

DEBATE RESEARCH & CURRENT ISSUES EVIDENCE PACK

10 High-Interest Debate Topics with Balanced Pro/Con Evidence

GRADES 8 - 12

Sourced Evidence Cards | Fallacy Guide | Rebuttal Workshop
Bias Checklist | Citation Guide | Evidence Card Template

TABLE OF CONTENTS

How to Use This Resource	3
Source Citation Guide	4
Evidence Card Template	5
Topic 1: AI Regulation	6
Topic 2: Climate Policy	8
Topic 3: Social Media Age Limits	10
Topic 4: School Uniforms	12
Topic 5: Criminal Justice Reform	14
Topic 6: Universal Basic Income	16
Topic 7: Space Exploration Funding	18
Topic 8: Standardized Testing	20
Topic 9: Animal Testing Ban	22
Topic 10: Free College Tuition	24
Fallacy Identification Activity	26
Rebuttal Construction Worksheet	28
Bias Identification Checklist	29

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

Welcome to the **Debate Research & Current Issues Evidence Pack**! This resource equips students in Grades 8-12 with the tools, evidence, and critical-thinking frameworks needed for effective debate preparation and participation. Each of the 10 topic packets presents balanced pro and con evidence so debaters can construct well-rounded arguments on both sides.

For Students

- Read each topic packet carefully, noting both pro and con evidence. Strong debaters understand both sides equally.
- Use the **Evidence Card Template** (page 5) to create additional evidence cards as you research beyond this pack.
- Apply the **Source Citation Guide** (page 4) to properly attribute all evidence in your speeches and briefs.
- Complete the **Fallacy Identification Activity** (page 26) to sharpen your ability to spot flawed reasoning in opponents' arguments and your own.
- Use the **Rebuttal Construction Worksheet** (page 28) to pre-build responses to the strongest arguments on the opposing side.
- Apply the **Bias Identification Checklist** (page 29) to evaluate every source before relying on it in a debate round.

For Teachers

- Assign one or more topic packets as pre-debate research. Each packet provides a balanced starting point with sourced evidence.
- Use the fallacy activity as a group exercise: have students identify fallacies in real debate recordings or transcripts.
- The rebuttal worksheet works well as a paired activity: one student builds a case, the other pre-builds rebuttals.
- The bias checklist can serve as an ongoing reference tool for any research assignment, not just debate.
- Consider having students expand each topic packet with their own evidence cards using the template provided.

Evidence Cards Explained

- Each evidence card contains a **Claim** (the assertion), **Evidence** (supporting data or reasoning), and a **Source** (where the information comes from).
- Pro evidence cards (green header) support the resolution; con evidence cards (red header) oppose it.
- Sources are cited using a simplified format suitable for Grades 8-12. See the Source Citation Guide for full details.
- All evidence should be verified against original sources before use in competitive debate settings.

SOURCE CITATION GUIDE

Properly citing sources is essential in debate. It establishes credibility, allows verification, and demonstrates academic integrity. Use this guide to format citations for the evidence cards in this pack and your own research.

Citation Formats

News Article	Author Last, First. "Article Title." <i>Publication Name</i> , Date. URL.
Academic Journal	Author Last, First. "Article Title." <i>Journal Name</i> , vol. #, no. #, Year, pp. ##-##.
Government Report	Agency Name. <i>Report Title</i> . Publisher, Year. URL.
Think Tank / NGO	Author Last, First. <i>Report Title</i> . Organization Name, Year. URL.
Book	Author Last, First. <i>Book Title</i> . Publisher, Year.
Website	Author Last, First. "Page Title." <i>Site Name</i> , Date. URL.

Quick Tips for Debate Citations

- Always include the **author** and **publication** when presenting evidence in a speech, e.g., "According to Dr. Sarah Chen in a 2024 *Nature* study..."
- Note the **date** of publication. In debate, recency matters. Evidence from 2019 may be outdated for fast-moving topics like AI or climate policy.
- Indicate the **type of source**: peer-reviewed study, government data, news report, advocacy group, etc. This affects how persuasive the evidence is.
- If a source has potential bias, acknowledge it: "While the Cato Institute has a libertarian perspective, their data on..."
- Keep a running bibliography for each topic. This helps during cross-examination when opponents question your sources.
- When citing statistics, always include the **sample size** and **methodology** if available; this strengthens your evidence against challenges.

Evaluating Source Quality

Criteria	Strong Source	Weak Source
Author credentials	Recognized expert with relevant qualifications	No listed author or unclear credentials
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal, government data	Personal blog, social media post
Recency	Published within 2-3 years	Outdated data, no publication date

Evidence base	Primary research, large datasets	Anecdotes, unsupported claims
Bias transparency	Discloses methodology and funding	Hidden funding, ideological language only

EVIDENCE CARD TEMPLATE

Use this template to create your own evidence cards as you research. Photocopy or recreate this format for each new piece of evidence you find. Each card should capture one distinct claim with its supporting evidence and source.

SIDE:	☐ PRO ☐ CON
TOPIC:	_____
RESOLUTION:	_____
CLAIM:	_____

EVIDENCE:	_____

SOURCE:	_____
DATE:	_____ SOURCE TYPE: _____
RELIABILITY:	☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low
BIAS CHECK:	☐ Passed ☐ Concerns (note below)
NOTES:	_____

How to Fill Out an Evidence Card

- **Side:** Check whether this evidence supports (PRO) or opposes (CON) the resolution.
- **Topic & Resolution:** Record the debate topic and the exact resolution wording.
- **Claim:** Write the specific assertion this evidence supports. Be precise, e.g., "*UBI reduces poverty by 40% in pilot programs*" rather than "*UBI helps people.*"
- **Evidence:** Record key data, statistics, quotes, or reasoning. Paraphrase in your own words when possible; note exact quotes with quotation marks.
- **Source:** Cite using the Source Citation Guide format. Include author, title, publication, and date at minimum.
- **Date & Source Type:** Note when it was published and what kind of source it is (study, news, government data, etc.).

