

# 1. Introducing Debating

Introducing debating to the classroom or setting up an A-Level debating club can be daunting. The first step is to provide your students with a clear introduction to what debates are, the different types of debate, where debates take place, and why they are so important.

## Why debate?

Dr Katie East, a Senior Lecturer in History at Newcastle University, is passionate about debate. She encourages her students to debate issues and to think about the purpose of debate. This is her summary of some of the key reasons debating is so important:

### Political and social function for decision-making

- Building a consensus
- Determining 'yes or no'
- Exploring different positions around a contentious topic

### Building skills and confidence

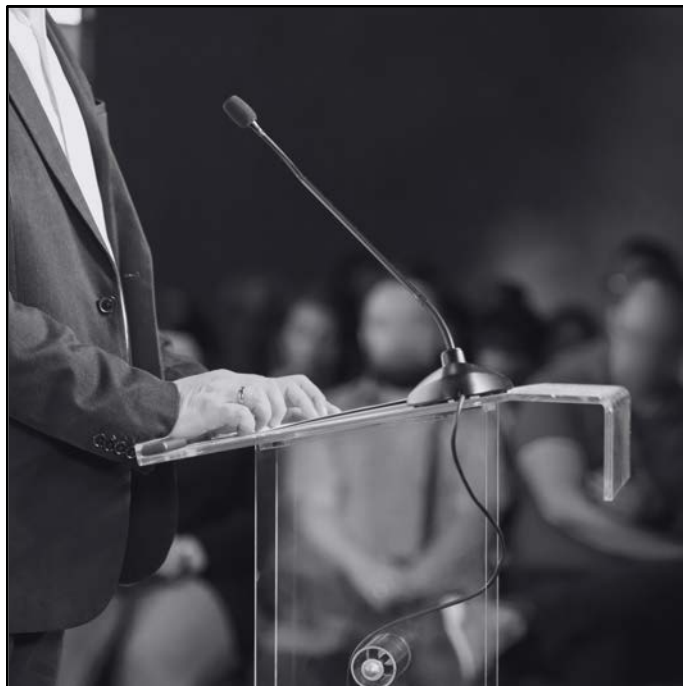
- Finding your voice
- Improving academic achievement at school and beyond
- Raising aspirations

## Introducing your students to debating

Use the 'What is a Debate?' information sheet to introduce your students to the idea of debating. Invite them to consider moments in their life when they may have taken part in a debate, perhaps without even realising it at the time.

# What is a Debate?

A debate is a discussion in which people express different opinions about something. Debates can be formal (e.g. government debates) or informal (debates with family and friends) and can take place in a variety of settings. When we think of debates, we often think about people expressing their views verbally, but it is also possible to debate things in writing.



*A person in a suit standing at a lectern.*

Debates have an important political and social function for decision making. For example, in the United Kingdom Parliament, debates take place in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and at the end of a debate a decision is often made. You can find out more about parliamentary debates on the [UK Parliament website](#).

Although we often associate debates with politicians, you don't need to be an MP to engage in debate. There are lots of opportunities to debate things in school, at home and pretty much anywhere! Being able to express your opinions both verbally and in writing is an important skill. Debating can help you 'find your voice', and building your skills and confidence in this area can improve your academic achievement and help you succeed, whatever educational or career path you choose to take.



# 2. Formal and Informal Debates

- 1 Recap on what a debate is (see the 'What is a Debate?' information sheet).
- 2 Give each pair/small group a set of post-it notes. They have 60 seconds to list on separate post-it notes as many places as they can think of where debates take place today. They may come up with ideas including:
  - Parliament - House of Lords and House of Commons
  - Universities
  - Work
  - Dinner table
  - Television (e.g. Question Time)
  - Social media (e.g. X, formerly known as Twitter; TikTok)
  - Pub
  - Classroom
  - Debating clubs/societies
  - Newspaper columns/letters pages

- 3 Display these headings on your whiteboard or SMARTboard:

**Formal Settings for Debate**

**Informal Settings for Debate**

- 4 Invite your students to come out to the front of the classroom and stick their post-it notes on the board underneath the correct heading. Some of these places may be venues for both formal and informal debate (eg. a classroom) so some students may stick their post-its in the middle.
- 5 Ask students to put up their hand if they have ever taken part in a debate in either formal or informal settings. Invite your students to discuss whether informal debate is a regular part of their lives, or something they avoid. Ask them to consider why this might be the case.
- 6 Share the 'DEBATE' acrostic sheet with your students. Let students know this is a good way of keeping debates civil and demonstrates expected behaviours.

