# 60 ESL Debate Topics for Students, A1 to C2, with Arguments for Both Sides

Ten debate motions for every CEFR level, from "Dogs are better pets than cats" at A1 to the compatibility of free will and physics at C2. Each one gives both sides a starting point and the language to use.

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## A1 · one reason, one sentence

### 1. Dogs are better pets than cats.

*Topic: Animals.*
*For: Dogs are friendly. Dogs like to play and go for walks.*
*Against: Cats are quiet. Cats are small and clean.*
*Useful language: I think… because… / I like… / It is (friendly / quiet).*

### 2. Summer is the best season.

*Topic: Seasons.*
*For: It is hot and sunny. We can swim.*
*Against: It is too hot. I like snow and winter.*
*Useful language: I think… / It is… / We can…*

### 3. Children should have a phone.

*Topic: Technology.*
*For: A phone is useful. I can call my mum.*
*Against: Phones are expensive. Children play too much.*
*Useful language: I think… because… / It is (useful / expensive).*

### 4. Pizza is better than rice.

*Topic: Food.*
*For: Pizza is nice and fast. Everyone likes it.*
*Against: Rice is cheap and healthy. I eat it every day.*
*Useful language: I like… / It is (healthy / cheap) / better than.*

### 5. We should have a lot of homework.

*Topic: School.*
*For: Homework helps us learn.*
*Against: I am tired. I want to play after school.*
*Useful language: I think… / It helps… / I am (tired / busy).*

### 6. It is good to live in a big city.

*Topic: Places.*
*For: There are many shops and buses. It is exciting.*
*Against: It is noisy and busy. A village is quiet.*
*Useful language: There are… / It is (noisy / quiet / busy).*

### 7. Reading a book is better than watching TV.

*Topic: Free time.*
*For: Books are interesting. I learn new words.*
*Against: TV is easy and funny. I can watch with my family.*
*Useful language: I like… / It is (easy / funny) / better than.*

### 8. Children should help at home every day.

*Topic: Family.*
*For: Children can cook and clean. It helps Mum and Dad.*
*Against: Children go to school. They need time to rest.*
*Useful language: Children can… / It helps… / They need…*

### 9. Football is the best sport.

*Topic: Sport.*
*For: Many people play it. It is fun with friends.*
*Against: Tennis and swimming are good too. Football is hard for me.*
*Useful language: I think… / It is (fun / hard) / with friends.*

### 10. Everyone should learn English.

*Topic: Languages.*
*For: English is useful for travel and work.*
*Against: It is difficult. Some people do not need it.*
*Useful language: It is useful for… / It is (difficult / easy).*

## A2 · two reasons with because and and

### 11. School uniforms are a good idea.

*Topic: School.*
*For: Everyone looks the same, so it is fair, and mornings are easier.*
*Against: Uniforms are expensive and uncomfortable, and students cannot choose their style.*
*Useful language: One reason is… / Another reason is… / I think… because…*

### 12. Children should not use social media.

*Topic: Technology.*
*For: They can see bad things online, and they sleep less.*
*Against: They talk to friends, and they learn about the world.*
*Useful language: I agree / I disagree / It is (safe / dangerous) because…*

### 13. It is better to live in a village than in a city.

*Topic: Places.*
*For: Villages are quiet and clean, and neighbours know each other.*
*Against: Cities have more jobs and better transport, and there is always something to do.*
*Useful language: In a village you can… / In a city there are…*

### 14. Students should eat lunch at school.

*Topic: Food.*
*For: School lunch is cheap and healthy, and friends eat together.*
*Against: Home food is nicer, and some students do not like school food.*
*Useful language: It is (cheaper / healthier) than… / I prefer… because…*

### 15. Everyone should have a pet.

*Topic: Animals.*
*For: A pet is a friend, and it makes you happy.*
*Against: Pets cost money, and some flats are too small.*
*Useful language: A pet can… / It costs… / There is not enough…*

### 16. Weekends should be three days long.

*Topic: Free time.*
*For: We can rest and see our family, and we are happier at work.*
*Against: Many shops would close, and children would forget their school work.*
*Useful language: We could… / We would… / It would be (good / bad) because…*

### 17. It is better to travel with friends than with family.

*Topic: Travel.*
*For: Friends like the same things, and you can stay out late.*
*Against: Family helps with money, and parents know the best places.*
*Useful language: I would rather… / It is (easier / more fun) to…*

### 18. Online lessons are better than lessons in a classroom.

*Topic: School.*
*For: You can study at home, and you can watch the lesson again.*
*Against: You cannot ask the teacher quickly, and it is hard to concentrate.*
*Useful language: You can… / You cannot… / It is hard to…*

