

‘This house would stop Year 10s buying water in plastic bottles from the corner shop on the way to school when they could bring in their own bottles and fill them up from the water fountain outside the gym instead’ is too **narrow**, however well intentioned.

- A successful motion must be **appropriate** to the cultural, academic and age context of the debaters it is allocated to.

‘This house would respond to an economic recession by deploying a Keynesian model of deficit spending’ is probably not the ideal motion for the first session of the Year Seven debating club, though it could be a great exercise in an A-Level Economics class (see Chapter 13, How To Use Debating in Lessons).

‘This house thinks dogs make better pets than cats’ might come across as seriously patronising if used in the final of a sixth form debating competition, but is ideal for introducing Years Five and Six to debating.

‘This house would introduce stricter gun control laws’ will spark lively and impassioned discussions in the US, but doesn’t make much sense in the UK, where gun control laws are already very strict.

‘This house would abolish Christmas’ is a great one for a fun debate at the end of term in December in a church school, but doesn’t work so well in a Muslim school in May.

Be sensitive also to the way in which debate topics which may touch on personal issues for students. ‘This house believes that the fashion and beauty industry helps cause eating disorders’ is not the best choice if you have a student in the debating club who has, or is recovering from, an eating disorder. ‘This house would introduce automatic prison sentences for anyone carrying a knife’ might be best postponed if you have a student in the club close to someone who has recently been a victim of knife crime.

**Make your
motions
appropriate**

What different types of motion are there?

**Policy
motions
are
easier**

Policy vs principle

The most basic distinction (about which we learnt in Chapter 2, How Debating Works) is between **policy** motions and **ideas** motions; that is, you remember, motions which begin ‘This house would ...’ and motions which begin ‘This house believes ...’

In general, **policy** motions are easier to tackle, and are therefore more appropriate for novices, because it is easier to focus on specific and concrete measures. Ideas motions are harder to define and pin down, so are more challenging, but can also lead to very interesting discussions.

So, ‘This house would ban mobile phones from schools’ is very specific and concrete, and therefore relatively straightforward.

‘This house believes money does not bring happiness’ is much more vague and general, and needs very careful definition to pin it down, while at the same time opening up really big and fascinating questions about the true nature of happiness.

Familiar vs unfamiliar

Familiar motions deal with issues all students have direct experience of, usually to do with school. They’re great for novice debaters.

Classic **familiar** motions are:

- This house would make all schools co-educational.
- This house would abolish school uniform.
- This house would abolish homework.
- This house would make school voluntary.
- This house would abolish exams.