# Rules for Informal Debate

**D**

**ig deep** into the other person's views. Ask them questions. Listen carefully.

**E**

**cho.** Check that you have understood the other person's view. 'So, if I understand you correctly, you believe...'

**B**

**uild** from the other person's position. "I can see your point about." or "I can understand why you feel strongly about..."

**A**

**rgue.** State your case clearly and without being personal. "My view is..."

**T**

**ake on board** some of the other person's views. Can you find a point of agreement anywhere? "I think what we are both saying is..."

**E**

**nd** on a note of conciliation. "I think we just need to agree to differ on this, but it's been interesting to hear your views".



# 3. Written and Verbal Debates

1 Explain to your students:

- When we think about debates, we usually think about people making speeches, for example, in debating competitions or in Parliamentary debates. These are examples of verbal debates.
- Debates don't always have to be verbal. Sometimes debates take place in a written format, for example, in academic essays, in newspaper columns or letters pages and even on social media. In the past, debates also took place in pamphlet exchanges.
- Speeches are often written down before they are delivered verbally.

2 Show your students clips of two or three young people making speeches in a debate in the UK Youth Parliament. For example, you may wish to choose [this debate on free school meals](#).

3 Ask your students to pick out things they notice about both the content and the delivery of the speech. You could provide them with the Debate Speech Review sheet to record their ideas, then discuss them as a class.

4 Have your students work in pairs to decide on three tips they would give to people who were delivering a speech as part of a formal debate. Ask each pair to feed back to the class and collate their ideas. Finish by seeing if the class can collectively agree on the three most important things to remember when preparing for a debate.

# Debate Speech Review

Considering both the content and delivery of the debate speech you have watched, write down anything you noticed about these aspects of the speech.

<b>Preparedness</b>	
<b>Body language</b>	
<b>Voice</b>	
<b>Notes</b>	
<b>Facts and figures</b>	
<b>Examples</b>	
<b>Persuasive language</b>	
<b>Other</b>	



# 4. How do Parliamentary Debates Work?

1 Parliament is perhaps the most obvious example of where formal debates take place in the UK today. Ask your students what they know about debates in Parliament. They may find it useful to consider the following questions:

- Who takes part in a debate in Parliament?
- Who chairs these debates?
- What sort of issues are debated?
- What happens in a debate?
- How are decisions made at the end of a debate?

After discussing these questions, you may wish to show your students this [short video from UK Parliament](#) which provides information on parliamentary debate.

2 Show your students an extract from either a live or a recorded debate in the House of Commons and get them to jot down and then discuss anything they notice.

3 Debates can be watched on [Parliament TV](#). Alternatively, you can find examples on You Tube. When selecting a suitable debate to watch you might find it useful to choose a debate in which:

- The students are likely to recognise the MPs who are speaking. You might choose to watch a debate that your local MP is taking part in.
- A topic is being debated which will be of interest to your students. For example, you might choose to watch a debate about education, university tuition fees or the environment.

4 Show your students the [House of Commons rules of behaviour](#). Explain that this leaflet, which was published in September 2021, is available online and sets out the rules for behaviour in the House of Commons.

Ask students to look through the leaflet and answer the following questions:

- How do MPs have to address/refer to other people in Parliament?
- How are people expected to behave when an MP is speaking?

# 5. Creating a Classroom Culture for Debate

Debates happen safely when people trust each other. Before holding a debate in the classroom, you will need to ensure that you have developed a classroom culture that is conducive to debate. Creating a classroom culture for debate takes time and effort, but it is essential that your students feel comfortable expressing their views and that they can do this in a way that is respectful to others.

Successful debates are built on well-constructed arguments and careful listening. Your students need to be able to listen to and respect the views of others, even if they disagree with them. They also need to feel confident in speaking in front of other people and expressing their own views.

