

U-Shaped Debate [The Critical Thinking Consortium (TC2)]

The U-shaped Debate strategy offers an alternative to the traditional two-sided debate. The goal is to encourage students to endorse positions provisionally while listening to others in an attempt to figure out the most defensible personal stance along a continuum of possibilities. Stress that students are not to try to convince others, but merely to explain why the position they are sitting in is the most defensible one for them. There is no need to reach consensus on the issue.

- arrange the class in a U-shape
- ask students with polar views (i.e., either strongly agreeing or strongly disagreeing with the proposition) to seat themselves at either tip of the U; ask students with mixed opinions to sit at appropriate spots along the rounded part
- ask students at each tip of the U to state their position and offer a few reasons only (if there is an imbalance in strong support for one side or the other, locate yourself temporarily in a polar position to get the discussion going)
- alternate from side to side, as students from all parts of the U offer their views
- encourage students to physically move along the spectrum if they have heard reasons that cause them to want to shift their intellectual position on the issue.