

Cross-Examination*

The art and practice of cross-examination is nearly 2,500 years old. We commonly presume that Plato's account of the trial of Socrates and his exchange of questions and answers with Meletus marks the first example of cross-examination.¹ Courts have used cross-examination for centuries; in 1926, Stanley Gray introduced cross-examination into educational debates at the University of Oregon.²

Cross-examination creates drama, intensity, and audience appeal. Unlike debate speeches, it offers direct person-to-person exchanges that make the dialectic process of debate more thorough. We begin this chapter by laying out the ground rules of cross-examination and then move to the purposes of cross-examination and strategies for both the questioner and the respondent. Finally, we end with general suggestions about cross-examination.

GROUND RULES

The Karl Popper format includes four separate sections of cross-examination: two conducted by members of the affirmative team and two conducted by members of the negative. A cross-examination period follows each of the constructive speeches and another follows the first-affirmative rebuttal and the first-negative rebuttal. Before the cross-examination begins, the questioner will usually use preparation time to consult with teammates and develop questions. Once the questioning begins, however, she must work independently.

In the cross-examination sections of the Karl Popper format, the two debaters involved in the exchange stand next to each other at the front of the room. When asking or answering questions, the debaters face the audience and judges, not each other. Naturally, the debaters glance at each other from time to time, but they keep their main focus on the audience and try to maintain eye contact with the judges.

Cross-examination is a courteous exchange of questions and answers. It is not a time for either debater to make speeches or to launch direct attacks on an opponent's position (e.g., the negative questioner cannot use this time to say, "Your second contention was wrong; you want to know why I think so?").

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