

Debate Parameters

Your group will be assigned a debate topic. Your group's job will then be to prepare the strongest PRO and CON argument for your debate topic. (So, for example, if your topic is Designer Babies, then your group will need to come up with the strongest reasons for why we should vs. why we should not allow people to predetermine the genetic makeup of their children).

Your group's arguments for both sides must be typed up and turned in to me on the day of the debate. Please take the "both sides" thing seriously – I do not want to be able to tell, just by reading your arguments, which side your group members personally come down on. Even if at first glance you don't see the PRO or CON side, work really hard to be able to do so! There are always intelligent arguments to be had – on BOTH SIDES. If you can't see them, then you're not thinking hard enough.

Each member of the group should locate at least one relevant reading associated with the debate issue (and not a Wikipedia encyclopedia entry please!), so that as a group you can base your arguments in sound science and public discussion. You will be required to put your name at the top of the reading(s) you come up with and all of the readings should be turned in to me with the group's argument summaries.

On the day of the debate, I will assign each group to present only one side of the debate (PRO or CON) by flipping a coin. Each group will have five minutes to set up their argument for the class. Then the class will debate all presented PRO and CON arguments. Class votes will be taken after the in-class debate.

Debate Topics

1. Should an adolescent be forced to take an antidepressant drug if a psychiatrist prescribes it?
2. Which leadership style is better, Theory X or Theory Y?
3. Designer Babies: Should parents be allowed to predetermine their child's genetic makeup?
4. Should animals be used for scientific or psychological testing?
5. Should euthanasia or physician assisted suicide be legal?
6. Are social networking sites good for our society?
7. Do violent video games contribute to youth violence?

Formal Team Debate



1. **Be ready to receive a topic to get to go debate on.** One team must debate the "affirmative" stance, and the other must debate the "negative" stance. The team that agrees with the topic is called the affirmative, while the team that disagrees is called the negative.
 - o Both teams will be seated near the front of the room they are to speak in — affirmative team (Government) on the left, negative team (Opposition) on the right.
 - o The chairperson or adjudicator will start the debate, and the first speaker will present their speech. The order of the speakers is generally affirmative, negative, affirmative, negative, and so on.



2. **Define the topic, if necessary.** Debating "That the death penalty is a just and effective punishment" is probably already pretty clear, but what if you're given a topic like "That happiness is a nobler trait than wisdom?" You might need to offer a definition before you proceed.
 - o The affirmative always gets the first and best opportunity to define the topic. The first affirmative should offer the "person on the street" test:
 - How might an average person on the street define the topic? Is it reasonable to expect a "normal" person to think of the topic in a certain way?
 - o The negative team is given an opportunity to refute the definition (otherwise known as challenging the definition) and offer their own, but only if the affirmative's definition is unreasonable or it renders the negative's position obsolete. The first negative speaker must refute the affirmative's definition if s/he wishes to challenge it.



3. **Write your argument according to the designated time limit (4 minutes).** Depending on what position you argue, you must follow certain protocol such as defining the topic or presenting a main argument.
 - o Support your opinions/contentions. If you say "I think the death penalty should be abolished," be ready to prove why this is the best course of action.

- Use religion only when appropriate. Things that are written in the Bible, Torah, Quran, etc, are not usually sound resources to use to prove your argument, as not everyone takes these sources to be the truth.
- Don't use rhetorical questions. Always give a clear answer to every question you ask. Leaving a question open-ended gives your opponents' room to refute.



4. **Present your argument.** When it is your turn, go ahead and present your argument. Be passionate in your speech—a monotone voice will cause people to drift off, and they may miss the point of what you're trying to say. Speak clearly, slowly, and loudly.
- Make eye contact with whomever decides the winners of the debate. While it's okay to look at your opponents every once in a while, try to direct your argument at the judge.
 - Give a layout of your argument before you make it. That way, your audience will know what to expect and your judge won't cut you off unless you run way overtime.



5. **Strike a balance between presenting your team's point(s) and rebutting the opponents' point.** Since teams take turns debating, it's always possible to offer rebuttals unless you are the first affirmative speaker. Here is a rundown of how both teams might organize their debate strategy:
- **1st affirmative:**
 - Define the topic (optional) and present the team's main line.
 - Outline, in brief, what each affirmative speaker will talk about.
 - Present the first half of the affirmative's argument.
 - **1st negative:**
 - Accept or reject the definition (optional) and present the team's main line.
 - Outline, in brief, what each negative speaker will talk about.
 - Offer a rebuttal of a few of the points presented by the first affirmative.
 - Present the first half of the negative's argument.
 - **2nd affirmative:**
 - Reaffirm the affirmative's main line.
 - Offer a rebuttal of a few of the points presented by the first negative.
 - Present the second half of the affirmative's argument.
 - **2nd negative:**
 - Reaffirm the negative's main line.
 - Offer a rebuttal of a few of the points presented by the second affirmative.
 - Present the second half of the negative's argument.

