

Social Media and Friendship

iPrepare

Setting the scene

What exactly is a friend? Or, again, what exactly is a stranger? The answers to these questions used to be clear. Friends were people that you knew, socialized with, liked, and trusted in real life. Strangers were people you did not know. But then along came new social media, and suddenly our ability to precisely define what makes one person a friend and another a stranger became increasingly blurred.

Your transition from high school to college involves leaving old friends behind and facing the challenge of making new friends in a brand new place. This might lead to some worries: What kind of friends will I make? Should I make friends through social media? How many friends will I make? In this unit, you will read two texts about social media and friendship which might be helpful to you.

Learning objectives

Upon completion of this unit, you will be able to:

- expand your vocabulary about social media and friendship
- explain how social media affect our concepts of friendship
- compare and contrast face-to-face friends with online friends
- identify better ways to make friends at college
- participate in a mock debate on the topic “Face-to-face friends are better than online friends”



1 iExplore

VIEWING

Making friends in social media

Over the past decade, social media have become a popular way to connect and communicate with friends. There are many tools out there you can use. Which one do you prefer?

Work in pairs. Describe the following pictures. Then tell your partner which of the social media you have used and how many friends you have made.





YOU CAN REFER TO THE ONLINE COURSE FOR PREVIEW.

READING

Understanding true friendship

Modern technologies have changed the way people communicate with one another. These technologies provide new social media for people to communicate — text messaging, email, chat apps, and social networks. They allow faster and more efficient communication and can help build relationships. However, the author of the following text argues that new social media make true friendship die away.

Is true friendship dying away?

Mark Vernon



¹ To anyone paying attention these days, it's clear that social media — whether Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn or any of the countless other modern-day water coolers — are changing the way we live.

² Indeed, we might feel as if we are suddenly awash in friends. Yet right before our eyes, we're also changing the way we conduct relationships. Face-to-face chatting is giving way to texting and messaging; people even prefer these electronic exchanges to, for instance, simply talking on a phone. Smaller circles of friends are being partially eclipsed by Facebook acquaintances routinely numbered in the hundreds. Amid these smaller trends, growing research suggests we could be entering a period of crisis for the entire concept of friendship. Where is all this leading modern-day society? Perhaps to a dark place, one where electronic stimuli slowly replace the joys of human contact.

³ Awareness of a possible problem took off just as the online world was emerging. Sociologist Robert Putnam published the book *Bowling Alone*, a survey of the depleting levels of "social capital" in communities, from churches to bowling alleys. The pattern has been replicated elsewhere in the Western world. In the United Kingdom, the Mental Health Foundation just published *The Lonely Society*, which notes that about half of Brits believe they're living in, well, a lonelier society. One in three would like to live closer to their families, though social trends are forcing them to live farther apart.

⁴ Typically, the pressures of urban life are blamed: In London, another poll had two-fifths of respondents reporting that they face a prevailing drift away from their closest friends. Witness crowded bars and restaurants after work: We have plenty of acquaintances,

though perhaps few individuals we can turn to and share deep intimacies. American sociologists have tracked related trends on a broader scale, well beyond the urban jungle. According to work published in the *American Sociological Review*, the average American has only two close friends and a quarter don't have any.

Shallow friendships

⁵ It should be noted that other social scientists contest these conclusions. Hua Wang and Barry Wellman, of the universities of Southern California and Toronto respectively, refer to "some panic in the United States about a possible decline in social connectivity." But notice their language: "social connectivity." That is not the same as intimate friendship. While social networking sites and the like have grown exponentially, the element that is crucial, and harder to investigate, is the quality of the connections they nurture.

⁶ Yet we know that less is more when it comes to deeper relationships. It is lonely in the crowd. A connection may only be a click away, but cultivating a good friendship takes more. It seems common sense to conclude that "friending" online nurtures shallow relationships — as the neologism "friending" itself implies.

⁷ It is striking that loneliness should be regarded as a mental health issue, and that seems right. At least since the ancient Greeks, it has been recognized in our political philosophies that we are social animals. Aristotle was just one thinker to remark that an individual could have everything that life can offer — career, family and money — but if a person didn't have a good friend, his or her life would be fundamentally lacking. A society that thwarts opportunities for deeper sociality, therefore, stymies well-being.

