Civics & Economics

Legislative Branch

Debating the Issues

An important element of citizenship is participation in public discussion of issues facing the community (school, town, state, nation, world). To that end, you will select an issue on which to conduct research, form an opinion, and then express that opinion in writing and verbally.

The written component of this project will be in the form of a letter to the appropriate governmental official – governor, senators, representative, president, etc. Your letter should explain in 500-1000 words what the topic is about and why you feel a certain way about the topic. The letter can be written from the pro or con position depending on your beliefs. (This position may be different from the side you actually argued in the debate) You should explain the problem and what you believe is the best solution. Your letter should be in proper letter format (this is attached) as it will be mailed to the appropriate government official.

You will also have a debate with your partner about a current issue. Your debate will begin with a 2-3 minute statement from both sides on your point of view. This statement must be written and handed in on the day of your debate. You will also be expected to respond extemporaneously to questions from your opponent, your classmates, and me. I will assess you on the rubric that is attached.

Each of these two components counts as a summative assessment. (Debate and letter)

Topics:

* Marijuana should be legalized.
* The death penalty should be abolished in America.
* All abortions in the U.S. should be illegal.
* Use of a cell phone should be prohibited while operating a motor vehicle.
* All young adults should be required to perform one year of national service.
* The current system of social services (welfare, food stamps, etc.) in Vermont is too generous.
* The drinking age should be reduced to 18.
* Doctors should not be held liable for taking part in euthanasia.
* The inheritance tax should be abolished.
* The United States should provide universal health insurance to all individuals.
* English should be the official national language of the U.S.
* Illegal immigrants should be eligible for social services.
* Juveniles should be tried as adults.
* Suspected terrorists should be tried in military tribunals only.
* Sex offenders can be rehabilitated and put back in society following their prison time.
* The federal government should authorize oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.
* Affirmative action should not be practiced in college admissions.
* America should put more emphasis on renewable energy than drilling for oil.
* Government should heavily regulate assault rifles and handguns.
* The Electoral College should be abolished.
* The U.S. should use the military to resolve nuclear proliferation around the world.

The debates will take place in class. The order of presentations will be selected before the due date, however everyone is to be prepared on the first day of debates.

Letter Format is below…[[1]](#footnote-0)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Your Name  Street Address  Town, VT zip code  Date of Letter |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Recipient's name  Recipient's street address  Recipient’s town, state zipcode  Dear Recipient's Name:  Single space your letters and use a serif typeface. Skip a line between paragraphs.  Because people read letters quickly, use shorter sentences and paragraphs than you would in a longer document. Sentences should average fewer than twenty words, and paragraphs should average fewer than seven lines.  Space your letter on the page so that it does not crowd the top.  Final paragraphs should tell readers what you want them to do or what you will do for them. |  |
| Sincerely,  *Signature*  Name |  |

Rubric

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Criteria** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** |
| **1. Organization and Clarity**: viewpoints and responses are outlined both clearly and orderly. | Unclear in most parts  **PRO** | Clear in some parts but not over all | Most clear and orderly in all parts | Completely clear and orderly presentation |
|  | Unclear in most parts  **CON** | Clear in some parts but not over all | Most clear and orderly in all parts | Completely clear and orderly presentation |
| **2. Use of Arguments:** reasons are given to support viewpoint. | Few or no relevant reasons given  **PRO** | Some relevant reasons given | Most reasons given: most relevant | Most relevant reasons given in support |
|  | Few or no relevant reasons given  **CON** | Some relevant reasons given | Most reasons given: most relevant | Most relevant reasons given in support |
| **3. Use of Examples and Facts:** examples and facts are given to support reasons. | Few or no relevant supporting examples/facts  **PRO** | Some relevant examples/facts given | Many examples/facts given: most relevant | Many relevant supporting examples and facts given |
|  | Few or no relevant supporting examples/facts  **CON** | Some relevant examples/facts given | Many examples/facts given: most relevant | Many relevant supporting examples and facts given |
| **4. Use of Rebuttal:** arguments made by the opponent and questions asked are responded to and dealt with effectively. | No effective counter-arguments made  **PRO** | Few effective counter-argumentsmade | Some effective counter-arguments made | Many effective counter-arguments made |
|  | No effective counter-arguments made  **CON** | Few effective counter-argumentsmade | Some effective counter-arguments made | Many effective counter-arguments made |
| **5. Presentation Style:** tone of voice, use of gestures, and level of enthusiasm are convincing to audience. | Few style features were used; not convincingly  **PRO** | Few style features were used convincingly | All style features were used, most convincingly | All style features were used convincingly |
|  | Few style features were used; not convincingly  **CON** | Few style features were used convincingly | All style features were used, most convincingly | All style features were used convincingly |

Reason for Decision:

TOTAL POINTS:

1. Adapted from http://www.writing.engr.psu.edu/workbooks/letter\_format.html [↑](#footnote-ref-0)