To build a safe space for debate in which students are comfortable listening, respecting and responding to the views of others, you may find it useful to incorporate some of the following activities into your teaching.

## Activities to encourage active listening

### Fish bowl

Divide students into groups of three. Two students are in the 'fish bowl', discussing an idea for up to two minutes. One student is the 'listener' outside the fishbowl. They must feed back what they've heard to the rest of the class. This activity can encourage students who don't often participate in class discussions to speak, and it can also encourage students who often dominate discussions to listen more.

### Report back

Divide the class into pairs. Ask one student from each pair to talk to their partner about their views on a given topic for one minute. The other student must listen carefully and report back to the class, summarising their partner's views. This activity encourages students who may feel reticent expressing their own views to participate. It also offers useful practice in expressing a view that is not their own.





# 5. Creating a Classroom Culture for Debate

## Activities to encourage speaking up

### Think, pair, share

Rather than asking the whole class a question and relying on those more confident students to answer, build in time for thinking alone and sharing with a partner. This activity provides an opportunity for students to build their confidence by developing and sharing their thinking on a one-to-one basis before sharing it more widely.

### Post your views

Ask students to write down their thoughts or ideas on a given topic on a post-it note and stick it on the wall. Select a post-it note from the wall and read it out. Invite the author to explain further, showing a clear positive response to them. This encourages those students who might not feel confident to voice their opinion the opportunity to share and develop their thoughts.

## Activity to encourage reasoning

### Agree/disagree continuum

Give your students a statement about the topic you wish to discuss (e.g. air travel should be banned, Charles I was to blame for the outbreak of civil war in 1642, Shakespeare's plays are still relevant today). Ask them to imagine that there is an invisible line across the classroom with 'agree' on one side and 'disagree' on the other side. Ask your students to decide how far they agree with the statement and to stand on the most appropriate place on the invisible line/continuum. Ask for volunteers to explain or justify their position. As they get more comfortable with this activity, and you do it more often, more students should be willing volunteer. If you have students who are very reluctant to speak in front of the whole class, you could have them explain their reasons to the student standing next to them, rather than to everyone.

# 6. Establishing the rules for a classroom debate

1 Decide as a class what rules you will need if you are going to have a debate in the classroom. You may wish to consider the following:

- Whose job will it be to ensure the debate runs smoothly?
- What language and tone should be used by anyone taking part?
- Will there be limits on how long people can speak for?
- What measures can be taken to ensure people's viewpoints are heard?
- How should the people who are speaking and those who are listening behave?

2 Display your rules in a prominent place in the classroom and make sure people stick to these rules during your debate. You can do so using the 'Rules for Classroom Debates' sheet.



*Debating rules displayed in a classroom*



# Rules for Classroom Debates

1

2

3

4

5



# 7. Choosing a Topic to Debate

There are several things to consider when deciding on an issue or topic to debate.

## Contemporary issues

You could debate a contemporary issue that is in the news and/or is important to your students.

For example:

- Should the voting age be lowered to 16?
- Should everyone eat a vegetarian diet?

## A-Level topics

Alternatively, you could debate an issue related to the topics your students are studying at A-level. If you decide to do this, you may find it useful to look at past exam papers and compile a list of potential topics for debate.

You may want to debate a contemporary issue which still links to your students' studies. For example, if your students are studying the Stuarts in A-level History and they are looking at the execution of Charles I and the Interregnum, having a debate about whether the monarchy should be abolished will allow them to draw on their historical knowledge to debate a current issue.

Whichever you decide, you may find it useful to come up with a list of potential topics for debate (either by yourself or with your students) and then have a class vote to choose. If you are running a debating club that's open to students from any subject, it may be best to select contemporary issues.

If you are stuck for ideas, you'll find lots of ideas for topics to debate on the internet.

# 8. Planning the Content of your Debate

## For and against

Once you have decided on a topic to debate you need to frame it in the form of a motion (for example, "This house believes that the voting age should be reduced to 16"). Divide the class into two equal sized groups and decide which group is going to argue FOR the motion and which group is going to ARGUE against it. You may wish to toss a coin as a fair way of deciding this. Then work through the following four activities:

### 1 List your ideas

Ask each group to think of all of the arguments they can make for their side of the debate and summarise each on a separate post-it note.

