

Locating the Intrinsic Flaws

Objective:

Review some common objections to Christianity and construct potential Columbo III questions to respond to these objections.

Instruction:

For each of these objections to Christian doctrine or moralities:

- (1) What is/are the flaw(s) in the question posed?
- (2) What is/are potential questions (Columbo III) that could be used asked in response to the flaws observed?
- (3) Each group will provide feedback to the whole class on the most challenging question not yet discussed

“You shouldn’t push your morality on me.”

“You’re intolerant and arrogant.”

“The miracles in the Bible prove it’s a myth.”

“That’s just your interpretation,”

“Jesus was a good man and a prophet, but He wasn’t God or the only savior.

“The fetus may be a human being, but it’s not a person.”

“How can God exist when there’s so much evil in the world?”

What Would Jesus Ask?

Objective:

Using Jesus as our example from the Gospels: "What would Jesus ask?"

Instruction:

For each of these scenarios:

- (1) What is the question posed to Jesus?
- (2) What is/are the flaw(s) in the question posed to Jesus?
- (3) What is/are potential questions (Columbo III) that could be used asked in response to the flaws observed
- (4) What would Jesus ask? (check your answer...no cheating!!)
- (5) Report to class as whole from one of your scenarios

Group A:

Matt 9:14 Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?

Matt 12:10 And, behold, there was a man which had *his* hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

Group B

Matt 15:2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

Matt 17:24 And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute *money* came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?

Group C

Matt 19:3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

Matt 19:16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

Group D

Matt 21:23 And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

Matt 22:17 Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?



Session #1:

1. What is the difference between tactics and strategy?

Strategy involves *the big picture*.

Tactics involve *the details of engagement*.

2. Finish these sentences:

Tactics are not *tricks, slick ruses, or clever ploys*.

Tactics are not *meant to belittle or humiliate the non-Christian*.

3. What are good tactics meant to accomplish?

Tactics are clever ways to *maneuver to get a footing or an appropriate advantage in a conversation*.

Tactics are meant to *exploit another's bad thinking for the purpose of guiding him to truth*.

4. The key to the Columbo tactic is using carefully selected questions to productively advance the conversation.

5. Give some of the advantages to using the Columbo tactic.

Questions are excellent conversation starters.

Questions are interactive by nature, inviting others to participate in dialogue.

Questions are neutral; there is no "preaching" involved.

Questions allow you to make good headway without actually stating your case.

Questions can buy you valuable time.

Questions keep you in control of the conversation.

6. The first application of Columbo is to gain information and employs the question, "What do you mean by that?"

Session 2:

1. What do we mean by the term "burden of proof"?

The burden of proof is the *responsibility* someone has to *defend* his own view.

2. What is the burden of proof rule?

The person who *makes the claim* bears the burden.

3. What is the second key question of the Columbo tactic?

"How did you *come to that conclusion*?"

Or "What is your *evidence* to support your *claim*?"

4. This graciously assumes that the non-Christian has actually come to a conclusion—that he has reasons for his view and has not just asserted it.

5. What is the "professor's ploy"?

Switching the *burden of proof* back on to the person who hasn't *made the claim*.

6. What is an easy way to stay out of the "hot seat" when someone is coming on strong?

Shift from *argument* mode to *fact-finding* mode.

Say, "Carefully explain your view and your *reasons* for it, then let me *think* about it."

Preview: Columbo III

- Examine the third use of the Columbo tactic: exploiting a flaw or a weakness in another person's view.
- Learn specific ways to improve our use of Columbo.
- Learn how to defend against the Columbo tactic when someone else uses it against us.

IN THIS SESSION WE WILL . . .

1. Examine the third use of the Columbo tactic: exploiting a flaw or a weakness in another person's view.
2. Learn specific ways to improve our use of Columbo.
3. Learn how to defend against the Columbo tactic when someone else uses it against us.

