I wanted to share some quick notes on cross x that I think some of you may benefit from.

In cross x, questions should be based on the argument that you want to make - yes, this means you should be planning out what you're going to run and subsequently, what you are going to be asking about. This means that you should be able to prepare a slew of questions to ask the other team before the debate even begins, and is especially true if you are neg.

For low level cx, you can just embarrass teams that don't know what they're doing by asking simple explanatory questions. However, this becomes outdated very quick as you face people that actually take the time to prepare their case and research its intricacies. The way that I lived through cx as the first aff speaker was reading and taking notes on the aff case, as well as getting my partner to prepare a little post-it note for me to refer to if I was asked about the technicalities of the case, and how the technology for it worked. Yes, that means that even though you are the first speaker, you must put in time to understand that case that you partner has prepared.

Returning to the topic of good cx practices:

For example, if I wanted to prove that their impact has no probability, I'd ask them a series of questions that force them to defend a statistical articulation of the probability of their impact scenario; something that is more difficult the less probable the impact is (surprising huh?). Then, in the speech, you would use their responses in cx to help defend your impact/attack their impact. Think of it this way; cx questions help give you ammunition to fight; so please consider your questions with some value.

Fundamentally, this is what cx is about. You force the other team into defending something that is bad for them; to stick them to an indefensible argument.

CX is in some ways an art and in some ways a science; the only way to get it right is through ample practice and observation of teams with good CX skills.

Going back to my previous emails, I'm just going to copy and paste this entire discussion on CX and I hope you can apply the things that are relevant to you.

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First, half of your first cross-x should **always** be prepped.

Second, the person who is NOT speaking next does the cross-x; which means if are not speaking, you are writing cross-x questions.

"*But Graca, how can my partner possibly function if I’m not constantly writing answers for him/her!?*"

I’ll let you figure out why that’s dumb. The benefit is that you have time to create strategic questions and not look like an awkward buffoon.

Third: but how do we get good CX questions? Well…

Here are some common mistakes:

**1. “*Oh yea, well what’s your answer to this?*”**

This is a colossally bad line of questioning. This can only possibly play out in two possible options:

a. You run your blocks in the cx (bad)

b. You say “well, if you make that argument in a speech, we’ll answer it” (awk)

B should be the only response. First, the aff hasn’t asked a question, they have made an argument. Making arguments is not the purpose of CX, a point I have belabored enough. The only other accept response is “Is that a question or what lmao”.

*B-b-but the argument I was making in cx was a good one!*

What exactly is the other side supposed to do? Read their 2NC/2AC block? I assume you think that is stupid, so what are they to do then? Pick their best analytic response and try and explain it with the aff constantly cutting them off? Ok assume they do that, what has been accomplished? Does that argument now go away? Does the aff make that argument in the speech, and then we hear the neg repeat their same answer amongst a litany of other answers? If that’s the case then what was accomplished by the CX? This line of questioning violates the fundamental premise of CX which is that you are supposed to be setting up arguments for future speeches. You aren’t setting up an argument, you are randomly making (are you even doing that?) an argument and trying to get a window into what their answer would be. This is silly.

In addition to being silly, this is just lazy. You aren’t formulating a strategy; you aren’t doing something clever. You have run out of things to say and therefore you are filling time. Even if some want to insist this is an “acceptable” cx strategy, explain why is it a GOOD strategy? Why is it better than asking other, smarter questions that better set up the points you want to make?

**2. CX is something you should prep for and strategize about.**

For any argument common enough that you need a 2AC block, you should have a prepared CX strategy. Think of it this way:

a. Do you look smarter when you improvise on 2 seconds of thinking, or when you think about something for a long time in advance?

b. In CX, do you want to look smart?

Here’s a good cross x (this is from the topic that said that: national interest should come before letting in migrants from refugee crises)

1N: National interest comes first

1A: What is national interest

1N: It’s kinda unclear, but it’s generally the goals of a nation

1A: how do you know the goals of a nation

1N: well we don’t really know, like we said its kinda unclear. But we meet their goals with the 1nc

1A: … but how do you know the nation’s goals?