### 2 Prioritise

Once they have listed their arguments, ask your students to arrange their post-it notes in order of most important to least important argument. Next, ask them to choose their top six arguments and rank them in order of importance. They can use the Priority Pyramid sheet to do this.

### 3 Find the thread

Ask the students to see if they can identify an overall argument which sews all their individual arguments together.

### 4 PEEL: Point, Evidence, Explanation, Link

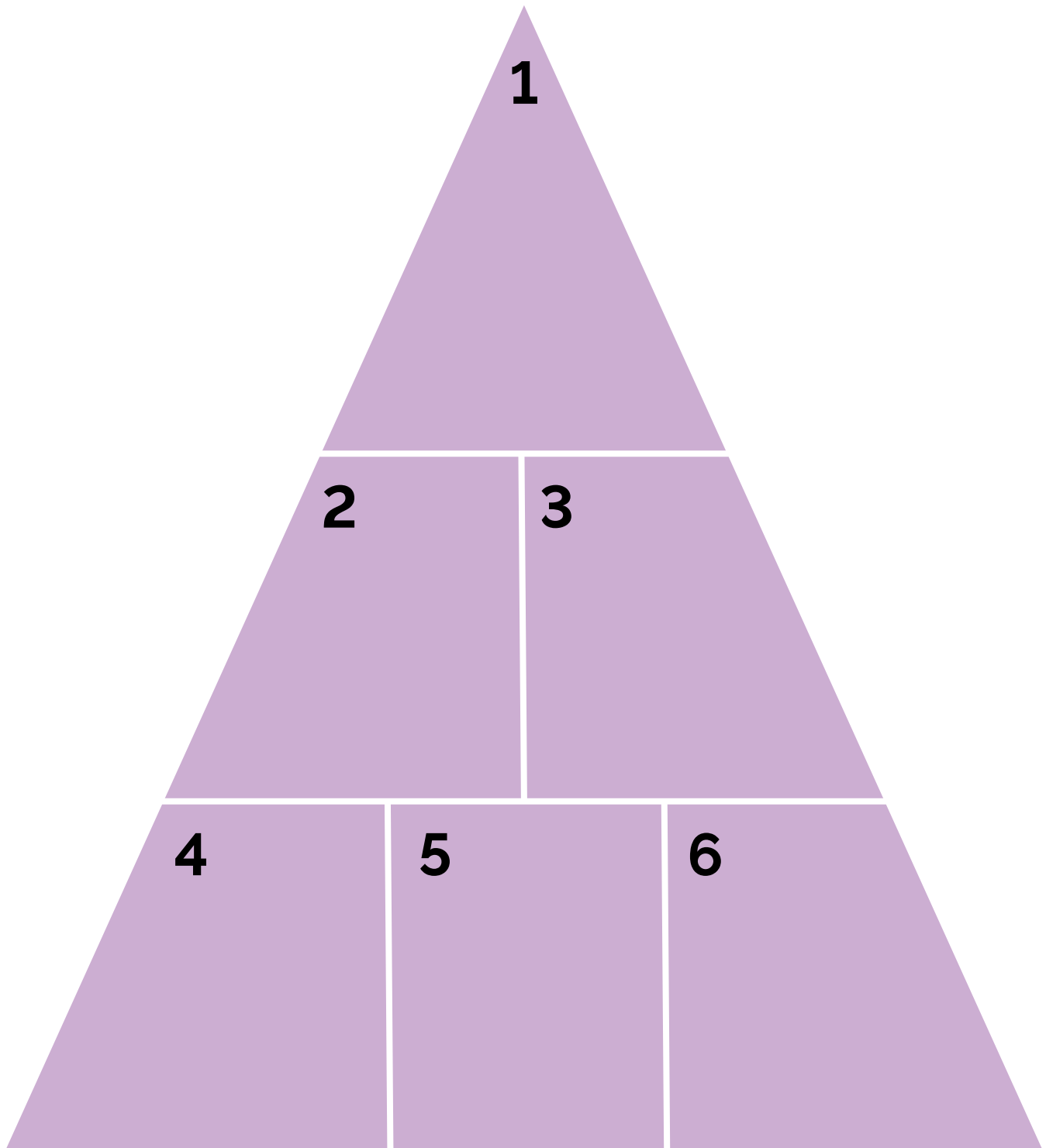
Encourage your students to use PEEL to structure each of their argument. They can use the PEEL sheet to do this.



