



8.2 Group Cross-Ex

This activity introduces basic cross-examination skills. A speaker delivers a brief speech before the class, and afterward members of the class take turns questioning the speaker. There are three variations on this activity:

- 1. In the most basic variation, each speaker tells a brief story – a creative tale or an analytical account of a current event. This variation is good for beginning debaters.*
- 2. In second variation, the speaker summarizes an affirmative or negative argument. This variation is good for introducing students to cases they might encounter in a competitive debate round while also honing cross-examination skills.*
- 3. In a third variation, the teacher is the speaker and the class cross-examines the teacher. This allows the teacher to model good cross-examination technique.*

Time Allotment

One class period

Objectives

By the end of this activity, students will:

- be introduced to cross-examination.
- build confidence in public speaking.
- be introduced to generating coherent answers to spontaneous questions about an argument.

Method

Variation 1: Cross-examining Stories

Each student should prepare a short (1-2 minute) story to present to the class. The “story” can be a short account of a current event based on a newspaper article or a short creative story. Give students 5 minutes in class to prepare a story. Alternatively, you can assign the story as homework and ask students to use an article from the newspaper as evidence.

Students should present their stories one by one to the class. After each storyteller has presented a story, the class will cross-examine the storyteller. Questions should encourage the storyteller to fill in a missed detail, explain an inconsistency, or discuss an alternate perspective on the events described. Limit the amount of time the class has to cross-examine each speaker according to the size of the class and the amount of time you wish to spend on the activity. For larger groups, you may give the class 30 seconds. For smaller groups, you may wish to allow for 1-2 minutes of questioning after each speaker

Students should make note of particularly effective questions and answers.

To conclude the activity, pick out the most effective questions and answers and discuss what made them effective. You may wish to give students a cross-examination tip sheet to refer to during this discussion.



Variation 2: Summarizing Cases on the Current Topic

For more advanced debaters, ask each student to summarize, without reading evidence an affirmative case, counterplan, disadvantage, or critique that they may encounter during a competitive debate. For this activity, you may wish to lengthen the allotted times for speeches and for class cross-examination in order to allow for more substantive discussion. Conclude the activity in the same manner as Variation 1.

Variation 3: Cross-examining the Teacher

You, as the teacher, should summarize a debate argument in front of the class. The students in the class will take turns asking you questions. After speaking yourself, you can continue the activity by having students speak, as in Variation 1 or 2.