

**Saskatchewan Elocution and Debate Association (SEDA)**  
**Ten Tips for Effective Cross-Examination**

**1. THE PURPOSE OF CROSS-EXAMINATION**

- performance for the judges
- build your case
- obtain admissions from the opposing side which are helpful to your own case,
- obtain admissions from the other side which can be used to hurt their own case
- clarify a point made by the other side

**2. OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS**

- use sparingly when you can
- can reasonably limit the extent of the response
- are fairly certain that you anticipate the general nature of the answer that you will get
- can then use a direct quote of the respondent's own answer to ask leading questions

Examples of open ended questions are:

- What is your plan?
- Do you have any authority for your statements?
- Why do you feel that this is a problem?
- How can you pay for this?

**3. LEADING QUESTIONS**

Leading questions suggest the intended answer.

Leading questions are designed to get you to agree with something that will harm your case or help the questioner's case.

A good questioner will ask a series of leading questions with a view to getting the respondent to agree with him for the first few questions. After lulling the respondent into a pattern of agreement, the questioner may pose a target question, hoping to have thrown the respondent off her feet, and have her agree before realizing what has been admitted to. Once the questioner has received the favourable answer, he will immediately move to a new line of inquiry, distracting the respondent, and forcing her to concentrate upon a different topic before she has an opportunity to elaborate upon her earlier, harmful, admission. The witness would look foolish or unreasonable if they try to disagree with obvious or factual questions

- Ask short, leading questions because they show the judges what answer you want
- Decide what admissions you want from the witness and make it a leading question
- Turn the question around
- Limit yourself to factual questions
- Don't argue
- Tie answers down
- Know when to leave answers alone
- Ask in positive form
- Ask a Series of Questions
- Show Relevance
- Don't back down
- Consider the order of Questions
- Try to predict an answer to a question
- Don't ask a question if you don't know the answer or there is no advantage

**4. COURTESY IN CROSS-EXAMINATION**

- be courteous, but not meek
- Do not seek to embarrass, belittle or intimidate one's opponent but challenge answers and non-responses

## 5. **SPEECH MAKING IN CROSS-EXAMINATION**

- Do not give a lengthy recitation of new information then make it sound like a question at the end

## 6. **CONTROL OF CROSS-EXAMINATION**

- **The questioner has the right to control the cross-examination**
- **The respondent has the right to qualify his or her answer**

Avoid any discussion of your own beliefs, which are in fact irrelevant. A debate is a clash of positions, and you need not say whether you personally support the case that you are presenting.

## 7. **STRATEGY IN CROSS-EXAMINATION**

Choose your questions and strategy based on some of these factors:

- Is the other side disorganized?
- Is their research inferior to yours?
- Are they prone to being argumentative and belligerent?
- Are they operating poorly as a team?
- Does your own case need more factual support?
- Has your partner been undermined by a powerful cross-examination?
- Do you need to change the tone and pace of the debate?

## 8. **QUESTION TREES**

For each area that you intend to examine upon, prepare a separate sheet of paper. At the top of the sheet, write the first question which you will ask. Then divide the sheet in half and record what your next question will be if the first question is answered with a yes, and what your question will be if it is answered with a no. Continue on like that until you have mapped out a course which must necessarily lead to a harmful admission, or which has taken the respondent to an absurd extreme, which will destroy his or her credibility.

Drawbacks:

- work best with questions that can only be answered with a yes or no
- can be frustrated by a properly qualified answer
- do not prepare you to depart from your advance plan
- sound canned

## 9. **MAKING USE OF THE CROSS EXAMINATION**

State the conclusions about the admissions you and your partner have obtained from the opposition, in a subsequent constructive or rebuttal speech. This is most effective when prefaced with one of the following phrases:

- As the first affirmative speaker admitted to my partner under cross-examination...
- My opponent stated during cross-examination that...
- Recall that the negative admitted our second need for change in cross-examination when they stated...

## 10. **Answering questions**

Your objective as witness is the same as your objective as examiner: to create a favorable impression with the audience:

- Listen to the question carefully - but don't stall;
- Ask for clarification or which question to answer if several are offered at once
- Answer the question truthfully, and briefly (less likely to make damaging admissions)
- Don't appear evasive
- Don't make speeches
- Tell the truth and be (and convey the impression of being) forthright