⁸ No single person is at fault, of course. The pressures on friendship today are broad. They arise from the demands of work, say, or a general busyness that means we have less quality time for others. How many individuals would say that friendship is the most important thing in their lives, only to move thousands of miles across the continent to take up a better-paid job?

It starts with childhood

⁹ Of course, we learn how to make friends — or not — in our most formative years, as children. Recent studies on childhood, and how the contemporary life of the child affects friendships, are illuminating. Again, the general mood is one of concern, and a central conclusion often reached relates to a lack of what is called “unstructured time.”

¹⁰ Structured time results from the way an average day is parceled up for our kids — time for school, time for homework, time for music practice, even time for play. Yet too often today, no period is left unstructured. After all, who these days lets his child just wander off down the street? But that is precisely the kind of fallow time so vital for deeper friendships. It’s then that we simply “hang out,” with no tasks, no deadlines and no pressures. It is in those moments that children and adults alike can get to know others for who they are in themselves.

¹¹ If there is a secret to close friendship, that’s it. Put down the device; engage the person.

¹² Aristotle had an attractive expression to capture the thought: Close friends, he observed, “share salt together.” It’s not just that they sit together, passing the salt across the meal table. It’s that they sit with one another across the course of their lives, sharing its savor — its moments, bitter and sweet. “The desire for friendship comes quickly; friendship does not,” Aristotle also remarked. It’s a key insight for an age of instant social connectivity, though one in which we paradoxically have an apparently growing need to be more deeply connected.

Source: Mark Vernon, “Is true friendship dying away?” *USA Today* <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/2010-07-27-column27_ST_N.htm>.

NOTES

Mark Vernon: a writer, broadcaster and journalist. He is an Honorary Research Fellow at Birkbeck College, University of London.

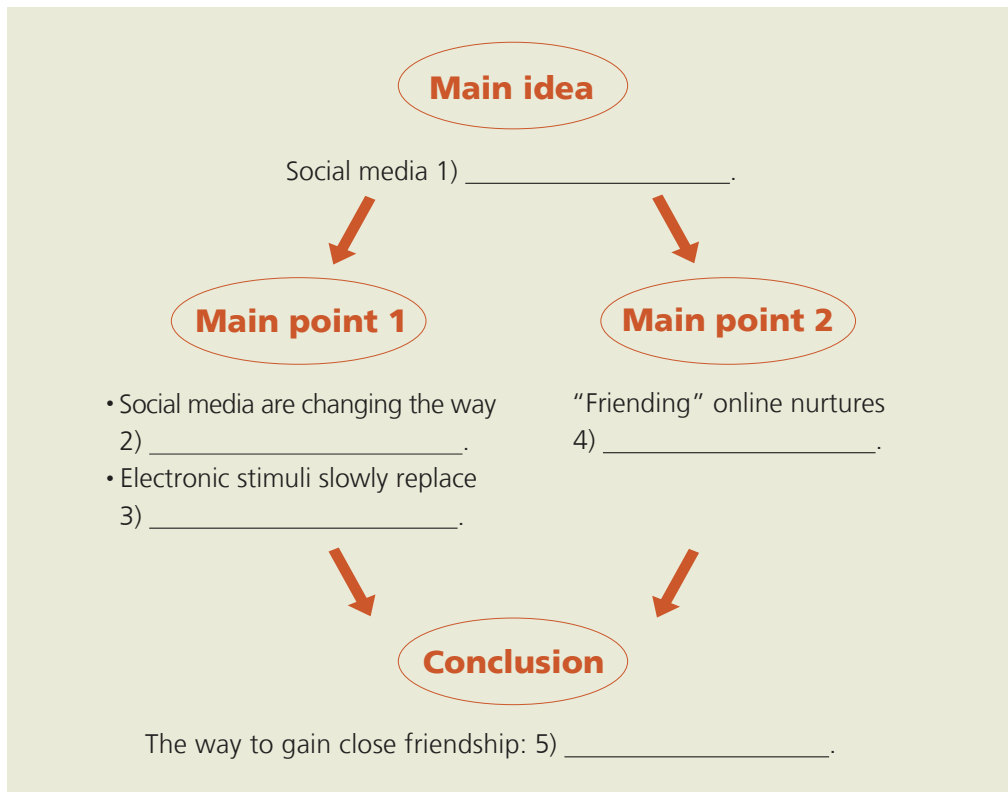
social capital: a socioeconomic concept with a variety of interrelated definitions, based on the value of social networks. For example, it can refer to the value created by social relationships, with expected returns in the marketplace.

