

Guidelines for Successful Q & A Sessions

Question and answer sessions require impromptu communication and are, therefore, challenging. However, these sessions are also important because

- Listeners will be more attentive if they feel they may have a chance to be involved
- Presenters can judge from the questions and comments how well they have communicated their information
- The sessions can provide presenters with feedback on their subjects

The Presenter

You and your audience can benefit a great deal from the Q & A session if you prepare:

1. Anticipate likely questions and consider how to answer them.
2. Let your listeners know in advance how you would like to handle questions. Do you want them to ask questions as you speak? Would you prefer that they save their questions and comments for the end of the presentation?
3. Set a time limit for the question and answer session in order to keep a lively pace and to limit long debates. As the time limit draws near, let the audience know by using an expression like, "We have time for one more question."
4. Use the Four-Step Response: (i) acknowledge the question and repeat it if necessary; (ii) check to be sure that you understand what's being asked; (iii) answer each question as directly, but as completely, as possible; (iv) check to see if your answer is satisfactory.
5. Always be polite, even if your questioner is not. If necessary, suggest that the time limit precludes further discussion of a heckler's question. Suggest that you meet to discuss his/her point after the presentation is over.
6. Anticipate not knowing how to respond. Feel free to use one of the gambits below if you do not know the answer.

I'm afraid that I can't answer your question.

Frankly, I really don't know.

I really can't say

It's impossible to say.

Perhaps someone else can answer that.

I'll check on that and get back to you with that information.

The Audience Member

Participate in a Q & A session by contributing in a positive way:

Be sincere.

Be respectful.

Be direct; don't ramble.

In pairs, discuss how you could best respond in the following scenarios:

Imagine that you are just given a presentation to a group of people. It is now the question and answer session. Work with a partner and decide on the best strategy in each of the following situations.

1. A listener angrily disagrees with your point of view.
2. A listener states his/her point of view, which agrees with your instead of asking a question.
3. A listener is convinced that some of your information is inaccurate, but you are convinced that you are correct.
4. A listener is convinced that some of your information is inaccurate, and you are not sure who is right.
5. A listener asks such a basic question that you realize that s/he could not possibly have understood any of your presentation.
6. A listener asks a question that would require a very long technical answer.
7. A listener asks a question totally unrelated to the information you have presented.