

In the Classroom

Introduction to Debate for EFL Students: A 9-Week Course Syllabus

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Learner English Level: Intermediate and above

Learner maturity Level: Senior high school and above

Preparation Time: 10 to 30 minutes (varies by lesson/week)

Activity Time: 50 to 90 minutes per week, nine weeks

Materials: Handouts, worksheets, video clip, Internet access

Recently, many high schools have begun to offer "debate" classes as part of their English oral communications curriculum, but rarely provide the instructor with the curriculum or syllabus needed to teach such a class to English as a foreign language (EFL) students. This 9-week course provides students with the basic introductory tools to research topics so that they have evidence to build an argument and refute an argument in a simplified 10 minute, 6-team debate format. This multiple skill-building syllabus ensures that the students will be able to perform a debate at the end of 9 weeks while providing inexperienced debate teachers with methods and techniques that will make the process effective and enjoyable.

Preparation & Procedures

Week 1: Print *Debate Class 1* worksheet (Appendix A)* for the class. Use the worksheet as a guided practice to give and share opinions, identify key components of webpages for citing references, and paraphrase information to avoid plagiarism.

Week 2: Print *Debate Class 2* worksheet (Appendix B) for the class. Use the worksheet as a guided practice to give and share opinions, identify key components of webpages for citing references, and paraphrase information to avoid plagiarism. (*Note: Internet access is needed to complete this worksheet.*)

Week 3: Watch the video *STeP Structure of Debate* (<https://youtu.be/juuiZPQIZWk>) in class or assign as homework at the end of Week 2. This video will give a visual example of how the debate is structured. Print *Debate Class 3* worksheet (Appendix C) for the class. Use the worksheet as a guided practice to review the debate format the students will perform. Put into groups of 4 (2 pro and 2 con). Have students practice reading the script for debate training.

Week 4: Print *Debate Class 4* worksheets Pro and Con (Appendix D). Separate the entire class into two groups, Pros and Cons. In respective groups, put students into pairs, Speaker 1 and 2. If possible, keep Pros and Cons out of earshot from each other so that they cannot hear the opposing sides. Use the worksheet as a guided practice to build arguments for their position and predict and anticipate arguments from the opposing teams. Reunite the sides by taking one pair from Pro and one pair from Con. Repeating the script reading exercise from Week 3, have students read their arguments and listen to the opposing team and take notes.

Optional Activity: Print *Debate Topic Survey* handout (Appendix E). Allow students to vote on school-related debate topics that they would enjoy debating. Collect survey sheets at the end of class and tally results.

Week 5: Print *Debate Class 5* worksheet (Appendix F). Put students into groups of 6. Randomly distribute debate topics selected by students from Week 5 to each group. Groups decide Pro & Con speakers as well as speaking order. Use the worksheet as a guided practice to review the debate structure as well as practicing refutation, rebuttal, and closing statements.

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Week 6 & 7: Students work in their 3-member teams to research, write, and practice their side of the debate. Groups should remain separated from the opposing sides. Emphasis should be given to timing (1 minute per speaker) and delivery (eye contact, intonation and inflection, and gestures). Print *Debate Rubric* handout (Appendix G) for the class. Review scoring criteria. The students may use the rubric as pre-debate self-evaluation to ensure that they have met all of the requirements.

Week 8 & 9: Students perform their final debate in class. If possible, the instructor should be responsible for the evaluation while another teacher, staff member, or student is responsible for time keeping.

Optional Activity: Print double-sided *Debate Rubric* handout (Appendix G). During the debate, the remaining teams in the audience watch, listen, and evaluate the debate performances. Students vote for the “winner” based on content, argument, and delivery. The instructor collects the evaluation sheets and tallies the score. Winners are announced after all the debates have been performed. Evaluation sheets may be given to the teams and used as feedback and a wrap-up to the course.

Conclusion

This is a nine-week syllabus that may be completed over the course of one academic term that incorporates the following objectives:

Students will be able to:

1. conduct basic research skills in English to investigate debate topics.
2. discern information between advantages (pros) and disadvantages (cons).
3. provide evidence to support their position and refute arguments from the opposing side.
4. develop critical thinking and analytical skills.
5. paraphrase passages from websites and online resources and cite them to avoid plagiarism.

Finally, this syllabus will provide inexperienced debate teachers with methods and techniques that will make the process manageable and effective.

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Cynthia Gonzalez is an 18-year veteran second and foreign language teacher. She has taught ESL in California and EFL in Japan in a variety of educational settings. She holds a Master of Science degree in Education with an emphasis in TESOL from Temple University, Japan. Her specialties include debate, critical thinking, persuasive writing, and public speaking. Currently, her area of research is in investigating the variables that affect willingness to communicate in EFL learners and the effects and benefits of positive affirmations in the EFL classroom.



* Appendices may be downloaded on our website at

<https://sites.google.com/site/speechdramaanddebatepublicsite/home/mask-gavel-archives>