### 19. People should walk or cycle to work.

*Topic: Environment.*
*For: It is cheap and healthy, and there is less traffic.*
*Against: It takes a long time, and it is difficult in the rain.*
*Useful language: It takes… / It is (healthier / slower) than…*

### 20. Cooking at home is better than eating in restaurants.

*Topic: Food.*
*For: You save money, and you know what is in the food.*
*Against: Restaurants are easy and fun, and you do not wash the dishes.*
*Useful language: It is (cheaper / easier) to… / You do not have to…*

## B1 · opinion, reason and example

### 21. Homework should be banned in primary school.

*Topic: Education.*
*For: Young children need rest and play, and too much homework makes them dislike school. For example, a nine-year-old with an hour of tasks has no time to relax.*
*Against: Homework builds good habits and shows parents what the class is learning. For example, a short reading task can help a child become independent.*
*Useful language: In my opinion… / For example… / That is why…*

### 22. Teenagers should be allowed to choose their own bedtime.

*Topic: Family life.*
*For: Teenagers need to learn responsibility, and parents cannot control everything.*
*Against: Sleep is vital for school, and tired teenagers make poor choices.*
*Useful language: Teenagers ought to… / It depends on… / The main reason is…*

### 23. Zoos should be closed.

*Topic: Animals.*
*For: Animals need freedom, and many zoos have small cages.*
*Against: Zoos protect endangered species and teach children to respect nature.*
*Useful language: I believe… / On the other hand… / It could be argued that…*

### 24. Everyone should do some volunteer work.

*Topic: Society.*
*For: It helps the community, and you learn skills for a future job.*
*Against: People are busy, and forced volunteering is not really volunteering.*
*Useful language: It is worth… / People ought to… / If you… you will…*

### 25. Plastic bags should not be sold in shops.

*Topic: Environment.*
*For: Plastic harms the sea and takes hundreds of years to break down.*
*Against: Shoppers still need bags, and alternatives such as paper are not always better.*
*Useful language: As a result… / Instead of… / The problem with… is that…*

### 26. Working from home is better than working in an office.

*Topic: Work.*
*For: There is no commute, so you save time and money. For example, many workers get an extra hour a day.*
*Against: Colleagues share ideas faster, and some people feel lonely at home.*
*Useful language: The advantage is… / The disadvantage is… / In my experience…*

### 27. Sports stars earn too much money.

*Topic: Society.*
*For: Nurses and teachers do more important work for much less pay.*
*Against: Sport is a short career, and clubs make huge profits from the players.*
*Useful language: Compared with… / It is unfair that… / They deserve it because…*

### 28. Children should learn to cook at school.

*Topic: Education.*
*For: It is a life skill, and it helps them to eat healthily.*
*Against: School time is limited, and parents can teach cooking at home.*
*Useful language: It is a good idea because… / Instead… / At home they can…*

### 29. Tourists cause more problems than benefits.

*Topic: Travel.*
*For: Crowds damage places and push up prices for local people.*
*Against: Tourism creates jobs, and visitors spend money in small businesses.*
*Useful language: This leads to… / It brings… / Without tourists…*

### 30. Reality TV is a waste of time.

*Topic: Media.*
*For: It is unreal and often shows people at their worst.*
*Against: It is relaxing entertainment and can start conversations with friends.*
*Useful language: I would say… / Some people think… but I think…*

## B2 · concede a point, then rebut

### 31. Universities should be free for everyone.

*Topic: Education.*
*For: Although taxes would rise, free education gives talented students from poor families a fair chance. Without fees, graduates do not start adult life in debt.*
*Against: Taxpayers who never attend university would pay for it, and fees make students value their degree. A free system may also struggle to keep standards high.*
*Useful language: I take your point, but… / Admittedly… / That may be true; however…*

### 32. Social media does more harm than good to teenagers.

*Topic: Technology.*
*For: Some studies link heavy use with anxiety and poor sleep, and comparing yourself with others harms self-image.*
*Against: Social media helps shy teens find friends and gives them a voice, so the real issue is how it is used.*
*Useful language: While it is true that… / Nevertheless… / The evidence suggests…*

### 33. Exams are not the best way to test what students know.

*Topic: Education.*
*For: Exams reward memory and stress management more than understanding, and one bad day can ruin a year of work.*
*Against: Exams are fair because everyone sits the same test, and projects can be copied or completed by parents.*
*Useful language: Having said that… / To some extent… / On balance…*