Columbo III Exposing a weakness

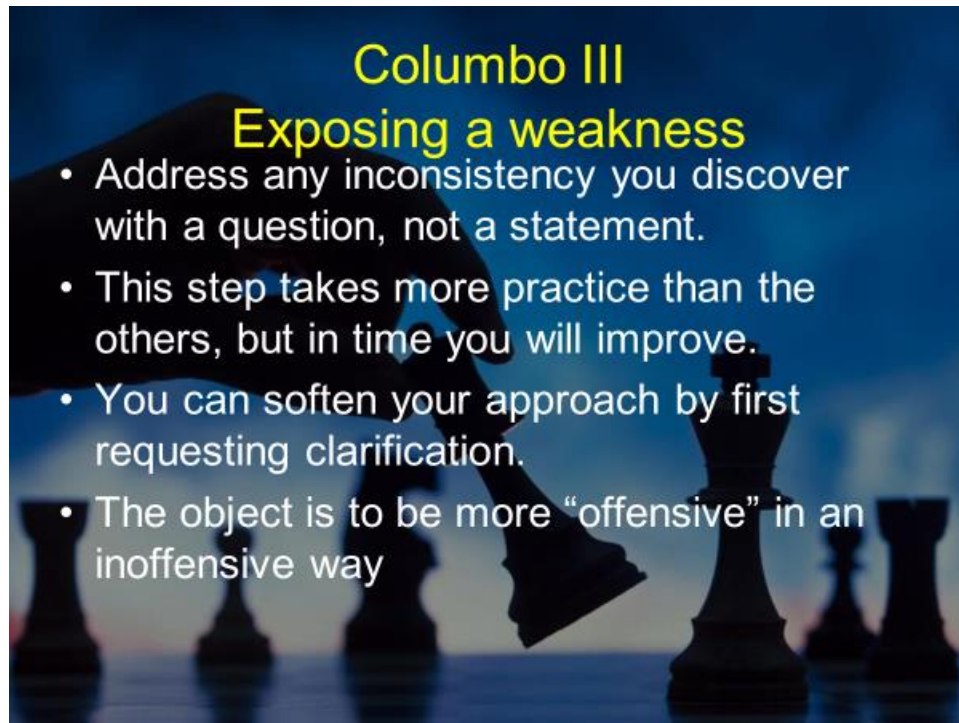
- Knowing what a person believes and why he believes it allows you to ask new questions that challenge a person's ideas. This is the final stage of Columbo.
- The conversation may alert you to some weakness, flaw, or contradiction in the person's argument that can be exposed and exploited.
- The key to this step is paying close attention to the answer to the question, "How did you come to that conclusion?"

KNOWING WHAT A PERSON BELIEVES AND WHY HE BELIEVES IT — THINGS YOU LEARNED FROM THE FIRST TWO STEPS OF THE COLUMBO TACTIC — ALLOWS YOU TO ASK NEW QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE A PERSON'S IDEAS. THIS IS THE FINAL STAGE OF COLUMBO.

1. The first two questions are somewhat passive.
2. The third Columbo question takes you on the offensive in an inoffensive way.
THE CONVERSATION MAY ALERT YOU TO SOME WEAKNESS, FLAW, OR CONTRADICTION IN THE PERSON'S ARGUMENT THAT CAN BE EXPOSED AND EXPLOITED.

1. There is no special formula for making this discovery.
2. You'll uncover it by listening carefully and then thinking about what was said.
THE KEY TO THIS STEP IS PAYING CLOSE ATTENTION TO THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION, "HOW DID YOU COME TO THAT CONCLUSION?"

1. Are there any blatant weaknesses in the view?
2. Do the conclusions follow from the evidence?
3. Can you question any underlying assumptions?
4. Is there a misstep, a non-sequitur, a fallacy, or a failing of some sort?



ADDRESS ANY INCONSISTENCY YOU DISCOVER WITH A QUESTION, NOT A STATEMENT. THIS STEP TAKES MORE PRACTICE THAN THE OTHERS, BUT IN TIME YOU WILL IMPROVE.

1. It requires some insight—an ability to see the flaws in the argument—which is a demanding request.
2. It is easy to “stall out” in the beginning, so don't be surprised or discouraged.

Student Interactive

Locating the Intrinsic Flaws



“You shouldn’t push your morality on me.”

1. When they say, “You shouldn’t push your morality on me,” you can ask, “Why not?”
 - a. *It’s going to be hard for them to answer this without contradicting themselves.*
 - b. *When they say you shouldn’t push your morality on them, they’re pushing their morality on you.*

“You’re intolerant and arrogant.”