- **3rd affirmative:**
 - Reaffirm the affirmative's main line.
 - Offer a rebuttal of any of the remaining negative's arguments.
 - Offer a summary of the affirmative's case.
 - Conclude debate for the affirmative team.
- **3rd negative:**
 - Reaffirm the negative's main line.
 - Offer a rebuttal of any of the remaining affirmative's arguments.
 - Offer a summary of the negative's case.
 - Conclude debate for the negative team.



6. **Note the three rules of rebuttal.** When rebutting a team's argument, remember three essential rules:
- Offer evidence for your rebuttal. Do not rely on vigorous assertion alone. *Show* the chairperson why the other team's argument is fundamentally flawed; don't just tell.
 - Attack the most important parts of their argument. It's not very effective if you pick bones with an obscure part of the opponent's argument. Go for the crux of their argument and pick it apart with the ruthless efficiency of a surgeon.
 - No ad hominem attacks. An ad hominem attack is when you criticize another person instead of his or her ideas. Attack the idea, not the person.



7. **Use up all your time (or most of it).** The more you talk, the more you'll convince the judge. Note that this means you should come up with many examples, not that you should ramble. The more the judge hears about why you are correct, the more inclined s/he will be to believe you.

**MATTER
MANNER
METHOD**



8. **Know what aspects of the debate you will be judged on, if appropriate.** For the most part, debates are judged on three main areas: matter, manner, and method.
- **Matter:**
 - Amount of evidence. How much evidence does the speaker marshal to support his/her claims?
 - Relevancy of evidence. How strongly does the evidence used support the argument?
 - **Manner:**
 - Eye contact. How well does the speaker engage his or her audience? Does the speaker spend too much time on his or her cue cards?
 - Voice. How well does the speaker's voice accentuate his or her argument? Does he or she offer a diversity of volume, pitch and speed to highlight important parts?
 - Body language. How well does the speaker use his or her body to emphasize arguments and communicate authority and calmness?
 - Nervous habits. How well does the speaker avoid verbal and bodily tics when he or she speaks? Does the speaker stammer, fidget, or pace?
 - Elocution. How clearly does the speaker pronounce words? Does the speaker use words, or do the words use him or her?
 - **Method:**
 - Team cohesion. How well does the entire team organize their arguments and rebuttals? How well do the individual arguments mesh together, as well as the rebuttals? How clear and consistent is the team line?
 - Individual prowess. How well does the individual stand out as he or she speaks? How clearly does he or she mark the end of one argument and the beginning of another?

Debate Evaluation Form

[Note: This form will be used by the instructor and by your classmates to evaluate your performance during the debate. Copies of this form will be provided in class.]

For each question, use a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 = poor and 5 = excellent, to indicate your grade for each team (Pro and Con).

	PRO Team	CON Team
OVERALL ASSESSMENT		
1. Did the team appear well prepared for the debate?		
2. Did the team appear to work well as a team?		
3. Did the team maintain respectful tone?		
4. Did the team exhibit confidence, energy, and passion?		
INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION		
5. Was the presentation well organized and effective?		
6. Did the team present plenty of empirical evidence to defend its position?		
7. Did the team make its presentation creative and interesting?		
8. Were the arguments presented in a logical and coherent way?		
9. Did the team use the allotted time well?		
QUESTIONS		
10. Did the team ask clear, concise, and effective questions?		
11. Did the team ask questions that were challenging for the other team?		
12. Did the team recognize the weak points of the other side and ask questions strategically?		
13. Did the team appear to know well both sides of the debate?		
ANSWERS		
14. Did the team provide informed answers to the questions?		
15. Did the team use empirical evidence in answering the questions?		
16. Did the team members maintain composure throughout the debate?		
17. Were the responses well formulated and eloquent?		
FINAL STATEMENT		
18. Did the final statement summarize the arguments in a persuasive way?		
19. Were the main points written on the board clear and informative?		
20. Did the final statement sound convincing to you as a member of the audience?		

Debate Team Contribution Form

Each member of the team is expected to contribute equally to the debate effort. Therefore, all team members must individually report the relative effort/contribution of each person on your debate team. Be professional and give a careful rating. The ratings on these forms will be used as weights to convert team debate grades into individual student debate grades.

