**Crossfire Tips**

DON’T ASK SEVERAL QUESTIONS WITHOUT GIVING YOUR OPPONENT A CHANCE TO RESPOND:

**“What was the date of that evidence? . . . and what did it say? . . . And why did she say it? . . . Huh?”**

DO ASK ONE QUESTION AT A TIME:

**“First, what was the date of that evidence?”**

**Fifth, maintain control of the cross-examination.** Allowing your opponent to answer your questions doesn’t mean your opponent is entitled to give a full speech each time he or she answers. Just give him or her the needed time to answer.

DON’T LET THE RESPONDENT QUESTION YOU WHEN YOU’RE THE QUESTIONER:

**Q: “Why would the United States attack China?”**

**R: “Hmmm. Well, you answer this: Why would China attack the United States?”**

**Q: “Well. I don’t know. Hmmm. I’ll have to think about that. Do you have another question for me?”**

Use your time for your questions. And use your questions to get information which will damage your opponent’s case and build up your case.

**Third, Don’t read new evidence.** Cross examination is for questions about arguments that you and your opponent have already made in speeches. It is not for questions about evidence that you have not read yet.

DON’T SAY:

**“Well, this piece of evidence will answer that. According to...”**

DO SAY:

**“Space stations can give added energy and we can document that in a later speech.”**

**“When you raise that issue, we will respond.”**

**Fourth, Be honest.** Don’t answer questions with lies just to make your case appear better. Answer questions truthfully.

DON’T SAY:

“**No. George Bush was never president of the United States.”**

DO SAY:

**“Yes it is true Bush was president.”**

**Fifth, Don’t ask questions unless you need to clarify your opponent’s question.** Remember that you are the respondent, not the questioner. So, answer; don’t ask.

DON’T DO THIS:

**Q: “Will Pakistan attack?”**

**R: “Would you want the Pakistanis to attack you? Huh?”**

DO THIS:

**Q: “Will Pakistan attack?”**

**R: “That would be unlikely.”**

***1st rule of questioning: ‘Ask little questions in a series.’***

Questions in Cross-Examination debate are very different from those

in Parliamentary debate. In Parliamentary debate, only a single

question may be put, and it carries the burden (either through humour

or straight refutation) of making a point. That is very difficult to do. In

Cross-Examination debate, however, a whole series of questions may

be asked and by seeking information a little bit at a time a much more

substantial point may be made.

There is a more important reason for asking questions in a series: your

purpose is to convince the audience; if you jump around, you may lose

them. By asking questions in a series you let the audience follow your

line of thought and understand the purpose of the questions. You allow

the judges to recognize your ability to think logically. And by focusing

on three or four important lines of questioning, you signal to the judge

that you can distinguish between important and trivial matters.

You should break each line of questioning into individual questions in

which you seek to make only one point per question. And you should

normally have between three and ten questions in a given line of

questioning. (If your purpose is *constructive* - for example, to obtain

plan details or to show the relationship between the affirmative and the

negative case - one or two questions may be enough. Only in your

*rebuttal* use of questions is three-to-ten-in-a-series a useful rule of

thumb.)

***2nd rule of Questioning: ‘Be well organized.’***

Occasionally, your questions will be intended to elicit admissions which can be used later in your speech (the *constructive* purpose spoken of

above). If so, the point of the questions may not be obvious to the

judges - not until you make use of the admissions in your constructive

remarks. For the most part, however, you are trying to make an

immediate point to the judges. Not only do you serve your purpose by

asking questions in a series, but you also make it easier for the judges

by asking organized questions which play on one topic for a time and

then move on to something else.

As a rule of thumb, spend only about a minute on each line of

questioning you pursue. To be most effective, you should choose your

lines of questioning while listening to your opponent’s speech. (You will

have brought several possible lines of questioning with you to the

debate; which you use, or whether you construct a new series of

questions on the spot, is a decision to make while listening to your

opponent.)

While it is good technique to use your question period to gain

admissions that you can later use in your own constructive remarks,

your questions will be more effective if the majority of them are directly

relevant to the speech that just concluded. As with rebuttal, you may

plan certain lines of questioning in advance, but if their purpose is

merely to rebut an argument - rather than to establish one of your own

- *you cannot use them if your opponent does not make that argument*.

In choosing which lines of questioning to use, keep two considerations

in mind: if you run out of time, you must have already covered the most

important areas of your examination - so put them first. On the other

hand, you want to end on a strong note - since much of your strategy

is creating the impression of success, rather than obtaining any

particular admission from the witness. So you may decide that you

should stop early - rather than commence a line of questioning that you

will not be able to see through to its conclusion.

***3rd rule of Questioning: ‘Be direct.’***

Ask focussed, leading questions, not vague, open-ended questions.

When a lawyer says to his client, ‘*You were travelling only about 30*

*miles an hour when you had the accident, weren’t you*?’, he ‘leads’ his

client to the answer he wants - a different answer, perhaps, than he

would get if he asked, ‘*Did you notice how fast you were going*?’ or

‘*How fast were you going when you had the accident*?’

