# diets-that-work1

# Round Table Diet Debates

# OVERVIEW

**Introduction**

Obesity is a very large problem in the United States. According to a 2009 report from the National Center for Health Statistics, obesity rates among adults and children have more than doubled since the 1970s. Though there has been some leveling off recently in rates of increase in obesity, still, two-thirds of all American adults are overweight or obese, a 2014 (vol. 311, no. 8) Journal of the American Medical Association study has found. Even children very often carry an unhealthy girth: one-third of all school-age children are in that category, and fully 25% of 2 – 5 year-olds are overweight. On top of these unappetizing numbers, weight problems disproportionately affect lower-income and minority families and individuals.

In light of these numbers, it isn’t all that surprising that diets are very popular among Americans. Dieting can be defined as ‘the practice of eating food in a regulated and supervised fashion to decrease, maintain, or increase body weight’ (WebMD.com). Dieting is so big in this country that $40 billion is spent annually on dietary products and services, with an astounding 45 million Americans declaring that they are on a diet each year. .

But the $40 billion question is: do diets actually work? Do people lose weight? Do they maintain weight loss? Do they improve their overall physical and mental health? We are going to address these crucial questions by debating about five of the most popular and prominent of the diets on the current scene: Atkins, South Beach, vegetarian diets, Weight Watchers, and the Zone. Students will build arguments about their diet’s efficacy, from researched evidence; they will rebut and refute arguments made in favor of other diets, and they will evaluate competing claims, warrants, and support. Using a multi-sided group debate format called Round Table Debates, students will exercise their critical thinking and argumentation skills, while learning in-depth about modern American diets.

**The Debate Topic**

These Round-Table Diet Debates will revolve around this question: which single diet should the American Surgeon General consider recommending to the public to address weight and related health problems?

There are five diet options that we will be debating about. They are:

(i) The Atkins Diet

(ii) The South Beach Diet

(iii) Vegetarian diets

(iv) Weight Watchers Diet Plan

(v) Zone Diet

Each student group will argue for the superiority of their diet over the other diets.

**Methodology**

(1) The class will be divided into five groups.

(2) Each group will be assigned one of the diets to argue for and defend in our Round-Table Debates, and one diet that they will develop cross-examination questions and rebuttal arguments against.

(3) Each member of the group will take one of four speaking parts:

(a) Affirmative Case

(b) Cross-Examination

(c) Negative Rebuttal

(d) Closing Statement

(4) The groups will then have time to research the media list sources for their diet and the diet they are directly cross-examining and rebutting.

(5) Each group will build their arguments and thus outline their affirmative case, with two to three reasons why theirs is the best diet, formulated as ‘contentions.’ Each argument in the affirmative case should have at least two pieces of evidence to support it. This makes it a ‘contention’ (i.e., a developed argument with more than one piece of evidence supporting it).

(6) The groups will develop arguments against the diet that they are to rebut. These arguments should each be supported by one piece of evidence, with reasoning attaching it to counter-claim. The rebuttal speech should refute the affirmative case arguments as specifically as possible, and should include at least four total arguments.

(7) Each group will also develop 2-4 questions designed to raise doubts about the efficacy of the diet that it is assigned to cross-examine.

(8) The closing statement should respond to the rebuttal arguments against the affirmative case, and should make a comparative, evidence-based evaluation of the five diet options in the debate, one that ultimately favors the diet for which it advocates.

(9) The Diet Debates should be conducted according to the format (see below, separate Round Table Diet Debates Speech Sequence), with the instructor keeping time and moderating.

(10) Each member of each group should carefully flow (i.e., track the arguments in) the entire debate, preferably using red ink to flow the affirmative arguments and black ink to flow the negative arguments in the debate.

(11) Each group will be given a team score of up to 50 points. There will be bonus points given for the debate winners, too. See the Argument-Centered Education Rubric and Assessment Form for a break-down of the criteria on which the group will be graded.

(12) Each individual will be required to write a 500-750 word (2-3 page) summative-assessment argumentative essay that make argues for their reflective view on the most effective diet of the five. Any argumentative position is valid, as long as it is consistent, focused, and clear. So, for example, one can argue that none of the diets are effective, or that all (or some specific) diets are equally effective.

The essay should be based on the arguments made in the debate, though it should also go beyond the analysis and evidence presented. The essay will be graded on the same criteria used for the debate, and will also be given a score of up to 50 points. So each student will be given a 50-point group debate grade and a 50-point individual writing grade.

**Format**

The entire debate is designed to take about 60 minutes, or two sessions of about 30 minutes each (cutting the debate between the cases/cross-examinations and the rebuttals/closing statements).

**Affirmative Case 2.5 Minutes**

Each case should consist of two to three contentions arguing for the efficacy of its diet. Each argument should contain at least two pieces of evidence.

**Cross-Examination 1.5 Minutes**

Each affirmative case will be followed by a period of cross-examination. One of the other teams will have a speaker who asks the affirmative case speaker several questions that are designed to cast doubt on the claims made in the affirmative case. The cross-examination exchange can be used by any speaker, including the rebuttal speaker, in a later speech in the debate.

**Rebuttal 2 Minutes**

Following all six of the affirmative cases and their subsequent cross-examinations, each team will have a speaker who delivers a rebuttal against one of the pre-assigned diets. The rebuttal speech should refute the affirmative case arguments as specifically as possible. The rebuttal speech should include at least four arguments refuting the case. Each argument should be supported by one piece of evidence.

**Closing Statement 2.5 Minutes**

The closing statement should respond to the rebuttal arguments made against the affirmative case. And the closing statement should make evaluative, comparative arguments attempting to persuade the audience that its diet should be the diet recommended by the America Surgeon General.

The debate will be followed by a vote for the winning groups. Each student will vote for the diet that they think won the debate – with the restriction that no student can vote for their own group. The top three groups will receive bonus points on their group assessment – 1st, 5 points, 2nd 2 points, 3rd 1 point.