

STRUCTURE ACADEMIC CONTROVERSY



Structured Academic Controversy is a teaching approach that encourages students argue for both sides of a controversial issue and ultimately come up with a balanced opinion about that issue. This teaching approach encourages students to consider all sides of an issue equally before formulating a final opinion.

Steps for the Strategy

1. Students are broken into two groups. One group receives materials favoring one side of a debate; the other group receives materials favoring the opposite viewpoint. Students read material and discuss together the most salient points of the argument to present.
2. Students present their argument. Each side has three minutes to present their ideas. After 3 minute presentations, each side has a minute to rebut.
3. Students then “switch sides,” receiving the material from the opposite side. In their groups, students now formulate their argument for this side.,,
4. Students present their arguments to the whole group in the same format as Step 2, except now they are representing the opposing view.
5. Back in their groups, students must come to a consensus and formulate their opinion on the topic, based on evidence from both sides of the argument.

What makes a good topic for Structure Academic Controversy?

A topic:

- Has two clear sides.
- Is relevant to the curriculum
- Is interesting to the students
- About which students or you can locate a variety of resources and information.

Example: Choose a historical question that lends itself to contrasting viewpoints (with a “yes” and “no” answer equally plausible).

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Selecting Sources

- Three documents should support the “yes” position and three documents should support the “no” position. (Some documents can contain arguments for both sides)
- Be sure to include the hyperlinks to the original full text documents and cite documents
- Browse large online document collections

Management

Helpful suggestions to give your students:

- be respectful of each other
- disagree with another person's position and ideas but don't be critical of the person
- don't take criticism of your ideas as a personal attack
- listen to everyone's ideas, especially if you don't agree with them
- change your mind when the evidence supports this
- try to understand both sides of the controversy
- understand the position differences before trying to reach consensus
- focus on reaching the best outcome, not on winning