American Sociological Review: the flagship journal of the American Sociological Association (ASA), founded in 1936 with the mission to publish original works of interest to the discipline of sociology

Hua Wang and Barry Wellman: authors of a journal article titled “Social Connectivity in America: Changes in Adult Friendship Network Size from 2002 to 2007.” Their findings show that friendships continue to be abundant among adult Americans between the ages of 25 to 74 and that they grew from 2002 to 2007.

Understanding the text

1 Check your understanding of the text by completing the following diagram.



2 Check your understanding of the text by answering the following questions.

- 1 What makes it possible for people to easily make a lot of friends?
- 2 What does the research mentioned in Para. 4 conclude?
- 3 Why does the author say “friending” online nurtures shallow relationships?
- 4 Why are friends so important in our life according to the text?
- 5 Why does the author think friendship starts with childhood?
- 6 What is the paradox mentioned at the end of the text?

3 Work in pairs. Read the statements from the text and discuss the questions.

- 1 We have plenty of acquaintances, though perhaps few individuals we can turn to and share deep intimacies. (Para. 4)
What do you think of this statement? Do you have such acquaintances around you? Use examples to illustrate your point.
- 2 It seems common sense to conclude that “friending” online nurtures shallow relationships — as the neologism “friending” itself implies. (Para. 6)
Why does the author mark the first “friending” with quotation marks? What does the author mean by “shallow relationships”?
- 3 Aristotle was just one thinker to remark that an individual could have everything that life can offer — career, family and money — but if a person didn’t have a good friend, his or her life would be fundamentally lacking. (Para. 7)
Do you agree with Aristotle? Use your own experience to illustrate your point.

Building your language

Theme-related words and expressions

1 Write down the words and expressions related to social media and friendship. You may refer to the text and also do some brainstorming. Start with the examples given below.

texting *acquaintance* _____

2 Define the following terms in your own words. You may refer to the text and dictionaries.

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1 social media | 2 friendship |
| 3 social connectivity | 4 structured time |

Collocations

1 Complete the following sentences with the collocations given in the box below. Change the form when necessary.

take up on a broader scale at fault and the like hang out
when it comes to

- 1 When I was a child, I often _____ with my neighbors in the town park — riding bicycles and playing hide-and-seek.
- 2 I don't think your friend should blame you even if you were _____ yesterday.
- 3 What used to be considered basic back-to-school items — schoolbags, pencil cases, stationery, _____ — have now become fashion accessories in the classroom.
- 4 David, my close friend, may be younger and faster than me, but _____ being smart, there's no contest.
- 5 Many young people prefer to _____ white-collar jobs after graduating from college.
- 6 If the costs for using Skype are so low, how come companies have not adopted it _____?

2 Complete the following sentences with suitable expressions from the collocation box below. Change the form when necessary. Sometimes more than one collocation is possible.

Adjectives which often go before:

friend	close	fair-weather	intimate	loyal	true
friendship	close	deep	intimate	lifelong	shallow
acquaintance	casual	nodding	old	personal	social

Verbs which often go before:

relationship

break off cultivate develop establish renew

intimacy

avoid create destroy enjoy promote sense

connection

break discover nurture establish make

- 1 She _____ when she found out about his gambling.
- 2 Researchers have now _____ between loneliness and depression.
- 3 I _____ between them from their casual and relaxed conversation.
- 4 I bumped into _____ when I visited the art museum yesterday.
- 5 He found that the people he had trusted turned out to be _____.
- 6 The two old men in their 70s have successfully maintained their _____.