### 34. Governments should tax sugary drinks.

*Topic: Health.*
*For: A tax reduces consumption and can pay for healthcare, as its supporters argue.*
*Against: It hits poor families hardest, and people may simply switch to other unhealthy products.*
*Useful language: One might argue that… / If that were the case… / In practice…*

### 35. Celebrities have a duty to be role models.

*Topic: Media.*
*For: Millions of young people copy them, so they hold a kind of social influence.*
*Against: They did not choose that role, and parents and teachers should guide children, not strangers.*
*Useful language: With influence comes… / It is hardly fair to expect… / That is beside the point.*

### 36. Cities should ban cars from their centres.

*Topic: Environment.*
*For: The air would be cleaner, streets safer and public space larger. Some cities have already restricted cars in their centres.*
*Against: Shops could lose customers, and disabled and elderly people depend on cars.*
*Useful language: I would not deny that… / The trade-off is… / A compromise would be…*

### 37. Learning a language is pointless now that translation apps are so good.

*Topic: Languages.*
*For: Apps handle everyday needs, so time can go to other subjects.*
*Against: An app cannot build friendships or trust, and relying on one is slow and unreliable in real conversation.*
*Useful language: Even if… / What this overlooks is… / Granted, but…*

### 38. Children under 14 should not have smartphones.

*Topic: Technology.*
*For: Early phone use affects concentration, and delaying it protects childhood.*
*Against: Phones help safety and independence, and a ban pushes the problem into secret use.*
*Useful language: The risk is that… / It would be more realistic to… / Rather than banning…*

### 39. Remote work will make big cities less important.

*Topic: Work.*
*For: If companies no longer need offices, people can live where it is cheaper and quieter.*
*Against: Cities offer networks, culture and opportunity that screens cannot replace.*
*Useful language: It is likely that… / This assumes that… / In the long run…*

### 40. Zoos and aquariums have no place in modern society.

*Topic: Animals.*
*For: Captivity causes stress, and education can now come from high-quality films and virtual tours.*
*Against: Breeding programmes have saved species, and seeing a live animal can change attitudes.*
*Useful language: Whether or not… / It is questionable whether… / The key issue is…*

## C1 · qualify the claim and weigh evidence

### 41. Artificial intelligence will do more to widen inequality than to reduce it.

*Topic: Technology.*
*For: Those who own the technology capture the gains, while routine jobs, often held by lower earners, are the first to be automated.*
*Against: Cheaper services in health and education could reach people who never had access, provided policy spreads the benefits.*
*Useful language: This hinges on… / One cannot overlook… / It would be naive to assume…*

### 42. Freedom of speech should not extend to misinformation.

*Topic: Law and ethics.*
*For: Falsehoods spread faster than corrections and can cost lives, so some limits are defensible.*
*Against: Someone must decide what counts as false, and that power can be abused by those in office.*
*Useful language: The crux of the matter is… / Who is to say… / A slippery slope…*

### 43. Economic growth should no longer be the main goal of governments.

*Topic: Economics.*
*For: Growth ignores wellbeing and environmental limits, and richer societies are not necessarily happier.*
*Against: Growth funds health, education and green technology, and a stagnant economy hurts the poorest first.*
*Useful language: By and large… / It is far from clear that… / To what extent…*

### 44. Every graduate should spend a year in national service.

*Topic: Society.*
*For: It builds shared experience across social groups and fills gaps in care and the environment.*
*Against: Compulsion erodes individual choice, and the cost and quality of placements would vary widely.*
*Useful language: On the face of it… / The underlying assumption is… / Evidence is mixed.*

### 45. Social media companies should be liable for what their users post.

*Topic: Law and ethics.*
*For: Platforms profit from engagement, so they should carry responsibility for harm they amplify.*
*Against: Liability would push companies to over-censor, and small platforms could not afford the risk.*
*Useful language: Arguably… / It follows that… / At what cost?*

### 46. Nuclear power is essential to meeting climate targets.

*Topic: Environment.*
*For: It offers reliable low-carbon energy that wind and solar cannot yet guarantee.*
*Against: Plants are costly and slow to build, waste remains an issue, and the money might cut more carbon in renewables.*
*Useful language: The case rests on… / Not least because… / Setting aside…*

### 47. Art and humanities degrees deserve less public funding than science degrees.

*Topic: Education.*
*For: Public money should go where the social return is clearest, such as medicine and engineering.*
*Against: Those subjects shape critical thinking and culture, and graduates often fill roles that no one predicted.*
*Useful language: To put it differently… / That framing assumes… / The returns are hard to measure.*

