



4.6



Creating a Prompt That Works

ELL Integration: Ensure that all students, especially ELL students, fully understand the definitions of all words associated with the prompt.

The prompt for Philosophical Chairs can dictate the success or failure almost immediately. The prompt must be engaging, easily understood, and clearly divided into two sides. A successful prompt will encourage students to debate the merits of the content behind the statement or question—and not allow students to hide behind one word as they search for a technicality in their argumentation.

When creating a prompt, consider the following:

1. Be sure that the issue has two debate-worthy sides. If more arguable positions exist, consider using **Four Corners** instead.

Instead of: Alternative energy sources are better than oil. (Which alternative energy sources are better than oil: wind, solar, geothermal, or nuclear? Is the argument one of alternative energy versus fossil fuels in general, which include natural gas and coal?)

Try: Increased resources should be invested into making alternative energy

2. Keep the prompt topic narrow enough to avoid overwhelming students, but open enough to provide a sufficient amount of debatable material.

Instead of: Addressing global poverty should be the world's focus. (This is too overwhelming.)

Or: The impoverished need free housing. (This is too narrow in scope.)

Try: State governments should raise income taxes to provide low-income housing for the working poor.

3. Choose your ambiguity carefully and make it work for you.

Instead of: Hosting the Olympic Games is a waste. ("Waste" is too vague.)

Try: Does hosting the Olympic Games use more resources than it is worth? ("Resources" is ambiguous—it could mean labor, capital, or environmental—but all of these considerations must be critically scrutinized and measured against the Olympic Games' worth, which could refer to the financial, cultural, or political benefits.)

4. Avoid superlatives and absolute phrasing, such as "all," "every," and "never." Consider using comparatives instead.

Instead of: Football is the best high school sport. ("Best" is a superlative.)

Try:) R R W S E D R O L G H D E V H Q U A R L M F K R R K O B Q V N H W E D O O ("Greater" is a comparative.)

Instead of: Middle school students should never have homework. ("Never" is an absolute term.)

Try: Middle school homework should be reserved for projects and test preparation.