In Cross-Examination debate, you should always ask leading questions

- not because they show the witness what answer you want (although

that is important) but because they show the judges what answer you

want.

Do not ask ‘*What do you think* ...’ or ‘*How do you explain* ...’ Such

questions invite an answer of book length and are not focussed.

Instead, invert the question and supply the answer you want the witness

to reach: ‘*You think ..., don’t you*?’ This often forces a ‘yes’ or ‘no’

answer (and even if it does not, it narrows the issue greatly), it makes

the issues clear for the judges, it leaves you in control of the

examination, and it tells the judges exactly what the purpose of your

question is. It follows from this that the best form of question is normally

one which is short and contains a statement that you want to put to the

witness. So, in a debate on free university tuition, don’t ask ‘*What*

*proportion of a student’s income is spent on tuition*?’; rather turn the

question around and ask, ‘*An average student spends about 25% of his*

*income on tuition, isn`t that so?’*

***rude.’***

Nothing looks worse than an examiner who is ripping into a witness -

the audience immediately feels sorry for the witness.

Your strategy is directed towards winning the sympathy of the audience;

to do that you may have to be tough, but you must always seem fair.

You must never make your audience sympathize with the witness.

Similarly, you must not try to choke off an apparently damaging answer

- because the judges will conclude (whether the answer is damaging or

not) that some facts are against you and you are trying to cover up your

weak position.

The only time you can interrupt an answer without alienating the judges

is when it is clearly irrelevant, and often then only after a long series of

irrelevant answers. If the witness avoids answering a question, ask it

again, if possible in exactly the same words. This is an effective way of

underlining the witness’s evasion.

Be polite, however: asking leading questions as suggested above will

give the audience the impression that you are being tough with the

witness. If this is accompanied by any intimidation by voice or gesture,

you are likely to lose the sympathies of the audience. For the same

reason, don’t demand a particular answer of the witness: your goal is

to convince the audience, not the witness. Even when you do not get

exactly what you want, if the audience realizes that the witness is

equivocating, you obtain the same measure of success. And it may be

that your argument can be made with what the witness gives.

During the examination period, you may only ask questions of the

witness - not make statements - so you are certain to lose any

‘argument’ with the witness. The witness can reply and you cannot,

unless you break the rules, so save any dispute until your team’s next

constructive speech. At that time, quote the source that shows the facts

that your opponent disputed or was unaware of; observe that you feel

confident your opponent is acting in good faith and that the mistake (in

getting the fact wrong) was a research oversight; invite the witness

(along with the audience), now in possession of *all the facts*, to share

your inevitable conclusion. *Your opponent cannot answer back during*

*your constructive speech, so this type of reply can be given much more*

*effectively here.*

**(1) CLARIFY**

The first and the most obvious goal of a

cross-examination is **clarification**. Often,

beginning debaters approach me with the

question – “What if I cannot think of any

questions?” My answer is: start from clarifying

the opponents’ arguments and their

general position. Very few speeches are so

well organized and well presented that we

(debaters and judges) understand them

perfectly. Moreover, even when they are

presented well, it never hurts to make sure

By Jurate Motiejunaite

**(3) EXPOSE FALLACIES**

A more exciting part of cross-examination

starts when debaters attempt to **demonstrate**

**fallacious reasoning** used by their opponents.

It is not enough to just claim that

opponents use fallacious reasoning, and to do

so in a simple statement like:

- In your first argument you state

that law enforcement diminishes the

number of drug users. How does it

make sense, if people in jails use drugs?

Although such a move may show the drawbacks

of the opponents’ argument, this will

not constitute an effective cross-examination

technique unless it traces the opponents’

reasoning and shows its flaws. It is crucial to

demonstrate how and why reasoning is fallacious

instead of jumping right to a conclusion.

This result is best achieved by employing a

series of questioning strategies.

**(4) EXPOSE INADEQUATE EVIDENCE**

Lastly, cross-examination can be used to

expose inadequate evidence. Sometimes,

it is necessary to ask for the date and

source of an opponent’s evidence in order

to establish its credibility. Alternatively, it

is occasionally important to show a judge

how an opponent’s how the lack of evidence

weakens their position. For example:

- You claim that law enforcement

strategies have decreased the number

of drug users?

- Yes.

- Could you demonstrate how

much that number was decreased by,

through a statistic?

- Well, it is common sense that

people cannot get drugs in jail, so

they stop using them.

In answering questions, honesty is key. If a debater

doesn’t know the answer to a question, they should admit

it; if they lack information, they should not invent it.

However, answerers should never allow their opponents to

intimidate them, and should feel free to ask for a question

to be clarified or rephrased if it is unclear.

For both the questioner and the answerer, politeness is always

fundamental. The ultimate goal of a cross-examination is to

clarify the debate, not make it more confusing. There is

nothing worse than a cross-examination that turns into an

argument or which devolves into *ad hominem* attacks.

Cross-examination can be the most interesting and interactive

time of the debate. If debaters prepare goal-oriented

questions in advance while remaining flexible during the

round, they can not only generate productive discussions

and pose effective questions, they can also enjoy an intellectually

invigorating experience.