

KEEPING THE FOCUS ON YOUR OWN ARGUMENTS

Much of what happens in a debate involves a time trade-off. You have only thirteen minutes of total speaking time in the debate, so the six minutes of cross-examination time is significant by comparison. If you allow the focus of cross-examination to remain on your opponent's case, you create the impression that your own case is less important in the debate. When you have control of cross-examination you should try to keep the focus on your case. You can't, of course, make speeches in cross-examination, but you can ask questions that highlight examples supportive of your case.

USING ANALOGIES

The most interesting portions of cross-examination in Lincoln-Douglas debate involve asking an opponent to respond to hypothetical examples or analogies. Both debaters made extensive use of analogies in the 2007 national final Lincoln-Douglas debate on the topic "Resolved: On balance, violent revolution is a just response to political oppression." In the first cross-examination period, James Logan High School debater Bilal Malik used the following sequence in questioning Taarini Vohra from The Hockaday School:

Q: Let's imagine for a moment that I'm being mugged, okay?

A: Okay.

Q: Do you think it's just for me to retaliate against my aggressor?

A: I would say that that is a right of self-defense.

Q: So, it is just?

A: That would be just.

Q: Okay, now would it be just for me to subdue my attacker, tie him up, and proceed to beat him with a baseball bat?

A: The question you seem to be asking ... the answer is a little more complicated.

Q: Sure, go ahead.

A: Okay, when somebody attacks you, every individual has that fundamental right to self-defense. So, what that means is that in a question of justice and what people are due, that right is something that matters, no matter how you implement that right.

Q: Okay, but isn't there some sort of proportionality to self-defense? Like if you steal a dollar from me, am I justified in breaking your kneecaps?