

The Rules for Formal Disputations

1. The Instructor will present a topic or question.
 - a. Students will write a contradictory pair of propositions on the topic or in answer to the question.
 - b. One of the pairs will be chosen as the subject of the disputation & the thesis identified.
2. Students will divide into teams of 3-4 students, each team committed to one or the other side of the question.
 - a. Each team will write one or more arguments in defense of its thesis. An argument will consist of two premises and a conclusion.
 - b. Teams will present their arguments to the group, beginning "I assert the thesis. My argument is: ..." or "I deny the thesis. My argument is ...". Formal defects will be repaired immediately.
 - c. Each team will prepare one or more objections to arguments against its thesis. Possible forms of response will be
 - i. An argument (two premises & a conclusion) against one of the premises, beginning "I deny the major" or "I deny the minor".
 - ii. A distinction between two senses of a term, showing that one proposition is true in one sense and the other proposition is true in the other. This is done by saying "I distinguish the ... term. That [premise with the term modified] I concede; that [other premise or conclusion with the term modified] I deny."
 - d. These responses will be presented to the group.
 - e. Each team will defend its argument against the objection (as at c above).

Example: Setting up the Disputation

Step 1	A Topic Announced	Daily quizzes in logic courses	
Step 2	Contradictory Pairs of Theses Composed	All logic professors should give daily quizzes.	Some logic professors should not give daily quizzes on logic.
		All logic classes should have a policy of daily quizzes.	Some logic classes should have a policy of daily quizzes.
		Daily logic quizzes is a good policy.	Daily logic quizzes is not a good policy.
Step 3	Choose a Pair & Identify a Thesis	Thesis: Daily logic quizzes is a good policy.	

Example: The Disputation Itself

Initial Arguments	Objections	Replies to Objections
I assert the thesis, which I prove as follows: Anything that encourages good study habits is a good policy. Daily quizzes encourage good study habits.	I deny the major: No policy that uses class time inefficiently is a good policy. Some policies that encourage good study habits are an inefficient use of class time.	I revise the middle term and argue as follows: Anything that encourages good study habits at reasonable cost is a good policy. Daily quizzes encourage good study habits at reasonable cost.
I deny the thesis, for: No policy that makes students dread coming to class is a good policy. Daily quizzes make students dread coming to class.	I distinguish the middle term: That "No policy that makes <i>good</i> students dread coming to class is a good policy" I concede. That "Daily quizzes make <i>good</i> students dread coming to class" I deny.	I reject the distinction: Any policy that makes students that are conscientious readers but slow learners dread coming to class is one that makes good students dread coming. Daily quizzes make students that are conscientious readers but slow learners students dread coming to class.