

Why Debate?

I have chosen the debate format for several reasons.

- First, in a debate, you are not expressing your opinion; rather, you are assigned an affirmative or negative position on the question. Your task is to find the pertinent data and assemble it into a set of logical arguments that will support or refute the statement, depending on the side to which you have been assigned. The formality of the debate will focus our attention on the scientific information that underlies each of the issues we will address, not on our opinions.
- Second, each debate will have two teams, with two individuals on each team. This format encourages each person to work as a part of the team, and the discussion that will be required to form your strategy should also sharpen your skills and logic. Each team will debate one topic, once as the affirmative team and once as the negative.
- Third, each debate will be judged by the others in the class, so both the debate teams and the audience will need to be actively engaged in the process. You must be an active participant, even when you are not debating yourself.

Resources and planning

- For the debates, you are required to use information from the primary scientific literature. I expect you to be able to find relevant papers using online databases such as PubMed and Google Scholar. If you need assistance, I can help you get started with these searches.
- If you'd like, you may contact me by email to schedule an initial meeting with you and your partner to get you started. Preparing for a debate takes time, both to search for information and to plan your strategy. You should begin to prepare with your partner at least two weeks before your debate.
- A Debate Brief is required of each team prior to the debate itself. These briefs will be shared with the opposing teams. The Brief will consist of four statements supportive of their position along with at least three quotes from relevant literature for each statement.
- An Annotated Bibliography is required from each team. The bibliography will document the range of scientific articles you used in preparing one of your debates. In addition to simply listing each article, you should make clear how you used the information as evidence to formulate arguments for or against the resolved statement. Each article on your list should have the following information associated with it:
 1. The complete reference so that someone could easily locate the article.
 2. A short paragraph outlining the main content, emphasizing points that you used as evidence in your argument or that can be used as a rebuttal to those arguments.

Debate Topics

+ Resolved – "Growing and selling genetically modified organisms for human consumption should be prohibited in the US"

Thought questions: What are the main issues that are raised in favor or against genetically modified organisms? What social and political influences are evident? How do these differ in various countries and regions? Why do you think there are such large differences?

+ Resolved – "Genome wide personal genomic information should be released to patients only with collaboration of professional medical experts"

Thought questions: Who should have access to your genomic information? How much professional explanation is needed when people access their own genomic profile?

+ Resolved – "The United States should establish a National DNA Criminal Database"

Thought questions: Who would be subject to having their DNA placed in the database? What means should be used to obtain samples?

Debate format

<i>Side</i>	<i>Presentation</i>	<i>Time Allotted</i>
<i>Opening Statements and Clarification</i>		
Pro	Opening statements and three arguments	4 minutes
Con	Ask any clarifying questions	2 minutes
Con	Opening statements and three arguments	4 minutes
Pro	Clarifying questions	2 minutes
<i>Rebuttal (No new arguments are presented)</i>		
Pro	Repeats their opponents' arguments and refutes them	7 minutes
Con	Repeats their opponents' arguments and refutes them	7 minutes
<i>Summary and Closing</i>		
Pro	Summarizes their position, addresses opponents' counterpoints Closes by explaining why their argument is best	5 minutes
Con	Summarizes their position, addresses opponents' counterpoints Closes by explaining why their argument is best	5 minutes
Audience	Questions for the debaters	5 minutes

Scoring

Debaters will be scored as follows.

First, scores will be assigned to the Debate Briefs and Annotated Bibliographies as they are turned in.

Deadlines are for these are on the syllabus. Second, debaters will be scored by the class using a scoresheet to be distributed on the day of the debate. Categories for scoring will be:

Appearance of team/Seriousness of team

Delivery – Team members addressed remarks in clear, loud voices

Opening statements were well-organized, complete and included at least three arguments

Team members participated equally

Arguments were related to the subject and did not consist of logical fallacies

Rebuttal was specific to arguments made in the opposition's opening statement

Summary was relevant and addressed the opposition's counterpoints

Answers to audience questions were well-reasoned and relevant

Respect was shown for the opposition throughout (no name calling, interruptions, etc.)

Class Responses

Finally, each student will be expected to respond to the debate by completing a Position Sheet to be provided on the day of the debate. These will be considered in-class assignments and will count toward your in-class assignments score for the course.