# Priority Pyramid

Write your six arguments into the pyramid in priority order, with your strongest argument at the top.

Motion for debate: .....



# PEEL

For each of your arguments, note down your point, evidence, explanation and any links back to your main argument or next point.

Overall argument:.....

Argument 1:

Point

Evidence

Explanation

Link

Argument 2:

Point

Evidence

Explanation

Link

Argument 3:

Point

Evidence

Explanation

Link

Argument 4:

Point

Evidence

Explanation

Link

Argument 5:

Point

Evidence

Explanation

Link

Argument 6:

Point

Evidence

Explanation

Link



# 9. Deciding on Debating Strategy

Once both teams have planned their arguments and gathered their supporting evidence, ask them to choose four people to speak on behalf of their team. Three of these people will be making the team's key arguments in the debate, which means they'll have two arguments each. The fourth person will be summarising these arguments. See our [visual guide to running a debate](#) in the classroom for further support with this.

Have your students decide who is going to speak first, second and third, and who is going to sum up. Encourage them to decide in which order they are going to put forward their key arguments. Make sure they write their arguments down and practice them. They may find it useful to use the [PEEL sheet](#) to help them.

In the debate, other members of the team will be able to raise points after the three speakers have made their arguments. Encourage your students to think about which other points they may wish to raise then.

Remind your students to anticipate the arguments the other side is likely to make and think about how they can respond to/counter these arguments.



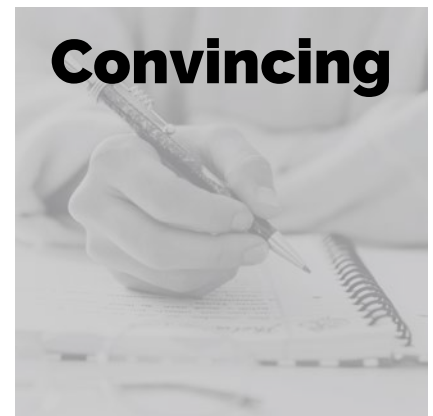
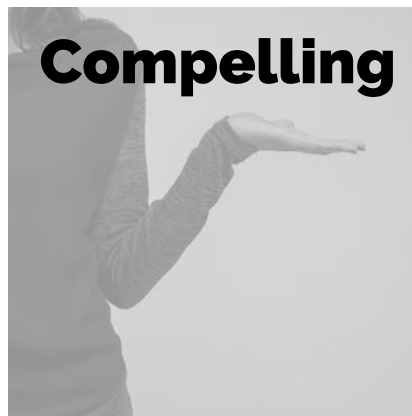
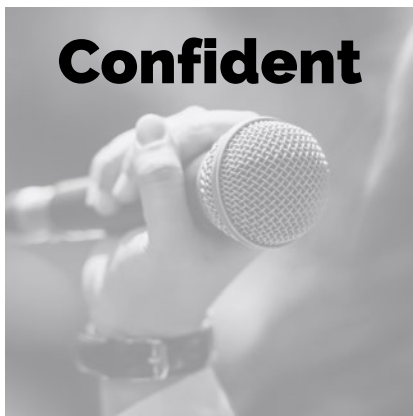
*Scattered pages that say "ideas" on them,*



# 10. Choosing a Delivery Style

Each team will need to think carefully about how they are going to deliver the arguments they wish to make in the debate. Choosing a suitable delivery style will enable them to communicate the points they wish to make effectively.

Considering ways to be more **Confident, Compelling and Convincing** (otherwise known as **the 3Cs** of debating) can help your students when deciding on a delivery style.



- 1 Give your students a copy of the 3Cs worksheet. Have them discuss as a group and note down things they might do to ensure they come across as confident, compelling, and convincing during the debate.
- 2 Give your students a copy of the Top Tips sheet. Have them discuss some of the ideas suggested and add any others to the notes they have already made on the 3CS sheet.
- 3 You may wish to print off the 3Cs poster to display on the classroom wall.

