

## **Public Forum- Crossfire Tips**

The art of crossfire is probably one of the most under-appreciated aspects of debate. We will discuss some tips and strategies for dealing with crossfire in a way that frames the debate to a debater's benefit.

First, crossfire is not a shouting match. NEVER raise the voice. When an exchange escalates into a heated argument, and both sides get carried away, everybody loses. Instead, if it is noticed that opponents are acting more "excitable," back off and calm down. Do not match their tone, but instead provide a stark contrast by maintaining an easy, light disposition. Professionalism is its own reward: there is nothing more infuriating to an opponent than having an overly-passionate response shot down in a manner that indicates to the judge that a debater does not need to stoop to rudeness to outmatch them. Impressions are everything, and the reserved debater is always the more credible one.

The interesting part about crossfire is that unlike other debate formats, cross-examination functions as an open exchange. How do we handle the inevitable "power struggle" that occurs with regards to timing and control over the process?

### **Avoid cutting off opponents too much in the crossfire.**

It is not particularly necessary because crossfire is not a contest to see who can ask the most questions. If an opponent is dominating the crossfire and declines to cede his or her line of questioning, the judge will realize this and mentally mark them down. Take advantage of this by sporadically speaking out a way that indicates a wish to interject,

but that the opponent is not allowing it. For example, in the middle of a long-winded rant, a debater might say with a raised hand, "If I could -". This works because one of two things will happen: either they do indeed cede the floor, or if they bulldoze right through the remark the judge will get annoyed with them.

**Realize that crossfire generally does not matter that much.**

If absolutely dying to say something, well, it is not a big deal because there is an entire speech coming up to say it. It is not crucial that a debater beat down their opponents with a clever line of questioning. A speaker can always just beat them down with an equally clever line of actual argumentation.

*Debaters can also see my blog on Forensics Community for tips on phrasing questions correctly:*

<http://www.forensicscommunity.com/policy/cross-examination-using-closed-ended-questions>

The large majority of PF debaters are ineffective at crossfire because they have no idea what questions to ask. They simply rattle off a laundry list of random queries that do not really have any impact on the debate. That is not particularly useful. In general, the most strategic questions are ones that are related. Focus on creating a chain of questioning, where the question being asked is contextualized to the response from the previous question. Example:

*Q: You claim that \_\_\_\_\_ is a result of these \_\_\_\_\_ conditions, correct?*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: And those are the only conditions you're claiming are responsible?*

*A: Yes.*

*Q: So your advocacy does not actually account for THESE  
\_\_\_\_\_ conditions?*

Boom. A speaker has just nailed down their opponent to a story that they have to stick to. Use that chain of questioning as the basis of arguments one can make during the speech. Remember, the goal of crossfire is not to make arguments--it is to set a debater up to make those arguments during their speeches where they can explore them in a nuanced fashion without interruption.

Finally, a last word. NEVER lie. Be honest in responses to crossfire questions, and never misrepresent what one's case says. Sure, a debater can probably get away with being vague occasionally, but does it really benefit? Not only is it intellectually suspect, a lot of judges will notice shadiness, and a lot of debaters will point it out. Things will catch up to a debater and that is not a position to be in. Maintain integrity and a sense of professionalism during crossfire for the best results.