A 100% rating means that a team member gave 100% effort – that is, did what is expected of each team member. So, if the team members all contributed essentially the same amount, then each member gets 100%. However, if you believe someone did not carry their fair share of the workload, you have to indicate that here. Thus, if a team member gave only 80% of the effort/contribution of what was expected, you would assign that team member 80% as a rating, and provide a brief explanation in the comments field. Note: your ratings and comments will be kept confidential by the instructor.

Please submit your ratings by the end of the day.

Your name: _____

Team Members (include yourself)	Effort/Contribution (0-100%)

Comments:

Sample Formal Team Debate

1st Affirmative Speech:

Ladies and gentlemen, today we're here to talk about something very important. The topic of today's debate is whether or not the United States of America should adopt English as its official language. First of all, when we say "official language," my partner and I mean that English should be the language used in all government business, administration, and publicity. Government documents, the proceedings of official meetings, and so on could still be translated, but emphasis would be put on addressing language barriers with English as a second language (hereafter called "ESL") education rather than constant and expensive translations.

As you may have already inferred, my partner and I stand in firm affirmation of this topic: English should indeed be made the official language of the United States of America. In our first speech, I will be talking to about how our country is suffering without an official language and why we need one. After taking some time to respond to our opponents, my partner will address how adopting an official language policy will be tremendously helpful to everyone, whether they presently speak English or not.

The first point we want to bring up is something vital: communication. Without it, a business owner could never sell her products. A patient could never tell his doctor what his symptoms are. If you do not speak the same language as a person, it is basically the same as not being able to communicate at all. Right now, in the United States, we deal with language barriers by making government documents and materials available in a wide array of languages via translation. The problems with this are twofold. First, this is a band-aid solution that forces a dependency on the beneficiary of the translations. Second, translation is not cheap and there is no end in sight. If the government continues on this course, it will have to dump money into translating all official materials at an ever-increasing rate.

The second point we would like to address is the equity of the American Dream. No matter who you are or where you are from, hard work and determination will give you a fair shot to succeed in the USA. For that to be the case, however, we need to make sure that we are doing everything possible to make sure that everyone is getting an equal chance at success. We can only do this by making sure that everyone served by our government, which is everyone who lives in the USA, can speak the same language. If we fail in this, our government is neglecting the needs of non-native English speakers and indirectly favoring those born into families that speak English.

1st Negative Speech:

Ladies and gentlemen, our opponents are correct in one thing, and that is stressing the importance of this topic. To begin, their definition of what an English Only policy would be like is flawed. By claiming that there would still be translations but they would save money by switching to ESL education, they are attempting to claim the benefits of their position without addressing the harms it does to society.

My partner and I disagree with the other team and believe that the United States should not adopt English as its official language. The US has never had such a policy, has never needed one, and certainly does not need one now. After showing why my opponents' arguments are wrong, I am going to detail the historical basis for rejecting an English Only policy and why that means we do not need one today. My partner will also respond to the affirmative team's arguments and then demonstrate the ways that such a policy would harm the United States and its citizens.

The two points my opponent presented can be grouped into one single point, which is as follows: We need an English Only policy to benefit the people who do not speak English. The fact is, such a policy would not help them at all. Our opponents claim that ESL education equips non-English speakers with skills for economic success, and that's true, but such programs are already in place in the US. They could only make a difference with this policy if money were taken out of providing translations. If that were done, however, tens of thousands of non-English speaking adults would be disenfranchised unless they were forced to attend ESL classes, which would quickly become a financial hardship and a violation of personal liberty.

Fortunately, the United States has always been a nation of immigrants. Since our inception, people have poured in from all corners of the globe to make the United States of America what it is today. Indeed, it is our diversity, rather than our homogeneity, that is our greatest strength. We only have the strong economy we do because our infrastructure was built by hard working immigrants from places including Italy, China, Germany, and Switzerland. In the past, these demographics were mistreated severely. Along with the violation of their civil rights, they were stereotyped as being isolationist foreigners and a threat to American culture and the English language. History has shown this notion to be nothing more than alarmist xenophobia. These groups have integrated into our linguistic culture and even helped American English to become more distinct from English spoken in other parts of the world. Just as we did not need legislation or policy to "protect" us linguistically from immigrants in the past, we certainly do not need it now.

