

Debates

Note: It is the responsibility of the 2 teams debating to select or create a proposition that has relevance for the particular audience you are addressing. You need to establish kairos explicitly. Each topic can only be debated once. Some text-related topics are listed under particular debates. But if you are doing, say, Debate 4, and you really like the topic for Debate 3, and if that topic were not debated earlier, you can debate it in Debate #4. But those in an earlier debate cannot poach a topic from a later debate (e.g., those doing Debate #3 cannot do a topic listed fro Debate #5) without prior written permission from those in Debate #5 (a permission cc-ed to me).

Date Due:

- **Debate # 1**, SES #9
 - **The proposition:** “Using Martin Luther King’s definitions in “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” it is clear that unjust laws still exist in 2010 America and that each of us has practical and moral obligations to actively oppose those unjust laws.”
 - Your own topic

- **Debate # 2**, SES #11
 - **The proposition:** Although it may sound selfish, Hardin is right when, in “Lifeboat Ethics,” he says that, “For the foreseeable future, our survival demands that we govern our actions by the ethics of a lifeboat, harsh though they may be.”
 - The proposition: Singer’s “Famine” essay is correct: “If it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it.”
 - Your own topic

- **Debate # 3**, SES #13
 - **The proposition:** We have a moral obligation to free the child in LeGuin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” regardless of the consequences to everyone’s happiness.”
 - The proposition: For both practical and ethical reasons, we have to take personal responsibility for the results of our actions.
 - Your own topic

- **Debate # 4**, SES #14
 - **The proposition:** For both practical and moral reasons, we should avoid using rhetoric because it is an immoral activity that ends up in manipulation and deception.
 - The proposition: For both practical and moral reasons, we should use rhetoric because it distributes power among many people and hence performs a practical and moral good.

- Your own topic
- **Debate # 5**, SES #16
 - **The proposition:** For both practical and moral reasons, satire is a dangerous genre and should be avoided by both writers and readers.
 - Your own topic

Process

- For the debate, you will work in teams of two—one team will argue the Affirmative and one will argue the Negative. Like good sophists, you do not have to believe the case you are argue — you only have to argue it convincingly.
- The debates follow a Strangian format—its purpose is to give each speaker 1 occasion for a relatively prepared speech and 1 occasion for thinking on his/her feet

Structure of the Debate (50-60 minutes)

1st Round (Opening Cases)

- 1st Affirmative (AFF) speaker (5 minutes):
 - Read the proposition
 - Define its key terms
 - Establish kairos for this particular audience (why should we, members of this particular 21W.747 class, care about this topic at this particular time)
 - Forecast your main reasons for supporting the proposition
 - Develop 1 or 2 of your main reasons (give evidence, state ethical principles you are invoking etc.)
 - Give your conclusion for your part (indicating that your partner will pursue these and other points further)
- 1st Negative speaker (5 minutes)
 - State your position
 - Agree with the terms as defined or disagree
 - If you disagree, you need to offer alternate definitions and justify using them instead of those offered by the AFF
 - Agree or disagree with the kairos offered by the AFF
 - Forecast your main reasons for supporting your position
 - Develop 1 or 2 main reasons (give evidence, state ethical principles you are invoking etc.)
 - Give your conclusion for your part indicating that your partner will pursue these and other points further)

3-minute pause for (1) audience to take notes, make an initial judgment about which case is stronger, etc. and for (2) speakers to prepare their rebuttals

2nd Round (Development)

- 2nd AFF speaker (5 minutes)
 - Reaffirm AFF position and the concepts that were attacked by the NEG
 - Indicate the points-at-issue (stasis) based on what NEG has said
 - If necessary, show why NEG is misguided about what points are really at issue
 - Refute or concede the 1st NEG's key points
 - Develop new arguments for the AFF
 - Cannot modify or change the original Affirmative position