# The 3Cs of debating

Think about the 3Cs when choosing your delivery style. You are aiming to be:



**onfident**



**ompelling**



**onvincing**



# Debating Top Tips

## Tip 1: Practice your speech in advance

Make sure you know what you want to say and rehearse it in advance. It's fine to have some notes you can refer to. Bullet points work well!



## Tip 2: Prepare your counter-arguments

Anticipate what the opposing team will argue and prepare some counter arguments in advance. You can jot down any additional points you'd like to make during the debate itself.



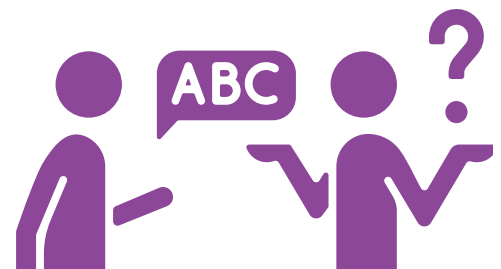
## Tip 3: Consider your voice

Project your voice so the audience can hear you clearly. Vary the tone, pitch and speed of your voice to maintain the interest of your listeners, to emphasise key points, and to convey emotion.



## Tip 4: Think about your body language

Look at the people you are speaking to. Use facial expressions and hand gestures to convey meaning, but avoid overusing them which can be distracting. Consider holding on to something (e.g. your notes or the table) if you feel nervous.



## Tip 5: Use humour carefully

Make sure any humour you use is relevant and appropriate. Use it carefully and sparingly so that it doesn't detract from your key points.



# Choosing a Delivery Style: the 3Cs

Once you know what you are going to argue and have worked out how you are going to do this, you need to think about how you will deliver your speech. Different people will naturally have different styles, but it may be helpful for your team to agree on the overall delivery style you are going for (e.g. serious, passionate etc). Whatever delivery style you choose, remember the 3Cs: you need to appear confident, compelling and convincing.

<b>Delivery style</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Things I can do</b>
<b>Confident</b>	Some people are naturally more confident than others, especially when it comes to public speaking. Even if you don't feel confident at all, there are things you can do to help you appear confident to your audience.	
<b>Compelling</b>	When you are speaking you should be aiming to capture and hold the attention of your audience and get them to believe in the arguments you are making. You need to give the impression that you believe in what you are saying and that you are speaking from the heart.	
<b>Convincing</b>	You need to get your audience to believe what you are saying. Not only do your arguments and evidence need to be convincing, but your delivery style should be too.	



# 11. Using Persuasive Language

Your students should consider the language they are using when taking part in a debate, and should be aware of the power of persuasive language. You can support them in understanding what persuasive language is and how they can use it effectively.

**I believe...**

**Join us!**

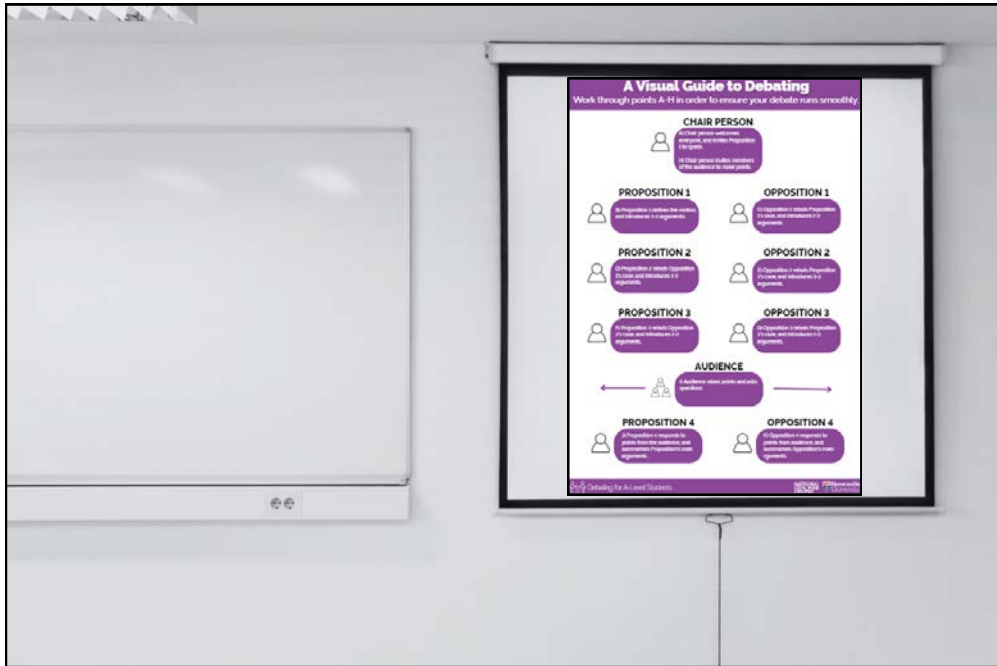
- 1 Return to the **3Cs** of debating. Recap on what they stand for, and remind your students of their importance.
- 2 Explain that having a compelling argument and being convincing is all about persuading your audience to agree with what you are saying. Remind students that their choice of language is just as important as what they are saying and the way that they deliver their speech.
- 3 Divide the students into groups and give each group a copy of the Persuasive Language Techniques sheet.
- 4 Ask each group to refer back to their **PEEL sheet**, select one of their key arguments, then write a paragraph using some of the persuasive language techniques suggested.

