

Clause: Building Fluency through Repeated Listening of Movie Scenes

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Written Debate: Arguing on Paper

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Quick Guide

Keywords: Writing, debate, competition, grammar

Learner English level: Low intermediate and above

Learner maturity: High school and above

Preparation time: 5 minutes

Activity time: 15-45 minutes

Materials: Paper, writing utensils, a timer (a timer that all can see is ideal, but if students can't view the timer that's not a problem)

Nothing like a bit of competition to motivate students. This activity injects the competitive spirit of debate into writing. Teams of students write arguments about a topic and then swap them with opposing teams. Teams get point if they find grammar or syntax mistakes in the other team's writing. They then attempt to write a refutation. Papers get swapped and the process is repeated. Each stage is timed and points given. There is minimal preparation and set-up, so this activity can

be used on the spur-of-the-moment. It is particularly useful for adding a bit of energy to a writing class and can be adjusted to suit various levels.

Preparation

Step 1: Prepare possible topics. Topics that allow teams to be divided into groups “for” and “against” are best. For example, *Japan should restart its nuclear power plants*, or *J-Pop is better than K-Pop*. These topics can then be written on pieces of paper or put on the board. For the ultra-minimal prep version, the topics can simply be dictated to the teams.

Step 2: Bring enough paper for each team of 2-3 students to have one or two pieces. Alternatively, handouts can be made with ruled sections for students to write arguments and counterarguments with a box for awarding points adjacent to each section.

Step 3: Teams will write in different colors. Most students will have different colored pens, but in case they don't, the instructor may wish to have some to give out.

Procedure

Step 1: Divide the class into teams of 2-4 students. In larger classes where the instructor cannot monitor all of the groups, assign one student as the “judge” for each pair of teams.

Step 2: Pass out one or two pieces of paper to each team.

Step 3: Assign a topic to each pair of teams. (All pairs of teams can use the same topic or a different topic can be given to each pair.)

Step 4: *Argument Phase* - Teams are given 2-3 minutes to write their first arguments either supporting or opposing the debate topic. (Each team writes in their team color throughout the debate. The time and number of sentences can be adjusted to match students' levels)

Step 5: *Correction Phase* - Teams then swap papers and the correction phase begins. Teams are given 1-2 minutes to find any grammar or syntax errors. Teams get 1 point for each mistake they

find, and 1 point for each mistake they correct. The teacher or judge checks these and assigns points.

Step 6: Refutation Phase – Once correction phase points have been awarded, the refutation phase begins. Teams get 2-3 minutes to write a refutation against the other team’s argument.

Step 7: Refutation Points Phase – At the end of the Refutation Phase, the teacher or judge reads the refutations and awards 0-3 points depending on the strength of the argument.

Step 8: Repeat steps 5-7. Students continue to correct the refutations and write counter arguments, with points being given at each stage, until the teacher decides to end that “round” of the debate.

Step 9: Points are tallied and winners decided. The process can then be repeated with another topic.

Conclusion

Students tend to participate eagerly in the debates thanks to the timed phases and point system. It is relatively quick moving and active for a writing activity. Writing as a team allows for cooperation and teambuilding. Students are surprisingly enthusiastic when trying to find errors. With error recognition being a laborious, frustrating activity for most students, this is a refreshing change of pace.

Philip Norton has over 15-years EFL teaching experience at Japanese universities. He has published two poetry collections, co-edited *Short Fuse: A Global Anthology of New Fusion Poetry* (Rattapalax, 2002), and released numerous spoken-word and music tracks. He received two Australian national poetry awards and is working on a new collection.