2. When they say, “You’re intolerant and arrogant,” you can ask, “What do you mean by that?” (the first Columbo question).
 - a. *Asking this question flushes out their definition of “intolerant” or “arrogant,” exposing what I call the “passive-aggressive tolerance trick.”*
 - b. *Here’s the way it usually looks:*
 - 1) “You’re intolerant and arrogant.”
 - 2) “What do you mean by that?”
 - 3) “I mean you think you’re right and everyone who disagrees with you is wrong.”
 - 4) “Tell me, do you think **your** views are right?” [Of course he does; that’s why he believes what he believes.]
 - 5) “Help me out here. Why is it that when I think I’m right, I’m intolerant, but when you think you’re right, you’re just right? What am I missing?”

“The miracles in the Bible prove it’s a myth.”

3. When the professor says, “The Bible is just a bunch of myths and fables,” you can ask, “How did you come to that conclusion?”
 - a. *The professor has probably assumed, because of his naturalistic philosophy, that miracles are impossible. Therefore, prior to evaluating any evidence (i.e., a priori¹, he has determined that any “historical” references to miracles are myths or fables.*
 - b. *Since modern day science is based on naturalistic philosophy, too, he thinks science has proved—instead of assumed—there are no miracles.*
 - c. *Since science can only measure the natural world, it cannot draw any conclusions, even in principle, about the supernatural world.*
 - d. *In using this logic, the professor has made what’s known as a “category error.”*²
 - e. *You can follow up the claim that science has proved miracles don’t exist by asking, “Would you explain how the methods of science can disprove the supernatural?”*

“That’s just your interpretation,”

4. When they say, “That’s just your interpretation,” you can ask, “What do you mean by ‘just’?”
 - a. *Your goal is to find out if they believe all interpretations are equally valid and yours is just another in the long line of alternatives.*
 - b. *If this is what they believe, then you’re free to interpret their words any way that then strikes your fancy, an “interpretation” that is just as good as any other.*
 - c. *You can challenge this view by making some drastic claim—for example, by taking them for a skinhead who thinks all Jews and homosexuals should be put in prison. When they object, follow up by saying, “That’s my interpretation of what you’re saying. If you disagree, that’s just your own interpretation. All interpretations are equally valid, aren’t they? Or could it be that some interpretations are more accurate than others?”*

“Jesus was a good man and a prophet, but He wasn’t God or the only savior.”

- When they say, “Jesus was a good man and a prophet, but He wasn’t God or the only savior,” you can ask, “How could Jesus be a good man and a prophet, but be mistaken about his own identity and purpose?”
- a. *If Jesus was wrong about His oft-repeated claim that He was the unique means of salvation,³ it then becomes difficult to call Him a good man, a prophet, or a wise religious teacher.*
 - b. *If Jesus was not correct, then he was lying or deeply deceived—qualities we would never use to describe a good man or godly prophet.*

“The fetus may be a human being, but it’s not a person.”

- When they say, “The fetus may be a human being, but it’s not a person,” you can ask, “What’s the difference?”
- a. *They are claiming there is a morally relevant difference between an unborn child and a toddler that justifies killing one and not the other.*
 - b. *To them, the difference between the two is personhood and allows you to kill the unborn, but not the toddler.*
 - c. *This is a difference they must defend, not just assert.*

“How can God exist when there’s so much evil in the world?”

- When they ask, “How can God exist when there’s so much evil in the world?” you can ask, “But if there is no God, how can we call anything evil in the first place?”
- a. *The existence of evil assumes a standard that is used to distinguish good from evil.*
 - b. *But there is no way to account for a standard of objective good—the moral rules that are violated by people who commit the evil in question—without the existence of a moral rule maker: God.⁴*
 - c. *How do we make sense of the difference between good and evil if there is no God?*



Asking “leading” questions: Inform

- How do you sidestep “The Question”?
- It requires that you have knowledge base.
- For example, learn a series of questions about sin, guilt and atonement .



Asking “leading” questions: Persuade

- Take knowledge to next level.
- Example: ask a series of questions about exclusivity of Christ’s atoning work.

A hand is shown in silhouette, moving a chess piece on a board. The background is a blurred sunset or sunrise sky. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

Asking “leading” questions: Refute

- Use the “passive-aggressive” trick.
- Ask for permission to speak freely.

