



Congressional Questioning: 12 Drills.

For students and parents practicing at home. Learn what makes a strong question and a strong answer, then work through twelve short drills that build speed, clarity and calm.

Why questioning matters

Every speech in Congress is followed by questioning. Judges watch both the **questioner** and the **speaker**, and good questioning is one of the fastest ways to stand out. Questioning periods are short: commonly two minutes after the first two speeches and one minute after later ones, often split into 30-second blocks. Times vary by league, so check yours. In the NSDA national scorer instructions, answers are scored and meaningful questions count toward the overall ranking.

Questions should be **pure questions**. Prefacing is usually barred, and speeches disguised as questions waste your time, so skip multi-part chains. If your question sounds like a mini-speech, rewrite it.

Types of good questions

TYPE	PURPOSE	EXAMPLE
Clarifying	Make the speaker commit to a position	"Does your plan apply to all states or only some?"
Evidence	Test the source	"What year is your statistic from?"
Cost or practicality	Reveal a weakness	"Which agency pays for this?"
Trap or setup	Lead to a point for your next speech	"Does your bill include a reporting requirement?"
Real-world	Test application	"How would a small town apply this?"

Question rules of thumb

Keep it under 12 words. Ask something with a short answer. Do not ask a question you cannot use in your next speech.

Answering well

- ♦ Answer in 10 to 20 seconds so more people can ask
- ♦ Start with the direct answer, then add one supporting sentence
- ♦ If you do not know, say "I do not have that figure, but the key point is ..."
- ♦ Smile, make eye contact with the questioner and stay respectful

12 drills

- 1 **Ten-word questions.** Write five questions about any bill. Each must be 10 words or fewer.
- 2 **Rewrite a speech into a question.** Take a statement like "The plan costs too much" and turn it into a pure question.
- 3 **30-second block.** Set a timer. A partner answers each question in 15 seconds or less. Aim for four questions.

- 4 Follow-up chains.** Ask a question, then a follow-up based on the answer. Keep each under 10 words.
- 5 No filler.** Answer five questions with no "um" or "like." Restart on a slip.
- 6 Bridge practice.** Answer the question, then link to your best argument in one sentence.
- 7 Evidence quiz.** Partner picks a stat from your speech. Name the source and year from memory.
- 8 Hostile questioner.** Partner asks the toughest questions possible. Stay calm and polite.
- 9 Silent listen.** Watch a practice speech and write one question per minute.
- 10 Question to ranking.** Rank your own questions best to worst and say why.
- 11 Rapid fire.** Two students trade questions every 10 seconds for one minute.
- 12 Mock chamber.** Family members take turns as speaker, questioners and timer for a full cycle.

Self-check

- ☐ My questions are short and have a short answer
- ☐ I do not preface with a speech
- ☐ I can answer without rambling
- ☐ I know at least one weakness in every bill I might debate
- ☐ I wait for the PO to recognize me

QUESTIONS I WANT TO ASK ON MY NEXT BILL

Want a plan built around your debater? Book a free consultation with Scholar Coach at the link below.

Built from public guidance: NSDA Nationals Congressional Debate scorer instructions · Wikipedia: Congressional Debate. Rules change by league and tournament, so always confirm against your tournament invitation and current league rules.

NOTES

Want a plan built around **your** debater?

Book a free consultation. The short intake takes about a minute and opens right away.

BOOK NOW →