POINTS OF INFORMATION

What is a Point of Information?

During one of the first six speeches in a point of information (POI) debate, speakers on
the opposing team may stand and say “Point of Information”. The speaker has the
option to either accept this point “Yes thank you”, or decline it, “No thank you.” It is
reasonable for the speaker to finish their current sentence before accepting or declining
the point, but if they leave the person offering the point standing for any protracted
length of time (two or three sentences), they should accept the point at the end of this
time. Having a speaker standing is a distraction, and so a prompt indication of the
speaker’s intention is recommended.

After being accepted, the person offering has a few seconds, fifteen at the VERY most,
to ask a question. They then sit. The chairperson and adjudicator time the point of
information, so if the question goes beyond fifteen seconds the person offering the
point will be called out of order and must cease the point immediately and sit down.
The speaker should then attempt to address the question, either finding an answer or
explaining why they are not answering.

Points of information may not be offered during the first minute or the last minute of a
speech, or at all during the reply speeches.

2. Reasons for Points of Information

Points of information provide an opportunity for all speakers to be active participants
throughout the debate. This provides a more entertaining debate for the audience, and
a more challenging one for the speakers. For people who normally speak first or
second, POIs are a chance to have a larger role in answering the opposition’s case. For
third speakers, points are a chance to influence the early direction of a team’s attack on
the opposition.

Points of information can legitimately be used to
• Provide a specific answer to a point the speaker is making
• Illustrate flaws in the argument that the speaker is giving
• Clarify a point that the speaker is making
• Execute an ethos attack on the speaker

Of these types of points, the first is the most effective, and accounts for at least 90
percent of points of information. An ideal POI combines a specific piece of rebuttal
with an ethos attack.
Points of information can also be illegitimately used to:
- encourage a speaker to continue talking about a trivial point
- distract a speaker away from a good point
- disrupt the method of a speech
- fluster a speaker

Note that POIs of this nature usually require the delivery of a bad point, or a point at an inappropriate time, and are just as likely to cause damage to the offerer as to the speaker. In particular, offering points in rapid succession to fluster a speaker is known as *badgering*, and can be directly penalised. Besides, a good speaker will not be flustered, and a bad speaker will earn sympathy through your attempts to put them off.

### 3. Offering Points

#### When to Offer a Point

Points are offered with two intentions - either to be accepted, or not to be accepted. The most damaging points are those which are actually made, but it can still be important to be seen to be objecting to something, even though you do not get to state the objection.

Try to offer at least one point of information for every argument or piece of rebuttal the opposition makes. If you don’t wish to be taken, offer the point during a particularly strong part of the point when they are speaking forcefully and smoothly, such as just after they have made the original assertion. If you do wish to be taken, wait until a pause either in the middle or at the end of an argument.

Occasionally it is a good tactic not to offer points. If the speaker is struggling for things to say, it is an act of generosity to offer them a point.

Do not offer points during elements of method, such as themes, splits and outlines. The same arguments will be addressed later in the speech, and it is the speaker’s choice when to talk about them, not yours. Especially do not offer points during a summary, even if the summary starts before the second bell.

Generally, each team member should be offering between two and five points to each speaker. It is acceptable to offer more points than this, so long as you remember that if you are declined, you should wait until the speaker has finished their current point, or at least for ten to twenty seconds before standing up again. It is also not advisable for another team member to stand up as soon as you have been declined.

On the other extreme, you will be penalised if you do not offer any points. If you do not feel confident with points, try to make sure you offer at least one per speaker, preferably two. There’s nothing to say that you have to offer the points at times when they are likely be accepted.
The Manner of a Point

As with timing, the manner of a point depends on whether you wish to be taken or not. Standing up with fingers steepled and an inquisitive expression will have less impact on the audience, but is not so intimidating to the speaker. Three opponents all standing at once and thundering “POINT OF INFORMATION!” makes it clear that you have a problem with what they are saying, but the speaker is quite unlikely to accept you.

Manner is a matter of personal choice, but constant aggression is neither desirable nor acceptable. If you are declined, be careful to sit down politely, and not put on a show of being offended.

Remember that if you are petulant, rude or aggressive you may put your audience off before you have had a chance to present your own substantive case. The adjudicator may also take off a manner mark even if you have already delivered your main speech.

The Matter and Method of a Point

It is important to remember that:

- General arguments may be answered with general arguments;
- Specific arguments may be answered with specific arguments;
- General arguments may be answered with specific arguments;

BUT Specific arguments may NOT be answered with general arguments.
The most effective points involve answering general arguments by giving or asking for a particular example.

Answering general arguments with general arguments is fairly weak, since this usually involves using some part of your case, which is poor method. General arguments also tend to become too wordy.

Answering specific arguments with specific arguments will often merely be an exchange of examples, which can serve to temporarily halt a flow of illustration, but is not particularly effective.

A specific argument usually involves asking the speaker to give an example, a cause or an effect, or offering a counter-example, a reason why something won’t or shouldn’t happen, or evidence that it hasn’t.

Points of information are not so much about conceptual argument, but using your general knowledge to challenge and test the speaker. To be effective, they should be very brief; i.e., normally one sentence, with two sentences an absolute maximum. They should also be in the form of a question, which forces the speaker to answer. Speakers will often avoid implied questions by statements such as “Thank you for your contribution.”
Accepting a Point

When to Accept a Point

As a rule, you should accept two or three points during your speech. If possible, it is good to arrange this so that you accept one point for each substantive argument that you make.

- Do not accept points during rebuttal. This causes you to spend too much time discussing their arguments, instead of your own.
- Do not accept points during elements of method, such as outlines, splits, summaries, or during a first speaker theme elaboration.
- Do not accept two points in a row, particularly not supplementary points from the same speaker. Either they're labouring the same point, or it is a trap.
- If you accept a point and it is about something you said earlier or are going to say later, tell them that it's irrelevant at this time since it's already been dealt with or will be dealt with later. If they ask you as a first speaker about something that your second speaker will say, deal with it as briefly as possible.

There are no compulsory rules for how to accept or decline a point. Just remember to be polite. If more than one opponent has offered at the same time, indicate who you wish to accept.

Answering a Point

If a point is specific, you should try to give a specific answer. Occasionally this will not be possible, such as if they ask you to explain an example that you've never heard of, in which case honesty is usually better than trying to avoid the question altogether.

"I was not aware of the current UN operation in Cyprus. Perhaps if the opposition would care to explain in their own time what makes Cyprus so special, we will endeavour to answer your question."

It is important never to ignore a point of information totally. As a last resort, "I'm sorry, I just don't see the relevance of your question" is better than no answer at all.
As the speaker on the floor, you must be in control. Don’t be intimidated, or accept a point when it doesn’t suit you. If an opposition speaker is harassing you and you have already accepted two or three points, “No thank you, you’ve had your chance” is usually a firm refusal and if they keep offering points leave it to the adjudicator to deal with.

Your manner when accepting a point may be:
- Calm, intellectual - be relaxed and in control
- Aggressive - “If you can answer that...”

Listen carefully to get the point of each question, and be prepared to interrupt - don’t let them make speeches. Remember not to spend a lot of time answering POIs (unless it suits you) because you have a speech to deliver.
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