Gems of the language

Read aloud the following sentences. Pay attention to the parallel structures.

Structured time results from the way an average day is parceled up for our kids — **time for** school, **time for** homework, **time for** music practice, even **time for** play.

It's not just that they **sit** together, **passing** the salt across the meal table. **It's that** they **sit** with one another across the course of their lives, **sharing** its savor — its moments, bitter and sweet.

The more social media we have, **the more** we think we're connecting, yet we are really disconnecting from each other.

Sharing your ideas

Discuss in groups

- 1 College is a time when you actively seek out new friendships. What kind of relationship do you want to establish with your professors, roommates and classmates? How do social media affect your communication with them?
- 2 With the increasing popularity of WeChat, almost all the students have Moments on WeChat, a feature that allows users to share messages, photos, etc. However, some of the contacts are only thumbs-up persons who seldom have real communication with others. What do you think of these thumbs-up people? How do they differ from real friends?



YOU CAN REFER TO THE ONLINE COURSE FOR MORE EXERCISES.

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VIEWING

How do social media impact real-world relationships?

There is no doubt that social media are affecting our life either positively or negatively. The following information reveals the findings collected from a variety of media and research institutes by the online education website schools.com. Read it carefully and think about how social media impact real-world relationships.

We just can't tear ourselves away!

24%

of people surveyed have missed important moments in person because they were busy trying to share those moments on their social network.

If not, then what is it good for?

In one survey, people said social networking:

- Bolsters their confidence 25%
- Facilitates new friendships 26%
- Helps shy and lonely people make new friends 83%
- Is good for finding old acquaintances 76%

How much time do we spend on Facebook?

Each day, Facebook users worldwide spend a total of **10.5 billion minutes** on the website (not including mobile users).

But can online friends replace real-world friends?

A Hong Kong study found that in comparison to online friendships, offline friendships involve more:

- Interdependence
- Understanding
- Breadth
- Commitment
- Depth

How do people use social media to maintain real-life friendships?

Share good news

62%

Schedule plans with friends

Age 18-24

Overall

43%

16%

Stay in touch with faraway friends

84%

Do social media ease loneliness, or help create it?

Of the Americans who completed the survey from Badoo:

39%

20%

33%

spend more time socializing online than face to face.

prefer texting or communicating online to talking face to face.

are more likely to speak to someone new online than in person.

1 Summarize the positive and negative ways social media impact real-world relationships.

Positive ways: _____

Negative ways: _____

2 How do you use social media to maintain real-life relationships?

READING

Comparing and contrasting online friends with face-to-face friends

The author of the previous text argues that social media make true friendship die away. He suggests that a secret to close friendship is to put down the device, and engage the person. However, the author of the following text doesn't think so. Read the following text, and compare online friends with face-to-face friends, which might give you some help in making friends at college.



YOU CAN REFER TO THE ONLINE COURSE FOR PREVIEW.

FRIENDS .COM



- 1 People have always needed friendship. Humans are very sociable creatures, so they need to interact with other people. Even if people have not changed much over the years, the way to make and enjoy friends has changed. These days, we can become friends with people we have never met by using the Internet. In fact, online friends have several advantages over face-to-face friends. You can communicate with online friends in new and different ways, you can share your feelings more deeply and honestly, and you can meet compatible friends that you would never have had the chance to know in the past.
- 2 The Internet offers special methods of communication. Traditionally, people talked with just one person face to face or on the phone, or to groups of people at parties or at school. On the other hand, only the Internet makes it possible to communicate with a large variety of different people sitting in different rooms all over the world. One example of this is the growing popularity of massive multiplayer online role-playing games, commonly called MMORPGs. In these online games, each player chooses a character and interacts with other players' characters. There can be 10 other players, or 50 or 100 or 1,000. Players can join and leave the game whenever they want to, and the next time they join

the game, it will have changed depending on what other players have done in that time. With traditional face-to-face friends, this would never be possible. You couldn't have players in China, Australia, Germany, Canada, and other countries all playing the same game at the same time and talking to each other.

