

lawyer questioning a witness. Points of Information, by contrast, are short—usually about 10 seconds—and interrupt the speaker during the “open” or “unprotected” time (the middle) of her speech. Generally, a speaker will only accept one or two POIs during a speech. The closest analogy here would be a parliamentary or congressional question. In theory, the questioner could follow up with another question, called a “supplementary,” but in practice this is very rare. In CX, you are using a logical scalpel to peel back the layers of obfuscation or circumlocution in an opponent’s case, whereas, with POIs, you are using a single rhetorical hammer blow to smash the shell apart—the objectives, however, are the same.

You may well wonder what a 3-minute, stand-alone process of inquiry could possibly have in common with a one-use 10-second “rhetorical grenade” thrown into the middle of another speaker’s remarks. It’s a good question and has several answers. First, both are strategic parts of the debate. They serve to clarify arguments and, in so doing, focus the debate on the clash that distinguishes the two sides. Debaters employ them to elicit information, demonstrate knowledge or the lack of it, create the basis for later rebuttal, and highlight inconsistencies in the constructive arguments of the other side. Both can be used to compel a speaker to clearly state her position or to acknowledge that she’s abandoned a certain line of argument. They can both be used to force speakers to make concessions or overextend a particular point toward a conclusion she would rather not acknowledge and was hoping everyone had missed.

Both approaches require the questioner to use precision in asking questions and the respondent to exercise caution in answering them. They both require the questioner to use a degree of imagination in guiding the respondent down a dangerous path and, in turn, the respondent to spot the trap in time.

Critically, they both represent the most immediate and direct form of interaction between the two sides. In that regard, they are the closest a debate comes to what might be thought of as a conventional argument. However, in that they both require precision, courtesy, planning, and brevity, they are also the best example of how far from an everyday argument debate really is.

Have a Goal in Mind

You have two possible goals in CX or when offering POIs. Sometimes you will be trying to get the speaker to provide information, clarify a point, or commit to a position. In other instances, you’re planting a seed of doubt in the mind of the adjudicator about your opponent’s argument that you or a teammate can return to and develop at a later