- 2nd NEG speaker (5 minutes)
 - Agree or disagree about 2nd AFF's explanation of the points-at-issue
 - Pursue argumentation, defend or expand the Negative's case
 - Refute or concede the 2nd AFF's key points
 - Offer more support for the 1st NEG speaker's points
 - Add new arguments against AFF's position and for NEG position

5 minutes—*questions and comments from audience to debaters*

5 minutes -- *team members to consult and for audience to go over their notes and decide which debate points the teams should be addressing and how they should address them*

3rd Round (Rebuttals)

- 1st AFF speaker (5 minutes)
 - Point out and attack any inconsistencies between the speeches of the 1st and 2nd NEG speakers
 - Systematically concedes or refutes the NEG points and case
 - Show how key AFF points undermine support of the NEG's position
 - Reaffirm several reasons to reject the NEG's position
 - Paint the “big picture”

- 1st NEG speaker (5 minutes)
 - Point out and attack any inconsistencies between the speeches of the 1st and 2nd AFF speakers
 - Systematically concedes or refutes the AFF points and case

- Shows how key NEG points undermine support of the AFF's position
- Illustrates the significant dimension of each issue from the constructive speeches in qualitative or quantitative terms

4th Round (Closings)

- 2nd AFF speaker (5 minutes)
 - Summarize the AFF case
 - Address any points raised by the audience that you feel need answering
 - Remind judges (the class) of the weaknesses in the NEG case
 - Answer any left-over points by the NEG (either points for NEG case or attacks on AFF) that have not been effectively dealt with.
 - Reaffirm several reasons to reject the AFF's position
 - Paint the "big picture"
 - End by saying "That concludes the case for the Affirmative. Thank you."
- 2nd NEG speaker (5 minutes)
 - Summarize the NEG case
 - Address any points raised by the audience that you feel need answering
 - Remind judges (the class) of the weaknesses in the AFF case
 - Answer any left-over points by the AFF (either points for AFF case or attacks on NEG) that have not been effectively dealt with.
 - Reaffirm several reasons to reject the AFF's position
 - Paint the "big picture"
 - End by saying "That concludes the case for the Negative. Thank you."

Audience (Judges)

- We applaud only at the end of the whole debate.

Elements of the debate

These are primarily values debates, not policy debates. You should use the language of ethical analysis (obligations, ideals, consequences) and argue that a particular ethical theory/theories is the most appropriate to apply to this particular proposition as you defend your position and attack the opposition's.

Definitions: define any key terms--e.g., if the topic proposal were "Jack should not trade the cow for the seeds that end up growing the beanstalk that leads to the giant's castle," one key term would be *should not* (and you might say "the term *should not* means is *morally obligated not to* and the ethical system being invoked is virtue ethics because...").

Moral principle(s), social values and personal virtues: State explicitly the principles and values you will be using to justify your position and then explain explicitly how they apply:

- Social values include
 - Democracy
 - Security
 - Human Rights
 - Competitiveness
 - Stability
 - Justice
 - Equality
 - Self-reliance
 - Social Responsibility (e.g., help others)
 - The Common Good
 - Globalism
 - Freedom
 - Obligations
 - Ideals (e.g., mercy, compassion, honesty)
- Personal virtues include
 - Prudence (practical wisdom)
 - Justice (includes fairness, honesty, keeping promises)
 - Fortitude (courage to pursue the right path despite great risks)
 - Temperance (self-discipline, the control of human passions and sensual pleasures, moderation in anger, food, drink, sex, etc.)
 - Loyalty
 - Obedience to God and/or country and/or some ethical code
 - Faith
 - Hope
 - Charity
 - Humility
 - Compassion
 - Self-reliance

Successful speakers will address the specific questions and points, stay on topic, respond thoughtfully and well to their opponents' points, show flexibility in adapting their points to answer their opponents, display poise and knowledge, and be effective presenters (e.g., good eye contact, gestures for emphasis, good voice projection).