### 48. Tourism should be capped in popular cities.

*Topic: Travel.*
*For: Overtourism raises rents and empties neighbourhoods of residents.*
*Against: Caps favour wealthy visitors and hurt the many local workers who depend on the trade.*
*Useful language: It is a question of… / Far from… / The burden falls on…*

### 49. Voting should be compulsory.

*Topic: Politics.*
*For: Higher turnout gives governments a stronger mandate and reduces the influence of small, motivated groups.*
*Against: Forcing disengaged people to vote may produce uninformed choices and violates the right not to participate.*
*Useful language: Whatever the merits… / It is arguable that… / The principle at stake…*

### 50. Standardised testing narrows education.

*Topic: Education.*
*For: Schools teach to the test, and creativity and collaboration are left out because they are hard to score.*
*Against: Without common measures, inequality in schools becomes invisible and cannot be addressed.*
*Useful language: To that end… / In the absence of… / Be that as it may…*

## C2 · argue the principle, not just the case

### 51. A society that values privacy above security is making a mistake.

*Topic: Law and ethics.*
*For: Prevention of serious harm is the first duty of the state; privacy that costs lives is a luxury.*
*Against: Surveillance, once built, rarely retreats, and a free society is defined by what it declines to know about its citizens.*
*Useful language: Self-evidently… / The distinction collapses when… / That begs the question of…*

### 52. Wealthy nations owe climate reparations to poorer ones.

*Topic: Environment.*
*For: Historic emissions built the wealth of the industrial states while the costs fall on those who contributed least.*
*Against: Assigning responsibility across centuries is conceptually muddled, and aid tied to blame invites paralysis in negotiations.*
*Useful language: One is tempted to conclude… / The moral calculus… / This conflates…*

### 53. Equality of opportunity is a myth, so redistribution is justified.

*Topic: Economics.*
*For: Starting points differ so sharply that effort alone cannot explain outcomes; redistribution corrects the lottery of birth.*
*Against: Redistribution can dull incentives, and the real remedy lies in better schools and mobility, not in transfers alone.*
*Useful language: The notion that… / Whether one concedes… / It does not follow that…*

### 54. Cultural heritage should be returned to its country of origin.

*Topic: Culture.*
*For: Objects taken under colonial power belong to the communities whose history they hold.*
*Against: Universal museums let the world see shared heritage, and some objects survive today only because they were removed.*
*Useful language: Provenance matters because… / Left unresolved… / There is a case to be made…*

### 55. Human enhancement through technology is a moral obligation, not a danger.

*Topic: Technology.*
*For: If we can reduce suffering and extend healthy life, refusing to do so is itself a moral choice.*
*Against: Enhancement risks a divide between enhanced and unenhanced, and it redefines what we mean by human dignity.*
*Useful language: To the extent that… / The line is hard to draw… / Taken to its logical conclusion…*

### 56. Democracy is under-equipped to deal with long-term threats.

*Topic: Politics.*
*For: Electoral cycles reward short-term thinking, so climate and pension reform are always postponed.*
*Against: Democratic correction and public legitimacy outlast the speed of authoritarian systems, which fail without feedback.*
*Useful language: Short-termism is endemic… / Legitimacy rests on… / The counter-example is…*

### 57. The right to be forgotten should be absolute.

*Topic: Law and ethics.*
*For: People change, and a permanent digital record denies them the chance to start again.*
*Against: Erasing facts undermines the public record, journalism and accountability for those in power.*
*Useful language: In principle… / Pragmatically… / The two rights collide when…*

### 58. Meritocracy is a comforting fiction.

*Topic: Society.*
*For: Success is shaped by luck, family and networks, and the language of merit lets winners excuse their advantage.*
*Against: Reward for talent and effort still motivates, and the alternative systems are far less fair in practice.*
*Useful language: It is disingenuous to… / Even so… / The rhetoric of…*

### 59. English as a global language does more harm than good to other languages.

*Topic: Languages.*
*For: It crowds out small languages and gives native speakers unearned advantage in business and science.*
*Against: A shared lingua franca opens education and trade to millions, and multilingualism often grows alongside it.*
*Useful language: Linguistic diversity… / A case in point is… / It would be reductive to…*

### 60. Free will is compatible with a world governed by the laws of physics.

*Topic: Philosophy.*
*For: Choices can be free in the sense that matters: they flow from our own reasons and values, even if those have causes.*
*Against: If every decision is the product of earlier events, praise and blame lose their basis and responsibility becomes arbitrary.*
*Useful language: Compatibilism holds that… / Strictly speaking… / It hardly follows that…*