3 The feelings you have communicating online are special, too. When I am talking in person with a friend, I am more hesitant and shy. I keep some of my ideas hidden. In contrast, when I am writing emails or IMing (instant messaging), I am more honest and open. Online communication feels safer and more confidential to me, and I don't fear people judging and criticizing me. I express my opinions more directly, and I share thoughts that I would never say out loud. I can't explain why this happens, but my friends tell me they feel the same way. I know when I receive emails and IMs, even from people I have never seen, they share more personal information than my face-to-face friends do. This kind of open honest expression is a relief to me.

4 The most important advantage of online friends is the possibility of finding friends without any geographical restriction. No matter what country someone lives in, he or she can become a close friend. Because you are communicating more honestly and openly, you can make friends more quickly and more easily, too. You can then decide to meet in person if you want to. In fact, I met my girlfriend online using MSN Messenger. I talked to her for many hours, and we shared some photos, so I got to know her very well. Then we met in person, and we have been dating ever since. If you can only meet friends in person, you can only meet people who live near you or go to school or work with you. Maybe you will like some of those people, but maybe you won't. If you don't like the people you see every day, you will have no friends. With the Internet, on the other hand, you can easily find friends who share your interests and opinions.

5 Both your face-to-face and your online friends are important. Unlike online friends, face-to-face friends can participate in sports with you or spend time with you even when you are not talking or communicating. Therefore, I am not suggesting that people should not have any face-to-face friends. However, if you want to try communicating in an exciting new way, if you want to share your feelings completely and honestly, or if you are looking to a compatible friend or partner, try looking online. When you turn on the computer, you are just a click away from meeting a whole new crowd of friends from all around the world.

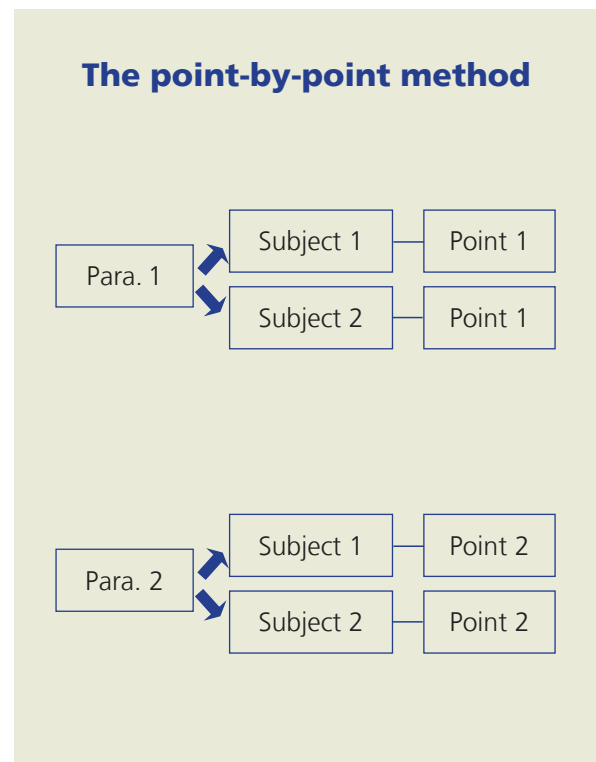
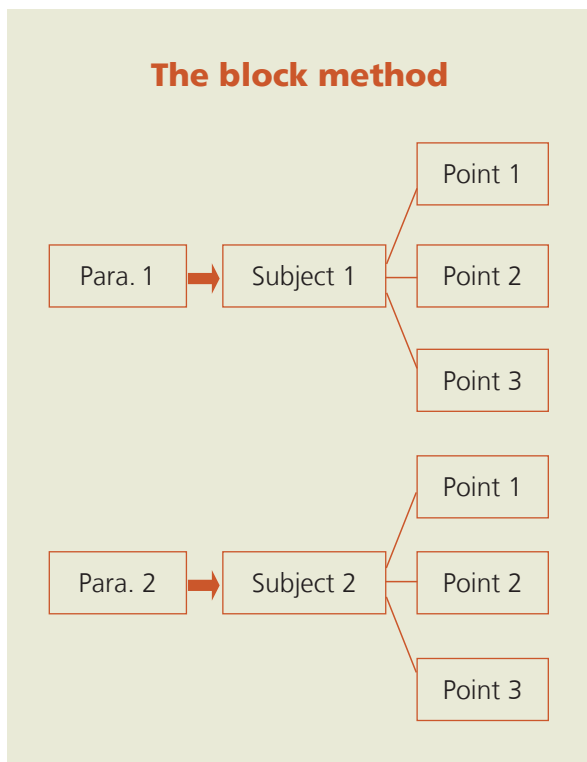


