



Philosophical Chairs

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

Philosophical chairs is a format for a class to use in discussing a controversial question.

PROCEDURE

1. Students sit with chairs in a horseshoe pattern, defining three areas:
 - a. Those FOR the question
 - b. Those AGAINST the question
 - c. Or, with those who as of now UNDECIDED
2. A student who is FOR the question begins by stating their name and then stating their opinion
3. A student AGAINST the question then responds
 - a. First by introducing themselves by name, then addressing the first speaker BY NAME,
 - b. Then summarizing what the other person said, starting “I heard you say...”,
 - c. Then, if that person affirms the summary was correct, the new speaker can continue to make their point.
 - d. But if the previous speaker says, “No, that is not what I was saying,” then there needs to be clarification and re-communication, until the new speaker’s summary is approved.
 - e. That student can then speak AGAINST the question
4. The discussion continues this way, with students self-selecting to stand and speak. Students can go in any order (not necessarily for-against, etc.) but they must follow the protocol of naming and summarizing the previous speaker’s thoughts.

Rubric for being evaluated

1. **Frequency.** Students must speak at least 2 TIMES to get full credit, no more than five, (5). (You can set your own rules here, to fit your class setting, timeframe, etc.)

I tell students that if they do not speak they get a zero on the assignment. If they email me their opinion later, because they were too shy, I usually give them a “D” (a 1 in our system...). I stress to students ahead of time that they will get a failing grade on the assignment if they do not speak. In practice almost all students participate in the assignment. They get courage listening to others speak...!

2. **Protocol.** They must correctly follow the protocol of addressing the other person by NAME, and correctly SUMMARIZING what they said.
3. **Clarity.** They must make a point (or points) that is (are) CLEAR.
4. **Substantive.** Their speech must show evidence that they researched the issue, by citing or quoting their source.
5. **Disposition.** ENTHUSIASM and AUTHENTICITY always help. Also...
 - **SOAP BOX.** When I offer this, it means a student gets SPECIAL points (extra credit?) for standing on the soapbox while they make their point. This indicates that they REALLY BELIEVE what they are saying, not just doing it for a dumb high school assignment!
 - **Teacher grading.** I use my photo seating chart during this activity to put marks next to a student’s picture for item on the rubric below.

RUBRIC

4=A 3=B 2=C 1=D 0=F I offer 1 point for each of the following:

1. Following the correct PROTOCOL. (first summarizing the last speaker, etc.)
2. Making at least one CLEAR point.
3. Showing evidence of having done RESEARCH.
4. Speaking with AUTHENTICITY and/or ENTHUSIASM.
5. Speaking a SECOND time (but less than 5, or whatever you set as the maximum)

I sometimes make an aide like this to help with my grading:

	Rubric for Philosophical Chairs ☐ You LISTEN first, then ADDRESS the other ☐ You SPEAK TWICE for full points ☐ The point you are making is CLEAR. ☐ You show ENTHUSIASM (and AUTHENTICITY) ☐ Your words are SUBSTANTIVE. Correct facts, t
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OBJECTIVES

1. For students to develop civic virtue, which includes participation in informed discussions about civic issues.
2. That students learn to be civil and respectful of other opinions.
3. That students listen with understanding, able to recapitulate the thoughts and opinions of other speakers.
4. That students take personal responsibility in staying informed about current issues that affect their lives.

RESEARCH

Mr. Pahl will place research links on the class website for the question being discussed...