

80 Debate Topics for ESL Students

Debate formats:

1:1 debates Two students debate each other. Other students listen. Transition into class discussion, encouraging students to refer back to points made during the debate.

paired debates Two on two. This allows partners to prepare their arguments together and rely on each other to respond to counterarguments.

group debates Students face off in small groups. Allow the groups to prepare their arguments together. Encourage turn-taking and contributions from all team members.

Debate rules:

Agree in advance on positions and time limits. Use a stopwatch or timer. Do not let students interrupt during another person's/team's turn.

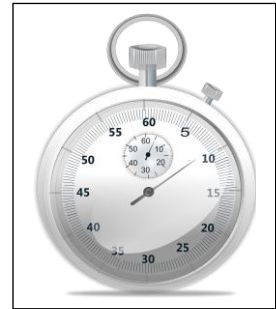
Suggested time limits:

Team A and Team B – 2 minutes for each team's opening argument.

1 minute to present a point.

1 minute for the opposing team to respond.

30 seconds to respond to the counterargument.



Debate topics:

Topics range from serious to silly. Lighter topics can result in very short debates, in which case you can have multiple debates during a class period. Lighter topics lend themselves to 1:1 debates. Far less preparation time is needed.

Complex topics require relevant vocabulary. As needed, start with class discussion to generate a word list that students (particularly the debaters) can refer to.

For your convenience, the topics have been grouped into categories. Students can select the general category, and you may choose the specific debate question.

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FOOD and BEVERAGES

1. Apples are better than bananas. Agree or disagree.
2. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Agree or disagree.
3. Hard ice cream is better than soft ice cream. Agree or disagree.
4. Pizza is unhealthy and should be avoided. Agree or disagree.
5. Junk food should be banned. Agree or disagree.
6. More people should learn to grow their own vegetables. Agree or disagree.
7. Tea is healthier than coffee. Agree or disagree.
8. Bottled water is a waste of money. Agree or disagree.
9. Big refrigerators are a waste of energy and aren't necessary. Agree or disagree.
10. Restaurants should only serve small portions. Agree or disagree.
11. Potatoes make a better side dish than rice. Agree or disagree.
12. Chopsticks are more convenient than a fork. Agree or disagree.
13. Snacks ruin your appetite for a full meal. Agree or disagree.
14. Everyone should learn how to cook a full meal. Agree or disagree.
15. Soda should be banned. Agree or disagree.



FAMILY

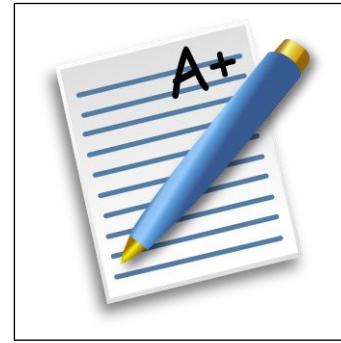
1. It's better to be the oldest child in the family. Agree or disagree.
2. In a full household, dinner should be a family meal. Agree or disagree.
3. In a two-parent household, parents should decide punishments together. Agree or disagree.
4. It's always best to live as close as possible to your family and relatives. Agree or disagree.
5. Sharing a family name from generation to generation (e.g., John Senior and John Junior or Charles Harvey IV) is confusing and outdated. Agree or disagree.
6. Adult children should personally take care of their aging parents. Agree or disagree.
7. Siblings have better relationships when they share rooms. Agree or disagree.
8. Siblings can't have a close relationship when there's a big age gap. Agree or disagree.
9. Young adults should live independent of their parents. Agree or disagree.
10. All families need at least one pet. Agree or disagree.



