



8.1 Chain Cross-Examination

This activity introduces basic cross-examination skills. Students sit in a circle and, one by one, ask a cross-examination question to the student sitting next to them. Each student will answer one cross-examination question and then ask a question to the next student in the circle. This exercise helps students prepare for cross-examination questions with respect to a particular case or negative position, and to learn to ask effective questions. A more advanced variation of this activity encourages students to evaluate the effectiveness of cross-examination questions.

Time Allotment

15-20 minutes

Objectives

By the end of this activity, students will:

- develop basic skills in cross-examination.
- advance their understanding of an affirmative case or negative position.

Materials and Preparation

Instruct students to arrange desks in a circle. Each student will need a piece of paper and a pen to take notes.

Method

Students should arrange their desks in a circle.

Choose a resolution and an affirmative case to use in this exercise. The case should relate to a topic students can discuss without research and evidence, or be related to research students have already completed.

Make sure that all students are familiar with the basic components of the affirmative case you will be using for this activity. If it is an affirmative case they might debate in an actual debate round, be sure they are familiar with the plan, solvency and inherency arguments, advantages and potential disadvantages. If the case you are using for this activity is an impromptu topic, you should open with a brief discussion or group brainstorm of the arguments for and against the case.

Select one student to begin the activity. The first student will pretend to be a negative speaker and ask a cross-examination question to the student sitting next to her. The second student should respond to the question as an affirmative speaker. Then, the second student should ask a third student a cross-examination question about the affirmative case. The third student will then question the fourth student and so on until every student has both asked and answered one question.

Students should make note of particularly effective questions and answers.



For particularly large groups, you may wish to switch to a different case half way around the circle. Alternatively, you can introduce a disadvantage part way around the circle. The students asking questions would ask as if they were on the affirmative side and the disadvantage had been run against them, and the students answering questions would defend the disadvantage.

To conclude the activity, pick out the most effective questions and answers and discuss what made them effective. If the case you have been working with is a case students expect to debate in a competitive debate round, encourage them to save notes from this activity for future reference.

Variation:

A variation of this activity can be used to teach students to avoid common pitfalls in asking cross-examination questions. Begin by handing out a list of these pitfalls to members of the class or by generating this list through discussion or an activity like "Ineffective Cross-examination Questions." Run the chain cross-examination as described above, with students taking turns asking questions of the student next to them in the circle. After each question, give the class a chance to object to the question if it is ineffective according to the criteria on the list. If the class deems a question ineffective, the student must ask another question until she comes up with an effective question. Then, the cross examination chain should continue around the circle as described above until another student asks an ineffective question.