1N: dude I don’t know

1A: OK who is qualified enough to determine a nation’s national interest

1N: like, ir professors and political insiders

1A: how do we know an action is actively working towards the national interest

1N: what do you mean

1A: how do you know a politician is fulfilling their nation’s national interest

1N: well, when they do something that helps their nation I guess

1A: how do you know a political action is helping or hurting a nation

1N: What?

1A: how do you know a politician is helping achieve the national interest or just doing lip service?

1N: well, when they say so

Now, at many points in that CX many of you would be tempted to DROP THE HAMMER!!!! Realizing the neg had said something silly you would try to pounce and instead of asking a question you would be tempted to make an argument. RESIST!! Making an argument just gives them free speech time, they have already fallen into the pit you can take your time and spring the trap later. The 2AC in this debate did so with an analytic argument that went something like this;

“*National interest is a BS ir concept- it's not something that can be measured or tracked, there is no way to know how much politicians are working towards it or how much a nation needs or how much a nation allegedly ‘fulfills its goals’. Their evidence doesn’t come from Washington insiders- it comes from random staff writers trying to sell papers by focusing on the spectacle of politics; they throw around terms like national interest but don’t mean anything. Where do their staff writers get the information on a nation’s political doctrine- from the same place Jack got his beanstalk beans? Their CX defense of this disad was laughable and you should not grant them any of their arguments until they have a defense of what national interest is and how it can be tracked and identified; that means you should prefer the team that best saves lives; it’s the least nebulous framing, the least self-serving, and gives both teams a clear and equal chance of winning since we can weigh physical lives but it's physically impossible to weigh an unknown*”

By not making the arguments in CX they didn’t give the neg any free speech time to respond or weasel. They let them hurt themselves and then moved on to the next question.

**3. CX is the time to ask questions, not make arguments**

I cannot stress this enough. No one flows CX the way they flow a speech- even if you make the greatest argument of all time (and here is a quick tip- you aren’t) you have to repeat it in a speech anyway- so what's the point of asking in cx? Why would you say the same thing twice?

CX is the time to use questions to establish the basic premises you will use later to make your arguments. You want to ask questions where the answer sets up an argument, not questions where the answer gives you the round. This is because no one ever concedes in CX. Observe:

“*Isn’t your terror advantage stupid?*”

“Yes! It is! I ‘m a fraud, give them the win and double 30’s!”

-Said no one ever

What people are doing when asking these stupid “shouldn’t you lose lole?” questions is basically trying to make an argument. They **want** to say “there’s no probability of a terror attack” but they know they have to make a question out of it so they say their argument but in question form.

So how do you go about asking questions that set up these arguments for later? I'm glad you asked.

“*When was the last time a confirmed refugee incited a terror attack in Europe?*”

Two things will happen:

1. They make a list - you now just have to explain why those individual examples of terror attacks are weak - for example “*yeah a guy assaulted some ppl*”- now gives you an avenue to read how that has no magnitude, is easily suppressed, and is only one scenario of violence with millions of migrants.

2. They can’t answer- now you have the basis for an attack “*they can’t explain a single instance of terror, which is an indication that you should assign zero risk to their terror impacts*”

**4. Don’t be an insufferable asshole**

“*where does your ev say X”*

“blah blah blah”

*“well I don’t think it says that*”

The basic formula? You ask a terrible question; they give you an answer (good or bad) and then you give your *\*\*brilliant\*\** commentary on that question. DO NOT DO THIS. CX is the time to ask questions, not make arguments. The snide aside is not even an argument actually, it is just you being petty- you asked a bad question and didn’t get the answer you wanted and now you are taking it out on all of us. WHAT ARE YOU HOPING TO ACCOMPLISH WITH THIS?????

