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## Debate Topics

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Once the teacher feels that everyone knows how to word a resolution, the following assignment is given:

For tomorrow/next week, bring in five debate topics, correctly worded.

The date the assignment is due, the teacher collects the students' work and types up a list of all the topics. Duplicate subjects can be eliminated. Poorly worded resolutions or those which are not clear can be put at the bottom of the list or on a separate sheet. The teacher then duplicates the list and gives every student a copy. Together the class can improve the poorly written resolutions. The list is discussed in class to ensure that the meaning of every resolution is clear. Those who generated unclear resolutions can be asked to explain or clarify.

Students bring the list to class with them and whenever a debate topic needs to be chosen they pull out their list and propose a topic. I usually let the class choose two or three topics and then vote. New topics can be added to the list at any time.

### Other Uses

Obviously, these topics, being controversial, also lend themselves nicely to writing activities.

### About the Author

*Susan Rosenfeld is the director of the English Language Program at the American Cultural Center in Niamey, Niger (West Africa). Prior to assuming her present position, Ms. Rosenfeld taught in Burundi and Senegal.*

# Generating Debate Topics

Susan Rosenfeld, American Cultural Center, Niger

This activity prepares upper-intermediate or advanced students for holding debates in class (or clubs). It is appropriate for classes stressing intensive listening and speaking skills.

## Background

When I first began teaching a Listening Comprehension/Oral Expression course, the students and I thought it would be a great idea to have debates. But we could never quite get started. My asking, "What shall we debate next week?" was met with silence. Result: no debates at all that year. This is what I did the following year.

## Procedure

First, explain how a debate resolution is worded. It is not a question, but rather a

statement with which one can agree or disagree. Example: "Should abortion be legalized?" is NOT a debate resolution. "Abortion should be legalized," or "Abortion should be outlawed" is. Discuss other examples of correct and incorrect resolutions. In resolutions such as "Tourists should not be allowed in our national forests" it is important to point out that "pro" and "con" are "pro" and "con" with reference to the statement. Since the resolution contains a negative, those "pro" are not in favor of tourists visiting national forests. I learned to emphasize this point the hard way, when both "pro" and "con" prepared the same side of a debate a few years ago because the resolution contained a negative and thus was misunderstood by one team. In class have the students generate a few debate topics and have them work on the wording.

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