A hand is shown in silhouette, moving a chess piece on a board. The background is a blurred sunset or sunrise sky. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

Asking “leading” questions: Exposing Flaws

- Look for weakness, or fallacies in argument (next week).
- “Narrate” the debate: review the structure of the argument and ask for clarification at the weak point in the argument (no dodging allowed).



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Using Jesus as our example from the Gospels: "What would Jesus ask?"

Instruction:

For each of these scenarios:

- (1) What is the question posed to Jesus?
- (2) What is/are the flaw(s) in the question posed to Jesus?
- (3) What is/are potential questions (Columbo III) that could be used asked in response to the flaws observed
- (4) What would Jesus ask? (check your answer...no cheating!!)
- (5) Report to class as whole from one of your scenarios

Table A:

Matt 9:14 Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?

Matt 12:10 And, behold, there was a man which had *his* hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

Table B

Matt 15:2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

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Matt 19:3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

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Stumped or stalled out?

- Don't feel compelled to push the conversation. Sometimes a simple statement will allow the conversation to die a natural death.
- Ask them to repeat and clarify. Then say that you would like think about it.
- Just get up to bat. You don't need to hit home run every time.

Begin by asking, "Can you clear this up for me?" or "Can you help me understand this?"

2. Next, offer your objection by gently challenging the belief or confronting the weakness in the argument.

3. Consider the gentle approach of the following questions.

a. Can you clear this up for me? How could the teaching on reincarnation be removed from every existing hand-written copy of the New Testament circulating in the Roman world during the 4th century?

b. Can you help me understand this? If the Bible were "merely written by men," how could it contain fulfilled prophecies?

c. Can you clear this up for me? How does having a "burning in the bosom" about the Book of Mormon give adequate evidence for its truth when people have similar reasons—a strong conviction from God in response to prayer—for rejecting it?

d. Can you help me understand this? If homosexuality is truly natural, then why did nature give homosexuals bodies designed for reproductive sex with women, not men? Why would nature give desires for one type of sex, but the body for another?

e. Can you clear this up for me? If partial-birth abortion is morally acceptable, on what grounds do we condemn infanticide, since the only difference between the two is the baby's location—partially out of the womb or completely out—and location seems irrelevant to the baby's value?

f. Can you help me understand this? If there is absolutely no evidence for abiogenesis

(life from non-life—life arising initially from inanimate matter)

and much evidence against it, how can we say that Darwin's theory of evolution is a fact?

Columbo III: A or B

- A. The first approach is the apparently harmless method of Lt. Columbo himself— halting, head-scratching, and bumbling.
 1. Have you considered?
 2. Can you help me to understand?
- B. The second approach is more confrontational and aggressive.

THE FIRST APPROACH IS THE APPARENTLY HARMLESS METHOD OF LT. COLUMBO HIMSELF — HALTING, HEAD-SCRATCHING, AND BUMBLING.

1. You can use a number of phrases to introduce questions that soften your challenge, such as:

- a. *“I’m just curious....”*
- b. *“Help me out because I’m trying to understand you on this....”*
- c. *“I’m a little confused on something....”*
- d. *“Maybe you can clear this up for me....”*
- e. *“Something about this thing bothers me...”*
- f. *“Maybe I’m missing something....”*

2. This style is best used in a college classroom or with a group of people you don’t know.

THE SECOND APPROACH IS MORE CONFRONTATIONAL AND AGGRESSIVE.

1. This technique is similar to that used by a lawyer in a courtroom.

2. The important rule in this approach is that a lawyer never asks a question he doesn’t know the answer to.

- a. *When I use the Columbo tactic aggressively, I have a goal in mind.*
- b. *I ask specific questions that legitimately get another person to dig his own grave.*



Columbo III: Taking it to Next Level

- **Anticipate:** try to anticipate objections and think of questions in advance.
- **Reflect:** Afterwards, reflect on questions you might have asked.
- **Practice:** When you think of a new idea or approach, practice the questions – and possible rejoinders – out loud.
- **Protect:** Learn to defend yourself when the Columbo tactic is used against you.

INITIALLY YOU WILL NOT BE QUICK ON YOUR FEET WITH RESPONSES LIKE THE ONES ABOVE.

1. Your best ideas will come afterwards, when the pressure is off.
2. This is the perfect time to focus on improving your technique.

ANTICIPATE OBJECTIONS AND THINK OF QUESTIONS IN ADVANCE.

