

## Discussion practicalities 2

### Voting

Voting is a simple way to begin and conclude a discussion and will give the lesson a clear focal point. Student opinion may change during a good discussion and so it can be interesting to capture the group's feelings before and after the discussion to gauge how much, if at all, their opinions have changed.

Depending on the learning objectives and the issue discussed, consider what type of vote would be the best to use. A public vote where everyone can see the voting process can be fun and inclusive, but if you want to encourage 'honest' voting where opinion is less likely to be influenced by peer pressure, an anonymous vote may be more suitable. A 'hands up' or a secret ballot are simple methods to gauge opinion, but here are some different techniques that can be used...

### Human barometer

A human barometer is a good technique if there is a range of opinions across a topic. Set up the room with one side labelled 'for' and the opposite side labelled 'against', then ask your students to stand between the markers at the point where their opinion lies (see diagram below). This can be repeated after the discussion, to see if opinions have changed, even if only slightly. The barometer can be captured using a digital camera to compare the difference before and after the discussion. If moving people around the room is not practical, create the barometer on a wall or a whiteboard and use sticky notes or coloured card to mark where students' opinions lie.



### Agree/disagree cards

Visual cards are a quick and easy way to see if students agree or disagree on a chosen topic. The cards can be themed to the discussion by using images or text linked to different opinions. You can also try 'traffic light' coloured cards, where red represents 'against', green 'for' and amber 'not sure'. To encourage 'honest' voting, cards can be made so that only the teacher/facilitator can see the image.

## Prop voting

Voting can be themed to the discussion by using props. Your options are limited only by your imagination. For example...

- Weigh Up the Argument – Using a set of pan or spring balance scales, ask your students to place weights or counters on either side of the scales (labelled 'for' and 'against') to give a good visual indicator of where their opinions lie.
- Filling Up – Coloured liquid is poured into measuring cylinders (labelled 'for' and 'against') to give a visual overview of the outcome of the vote. A similar result can also be achieved by placing counters into labelled see-through bowls.
- Take Your Pick – Following a discussion about an issue such as organic v. non-organic food, students can place their vote by choosing between an organic or non-organic piece of food. Then see how much of each sample has been taken.