# Persuasive Language Techniques

<b>P</b> ersonal pronouns	Use personal pronouns to create a connection between you and the audience. For example, phrases such as 'I believe', 'you are all aware', or 'we must'.
<b>E</b> motive language	Use vocabulary to make your audience feel something about the topic. For example, if you want people to feel outraged, you might talk about 'a disgraceful disregard for human rights.'
<b>R</b> ule of three	Give three clear points to support your argument. For example: 'making these changes would make the system quicker, cheaper and fairer'.
<b>S</b> imple statistics	Keep statistics simple. For example, 'These measures would save the council £3 million each year', or '90% of patients agree that this would improve their quality of life'.
<b>U</b> se alliteration	Use clusters of words that start with the same sound to grab people's attention and make an impact. For example, 'Their living conditions are dirty, damp and dangerous'.
<b>A</b> sk rhetorical questions	Build rhetorical questions into your speech to help you get your point across. For example, 'Could you live with yourself, knowing that you haven't done anything to stop this abhorrent practice?'
<b>D</b> emand action	Encourage your listeners to take action. For example, 'Join us in calling for the government to lower the voting age to 16'.
<b>E</b> mphasise key words	Repeat phrases and use exaggerated language to emphasise the key points you wish to get across.

# 12. Running Debates in the Classroom: a Visual Guide

Our visual guide to debating, which is a modified version of the British Parliamentary Debate Format, provides you with a clear order in which to run debates in the classroom. You can also use it to support your students' understanding by including it in a slideshow or displaying it in your classroom.



*A visual guide to debating displayed on a screen in a classroom*



*A visual guide to debating displayed in a classroom*

# A Visual Guide to Debating

Work through points A-H in order to ensure your debate runs smoothly.

## CHAIR PERSON



A) Chair person welcomes everyone, and invites Proposition 1 to speak.

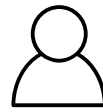
H) Chair person invites members of the audience to make points.

## PROPOSITION 1



B) Proposition 1 defines the motion, and introduces 1-2 arguments.

## OPPOSITION 1



C) Opposition 1 rebuts Proposition 1's case, and introduces 1-2 arguments.

## PROPOSITION 2



D) Proposition 2 rebuts Opposition 1's case, and introduces 1-2 arguments.

## OPPOSITION 2



E) Opposition 2 rebuts Proposition 2's case, and introduces 1-2 arguments.

## PROPOSITION 3



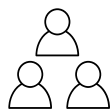
F) Proposition 3 rebuts Opposition 2's case, and introduces 1-2 arguments.

## OPPOSITION 3



G) Opposition 3 rebuts Proposition 3's case, and introduces 1-2 arguments.

## AUDIENCE



I) Audience raises points and asks questions



## PROPOSITION 4



J) Proposition 4 responds to points from the audience, and summarises Proposition's main arguments.

## OPPOSITION 4



K) Opposition 4 responds to points from audience, and summarises Opposition's main arguments.

