

CHAPTER 10

Yes or No: Commanding the Cross-Examination



Coming Up!

In a cross-examination debate, a period of questioning by a member of the opposing team follows each constructive speech. This chapter will show you how to ask a series of tough questions when you're the cross-examiner. It will also show you how to stand your ground when you're the one under fire.

SAVVY ON THE SPOT

A cross-examination is a lively, ‘heat of the moment’ opportunity for you to show your command of the debate. After each of the first four speeches, a member of the other team has a few minutes to cross-examine the speaker. Put another way, it’s your opportunity to pepper your opponent with a barrage of questions intended to weaken his or her arguments. If you’re the one being cross-examined, it’s your chance to show that you’re confident in your arguments and that you can withstand sustained criticism.

At the end of a constructive speech, the speaker will make a statement like, “I now stand open for cross-examination.” The cross-examiner then rises and begins the questioning. Different versions of cross-examination debate have slightly different structures. Here’s a typical example of a speaker and cross-examiner configuration:

1st Affirmative Constructive (1AC):	6 minutes
Cross-examination by 2nd Negative:	4 minutes
1st Negative Constructive (1NC):	6 minutes
Cross-examination by 1st Affirmative:	4 minutes
2nd Affirmative Constructive (2AC):	6 minutes
Cross-examination by 1st Negative:	4 minutes
2nd Negative Constructive (2NC):	6 minutes
Cross-examination by 2nd Affirmative:	4 minutes
1st Negative Rebuttal (1NR):	4 minutes
1st Affirmative Rebuttal (1AR):	4 minutes

CHIPPING AWAY: CROSS-EXAMINER GOALS

If you’re the one asking the questions, you should go into the cross-examination with specific objectives in mind. It’s your golden opportunity to chip away at your opponent’s case. But if you don’t know what you’re trying to accomplish, you’ll be stuck firing off unfocused, unrelated questions that don’t significantly damage your opponent’s case. What are some of the goals you should be trying to accomplish?

Expose Errors. If your opponent has made statements that are either contradictory or inaccurate, the cross-examination period is a great place to point them out. It can be even more effective than doing so in your own speech, because the judges will see your opponent struggling to defend the errors.

Attain Admissions. Forcing your opponent to admit a fact or point that you believe is important to the issue at hand can leave you a step ahead at the end of the cross-examination period. The speaker will appear to be retreating as you draw out admissions that are helpful to your side of the debate.

Attack Arguments. As with refutation, a cross-examination is an opportunity to challenge the logic behind the other team's points. The advantage of a cross-examination is that you can craft a line of questioning in a way that gradually and systematically weakens your opponent's argument. This leaves it 'exposed' for further refutation later on in the debate.

Setup Points. A cross-examination isn't intended for you to present new arguments. However, you may find it useful to establish the *foundation* for a future point without completely giving it away. One such use is establishing the validity of an assumption necessary for one of your upcoming arguments.

Clear Up Confusion. If your opponent has presented definitions or arguments that are confusing, spending a short period of time to bring clarity may be valuable. You'll get the credit not only for showing that your opponent was unclear, but also for making it easier for the judges to understand what's happening in the debate.

TOUGH AND TIGHT QUESTIONS

The type of question you ask has a significant influence on the type of answer you'll receive, even if the intent is exactly the same. It's important that you to understand how to phrase a question in order to achieve your objective. Questions can be grouped into three categories: open-ended, semi-directed, and leading.

Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions invite and encourage the responder to provide lengthy, drawn out answers. When used in a cross-examination, they allow the speaker to take up time elaborating and explaining, which isn't to your advantage as a cross-examiner. Rather than enabling you to drive toward a specific objective, they allow your opponent to control the cross-examination. For example, "How severe do you think the problem of speeding is in this city?"

Semi-Directed Questions

Semi-directed questions suggest what the response should include. They sometimes call for a particular fact to be stated. Although more effective than open-ended questions, they don't drive at your point quickly enough, especially if the speaker doesn't know the answer or tries to maneuver into a related area. For example, "Are you aware of what the latest police report said concerning the number of people killed in this city last year because of speeding drivers?" (This question only encourages an answer such as, "No, please enlighten me.")

Leading Questions

Leading questions imply an answer to which you want the responder to agree. Therefore, they serve to make an argument while pushing for an admission. These are the types of questions you want to be asking most often in a cross-examination, because they allow you to control the process and drive toward an end goal. For example, "Would you not agree that the 1,442 deaths and 10,662 injuries caused in this city last year by speeding drivers show very clearly that this is a severe public safety problem?"

Success Tip!

Keep your questions short, simple, and to the point.



