

ADVICE FOR THE QUESTIONER

Asking questions is more an art than a science. As a result, we do not give specific rules for the questioner. We are simply passing on what we have learned from participating in and judging debates.

ASK QUESTIONS; DON'T MAKE SPEECHES

Remember that the cross-examination period is not a time to make a speech but to ask questions. The questions may be “leading”—that is, they may be aimed at eliciting a specific response—but they should never be belligerent or insulting. Generally, the questions should be aimed at eliciting statements rather than just “yes” or “no.” Demanding one-word answers is unfair because it precludes the nuance and complexity that belong in educational debate. The person answering the question should be given the chance to answer fully, clearly, and honestly.

STAY IN CONTROL

As questioner, you should control the use of time, giving an opponent sufficient time to offer a complete response but interrupting politely if she is going on too long or not answering the question directly. You should be respectful and preface your interruption with “excuse me” or the equivalent. If your opponent asks a question instead of giving an answer, remind her that her team has its own time for questions.

ASK QUESTIONS THAT PURSUE SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Many lawyers are fond of saying that they don't ask a question in the courtroom unless they already know the answer. You can't achieve this in cross-examination, but it is a good principle to keep in mind. You should have a sense of what you *want* the respondent to say; you may be disappointed and may get answers you do not expect, but at least your questions will have specific goals. You will find phrasing your questions appropriately easier if you keep the goals in mind when formulating your questions.

REMAIN FLEXIBLE

The questioner should remain flexible. During prep time, you should plan two or three lines of inquiry rather than create a list of questions to follow in rigid sequence. Listen to what the respondent says and ask follow-up questions to clarify the issue. Remember that the respondent's strategy is to give up as little as possible and so his initial responses will often be noncommittal. Sometimes, he will try to avoid answering your question directly, no matter how many times you ask it. In such a case, acknowledge the obfuscation and move on.

DIRECT QUESTIONS TOWARD SPECIFIC GOALS

Debaters should maintain focus and follow a line of inquiry rather than ask numerous questions that wander all over the opponent's case. Poorly phrased