

STRUCTURED ACADEMIC CONTROVERSY

Building Understanding by Constructing Arguments

OVERVIEW

Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) is a multi-step form of small group discussion founded on using evidence to respond to a prompt. Students are assigned a point of view on a prompt, they change points of view and ultimately, they work to reach consensus on the prompt.

For a thorough review of Structured Academic Controversy, please revisit the strategy guide provided in the Bronze Current and Controversial Issue Discussion Course.

Works best when:

- There are two clear perspectives, but room for compromise to build consensus.
- When building a consensus, students can use text-based evidence (logos) and their own lived experiences (ethos).
- Neither of the assigned perspectives would be morally objectionable for students to defend (pathos).
- Should NOT be used to deliberate settled issues (slavery, Japanese-Internment, separate but equal).

How can this be done in remote learning?

Structured Academic Controversy can be iterated in virtual learning, provided the right platform. Virtual meeting tools like Zoom, Google Meets, Go To Meeting, Microsoft Teams, etc. can be used to facilitate student discussion. Consider the following adjustments:

- After students have examined the prompt and had individual think time to discern their position, instruct students to show their initial position to their displayed name by adding “Yes”, “No” or “Undecided” after the name that appears on the screen
 - For organizational purposes, consider assigning the odd-numbered rooms the opposing position and the even-numbered rooms the supporting position
- After students have had time to craft their position, have students meet in breakout rooms of 4 to exchange information (pulling pairs of students from the odd and even-numbered groups) and drop their assigned positions to reach consensus. Have each breakout group record what they reached consensus on in a shared google doc, whiteboard, jam board, or another common document.
- When the class reconvenes, display the common document that recorded how each breakout group of 4 reached consensus. Debrief these findings with the whole class.

Using Tech Tools: FlipGrid

FlipGrid is a free tech tool that can be used to meet many of the goals of Structured Academic



**Current & Controversial
Issue Discussions**

Controversy. [Here is a quick tutorial on how to use FlipGrid](#)

- After each student is assigned an initial position and explores the resources provided, they can record a FlipGrid summarizing the best claims for their assigned position. Students should give a title to their recording that reflects their assigned position.
- Students then watch the recording of at least one of their classmates that was assigned the same position, adding information to their t-chart. Students can give their peer feedback on what they learned or what information was reinforced by viewing the recording.
- Next, students will watch the recordings of at least TWO of their classmates that were assigned the opposite perspective, adding information to the opposite side of the t-chart. Students can give their peer feedback on what they learned from the recording.
- Finally, students drop their assigned positions and leave a final flip grid recording of what they think about the issue and where they believe there is room for consensus building.
- In a whole class debriefing exercise, the teacher can facilitate finding consensus on the issue.

