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## Top Tip & Talking Point #3: The Questioner

The job of Questioner is frequently the least successfully executed role in the competition and, as with the Chairperson, this is often because the students concerned have the wrong idea of what they need to do! It is also a difficult job to fulfil well.

The Questioner is allocated 4 minutes of question and answer time with the Speaker. Now, it is true that they are from two competing teams and it is also undeniable that each team will want to win the heat, but this does not mean that the question and answers should lead to a dual between them!

As with the Chairperson, the Questioner needs to understand that they are participating in what - outside of this PSC - would be a public meeting. Yet your students have probably never been to one. They need to imagine that each presentation by a Speaker with the Chairperson and Questioner is a unique occasion to which the audience members have come along to be informed or entertained. They need to forget about the judges and the timekeepers who would not be there at a public speaker meeting.

Unlike in a debate, the Questioner is there - in many ways on behalf of the audience - to seek further elucidation from Speakers as to what they have said. The Questioner's role is to ask the questions to which everyone would like answers. The Questioner should seek clarification and discover what else the Speaker can add to what has been said already. This role requires excellent listening and analytical skills! This is not a confrontational job, although it is open to the Questioner to suggest to the Speaker an alternative line of thought for comment.

Probably the only other times that students see or hear this formal type of questioning, it will have been pretty aggressive! Whether at Prime Ministers' Questions (which is a hostile process) or on political programmes on the TV or radio (when journalists interrogate politicians head on), students will have probably witnessed brutal cross-examinations as each side seeks to win. This is not what the Questioner does in the ESU public speaking competition!

So, what makes a successful Questioner? They are students who:

- have clearly listened carefully to the Speaker
- refer directly to what the Speaker has said and not simply plough through a prepared list of questions
- are polite and engaging in their questioning; they may compliment the Speaker on the speech, but not offer judgement on its presentation (that is for the judges)
- engagingly ask Speakers to explain points which could have been clearer (without expressing it in that way!)
- seek further examples and evidence from the Speaker on key aspects of their speech
- ask the Speaker's views on alternative view-points
- ask follow-up questions where an answer has not been as clear as it might have been; judges like spontaneity
- vary the length and type of questions
- realise that the Questioner is not having a private conversation with the Speaker, but is asking questions on behalf of all

Questioners should not be students who are frustrated that they are not the main Speaker and who decide, therefore, to show they are better than the student they are questioning! They are not there to make their own speech. They are more an 'Everyman' character and definitely not Jeremy Paxman, impressive though he may be!

It would be really useful to know what others think of this advice and what other points should be raised concerning the role of the Questioner.

Best wishes.

Matthew Christmas

Lead Organiser: ESU-Churchill Public Speaking Competition

[matthew.christmas@esu.org](mailto:matthew.christmas@esu.org) / 0207 529 1587 (direct dial)