Understanding the text

Check your understanding of the text by answering the following questions.

- 1 What kind of essay is the text?
A. Descriptive essay. B. Comparison and contrast essay.
- 2 What is the thesis statement of the essay?

- 3 What are the three main points the author uses to support the main idea?
1) _____
2) _____
3) _____
- 4 You can organize comparison and contrast essays in two major ways: the block method and the point-by-point method. The former is to examine one subject thoroughly and then start the other. The latter is to examine two subjects at the same time, discussing them point by point. The following diagram presents the features of these two methods in a more explicit way.



Which method does the author use when comparing and contrasting online friends with face-to-face friends?

- A. Block method. B. Point-by-point method.

5 When developing comparison and contrast paragraphs / essays, writers usually use some linking expressions (e.g. on the one hand, also, similarly) to help readers achieve better understanding.

1) What linking expressions does the author use to show comparison and contrast?

2) What other linking expressions do you know?

Building your language

Theme-related words and expressions

Write down the words and expressions related to online friendship. You may refer to the text and also do some brainstorming. Start with the examples given below.

open *confidential*

Collocations

Complete the following sentences with the collocations given in the box below. Change the form when necessary.

interact with a variety of in contrast have an advantage over
say out loud in person

- 1 Parents need to make opportunities for children to meet and _____ others.
- 2 _____ to a previous report, we found no significant relationship between someone's personality and how many friends he or she has.
- 3 Before you start, ask yourself: Which people do we want to reach, what do we want them to take from this event — _____ or through the media and press?
- 4 There are _____ definitions of the word "friend." Americans use the word "friend" in a very general way. They may call both casual acquaintances and close companions "friends."
- 5 David claims that a man who can use social media will always _____ others.
- 6 At this point it is a good idea to _____ to yourself, "Now I am going to give up socializing online," and from then on not to change your mind.

Gems of the language

Read aloud the following quotes and try to recite them.

Friendship is a union of spirits, a marriage of hearts, and the bond there of virtue.
—Samuel Johnson

Friendship improves happiness, and abates misery, by doubling our joys, and dividing our grief.
—Joseph Addison

We should behave to our friends as we would wish our friends to behave to us.
—Aristotle

Sharing your ideas

Discuss in groups

1 The author of the text discusses the advantages of online friends over face-to-face friends. In your opinion, what are the major disadvantages of online friends? Use evidence to support your points.

2 Like Facebook and LinkedIn, there are also some popular social networking sites in China, such as Renren and QQ, which are used by many college students. What do you think of these networking sites? Do you use any of them to make friends? Why or why not?



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UNIT PROJECT

Conducting a mock debate: Face-to-face friends vs. online friends

Argumentation, the act or process of giving reasons for or against something, is one of the abilities that universities want to develop in their students. A good argument is one in which you make a point and then provide persuasive and logical evidence to support it.

In this unit, the author of the text “Is true friendship dying away?” argues that people should make face-to-face friends, whereas the author of the text “Friends.com” claims that online friends have advantages over face-to-face friends. Which one is better for college students, face-to-face friends or online friends? It is a question all the college students have to face.

Suppose you are going to participate in a debate contest organized by the Student Union of your university. The proposition is “Face-to-face friends are better than online friends.” You may practice with your classmates by conducting a mock debate in the following steps.



1 STEP

Form groups

Make groups of four people. Divide each group into two teams. One team takes the pro position and the other team the con position.