“*Well, I want the judge to know their answer was wrong”*

Assume for a second this is a meaningful goal: your method here sucks. No judge is convinced by your snide remark. If you want to make an argument, make it in a speech.

But let’s attack the actual premise. Are you so worried that the judge is going to be swayed to vote against you by a random terrible answer to a pointless CX question that you need to comment on it at exactly that moment? 75% of judges aren’t paying attention to cx anyway, and those who are paying attention are well aware of the answer being potentially stupid

**5. Filibustering**

This is when you either go on a tangent about something irrelevant or pretend you are writing an 8th grade English paper that has a page minimum and you belabor your point with needless adjectives to make a two-word answer into a paragraph. This doesn’t impress anyone. All these tactics designed to “waste” the other teams time generally don’t hurt them at all- they hurt your image/ethos exclusively by making it look like either:

-you don’t know what you are talking about

-you are a jerk

Whatever rationale you have for doing this, realize you are wrong. NEVER in the history of debate have you heard a judge tell you

“*I really wish you had danced around more dodging questions and being more pointlessly evasive- that would have resulted in higher speaker points and probably a win. Actively wasting everyone’s time is the easiest way to win!*”

No judge likes this. It accomplishes nothing strategic. It REALLY hurts your image. Stop doing it.

**6. Don’t argue with the other team.**

You most often see this when there is a disagreement over what an answer to something means.

“Question?”

“Answer"

“Lol answer”

“no not that ……”

Here is the thing - 99% of the time the other team is not going to make whatever crushing argument they think they just got you to admit to in their speech anyway, so don’t worry about it. If they do then hopefully the judge understands that you are being misquoted. If not, you arguing in CX won’t accomplish anything anyway. Now if you actually misspoke you can feel free to try and clarify that. That’s not really what I’m referring to. I am thinking here of a CX where the time is wasted chasing down a rabbit hole after an ambiguous cx answer is interpreted in a slanted way by the negative and then the aff gets overly defensive about it. Being defensive, generally, does not help your image- it makes you look guilty. So just let it go and clear it up in your speeches.

**7. Admit you don’t know.**

People are skeptical at first, but just saying “I don’t know” is not a bad thing.

*“What is death”*

“I don’t know exactly”

What exactly is gonna happen now? The “worst” thing that can happen is the neg adjusts its Fall Out boy shirt, pushes up its thick rimmed glasses and scoffs at you with some remark like “OH MY GOD YOU DON’T KNOW!!! LOL THIS GUY DOESN’T KNOW WHAT DEATH IS!!! ALERT THE UNITED ASSOCIATION OF DEBATE HIPSTERS!” That is literally it. The reasons nothing bad can happen from this are a few fold:

1- people in debate generally dislike intellectual arrogance. In order to “capitalize” on your answer the neg would basically need to be a jerk about it and try to make you feel stupid. In front of most judges this strategy will backfire- the judge is already annoyed they are about to waste 90 mns of their life listening to the death k and a bunch of pointless grandstanding by the negative doesn’t make that any better.

2- you can always re-answer later. When the 2AC reads evidence that says “Death is X”- it’s not an invalidation, it’s a clarification; nor you can your previous answer be used against you. “I don’t know” functions in a certain way as pleading the debate 5th. Now- this could easily be taken too far. There was a time not too long ago when people answered every question with “Thats not relevant to our 1AC” even though it clearly was relevant. If you start just blanket answering everything with “I don’t know” you are going to look just as annoying. The IDK has to be deployed with a little bit of intelligence- use it when the question is so inane or stupid that it doesn’t make sense that you would have prepared an answer AND MORE IMPORTANTLY when you don’t actually know the answer.

3- You are being honest, and generally in CX no one is honest. Being honest is a powerful move in terms of persuading the judge because it makes you seem reasonable and judges want to vote for reasonable people. More importantly though, being honest avoids the damage that can be done when you try to be more clever than you are capable of.