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EDUCATION

1. School teachers should be graded by their students. Agree or disagree.
2. Every child should have art and music classes as part of their education. Agree or disagree.
3. Parents should decide how much homework their children should be assigned. Agree or disagree.
4. There should be no grades in elementary school, only "pass" or "fail." Agree or disagree.
5. Homeschooling is better than sending your child to a large public school. Agree or disagree.
6. All students should be required to participate in at least one school club or activity. Agree or disagree.
7. Schools should teach students how to manage one's personal finances. Agree or disagree.
8. Schools should be required to teach home/survival skills, including cooking and first aid. Agree or disagree.
9. Schools should be paperless and use only digital materials, including e-books. Agree or disagree.
10. School principals/directors should be elected rather than hired. Parents and teachers should be allowed to cast their votes. Agree or disagree.
11. A college (university) education is not necessary for a successful, prosperous career. Agree or disagree.
12. American school children should be required to learn a foreign language starting in elementary school. Agree or disagree.
13. More time should be spend learning modern history rather than ancient history. Agree or disagree.
14. Boys and girls learn better when they study separately. Agree or disagree.
15. It's a good idea to work for a short time before applying to college (university). Agree or disagree.



ENTERTAINMENT and SPORTS

1. Movies are better than TV shows. Agree or disagree.
2. Reading books is a richer experience than watching a movie. Agree or disagree.
3. Golf is not a sport. Agree or disagree.
4. There is no need for the Olympic Games in this century. Agree or disagree.
5. Team sports are a better experience for children than individual sports. Agree or disagree.
6. Gym memberships are unnecessary and are a waste of money. Agree or disagree.
7. There is no longer any need for libraries. Agree or disagree.
8. Comic books are a lower form of literature. Agree or disagree.
9. There is no need for radios or radio stations in this century. Agree or disagree.
10. Reality shows are unhealthy to watch. Agree or disagree.
11. Watching a movie alone isn't any fun. Agree or disagree.
12. Society cannot survive without organized sports. Agree or disagree.

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13. When playing a game, it's a good idea to let younger children win. Agree or disagree.
14. Live theater performances are better than movies. Agree or disagree.
15. Going to the movies by yourself is strange behavior. Agree or disagree.

SOCIAL ISSUES

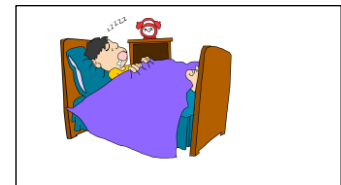
1. Shelters are the best solution for getting the homeless off the streets. Agree or disagree.
2. People have lost conversation skills due to increased use of texting and text chats. Agree or disagree.
3. Smoking in public should be banned. Agree or disagree.
4. Home sizes should be limited by square footage and acreage. Agree or disagree.
5. People should not get married before the age of 21. Agree or disagree.
6. One or two years of military or government service should be mandatory. Agree or disagree.
7. There should be government-enforced curfews for children under the age of 18. Agree or disagree.
8. Students and companies should have community service requirements. Agree or disagree.
9. Prisoners should have free access to online college courses. Agree or disagree.
10. Instagram is better than YouTube. Agree or disagree.

MONEY

1. Stores should have the option to be cashless. Agree or disagree.
2. Children should have a weekly or monthly allowance. Agree or disagree.
3. Children shouldn't receive money as a gift. Agree or disagree.
4. Teenagers have a part-time job during school vacations. Agree or disagree.
5. There should be one currency in the world. Agree or disagree.
6. There is no need for coins in this century. Agree or disagree.
7. Money is the biggest deciding factor when considering a new job. Agree or disagree.
8. Parents shouldn't give or lend money to their adult children. Agree or disagree.
9. You should never lend money to friends. Agree or disagree.
10. A married couple should have separate finances. Agree or disagree.
11. On a date, the two people should pay for their own expenses. Agree or disagree.
12. It's difficult to have a friendship with someone who earns significantly more or less than you. Agree or disagree.

MISCELLANEOUS

1. People who snore should sleep by themselves. Agree or disagree.
2. Flossing your teeth in public is unacceptable. Agree or disagree.
3. Restaurants should have a separate section for families with young children. Agree or disagree.



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