GIVING YOUR RIVAL A GRILLING

We've seen why knowing your objective helps you focus your cross-examination, and we've covered the different types of questions. It's now time to discuss how specifically to go about reaching your goals.

The key to successful cross-examining is asking direct, targeted questions in a series. Firing off random questions on a wide variety of issues will leave you without any key takeaways at the end. Here are some smart strategies for successful cross-examining:

Ask one question at a time. Multipart questions show a lack of flow and focus. You're also required to allow the speaker enough time to answer all of your questions, which makes it harder for you to regain control when you want to move on. A single question is more focused, as it helps you drill down a specific point. It's best to follow up with another question once you've received an answer.

Avoid sarcasm or mockery. There's nothing worse than looking like you're trying to 'beat up' on your opponent. Stick to intelligent, purposeful questions that show confidence and command of the debate. If you have your opponent on the defensive, sounding arrogant about it paints you in a negative light.

Ask leading, "yes or no" questions. Your goal in a cross-examination is to force a quick, anticipated response from the speaker. Ideally, you want your opponent to say "yes" or "no" without leaving much room for a lengthy explanation.

Permit a brief qualification. Even if you ask a "yes or no" question, the speaker has a right to qualify his or her answer. If, however, your opponent starts rambling, you're well within your rights to cut off the answer promptly and respectfully.

Keep your questions brief and to the point.

Lengthy introductory explanations make it look more like a speech and less like a cross-examination. Granted, you're trying to argue your perspective in a cross-examination. But let your questions suggest your line of argumentation, rather than trying to make arguments directly.

Watch Out!

Don't start 'speech-making' in your cross-examination.



Plan a series of questions. On a given issue, prepare to ask at least six to eight questions to get to the point or admission that you're seeking. This tactic will provide key areas of focus for the cross-examina-

tion, leaving the judges with the sense that you've inflicted damage to specific arguments. Simply scratching the surface of many arguments leaves everyone wondering what, if anything, was accomplished.

Persist in response to indecisiveness. If the speaker tries to avoid a question deliberately, ask it again in different words and with a firmer tone. Don't let your opponent get away with being inconclusive. In most case, evasiveness suggests there's something to hide. Be determined to get a direct answer to your question.

Know when to move on. When you get to the end of a questioning sequence, your opponent will be very reluctant to admit what you want in order to avoid making a damaging remark. Once the cross-examination is at a deadlock, move on to another line of questioning or conclude. There's nothing worse than going hopelessly back and forth on the same question when both sides have clearly staked out their respective positions.

Maintain control of the questioning. Sometimes the speaker will try to turn around the cross-examination by asking questions back to you. This is a trick aimed at shifting the power away from you. Don't let it happen. If your opponent starts asking questions, remind him or her that it's your cross-examination.

FAULTY TO FANTASTIC: SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Now that you know the tools of the trade for asking powerful cross-examination questions, let's take a look at a few examples of questions to see what makes (and breaks) a cross-examination. Notice how each question progresses from a poor wording to a good wording. Knowing the difference between weak and strong questions will greatly improve your cross-examination.

Internet Censorship (Open-Ended to Leading)

- **Poor Question:** "What do you think about how easy or difficult it is to verify the age of each person who wants to enter an adult website?"
- **Okay Question:** "Isn't it challenging to check the age of someone entering an Internet site, since there's no face to face contact?"

- *Good Question*: “Would you not agree that the unrestricted nature of Internet search makes it almost impossible to verify the age of someone entering a site?”

Food Labeling (Speechmaking to Brief)

- *Poor Question*: “There are many people who don’t want to eat genetically-modified foods. We believe they deserve the right to know if a particular item at the grocery store has been genetically-modified in any way. Required labeling of genetically-modified products would help them make the choices they desire. Don’t you agree?”
- *Okay Question*: “Considering that many people don’t want to buy any genetically-modified foods and that labeling is the only way to allow them to make informed choices, do you agree that mandatory labeling would protect a consumer’s right to know what’s in a food product?”
- *Good Question*: “Would you acknowledge that many consumers prefer not to eat genetically-modified foods?”

Commercialization of Sport (Multipart to Single)

- *Poor Question*: “Wouldn’t you agree that corporate sponsorship injects more money into sport programs, which helps train athletes and leads to stronger performance at the Olympics and other competitions?”
- *Okay Question*: “Do you acknowledge that sports facilities use sponsorship money to stay afloat and to train athletes?”
- *Good Question*: “Do you agree that many training facilities receive a significant portion of their revenues from corporate sponsorships?”

Joint Peacekeeping (Mocking to Intelligent)

- *Poor Question*: “Wouldn’t you agree that your grandiose plan to have rivals work together is a bit like asking kids to be part of the same group project after they’ve had a big fight?”
- *Okay Question*: “Do you agree that asking enemies to be friends all of a sudden is really a teamwork disaster waiting to happen?”

