

8. PRO AND CON GRID

Required Material

Approx. duration: 45-60 min
Groups of: 4-6
Competencies involved: S, L, W
Level: All

· Notebook or piece of paper and pen
· Whiteboard and marker (optional)
· Laptop (optional, but recommended for the final research activity)

Activity Description

This activity is a good starting point to prepare a debate activity or an argumentative essay. It can “[...] help students move beyond their first reaction to a topic, search for at least two sides to the issues in question, weigh the value of competing claims, think critically about the construction of arguments they encounter in the real world, or get an overview of their analysis of an issue of mutual concern.” [1] Some interesting variations include “for or against”, “advantages and disadvantages”, “benefits and costs”, etc.

The first step of this activity is to choose one or a few debatable topics as starting points. The teacher can either propose a theme and ask the students to find their own debatable topics or propose specific topics. Students should be given some context about the themes or topics and task details such as the required number of items, the format (word, phrase, or sentence) and the allotted time to complete the task.

Working in small groups, students can start drawing their collective pro and con grid on a piece of paper or on a whiteboard. Next, they should team up with another small team to provide and receive feedback about their grid. The feedback elements should be previously determined by the teacher. Once the students have received enough feedback, the teacher can lead a quick recap activity with the groups by asking them to share their lists with the class.

An optional next task is to ask the students “[...] to back up their pros and cons with evidence and / or reasoned analysis.” [2] Depending on the level, the teacher can ask for one or more source-based pieces of evidence per list item. The recap activity can be a quick overview of the students’ arguments and evidence. [3]

Preparation

TEACHER

- Debatable theme or topic choice
- Assessment and/or feedback tool preparation (optional)
- Team formation
- Assignment explanation and topic assignment

STUDENTS

- Preliminary research/work (if applicable)

Workflow

TEACHER

1. Gives the activity instructions and the theme/topic.
2. Times the activity steps.
3. Walks around the classroom to verify the students’ progress.
4. Encourages students to give each other feedback.
5. Proposes the final task: finding evidence (optional).
6. Proceeds with a collective recap (optional).

STUDENTS

1. Come up with their pro and con list as a small team.
2. Team up with another team to give and receive feedback using the teacher’s feedback grid/instructions.
3. Apply the feedback to improve their grid.
4. Do the additional final task: finding evidence (optional).
5. Finalize their grid with the recap activity.

Evaluation options

TEACHER

- Formative or summative assessment of the final pro and con grid using a basic evaluation grid that has previously been shared with the students

STUDENTS

- Formative assessment of other teams’ work using basic assessment elements previously provided by the teacher

Tips

· Some topics can generate discomfort, so it’s important to be prepared to face those situations and to bring the focus back to the pedagogical goal of the activity. [3]

· Students should be reminded that they do not need to take a position. The goal of the activity is to find relevant pros and cons for a given topic.

[1] Center for Teaching, Learning & Mentoring. (2020). Using Pro and Con Grid activity to facilitate critical thinking in a classroom. University of Wisconsin-Madison. <https://kb.wisc.edu/instructional-resources/analysis-pro-con-grid>

[2] Angelo, T. Cross, P. (1993). Classroom Assessment Techniques. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 427 pages.

[3] Innovation en moyens pédagogiques d’apprentissage actif pour le génie. (s. d.). Vignettes de pédagogie active : Grille pour ou contre. Polytechnique Montréal. <https://www.polymtl.ca/vignettes/grille-pour-ou-contre>