Questions & Points of information in Debates

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A debate is a show. Show business – no show, no business.
- Debate is competition, it is all about you looking better and being better
- You are always on display.
- Show command – you are in charge of the situation, the arguments, and the competition.

Questions/Points of information are important to this:
- To show you are in command of the issues, face to face
- To develop and advance the arguments
- To establish you as the best debater in the room
- To stay active in the debate

Making a point of information – general guidelines
- Short point: **most important**, a quick point makes it harder for them to come up with a strong answer. Make it clear but quick and they have less time to think. Draft it in advance, reword it, work on it, then give it in its best form. The rules say you get 15 seconds, you should use less.
- Hard to answer: **also most important**, make your point difficult and challenging. Think about how you would answer this if you were them, and if you can answer it easily, it is not a good point.
- Prepared: before the debate, during the debate, but prepared.
- Staying active: if you will not speak again you remain engaged in the debate, make yourself hard to forget.
- Rising no matter what: do not rise too often (3-4 times during a speech) but remain determined and you will be noticed even if you are not called on.
- Rising together: sometimes all team members can rise at the same time, and then the audience will think “the speaker must have said something stupid,” and then they may find something. Do not do this more than once in a debate.
- Language on rising – “Point,” “On that point,” “Sir,” “madame,” and nothing more than that. Or, just stand up.
- Timing during speech: offer a point when it will be taken, during a “seam” in the speech between major segments. Anticipate this seam by 15 seconds and then be standing when the time comes.
- Look at the audience: first look at the speaker, then turn and watch the audience for non-verbal feedback which can be very useful.
- Point need not be a question, and may be a statement.
- Rarely a request for explanations – do not help them more fully explain a poorly explain argument.
- Follow up on points during speeches. Nothing is more powerful evidence than quoting something they said.
Responding to a point of information – general guidelines

• Short answer: most important, a short answer makes you look like you are in command. You want that. It also allows you to answer without wasting your time.

• Turn it: also most important, do not answer defensively, whenever possible indicate how you solve that problem or difficulty, how you make the situation better with your side of the motion. Think offense, not defense. Defense – “It will not cost so much money;” offense – “It will save money.” Of course, then you have to have a reason why. You can think of a reason why, but you have to believe in yourself and will yourself to do it.

• Dismissing points – you can say “no thank you” but that interrupts your speech. Instead, just wave them down.

• When to take them: have a plan for when you will take points, and then take them then.

• If they go on too long, interrupt them with, “Yes, yes, our answer is…. Because they have gone beyond their 15 seconds you can do this.

• How many to take. Two.

• Who to take them from – take them from the speaker of the other team who you think is the best debater.

• No follow up allowed – it is not a conversation or a cross-examination.

• Never ask for a repeat of a question you did not understand. Do your best to answer it, and the audience may be amazed that you understood a question they did not.

• Look at the audience. You want their non-verbal feedback,

• Following up on points during a speech. Do it, Use your team’s smart answers.

• Two part points by them – answer the first one.

• What if you do not know how to answer it? Say, “I am glad you raise that point, my response is…. And then think of a good answer. All you really want is a second or so to think of an answer, and with this technique you will get that without sounding uncertain.

EXERCISE: POINTS OF INFORMATION

GOALS:

• Develop strong Pol offering skills.
• Develop strong Pol replying skills.
• Make students search for arguments, and thus points to pose, on a variety of motions.

PROCEDURES:

• Give each student a motion.
• Have them outline a very brief first prop or opp speech in about 7-8 minutes of prep.
• Then, have a student stand up and speak on this motion, but after one to one and a half minutes you pound the table and all in the room start offering points of information.
• The speaker MUST take all points from a variety of students.
• It is the responsibility of all students to pose points to the speaker.
• Your role is to be the audience, and make sure to be active. Point out things like: question too long, question too easy, answer too long, weak answer, answer not scoring points for their aide, etc.
• Feel free to interject these comments during the speech, but do not let others do so.
• Make speeches long enough so that you use all the time and everyone gets to speak. If they have to speak for nine minutes taking points for eight of them, fine. It will make them stronger.
• You can also feel free to offer points, but try and model good practice and behavior.

CAUTIONS:
• Always make sure to maintain decorum, no flagging of points or inappropriate behavior.
• Watch the time; calculate how long speeches can be before the first one is given based on the time left and how many students are in your group.

VIDEO

Several can be found here: http://debatevideoblog.blogspot.com/search?q=information