2nd Affirmative Speech:

Allow me to start off by restating that the United States of America definitely needs to declare English as its official language, and what our opponents have said supports that. The biggest example that supports our position is the hardship suffered by the immigrant groups they listed. When Italian and Chinese immigrants came over to the US in waves, they had a very hard time obtaining higher education, securing loans, and generally enjoying the privileges that should, supposedly, be available to everyone. Is it not possible that this was due, at least in part, to their inability to speak English? If you and a friend both move to a country where he speaks the language and you do not, who do you think is going to succeed? Your friend is, of course, and it was the same way for these poor immigrants. Today, plenty of people are still immigrating to the USA, and we do not have to let them suffer like previous generations of immigrants have. We need to apply the lessons of the past and declare English as the official language of the United States of America so that we can help them adapt and succeed in our nation.

Such a policy would bring with it a myriad of benefits to our society. First and foremost would be satisfying the moral obligation we have to help immigrants integrate into the American community. If we fail in this regard, not only are we guilty of a moral and sociological trespass, but the byproduct would be creating a subversive, marginalized element of society. Rather, making English the official language of the United States would help include immigrating Americans into both our language and culture, allowing them and their children a more productive means of socioeconomic growth and helping to keep them away from criminal activity. An additional benefit would be the amount of jobs created, not just because of the expanded workforce resulting from more fluent, capable workers but also from the teaching positions that would become available to make this dream a reality. In summary, for a better economy, a reduction in crime and, foremost, because it is a moral obligation, the US ought to adopt English as its official language.

2nd Negative Speech:

The United States does not need an official language, be it English or any other. So far, our opponents have built their case on some pretty dubious claims that border on being offensive. Most recently, our opponents tried very gently to say that the US should have an official language policy to keep immigrants from committing crimes. Now, let's not mince words, here: the largest group immigrating to the US are people from Central and South America. The affirmative team has done a good job at subtly hinting at it instead of saying it outright, but what my opponents really want is for you to agree with them out of baseless Hispanophobia. Once you begin

saying, “These poor people from another country deserve to be reeducated and included in our culture,” what you are really saying is, “We need to remake their identity as Americans because our culture is superior to theirs.” Obviously, this is unethical and completely invalidates their claims to be fulfilling a moral obligation.

Making English the official language of the United States would harm our country in other ways, too. Such a policy sends a clear message: “Who you are when you arrive here is not good enough. You will change because we want you to.” Our native language is a part of our very personalities; the language of our innermost thoughts. Rejecting that in a person is hardly the kind of message that would culturally unify a diverse population. Rather, it divides them, declaring that English-speaking America is somehow above immigrant America. Because of this, we could only expect a reaction of resentment and, with it, a rise in crime. A federal ESL policy would be economically harmful as well for the simple fact that there are already private English-teaching services in the United States. Is it fair for the United States government to take customers away from private companies just to satisfy a misguided sense of linguistic protectionism? Of course not. The only responsible conclusion is that the United States of America does not need an official language.

3rd Affirmative Speech:

Throughout the course of this debate, we have proven and demonstrated that the United States should make English its official language. The goal of doing so would certainly not be to somehow diminish the value of other cultures or languages, but better equip recently arrived American citizens with the skills they need to thrive in their new country. ESL education does not teach a person that English is better than their native language any more than it teaches them that an American brand clothing or hamburgers with french fries are better than their native attire or food.

My partner and I have demonstrated that the great benefits that would result from making English the official language of the United States. Immigrants would be given the tools for financial success, employment opportunities would be created for teachers and the American people would be united behind doing the right thing by giving our newest citizens a leg up. The most important thing to remember in this debate is the message that the Statue of Liberty bears to all those who come to the United States. It is our responsibility to embrace the tired, poor, and huddled masses and do whatever is necessary to ensure that they have just as much of a chance to live the American Dream as native-born citizens.

3rd Negative Speech:

We would like to thank the judges, the audience and our opponents for coming to this debate. We would also like to state one final time that the United States of America does not need and should not have an official language. It is important to remember that all of the economic benefits our opponents claim stem from ESL education, which we already have in the US. Their other option would be to federalize ESL, which would infringe on the market freedom of existing language learning corporations. Their claims of fulfilling a moral duty are also void, as declaring an official language would violate the higher moral duties of respecting other cultures and preserving personal liberty.

I am glad that our opponents brought up the Statue of Liberty, because she is the very symbol of what the United States ought to be. Lady Liberty stands to welcome all those would come to the US and accepts them as they are, rather than insisting that they change into something or someone else. At the heart of it, that is all that an English Only policy would accomplish: sending a message to the rest of the world that they are only welcome to the United States if they conform linguistically.