- *Good Question:* “Do you agree that countries work together more effectively if they have a long history of friendly relations?”

PLANNING THE PROCESS

Like any speech, a cross-examination must have structure in order to be effective. Usually, you have three to four minutes to cross-examine the speaker. This length of time allows you to cover more than one issue. One effective technique is ‘signposting’ your cross-examination. For example, you could say, “The first area I want to ask you about is the legal aspect of professional boxing.” Once you’ve completed this line of questioning, you could state, “Now that I’ve challenged your points about legality, let’s move on to your assumptions concerning moral hazards.” The advantage of breaking down the cross-examination is that the judges will grasp more easily the distinct themes that you’ve covered.

Success Tip!

Plan a full line of questioning with an end goal.



STANDING YOUR GROUND: SPEAKER GOALS

Of course, the questioner has an opportunity to go on the offensive during the cross-examination period. But as the speaker being cross-examined, you can do much more than simply weather the storm. Instead, you can strive to come out of the cross-examination appearing even stronger than before it. As the speaker, there are a number of objectives you may want to accomplish:

Pre-refute refutation. Your cross-examiner is trying to expose flaws that will assist him or her in future clash against your arguments. If you can deflect and debunk the attacks during the cross-examination, you’re essentially negating what the other team plans to use as its refutation. Done effectively, this tactic can leave your opponent scrambling to find another angle of attack.

Stifle the questioner. Your opponent will likely have a series of questions to ask you on a given issue. In most cases, he or she has anticipated what you’ll say about the preliminary questions in order to

setup the more damaging ones. If you can sidetrack the cross-examiner early on by presenting fair but unexpected answers, you can leave your opponent struggling to get back on track. In addition, you'll force your rival to take up valuable cross-examination time scurrying to get to the point of contention.

Defend your case. If you can stand tough against a strong cross-examiner, you'll have gone a long way in showing confidence in your case. The judges will view bold and intelligent responses to tough questions very favorably. They show that you can face criticism on the spot, which emphasizes the strength of your arguments.

Success Tip!

Anticipate the cross-examiner's next questions.



YES, NO, MAYBE SO: ANSWERING QUESTIONS

The best cross-examiners will try to force you into to simple, "yes or no" answers. Remember that your cross-examiner has likely planned out a series of questions aimed at extracting an admission from you. Here are some of the keys to answering questions effectively:

Qualify your answers. Your cross-examiner is hoping you'll answer a simple "yes" or "no" so that he or she can quickly move on with the line of questioning. Don't let your cross-examiner dominate you in this way. There are usually nuances, exceptions, and details that will strengthen your answer. Providing an explanation to your answer will help stifle the cross-examiner and show your confidence.

Be concise. The risk of qualifying your answers is that you'll start to ramble. Going too far with explanations will result in you losing points. You don't want to be seen as killing time by making speeches instead of providing answers. Do qualify your answers, but get to the point quickly and let the cross-examiner move on.

Refer back to your speech. When relevant to the answer, saying, for example, "As I discussed in my second point ..." or "We've already explained that ..." reminds the judges of what you said previously. It also makes your answers stronger by using the backing of arguments that have already been well-developed.

Don't pass it on to your partner. Saying, for example, "My partner will address your question in her upcoming speech" makes you seem unsure. In addition, you've now made a promise that your partner has to keep, throwing your team's next speech off track. Always provide a complete answer yourself.

Never give in. It doesn't matter if your cross-examiner has you on the ropes with a series of very tough questions. Always defend yourself, even if your opponent has done damage to your case. Conceding a point only worsens the damage, making it next to irreversible.

Look at the audience as well. There's nothing wrong with looking exclusively at your questioner. It certainly makes sense, since he or she is the one with whom you're conversing. However, also making eye contact with the audience makes you seem more engaging and confident in what you're saying.

Don't communicate with your partner. Whispering or gesturing between you and your partner makes it seem like you need a 'clutch' in order to answer the question. It's essential that you seem independently confident in your speech.

Answer questions, don't ask them. Some debaters find it clever to try turning around the cross-examination by asking questions to the cross-examiner. This tactic will be obvious to the judges, who will typically view it as inappropriate. Stick to your role by answering questions asked of you by your opponent.

Be decisive. It isn't good practice to be deliberately vague, as it seems like you're trying to evade your opponent or that you lack confidence. Make sure your answers are clear and direct. Answers such as, "Well, it just depends" or "It's tough to say, really" appear very indecisive.