1. Work on an issue or question that has stumped you in the past.
 - a. *Brainstorm straightforward response questions that will put you in the driver's seat of those conversations.*
 - b. *Remember that a question mark is shaped like a fishhook—you want to use questions like a hook.*
2. Advance preparation takes work, but can be quite effective. The next time you're asked those particular questions you'll have responses at your fingertips.

REFLECT ON QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT HAVE ASKED.

1. After each encounter, take a few moments for self-assessment.
 - a. *Think about questions you might have asked.*
 - b. *Determine how you could have phrased questions more effectively or maneuvered through the conversation differently.*
 - c. *With the pressure off, other alternatives may occur.*
 - d. *Write down your thoughts and review them later.*
2. This kind of assessment is not hard and can be a lot of fun.
 - a. *It prepares you for your next opportunity.*
 - b. *It puts new ideas at your fingertips next time around.*
 - c. *It becomes second nature when you get into the routine of it.*

WHEN YOU THINK OF A NEW IDEA OR APPROACH, PRACTICE THE QUESTIONS — AND POSSIBLE REJOINDERS — OUT LOUD.

1. Practice increases your practical experience—it places you in the actual dialogue—yet in a safe environment.
 - a. *Anticipate the turns your new tack might take and how you'd respond to possible rejoinders.*
 - b. *Role-play it with a friend.*
2. Practice prepares you for actual encounters.
 - a. *If you practice in advance, when these issues come up you'll be ready.*
 - b. *This really works because when issues come up in the future you've already rehearsed your response.*
 - c. *It's the way political candidates prepare for televised debates.*

SOMETIMES YOUR OPPONENT WILL USE THE COLUMBO TACTIC AGAINST YOU.

1. Your opponent may use Columbo to go on the offensive himself.
2. He'll ask questions that you sense are meant to trap you in some weakness he perceives in your view.

YOU CAN LEARN TO PROTECT YOURSELF BY USING THE FOLLOWING TWO STEPS.

1. First, stop the advance.
 - a. *Don't let your opponent set you up with leading questions.*
 - b. *Politely respond by saying, "I'd rather not answer questions. I want to know what you think."*
2. Second, regain control.
 - a. *Force your opponent to change his approach so he is not in control of the conversation, yet still can make his point.*
 - b. *Say, "Here's what I suggest . . ."*
 - 1) Start with Columbo question #1: "Instead of questioning me to make your point, just state your point clearly so I don't misunderstand it."
 - 2) Then move to Columbo question #2: "Next, give me your specific reasons for holding this view."
 - 3) Finally, move to the third step of Columbo if you see a weakness, or employ your "hot seat" maneuver: "Let me think a while on what you said and then get back to you."

When a question is not a question:

Worded like a question, but really is an attack: "What give you the right...?" or "Who are you to say?"

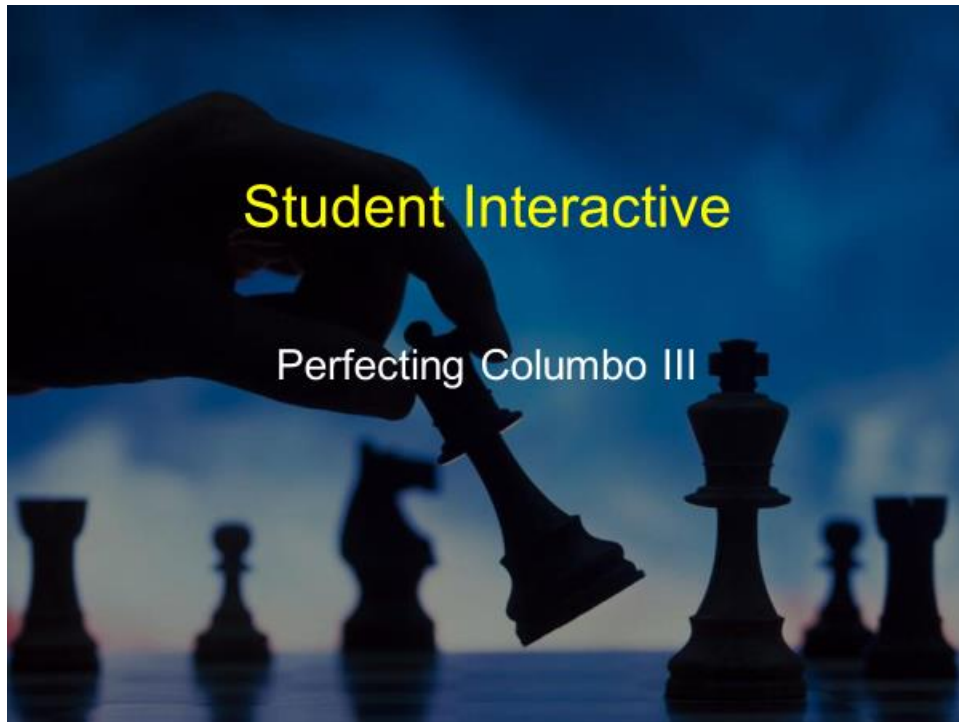
The question is not about who I am, but whether or not what we are discussing is truthful

