



SETTING UP A DEBATE

Ambassador Schools ACTIVITY SHEET

PURPOSE

One of the roles of Junior Ambassadors in European Parliament Ambassador Schools is to engage their peers and wider community in these debates. There is almost nothing in our daily lives that isn't touched by politics, and which doesn't have a European dimension. So, creating debate as part of Ambassador Schools can be about almost any aspect of life which interests you and your peers.

Furthermore, we often think of a debate as having a particular formal structure, but this isn't necessarily the case. We can have debates that are not restricted to a particular place or date, that are less formal and more participative, or that use media other than people talking to one another.

Both the topic and the format are entirely up to you, but below are some principles and guides to help you get on your way.

ACTIVITY

Essentially you have 6 steps you need to take:

1. Choose a topic
2. Write the motion
3. Choose a format
4. Find debaters
5. Sort out the practicalities
6. Promote your debate

The following pages will guide you through each step.



1. CHOOSE A TOPIC

IS IT RELEVANT TO AMBASSADOR SCHOOLS?

The only criterion here – from an Ambassador Schools point of view – is that there is a European aspect to it, but that covers just about everything. If you want some inspiration have a look at this website:

<https://what-europe-does-for-me.eu/en/portal>

IS IT RELEVANT TO YOU?

There is no point setting up a debate if it doesn't interest you, the participants, and the audience. Get a small group together and throw a few ideas around, see what excites the most interest.

2. WRITE YOUR MOTION

The motion is the actual statement that you will form your debate around. It needs to be something specific, that people can agree or disagree with.

A simple trick for making your motion more provocative – and thereby more interesting to your potential audience – is to turn it into a negate. Here are some examples.

ISSUE	POSITIVE STATEMENT	PROVOCATIVE VERSION
<i>Climate Change</i>	The EU's Green Deal is an essential step towards addressing the climate crisis.	The EU's Green Deal will kill the European economy – and take the UK down with it.
<i>Asylum and migration</i>	The UK should work with the EU to take a share of the people coming to Europe to escape terror and persecution in their home countries.	The UK is full; we should do everything we can to prevent any further migration, from Europe or beyond.
<i>Sport and Culture</i>	Competitions like the Euros and Eurovision are an essential part of sharing European culture.	The UK should leave the Euros and Eurovision and establish Commonwealth versions, to better reflect our Anglo-culture.

Remember people arguing for or against any of these positions may not necessarily agree with what they are saying, they are taking the position assigned to them.



3. CHOOSE YOUR FORMAT

We often think of a debate as having a particular formal structure, but this isn't necessarily the case. We can have debates that are not restricted to a particular place or date, that are less formal and more participative, or that use media other than people talking to one another.

You could choose one of these (defined in more detail below) or make up your own format.

FORMAL DEBATE

For this you'll need:

- A clear statement for and against your debate question.
- One person (or a team) to argue for each position.
- Time for people to research their positions.
- A structure and timings that both sides will work to. E.g.
 - [Oxford-style](#)
 - [Parliamentary-style](#)
 - [A slightly different Parliamentary-style](#)
- Someone to chair (moderate) the debate.

ONLINE DEBATE

This might follow a similar format to a formal debate or be much more participative, but people can contribute from anywhere, at any time.

This could be something you set up on [Google Classroom](#), using Google Docs, or an a specialist debating platform like [Kialo](#).

Of course, there are risks with this, so you may want to lock down the debate to known users in your school.



ARTISTIC DEBATE

Ask people to respond artistically to the topic you have chosen.

You will need to:

- Set a timescale for when participants need to submit their pieces.
- Decide whether you want to limit formats – e.g. only photos, paintings, posters.
- Decide whether you want artists to provide an explanation – i.e. a short piece of writing – or just let the works speak for themselves.
- Organise somewhere to exhibit the pieces.
- Consider whether you want to give viewers of the pieces a formal way to react – e.g. a discussion after the exhibition, feedback forms, a vote on the most persuasive piece.

PARTICIPATIVE DEBATE

In this structure everyone is encouraged to contribute.

You will need to research the topic yourself to set up the debate:

1. Find 10 or more statements you can make about the topic. These should be short, but forceful and provocative. Write each one on a large piece of paper and stick them up around the room you are running your debate in. You may want to have a few blanks so people can add their own statements.
2. As each person comes into the room give them a pen and stack of Post It notes. Ask them to read each statement and write any reactions or questions they have about them and stick them under the statement.
3. After everyone has had some time to add their notes, ask people to stand by a statement they want to ask a question about.
4. Choose people from around the room to ask a question. Ask if anyone can answer the point.
5. Once you have had a decent number of questions and answers, ask people to stand by the statement they feel best represents their position.
6. Ask people to explain why they have chosen to stand where they have – see if they can encourage anyone else to come to stand with them.



4. FIND DEBATERS/PRESENTERS

Generally, you will need at least one person to present and argue for each side of the debate.

It may be that you have people in your school/college who are eager to do this, or you might try to bring in experts from outside.

You could bring in MEPs or former-MEPs who have a particular interest in the issue. You can find a list of MEPs and which committees they sit on here:

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/home>

To find MEPS from a particular committee, use the 'Choose your committee' drop-down and then the 'Members' link under the 'Home' menu.

Members of the UK Parliament's European Union Committee may also provide an interesting perspective: <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/176/european-union-committee/membership/>

Even if your debate does not have two opposing sides – like an artistic debate or a participative one – you may choose to have someone present the issue at the start to help people frame their thinking.



5. SORT OUT THE PRACTICALITIES

Unless you've decided on an online debate, you'll need to arrange the following:

1. Set a time and date
 - Make sure it's a time when the audience and participants can come.
 - How long will you need to promote the event?
2. Book a venue
 - The school hall, a classroom, the theatre?
 - Make sure it's not too big or too small for the number of people you are expecting.
3. Debaters
 - Do you have people to represent both sides?
 - Will you use people from your school, or bring in outside speakers?
 - Do they have the tools to research and present good arguments?
4. Organise equipment
 - Do you need seats, tables, water for the debaters?
 - How many seats do you need for the audience?
 - Do you need a projector and screen?
 - Do you need a timer? How will that be displayed and visible to everyone?
5. Staffing
 - Who will be the chairperson?
 - Who will be the timer (if you need one)?
 - Do you need adult staff members to supervise? If so, have you confirmed with them they can do it?
 - Who will put out the tables, chairs, etc. and tidy up afterwards?



6. PROMOTE YOUR EVENT

A debate isn't much good if there's no one there to hear it. So the last thing – but by no means the least – you have to do is promote your debate. Whatever format you've chosen how you promote it is likely to be very similar.

Choose the methods that will most appeal to the audience and participants you want to attract:

- Posters
- Social media messages
- School website
- Newsletters
- Flyers
- Announcements in form time/assembly

Make sure you include all the essential information:

- The motion (what the debate will be about)
- The venue
- The date
- The time
- How they can contribute (ask questions, submit art work, join in online)
- Whether they need to register or just turn up.