ADEPT ANSWERS

We've discussed the keys to answering cross-examination questions. Now let's take a look at a few examples. The following sample answers will lead you from a poor response through to a good response:

Unqualified to Explained: “Do you not agree that advertising designed to appeal to our emotions makes us buy things with little benefit?”

- *Poor Answer:* “No, I don’t agree.”
- *Okay Answer:* “No, because if it satisfies our emotions, then it does indeed have a benefit.”
- *Good Answer:* “Not necessarily. We don’t get personal satisfaction only from what we ‘need’. We also have nonessential ‘wants’ that advertisers aim to satisfy, such as feeling good about wearing a particular brand of clothing.”

Concession to Case Defense: “Is it not true that students would benefit from more music training?”

- *Poor Answer:* “Sure, they would of course get some benefit.”
- *Okay Answer:* “They may get a benefit, but there would be significant time and money costs.”
- *Good Answer:* “Despite the enhancement, increasing the time spent on music class would take away from other courses. There’s limited time, and the trade-off away from core subjects would be harmful.”

Indecisive to Confident: “Do you acknowledge that prison amenities and activities make it easier to go from being a criminal to acting as a responsible member of society?”

- *Poor Answer:* “Well, it depends. Everyone is different.”
- *Okay Answer:* “Although they perhaps make for an easier transition, they go slightly against the core goals of prisons, namely punishment for crimes and deterrence against future crimes.”
- *Good Answer:* “Quite the contrary. Prisons are meant to punish criminals and deter crime. Prison luxuries send the opposite message.”

Questioning to Answering: “Isn’t it the case that corporate executives are accountable only to the profit demands of shareholders?”

- **Poor Answer:** “But do you not think that they consider how the public will view their actions? Wouldn’t you agree that they also want to have a good public image?”
- **Okay Answer:** “For certain, shareholders may be one stakeholder, but you must admit that they consider public perceptions and their own reputations as well.”
- **Good Answer:** “No, they have to balance demands for short-term profits with their goal of creating a positive, long-term relationship with the public. Executives know that a strong corporate image will help the company over time.”

HAMMER IT HOME: USING THE CROSS-EXAMINATION

Standing alone, strong performance in a cross-examination period can help your team considerably. But can you stretch the effects of a cross-examination into other parts of the debate? Absolutely. Applying the cross-examination to the overall debate highlights and reinforces moments in the cross-examination that you feel benefited your case. This tool applies both to cross-examinations that involved you and those in which your partner was a participant. Additionally, although you’ll usually find more material to use from when your team asked the questions, your answers may also be good material for future speeches. Here are some ways to use the cross-examination:

Success Tip!

Remind the judges of the cross-examination.



Highlight a flaw. If your team has exposed weakness in one of your opponent’s arguments, remind the judges that you’ve done so. Since you don’t have a full opportunity to analyze and criticize your opponent’s answers during a cross-examination, an uninterrupted speech provides you with a valuable chance to explain exactly how the cross-examination exposed the flaws.

Use an admission for refutation. Bringing up concessions made by your opponents during cross-examination periods is a way of turning their own words into refutation. An admission provided in an answer makes your clash significantly stronger, since you don't have to spend very much of your valuable time explaining and proving a point that the other side has already conceded.

Lay the foundation for your argument. Although it's less common than using the cross-examination for refutation, you can use an admission gained during a cross-examination to support the basis of a constructive point. This tool can be used to defend previous points or to lay the foundation for new points. Using cross-examination concessions in this way makes it tougher for the other side to clash, since your opponent appears to be at least in partial agreement.

Reinforce your strengths. An opposing team will try fervently to weaken your arguments while cross-examining you. In many cases, your rival will go in circles without inflicting any harm, helping you show confidence in your case. Referring back to the cross-examination can aid in reinforcing that your points have passed the test of criticism. It's a way of saying, "They tried to defeat it, and they failed."

Cross-examination debate can be challenging. But knowing how to ask tough questions, how to answer questions effectively, and how to use the cross-examination in your speech will improve your performance at this style of debate.

Chapter 10: Keys to Success



- ✓ **Ask direct, leading questions to get the answers you want.** This method allows you to control the cross-examination. Open-ended questions give your competitor an opportunity to ramble, taking up your valuable cross-examination time.
- ✓ **Have a clear objective for your cross-examination.** Ask a series of questions designed to get at a particular point or admission. Start with questions that setup the line of questioning, and then proceed to questions that get to the heart of the matter.
- ✓ **Answer directly, but be sure to qualify your answers.** A simple “yes” or “no” gives the cross-examiner excessive control over the questioning period. Providing a brief explanation will clarify your perspective and will make it more difficult for your opponent to go on the attack.
- ✓ **Use the cross-examination.** If you’ve forced a damaging admission or defended your case effectively, remind your judges about it during the speech that follows.