Columbo III B

- Protections include:
 1. Columbo I
 2. Columbo 2
 3. Let me think about it.
 4. Stopping the non-question question.

Style

- Think about style. Will your style be Like Columbo's?
- Mind your manners!



Objections to Christianity:

If you can't think like your opponent, how can you hope to reach them with the Gospel? If you think all objections to Christianity are foolish and crazy, you may be caught by surprise. More importantly, it will be almost impossible to make an impact on someone whose view you think is so wacky you could never take it seriously.

For each table think of one statement you have heard that opposes Christianity or

Christians. (ANTICIPATE)

As a table, try to put yourself in the shoes of the one objecting. Jot down at least two reasons you think they might give for their challenge and what would be the response. (REFLECT)

Now within your tables engage in an improvised dialogue (PRACTICE)

The table leader will offer the challenge by acting as if s/he opposed Christianity.

The remainder participants will practice the Columbo tactic by asking questions that force the table leader to defend that view.

Repeat cycle:

- 1) What responses should have been anticipated?
- 2) Reflect on potential questions to those responses
- 3) Practice, practice, practice!

Wrap-Up

- Review of major points
- Homework
- Preview next week: Analysis of argumentation structure and fallacies to better equip you in the use of Columbo III

Review

FIRST, WE LOOKED AT THE THIRD USE OF THE COLUMBO TACTIC: EXPLOITING A FLAW OR A WEAKNESS IN ANOTHER PERSON'S VIEW.

1. Listen carefully to the reasons he or she gives to the second Columbo question, "How did you come to that conclusion?"
2. Ask yourself if the conclusion follows from the evidence.
3. Point out errors with questions rather than statements.

1. The third application of Columbo is to use your questions to subtly exploit a weakness or flaw in the other person's views.

2. There is no special formula for acting on your discovery. Just listen carefully, then think about what has been said.

3. The key to mastering the third step is to pay close attention to the answer your opponent gives to question two. Do his conclusions follow from his evidence?

SECOND, WE LEARNED FOUR SPECIFIC WAYS TO IMPROVE OUR COLUMBO SKILL.

4. List four specific ways to improve your Columbo skill.

Anticipate objections and think of questions in advance.

Reflect on questions you might have asked.

Practice new questions—and potential responses—out loud.

Protect:

a. First, *stop the advance* by refusing to *answer* questions.

b. Second, regain control by asking your opponent to *state his point* (Columbo I) and give *reasons* (Columbo II) for it so you can further consider her view.

5. List two steps to defend yourself against the Columbo tactic.

First, *stop the advance*. Politely refuse to answer his leading questions.

Second, *regain control* by asking him to simply state his point and his reasons for it.

Homework

This week, look for opportunities to hone your Columbo skills. Use the first two questions, "What do you mean by that?" and "How did you come to that conclusion?", to navigate in conversations. If you feel comfortable, use further questions to gently challenge points of weakness you see. If you are stumped, let the issue go for the time being and brainstorm possible responses later with a fellow believer. Be prepared to share your experiences in class during the next session.

2. Introduce a few friends to the three uses of the Columbo tactic. Describe the main idea of each question and your reasons for using them. Explain how they can improve their Columbo skill and defend against it when someone uses it on them.

3. Review the material from the Columbo I/II/III so you will be able to answer all the questions without the prompts. At the beginning of the next class, you will be given an exercise to demonstrate your mastery of these questions. Be prepared.