

Hard Interaction: Points of Information and Cross-Examination

Interaction is the very heart of debate, without it you just have a group of people in a room talking among themselves. Interaction comes in two forms: hard interaction, where debaters are speaking directly to each other, offering questions, making short points for contrast, or demanding clarification or explanation, and soft interaction, where speakers are referring to each other's ideas and adjusting their own in responses. Between them, these two activities provide the pillars on which the "debateness" of debate rests. This chapter examines hard interaction—Points of Information and cross-examination. It first looks at the similarities and differences between the two and then discusses the goals they share. Then it describes the reasons for offering questions and explains how to respond to them.

Points of Information and Cross-Examination

Hard interaction takes place in the form of cross-examination (CX) in formats such as Karl Popper, and Points of Information (POIs) in formats such as British Parliamentary and World Schools. Because hard interaction is used to solicit a response, it is frequently in the form of a question. Occasionally, it may be phrased as a statement but one that is fulfilling the role of a question, encouraging the respondent to elucidate further on a particular point. Adherents of particular formats will, rightly, observe that there are many differences between CX and POIs; however, they share enough in terms of strategic function that we can usefully consider them together.

The most obvious difference between CX and POIs is the amount of time each takes up. Periods allotted for cross-examination typically last three minutes and allow for multiple questions, usually pursuing a single theme. They follow directly from a speech and form a distinct element of the debate. The closest analogy for their use would be a courtroom