

English-Speaking Union

Public Speaking Competition

Guidelines for Questioners

Good listening

Good listening is vital for all members of the team. Below are some tips for improving your listening skills, so that you can pick out the main points of what the other speakers are saying.

Bad listening habits are usually caused by:

- X Not listening:** Focussing on other tasks which you need to do, homework that you have yet to complete, chores to do at home.
- X Listening too much:** Trying to note dates, times, places, indeed all the information in the speech. Try to extract the main themes which the speaker is using.
- X Jumping to conclusions:** Assuming that the speaker has said something which they have not.
- X Focussing on delivery:** Although audiences pay a great deal of attention to delivery, if you want to gain the most from a presentation you should try and focus instead on what is being said, not how it is being said.

To avoid some of these pitfalls, practise taking notes while speakers are delivering a presentation. Compare what you got out of the presentation with someone else. See here you differ, and discuss why you differed. If you can, compare your notes with someone who has a lot of experience taking notes (your parents or your teachers), and see how they structured their notes.



A good Questioner listens first to hear what the Speaker is saying ...



... and then makes a few notes to help them remember what's been said.

Good questioning

Often someone who is a good questioner in the ESU competition has the ability to:

- ✓ **Be spontaneous**
- ✓ **Seek clarification:** "Could you explain in more detail what you meant by ... ?". However, you should avoid letting the speaker make another speech; otherwise you might never get to your second question.
- ✓ Ask the Speaker for **more evidence** to support a claim they have made. In particular you should ask yourself whether the information is (a) accurate, (b) objective – is it biased by the source?, (c) relevant or (d) sufficient?
- ✓ **Suggest an area for discussion** that has not been covered.
- ✓ **Point out contradictions** or lapses in the logic of the argument.
- ✓ **Suggest areas of disagreement** between yourself and the Speaker, or perhaps offer a counter-point.

It is worth bearing in mind that good questioning in the competition is most effective when it isn't combative. A good Questioner should raise issues, circulate ideas and point out areas in which the speaker could develop their ideas further. It is not the purpose of the Questioner to embarrass the Speaker, or to highlight mistakes or ignorance of particular issues. Politeness is key, and barracking, or debate-style questioning should be avoided.



Later on you'll use your notes to question the Speaker. As well as engaging them in discussion, remember to look out at the audience as well!

Skills Summary

At the end of this section you should be able to identify some pitfalls of bad listening and how you can improve your own listening skills. In addition you should understand what makes a good Questioner.