

Lesson 6: Crossfire

What is crossfire?

In a PF debate round, there are three crossfires: 1st crossfire (after 2nd constructive for 1st speakers), 2nd crossfire (after 2nd rebuttal for 2nd speakers), and grand crossfire (after 2nd summary for all speakers). Each crossfire is three minutes.

Crossfire's purpose

The purpose of crossfire is to ask questions about the opposing team's arguments. Questions can be clarifying, aim to reveal flaws in their argument(s), or generally force the opponent into an uncomfortable position. During an in-person debate round, you should stand up and look to the judge instead of your opponents.

Crossfire questions

While many tend to ask questions that make their opponents look underprepared, it is common for people to forget to ask clarifying questions when they don't understand the other side. If a part of your opponent's case or rebuttal was unclear, the place to make sure you understand their argument is in crossfire; most technical judges will not evaluate crossfire when making their final decision.

When phrasing crossfire questions, avoid using overly wordy rhetoric or jargon to ask questions as this can confuse the judge and/or your opponents. Instead, phrase the question using generic speech as if you're having a regular conversation with the other speaker. Also, try to make the questions as concise as possible to save time and prevent confusion, as crossfire is only three minutes. However, do not speed read, or spread your questions. Aim to spend no more than 20 seconds asking your question.

Crossfire time management

Furthermore, try not to spend more than a minute on each question, allowing sufficient time for clarification as teams sometimes change

their warranting in crossfire. If too much time is spent on one question, you can politely ask your opponent: "We've spent a long time on this, can we move on?/may I take a question?"

Crossfire in lay rounds

Crossfire becomes significantly more important when being judged by someone inexperienced like a parent. Since inexperienced, or "lay," judges do not understand nor care about the technicalities of how a debate round should be evaluated, many lay judges view crossfire as an opportunity to see which team is more confident and assertive, therefore worthy of their ballot. Thus, lay rounds require a stronger focus on perceptual dominance, particularly in crossfire. The key to being perceptually dominant is knowing your arguments well.

Crossfire tips

In any crossfire, knowing the history of your arguments or having empirics to strengthen your argument can look good to lay judges who don't know much about the topic. This also makes your argument hard to argue with.

Additionally, another way to follow-up on a question is simply asking "Why?". More often than not, teams take answers to their questions at face value instead of testing the answers. It forces teams to explain their warranting better and exposes teams who are underprepared. This tip is also a good way to detect poor warranting.

Finally, if your opponents don't answer your question properly, call them out on it. This makes it obvious to the judge that they are dodging questions. Especially in lay rounds, many judges may not notice if a question was answered or not. Similarly, if your opponents interrupt you in crossfire, call them out on it. This puts you ahead on the courtesy debate and puts you in control of the crossfire dynamic against debaters that are just interrupting you.