, such as “The elephant is the largest land mammal”, “We are at war”, “It is night-time”, or “There will soon be a new Prime Minister”. Asking the two students to choose their words carefully, ask one to rephrase this to make it sound good, and one to rephrase it to make it sound bad.

**Longer version:** Write a number of phrases on the board or provide them on a handout. Ask students to work in small groups to make the phrases sound good or bad, then get them to share their work with the rest of the class.

### ► **Points of Style**

Brainstorm the things that people need to do when speaking in order to persuade their audience effectively. If students omit to mention some points, model the wrong behaviour (e.g. speak very quietly, or very loudly) as prompts.

The list might include:

- Speak loudly but don't shout
- Speak clearly and at a reasonable pace
- Use inflection in your voice, and variations in pace and tone, to suit the mood of particular points
- Use your notes as discreetly as possible, referring to them only when required
- Sound confident, and as if you're enjoying yourself
- Maintain eye contact with the audience
- Use interesting, varied language and humour where appropriate
- Adopt a confident but relaxed stance
- Use occasional hand or body gestures

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**DEBATE** *Wales* **2006**  
WORLD SCHOOLS DEBATING CHAMPIONSHIPS

This material is published by the Welsh Centre for International Affairs, as a consequence of its hosting the World Schools Debating Championships in July 2006. The tournament attracted participants from 36 nations, including new competitors Lesotho, Montenegro and Botswana. 159 debates were staged at 26 schools, Cardiff University, the Millennium Stadium, Caerphilly Castle, Llandaff Cathedral and City Hall, Cardiff. The winning team was Australia.

The event's main supporter, and sponsor of these materials, was the Welsh Assembly Government.