



7.1 Chain Debates

This activity introduces basic argumentation skills. In this activity, students take turns responding to arguments with agreement or disagreement. The activity is a good way to practice basic argumentation skills (giving warrants, refuting arguments directly, etc.) and get students engaged in debate.

Time Allotment

20-40 minutes

Objectives

By the end of this activity, students will:

- gain experience in directly responding to specific arguments.
- develop skills in generating arguments under time constraints.

Method

Ask the students to arrange themselves so that they are sitting in a single tiered, unbroken circle. Either solicit potential topics from the class or simply give the class a general topic of debate. A topic with two clear sides often works best. The topic should be as basic or advanced as is appropriate and productive.

Now, you are ready for a chain debate. Either a volunteer or you should give the first argument on the topic. After the first argument has been presented, the student immediately to the right of the person who made the first argument must respond either by adding "And" followed by a point of agreement, or by saying "But," followed by a point of disagreement. Each point should be original, students shouldn't repeat points that have already been made.

This can continue around the class until each student has made an argument, or until you decide to switch topics.

This activity can be altered by:

- giving students preparation time to think of possible arguments in advance.
- creating the role of a student moderator, who calls on students to make arguments.
- passing a ball from student to student, as they volunteer to give their arguments.
- creating the role of the reporter, who flows all of the arguments and presents her evaluation of both sides at the end of the debate.
- holding student arguments to higher standards, insisting that each point have both a claim and a logical warrant.