Unsuccessful speakers will simply give their points as though they were stand-alone speeches instead of part of a dialogue with the other team and will not be effective presenters.

Your Tasks

1. Get together well ahead of time to decide what topic you will debate.
2. It's probably a good idea for the 2 teams to meet with me as soon as you have selected a topic to discuss it and strategy.
3. To be a good debater, you need to anticipate and prepare for possible points that the opposition will raise (as well as preparing your own case).

In other words, you need to anticipate not only the points the opposition will make for his/her case (and how you would rebut or concede them) but also the counter-arguments he/she will raise against your points (and how you will answer those).

4. For the debates, you are **sophists**—you do not have to believe the position you argue for ... you simply have to argue it well.

Often, the particular topic will be an example of a larger ethical issue. Many times, that underlying issue is this: “The ends justify the means.” In other words, if the end (goal) is good (morally, practically), then it is morally all right to use immoral means to achieve that goal. Often, connecting the particular issue to the larger issue is an effective strategy for convincing your audience.

TOPICS -- Any topic must be set up as a proposition (an assertion—not as a question—see the examples below for a model) and the topic must be controversial—a controversy is any topic about which intelligent, well-informed people of goodwill can disagree. If your team cannot agree on a topic, here are some suggestions (but coming up with an original topic is neither a plus nor a minus in terms of your grade—the point is a spirited, interesting, and well argued debate). If the suggestions don’t help, come to see me (together) and we’ll find a topic:

1. **The proposition:** “The World is not dangerous because of those who do harm but because of those who look at it without doing anything.” --Albert Einstein.
2. **The proposition:** For practical and moral reasons, political assassination is sometimes necessary.
3. **The proposition:** No action is too extreme in the defense of freedom.
4. **The proposition:** The United States is just like the Titanic.
5. **The proposition:** The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.--Lesley Poles Hartley (*The Go-Between*)
6. **The proposition:** It is better to be lucky than smart.
7. **The proposition:** Society has become too dependent on technology.
8. **The proposition:** Beauty is better than brains.
9. **The proposition:** Batman is a greater superhero than Superman.
10. **The proposition:** Achilles should refuse to go fight in the Trojan War.
 - a. Background: Achilles has learned from a completely reliable source (the gods) that he has two possible fates: (1) he can refuse to join the rest of the Greeks as they go to war with Troy, in which case he will live a long and happy life—but after he is dead, history will not remember him; or (2) he can go to Troy and win great glory that will live in history through the centuries, but he will die an early death and not know the joys of being married, having children, etc.
11. **The proposition:** In politics, the ends do justify the means—i.e., a morally good goal (end) justifies the use of methods which are morally questionable, immoral, or even illegal.

12. **The proposition:** For both practical and moral reasons, it makes sense to sacrifice individual rights for the safety of society.
13. **The proposition:** For both practical and moral reasons, voting in national elections should be compulsory.
14. **The proposition:** MIT has a moral obligation to prohibit hate speech.
15. **The proposition:** Because human life is sacred, there is never a good reason for killing another human being.
16. **The proposition:** Religious beliefs have done more harm than good.
17. **The proposition:** Inaction in the face of injustice makes an individual morally guilty.
18. **The proposition:** It is better to be a liberated pauper than a wealthy slave.
19. **The proposition:** Because free speech can lead to three undesirable things (to violations of national security, to hate speech, and to the expression of unpopular or even treasonous ideas), the Constitution should be amended to put clear limits on free speech.
20. **The proposition:** In Stephen Crane's poem that follows, the man who fears he might find a victim is the wiser of the two.

Poem # 56

A man feared that he might find an assassin;
Another that he might find a victim.
One was more wise than the other.

21. **The proposition:** If we on the island in *Lost* at the end of this season, we would not risk losing all that we had learned and felt in order to return everything to the way it was before Oceanic 815 Flight crashed. (to refresh your memories-- <http://beta.abc.go.com/shows/lost/timeline>)
22. Your own topic

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