2 STEP

Make pre-debate preparations

- 1 Each team prepares its arguments and supporting evidence, and the opposing team's possible arguments and rebuttal. Besides the arguments and supporting evidence mentioned in the texts, you may also search the Internet and libraries for as much more evidence as is needed. Your evidence can draw on, but should not be limited to the following resources:
 - personal experience or observations
 - facts, statistics and research findings as reported in the media (newspapers, magazines, television, etc.)
 - opinions from recognized authorities
- 2 Each group discusses how to utilize the collected evidence to back up your arguments effectively through logical reasoning. For instance, you can collect opinions from recognized authorities through translating the following paragraphs, and discuss how such points can support your stance in the debate.

A. Aristotle on friendship

Friendships for Aristotle can be divided into three main categories: friendships of utility, friendships of pleasure and friendships of virtue. Friendships of utility are based on people who are useful to each other. Friendships of pleasure are based on the amount of pleasure people get from being in the relationship. Friendships of virtue, unlike friendships of utility and pleasure, which can include a circle of friends, are strictly one-on-one relationships. Such a friendship can only occur between two people of the same (or closely similar) values and ideals and both persons have to be virtuous.

B. Confucius on friendship

孔子曰：“益者三友，损者三友。友直，友谅，友多闻，益矣。友便辟，友善柔，友便佞，损矣。”

Tips

Logical reasoning

In logic, we often refer to the two broad methods of reasoning as the deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive reasoning works from the general principles to a particular case. Inductive reasoning works the other way, moving from specific observations to broader generalizations and theories.

3

STEP

Write an outline

Each team writes an outline based on the information you have researched.

	Outline
●	Your stance: _____
●	Definition of friendship: _____
●	Advantages of _____ friends:
●	Argument 1: _____
●	Supporting evidence: _____
●	Argument 2: _____
●	Supporting evidence: _____
●	Argument 3: _____
●	Supporting evidence: _____
●	Possible disadvantages which might be used by the opposing team:
●	Argument 1: _____
●	Argument 2: _____
●	Rebuttal of the opposing team's arguments:
●	Rebuttal 1: _____
●	Rebuttal 2: _____

4

STEP

Familiarize yourself with the organization of a debate

- 1 Debater 1 of Team 1 presents arguments and evidence to support them. (4 minutes)
- 2 Debater 1 of Team 2 briefly states the opposing view, explains in what way Team 1's position is incorrect (rebuttal), and then focuses on arguments and evidence supporting Team 2's position. (4 minutes)
- 3 Debater 2 of Team 1 and Team 2 present the rebuttal. (4 minutes each)
- 4 Debater 1 of Team 1 and Team 2 summarize your arguments. (2 minutes each)

5

STEP

Conduct a rehearsal

Decide the role you will play in your team and conduct a rehearsal. The expressions in the following box might be helpful to you.

Useful expressions for debating

How to open a debate

- To set the framework for our motion, we believe it is necessary to first define the term ... in the following way.
- To begin with, we would like to introduce our motion by giving the following definitions ...
- In order to have a thorough discussion of this topic, we would like to first propose ...
- In the first place we would like to make clear that ...

How to rebut

- It is inconsistent with the evidence to say that ...
- It is unreasonable to assume that ...
- There is little evidence for the argument that ...
- The other team unfortunately failed to reveal the truth of the matter ...
- I'm sorry to interrupt, but you've misunderstood our point.

How to draw conclusions

- It can be concluded that ...
- We can deduce that ...
- It can be inferred that ...
- Let's sum up where we stand in this debate.
- To sum up, here are the main points our opponents have failed to address ...
- After careful consideration, it is safe for us to conclude that ...
- The argument that ... is erroneous.
- The proposition that ... is easily refuted.

6

STEP

Debate in class

Conduct your debate in class. You are allowed to use note cards while talking. You can use the following checklist to prepare for the debate and after the debate to assess your performance.

CHECKLIST

OK Needs work

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 1 I have given my point of view in a clear and effective way. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 2 I have provided convincing supporting details for my view. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 3 I have spoken logically and coherently. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 4 I have used appropriate expressions in the debate. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 5 I have used appropriate intonation patterns. |



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