Straw Man	Misrepresenting an opponent's argument to make it easier to attack.
False Dilemma	Presenting only two extreme options when more possibilities exist.
Slippery Slope	Arguing that a small step will inevitably lead to a chain of catastrophic events.
Hasty Generalization	Drawing a broad conclusion from a small or unrepresentative sample.
Post Hoc	Assuming that because B followed A, A must have caused B.
Appeal to Emotion	Using emotional manipulation in place of valid reasoning.
Bandwagon	Arguing that something is true or good simply because it is popular.
Cherry Picking	Selecting only the data that supports your position and ignoring the rest.
Circular Reasoning	The conclusion of an argument is assumed in its premise (begging the question).

REBUTTAL CONSTRUCTION WORKSHEET

A strong rebuttal doesn't just say "you're wrong"—it systematically dismantles the opponent's argument by exposing weaknesses in their evidence, logic, or impact. Use this worksheet to pre-build rebuttals against your opponent's strongest points.

STEP 1: State the Opponent's Argument

Accurately and fairly state the strongest version of your opponent's argument (avoid the Straw Man!).

STEP 2: Identify the Weakness

Determine where the argument fails. Check the relevant box and explain.

STEP 3: State Your Counter-Claim

What is your direct response to their argument?

STEP 4: Provide Counter-Evidence

What evidence supports your counter-claim? Cite your source.

STEP 5: Explain the Impact

Why does your rebuttal matter? How does it shift the debate in your favor?

Identify the Weakness (Check all that apply):

- **Outdated/Incorrect Evidence:** The data is old, wrong, or taken out of context.
- **Logical Fallacy:** The reasoning contains a fallacy (see Fallacy Activity).
- **Flawed Methodology:** The study was too small, biased, or poorly designed.
- **Missing Impact:** The argument is true but doesn't prove the resolution.
- **Counter-Causality:** The cause they identified is wrong; something else caused the effect.
- **Reverse Causality:** The effect actually caused the cause (they have it backwards).

Practice Rebuttal Construction

Select one of the 10 topics from this packet. Choose the strongest piece of evidence from the side you **disagree** with, and construct a full rebuttal using the steps above.

Topic & Resolution:

Opponent's Argument (Step 1):

Weakness Identified (Step 2):

Your Counter-Claim (Step 3):

Your Counter-Evidence (Step 4):

Impact (Step 5):

BIAS IDENTIFICATION CHECKLIST

Every source has a perspective. Bias doesn't necessarily make a source useless, but you must identify it to evaluate how much weight to give the evidence. Use this checklist for every source you rely on in a debate. If a source fails multiple checks, it may not be credible enough for competitive use.

Check	Criteria	Questions to Ask	Pass/Fail
1	Author Affiliation	Who wrote or funded this? Are they tied to an organization with a stake in the outcome?	■ P ■ F
2	Ideological Leaning	Does the source have a known political or ideological stance (e.g., conservative, progressive, libertarian)?	■ P ■ F
3	Balanced Coverage	Does the source acknowledge opposing viewpoints or counter-evidence, or does it ignore them?	■ P ■ F
4	Emotional Language	Does the source use loaded, sensationalized, or emotionally charged language instead of neutral terms?	■ P ■ F
5	Methodology Transparency	If it's a study, are the methods, sample size, and data clearly disclosed so others can verify?	■ P ■ F
6	Corroboration	Can the key claims be verified by other independent, credible sources?	■ P ■ F
7	Omission of Fact	Are there obvious, relevant facts or data that the source leaves out to make its argument stronger?	■ P ■ F
8	Recency & Context	Is the data current? Are statistics presented in proper context, or manipulated (e.g., cherry-picked years)?	■ P ■ F

How to Use This Checklist in Debate

- **Before the debate:** Apply this checklist to all your evidence cards. If a key piece of evidence fails multiple checks, find stronger evidence or prepare to defend the source's credibility.
- **During cross-examination:** Use these criteria to question your opponent's sources. E.g., "Your evidence comes from the Cato Institute, which has a stated libertarian mission. Can you show that their data is corroborated by an independent, non-ideological source?"
- **During rebuttal:** Highlight bias to undermine an opponent's impact. E.g., "The opponent's statistic uses cherry-picked data from 2020 during the pandemic, ignoring the trend line from 2018-2023 which tells the opposite story."
- **Be fair:** Acknowledging a source's bias upfront makes you more credible. E.g., "While the Heritage Foundation has a conservative perspective, their raw data on government spending is corroborated by the Congressional Budget Office."

Thank You for Choosing UM Printables!

We are dedicated to providing premium, high-quality educational resources for educators and students. Your support means the world to us!

Your Feedback Matters!

If you found this **Debate Research & Current Issues Evidence Pack** helpful in your classroom or debate team, please consider leaving a review on Teachers Pay Teachers (TPT).

Your honest feedback helps other teachers discover this resource and helps us improve our materials. It only takes a minute and makes a huge difference!

UM Printables

Premium Educational Resources for Teachers