

Introductory Debate Exercises

1. SKILLS INVENTORY

GOAL:

To demonstrate to students that they already possess many of the skills relevant to debate.

METHOD:

- Ask students to write down at least three skills they have which they believe might help them become good debaters.
 - Students can share their answers with the class.
 - Coaches can highlight answers that reinforce the message that debate doesn't require an entirely new set of skills, but presents an opportunity to use and develop many skills and interests students already have.
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2. DEBATE OF THE MASSES

GOAL:

To focus on argument construction and refutation while involving a large group of students.

METHOD:

- Divide the class into two halves, affirmative and negative.
- Then divide each group in half again, creating the first affirmatives and the second affirmatives, and the first negatives and the second negatives.
- Pick a topic students are familiar with.
- Start off by asking the first affirmatives to stand in turn and present one argument, speaking for no more than 30 seconds.
- The entire class should write down and number each first affirmative argument.
If there are five speakers in the first affirmative group, by the time every affirmative has spoken, each student should have a list with arguments one through five, numbered as such.
- Before the first affirmatives start, number the first negatives and inform them that they will be responsible for refuting the corresponding affirmative argument.
- Once the first negatives have responded, the second group of affirmative speakers is up. Their goal is to defend one of the original affirmative arguments by attacking the negative response to that argument.
- Again, each person has a number, so affirmative three would be expected to defend the third affirmative argument.
- The second group of negative completes the process according to the same system.