



SCHOLAR COACH

Boutique Academic Coaching & Tutoring

Cross-Examination Drill Sheet.

Cross-examination is the least-practiced skill in debate and the one that most often separates top speakers from the field. Seven rules, three drills a parent can run at home, a question bank to fill in, and a scoring rubric.

INSIDE

Free Resource

Format	Policy (CX) Debate
Level	All levels
Pages	4
Time needed	15–20 min per drill
From	Scholar Coach Debate

THE SEVEN RULES

How Good Questioners Work

- 1 Ask questions.** The biggest novice flaw is making statements and hoping for a response. Ask, get an answer, ask again.
- 2 Prepare questions in advance.** Short, simple questions written before the tournament: on the affirmative, questions built around your 1AC and your likely 2AC blocks; on the negative, questions that set up your positions.
- 3 Ask leading questions.** A leading question never starts with who, what, where, when, why or how, and can be answered only yes or no. It supplies the premise and leads the witness to it.
- 4 Know the answer before you ask.** The richest source of questions is the part of the other team's evidence they did *not* read. "Isn't it true your author also says...?"
- 5 Listen to the answers.** Don't just hear them; use them in your next speech. "In cross-ex they conceded that..."
- 6 Set up arguments with questions.** Every question has a purpose. Open-ended questions are fine when you don't understand something, but never let the other team re-tell their story to the judge.
- 7 Face the judge, not your opponent.** Ask and answer while looking at the judge. It keeps you from getting aggressive and lets you read the judge's reactions.

When you are the one answering: answer briefly, stay calm, don't volunteer, and never refuse a question. If a question is unclear, restate it in your own words before answering. If you don't know, say so and move on.

COMMON MISTAKES

Four Mistakes and Their Fixes

MISTAKE	WHY IT COSTS YOU	FIX
Asking "why" or "how"	It invites a speech, and the other team uses your time to repeat their case.	Rewrite it as a yes/no question that you already know the answer to.
Arguing with the witness	The judge sees a fight, not a point being made.	Accept the answer, write it down, and save the argument for your next speech.
Questions with no purpose	Time passes and nothing useful is on the record.	Before each question, finish the sentence: "I am asking this so that I can say..."
Forgetting to use the answers	A concession no one mentions is worth nothing on the ballot.	Star every useful answer on your flow and cite it in your next speech.

RUN AT HOME, IN SESSION, OR ON THE BUS

Three Drills

Drill 1 · Leading Form

5 minutes. A partner or parent reads one claim from any article, speech, or 1AC. The debater must ask five leading questions about it in a row — each answerable only with yes or no — without using who, what, where, when, why or how.

Scoring: one point per valid leading question; minus one for any open-ended question. Target: 5 of 5, then speed it up.

Drill 2 · 20 in 6

6 minutes. Twice the length of a real cross-ex. The debater questions a partner who plays the 1AC (or reads a sample case). Goal: 20 questions in 6 minutes, every one leading, every answer written down in one word.

Scoring: count questions asked, leading questions, and answers actually recorded. Then the debater gives a 60-second summary of what was conceded.

Drill 3 · The Un-highlighted Card

10 minutes. Take any evidence card with highlighting. The debater reads the full card, finds the sentence the other side skipped, and writes three questions that force the opponent to admit what the author also said.

Scoring: each question must quote or paraphrase the un-read text and end in a yes/no. Then ask them aloud, facing a "judge."

QUESTION TYPES THAT WIN ROUNDS

A Question for Every Situation

TYPE	PURPOSE	MODEL QUESTION
The pin-down	Lock in a fact you will use later	"Your plan is funded through normal means, correct?"
The premise	Get agreement on a general principle before the specific	"You'd agree a policy that costs more than it saves shouldn't be adopted?"
The source challenge	Expose weak or dated evidence	"Your solvency author is writing in 2014 — before the current law, isn't that right?"
The un-read text	Use what they skipped	"Isn't it true the same author says the program 'has never been tested at scale'?"
The link set-up	Prepare a disadvantage or counterplan	"The plan requires new federal spending, yes?" · "The states could do this on their own, couldn't they?"
The clarifier	Only when you truly don't understand	"What does the plan mean by 'substantially'?" (Open-ended on purpose; use sparingly.)
The follow-up chain	Three short yes/no questions that walk to a conclusion	"The harm exists now? The present system hasn't fixed it? So the barrier is funding, not law?"

A 15-MINUTE PRACTICE SESSION

Put the Drills Together

MINUTES	WHAT TO DO	WHO
0 to 3	Read one claim aloud, then write three leading questions about it.	Debater
3 to 9	Run Drill 2 (20 in 6); record every answer in one word.	Debater and partner
9 to 15	Give a 60-second summary of what was conceded, say it as a speech line, then score the session with the rubric on page 4.	Debater and partner

FILL IN BEFORE THE TOURNAMENT

Question Bank

AFFIRMATIVE · QUESTIONS FOR THE 1NC (SET UP MY 2AC)

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

QUESTIONS I EXPECT TO BE ASKED · MY ONE-SENTENCE ANSWERS

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

NEGATIVE · QUESTIONS FOR THE 1AC (SET UP MY POSITIONS)

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

CONCESSIONS I GOT IN CROSS-EX · WHERE I USED THEM

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

FROM QUESTION BANK TO QUESTION CHAIN

Build a Three-Question Chain

Step 1 · Pin the fact

Ask a yes/no question that puts a small, safe fact on the record.

Example: "Your plan starts next year, correct?"

Step 2 · Add the link

Ask a second yes/no question that connects that fact to your argument.

Example: "And a program like that needs new funding to start, yes?"

Step 3 · Land the point

Ask a third question that makes the conclusion hard to avoid, then stop talking.

Example: "So the plan cannot start without new spending?"

Use it later. Write down the exact words of each answer. In your next speech say: "In cross-examination, they agreed that..." Judges can only reward what they heard you win, so say it out loud.

BEFORE EVERY CROSS-EXAMINATION

A 30-Second Self-Check

1 Do I know my goal? Pick the one point this cross-ex must win.

2 Are my questions written? Short, yes/no, in the order I will ask them.

FOR COACH, PARTNER, OR PARENT

Cross-Ex Scoring Rubric

Score each line 1 (not yet) to 5 (tournament-ready) after every drill or recorded cross-ex. Total out of 45. Track the total week to week; the goal is a steady climb, not a perfect first score.

SKILL	WHAT A 5 LOOKS LIKE	SCORE				
Asked questions	Every turn was a question, not a statement.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
Leading form	Questions answerable yes/no; none began with who/what/where/when/why/how.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
Prepared	Questions clearly written in advance and tied to a position.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
Knew the answer	Used the un-read portion of evidence or a known fact.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
Listened	Recorded answers; did not talk over the witness.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
Set up arguments	At least two answers were used in the next speech.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
Faced the judge	Eye contact with the judge, not the opponent; tone courteous.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
Answering	Brief, calm, direct; restated unclear questions; never refused.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
Time use	Used the full 3 minutes; no dead air, no rambling.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
Total					____ / 45	

DATE · DRILL · SCORE

ONE THING TO FIX BEFORE NEXT TIME

The habit that makes it stick. Listening is half of debate. Practice it everywhere: with teachers, parents, siblings, friends. The precondition to answering any argument is knowing what argument was made, and the debaters who become the best listeners become the best questioners.