
Points of Information

Introduction

A point of information is a formal question by a member of the opposing team. Points of information allow members of the opposing team to rise in their place and ask a question of the speaker. The speaker can accept or decline the point of information. Accepting the point of information means listening to the point and responding. Declining the point of information means that the offeror cannot even ask the question. A point of information is a significant opportunity for the offeror to expose a flaw in the speaker's argument or to introduce rebuttal. It's also an opportunity for the speaker to strengthen their case and answer points of rebuttal.

Asking a point of information

There are a number of requirements of the debater asking the point of information:

- Points of information may not be asked in the first or last minute of a speech. These protected minutes allow the speaker to establish and summarise arguments without interruption.
- Points of information may only be offered to speakers on the opposing side.
- Debaters wanting to ask a point of information must stand up and say 'Point of information' in a manner that is audible but not disruptive. They must then sit down upon either having finished asking their point of information or being refused. Points of information are generally accepted or rejected with a 'Yes, please' or 'No, thank you'.
- Points of information must be brief. At most they should last 15 seconds. Long and verbose points of information are more easily evaded as the audience can become confused about their nature. Points of information far exceeding 15 seconds should be stopped by the adjudicator, and may also attract penalties from the adjudicator.
- Points of information should be expressed as a question so that the speaker is required to provide an answer.
- Debaters should not use points of information to badger or heckle their opponents or they may find that they are penalised in the same way that they would be penalised for a personal attack on their opponent. Adjudicators should exercise discretion where such interjections take place and should first attempt to discourage this behaviour before imposing penalties.
- Points of information should be offered regularly and throughout the course of the debate. Offering points of information suggests that the speaker understands the issues through the course of the debate.
- Points of information are not allowed in reply speeches.

Points of information are a valuable opportunity to attack an opposing argument. In the same way that rebuttal may be more valuable where it undermines the foundations of an argument, points of information will be effective where they attack a strategically important argument or a significant example. Points of information should not be wasted; they should address critical issues in the debate.

Answering a point of information

Answering a point of information gives the speaker an opportunity to strengthen their arguments and resolve issues in the face of criticism or confusion.

There are a number of requirements of the debater answering the point of information:

- Speakers are entitled to decline to hear the point of information. However, once the speaker accepts a point of information, they must give the offeror a reasonable opportunity to be heard.
- Debaters are expected to accept two points of information per speech (no more, no less). The minimum requirement is less stringent for Year 11 students. Accepting more than two points of information has a tendency to take up too much time and prevent the speaker from presenting the arguments they want to make in a coherent fashion.
- Speakers must ensure that their speech is not dominated by points of information. A speaker who becomes a prisoner to constant interruptions may score poorly in method (for poor organisation), matter (for being unable to introduce sufficient arguments) and perhaps manner (for losing control of the speech). An audience is quick to tell if a speaker has lost control, and the effectiveness of the speaker is then much reduced.
- Speakers must attempt to answer the point of information clearly and succinctly. While they should take time to resolve the point of information, they should not become overly distracted from the development of their arguments. Experienced speakers become very good at handling points of information. They accept questions when convenient (usually at the conclusion of an argument) and answer questions convincingly, clearly and succinctly.

Assessing points of information

Points of information affect the speaker and the offeror as follows.

(a) Matter

The point of information can reduce the persuasiveness of the speaker's arguments, in which case the offeror should be rewarded. If the speaker answers the point of information clearly, and manages to maintain (or even increase) the persuasiveness of their argument through their answer, then they too should be rewarded. A speaker who fails to effectively answer the point reduces the persuasiveness of their case and can have marks deducted in the matter category.

A speaker who fails to take an adequate number of points of information may also have marks deducted in the matter category on the basis that they are avoiding having the persuasiveness of their arguments tested. This must create doubts in the mind of the average reasonable person as to the strength of the speaker's arguments.

(b) Method

The inclusion of points of information can affect the structure and organisation of a speech. A speaker who takes too many points of information may experience significant interruptions and this may adversely affect the clarity and coherence of the speech. Accordingly, a speaker may have method marks deducted for poor organisation. In contrast, a speaker who takes an appropriate number of points, and takes them in such a way as to not interrupt the flow of their speech, should be awarded method marks.

(c) Manner

The manner in which points of information are either asked or answered can also affect the assessment of manner. A speaker who becomes flustered and appears nervous while answering a point of information may have manner marks deducted; their nervousness would not imbue an audience with confidence in their arguments. On the other hand, a speaker who confidently and clearly answers a point of information should be awarded manner marks.

The offeror should similarly be judged according to the confidence and clarity with which they ask the point of information. They should be careful not to hector or unduly interrupt the speaker or they may come across as overly aggressive. In extreme cases of hectoring, the offeror may have marks deducted on the basis that such behaviour would alienate average reasonable audience members.