

10A Q&A sessions

You've told a compelling story, you've designed dazzling PowerPoint slides, you've delivered your message confidently, and now you open the floor to questions. Unless you manage this part of your presentation effectively, all of your other efforts will go up in smoke. You must stand tall in the line of fire and learn how to handle tough questions.

Jerry Weissman, Power Presentation Ltd



- 1 Leading corporate presentations coach Jerry Weissman has worked with high-profile companies such as Cisco, Microsoft and Yahoo! How important is Q&A in the talks *you* have to give? How do you 'manage this part of your presentation'?
- 2 **2.26** Listen to pairs of speakers briefly comparing how they handle questions from the audience. After hearing each pair, underline the speaker you agree with more and explain why to a partner.

a First / second speaker because ...	e First / second speaker because ...
b First / second speaker because ...	f First / second speaker because ...
c First / second speaker because ...	g First / second speaker because ...
d First / second speaker because ...	h First / second speaker because ...
- 3 The speakers in 2 refer to different types of question. Complete the main question types:

a a g.....d question	d an unn....c....ss....ry question
b a d....ff....c....lt question	e a m....lt....pl.... question
c an ff-t....p....c question	f a h....st....l.... question
- 4 Look at Kees Garman's D8 system for handling questions. What strategy or combination of strategies would work best for each type of question in 3?



Deal with the question straight away
 Define exactly what the question is first
 Defuse any negativity before answering
 Divide up the question into sub-questions
 Deflect the question onto someone else
 Defer answering the question until later
 Disarm the questioner by admitting you don't know
 Decline to answer the question but give a reason
Kees Garman, communications coach

- 5 Now, bearing in mind the D8 system, match up each of the six question types in 3 with how you might actually respond, using the sentences below.

Question type

good

unnecessary

difficult

multiple

off-topic

hostile

a

I think that raises a slightly different issue.

b

What are *your* thoughts on the matter?

c

I think there are several questions there.

d

Well, as I might have mentioned, ...

e

I'm glad you asked me that.

f

I'm afraid I'm not able to discuss that, but ...

g

I'm afraid I don't know off the top of my head.

h

OK, let's take those one at a time.

i

Let me just check I understand you correctly.

j

Hmm, I wonder what other people think?

k

Sorry, I don't quite see the connection.

l

I don't have that information to hand.

m

OK, so I think your main question there is ...

n

I'll find out. Can I get back to you on that?

o

Ah, perhaps I didn't make that clear.

p

Alicia here might be a better person to answer that. Alicia?

q

Ah, yes, thank you for reminding me.

r

To be quite honest with you, I really don't know.

- 6  2.27 You heard one of the speakers in 2 talk about the importance of repeating the questions you're asked before answering. Repeat the questions below using the words in *italics* to help you. Then listen and check your answers.

- a Are you planning to go public with this? *You're asking me whether ...*
- b Are we in a position to take on more work? *You want to know if ...*
- c How do you see the market developing? *You ask me ...*
- d What are our chances of success? *You're wondering ...*
- e When is the launch date going to be? *You'd like ...*

- 7  2.28 You also heard one of the speakers say that hostile questions need to be rephrased. Rephrase the questions below using the words in brackets to help you. Listen and check.

- a Why did we spend so much on this? (asking – why – scale – investment – necessary)
- b Are these figures accurate? (like me – go through – some – figures again)
- c Why is this project six months behind schedule? (have – some concerns – timeframe)
- d Is this really going to be worth it? (like – look again – some advantages – new system)
- e Is anybody actually in charge of this unit? (have – question – management structure)
- f Do you honestly expect us to support this? (not fully convinced – benefits – initiative)

- 8 Turn to page 92 to practise handling neutral and hostile questions.

- 9 Turn to page 92 to practise dealing with all the different types of question. You can evaluate your performance using the feedback form on the website.



After you've prepared your material, write down the twenty questions that the audience is most likely to ask. Be prepared to answer them. This may surprise you, but you will have figured out at least ninety percent of the questions.

Sue Gaulke, Successworks



I don't do much by way of thinking of all the questions they might ask and preparing answers. I do spend a lot of time thinking about the key themes, how they link together and the best way of explaining them.

*Marjorie Scardino, CEO
Pearson PLC*

- 1 Think of a presentation you have given or may have to give in the future. Take Marjorie Scardino's advice and list the key themes of your talk – list no more than three. Work out how you could link them together.

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3

- 2 Now take Sue Gaulke's advice and write down three questions you think your audience would be likely to ask about each theme.

Q1	Q1	Q1

- 3 Work with a partner. Briefly outline the themes of your presentation to him/her and be prepared to clarify if necessary. Then take the questions one by one plus any follow-up questions your partner may have.
- 4 Which themes were hardest to explain? Did you lack vocabulary at any point? Which questions were the toughest to answer? Why? What strategies could you have used to handle them better?
- 5  **2.29** Sometimes, especially in less individualistic cultures, an invitation to ask questions can initially be met with silence! Listen to three speakers trying to deal with this. Whose approach would suit you best?
- 6 Match the expressions (a–j) opposite to their functions by writing in the corresponding letter. The first one has been done for you as an example.

- a** You claimed that Could you tell us how you arrived at that figure? ☒
- b** Going back for a moment to what you were saying about ... ☐
- c** But you still haven't answered my question, which is ... ☐
- d** I want to take you up on what you said about ... ☐
- e** You told us Do you have any data to support that? ☐
- f** I think you mentioned Could you just elaborate on that? ☐
- g** OK, then. Well, let me put it another way ... ☐
- h** Oh, OK, fair enough. Point taken. I see what you're saying. ☐
- i** When you were outlining ..., you said What exactly did you mean? ☐
- j** One thing I'm still not clear about. Did you say ... or am I mistaken? ☐

Functions

- | | |
|--|---|
| a asking for an explanation | f asking for proof |
| b making a criticism | g clearing up a misunderstanding |
| c referring to an earlier point | h pushing for an answer |
| d rephrasing a question | i conceding a point |
| e querying a point | j asking for more detail |

- 7**  **2.30** A management consultant has just given a presentation on marketing strategy. Listen to five short exchanges from the Q&A session which followed. Write the functions in **6** in the order you hear the audience members using them. The first one has been done for you as an example.

Extract 1 ☒ ☐ Extract 2 ☐ ☐ Extract 3 ☐ ☐ Extract 4 ☐ ☐ Extract 5 ☐ ☐

- 8** Turn to page 93 to practise fielding questions.

- 9** As you can see in some of the expressions in **6**, when asking questions at the end of a presentation, it's often useful to set the context before you ask the question.

(Context) You claimed that ... (Question) Can you tell us how you ...?

(Context) You mentioned ... (Question) Could you just elaborate on that?

Sometimes you need to set the context in two stages as you zoom in on your question:

(Context) When you were outlining ... (Zoom) you said ... (Question) What exactly did you mean?

Now turn to page 93 to practise contextualising your questions in this way. You can evaluate your performance using the feedback form on the website.

- 10** Why do you think it might not be such a good idea to finish your presentation with the Q&A session? See what public speaking pro Tom Antion has to say about it. And good luck in your future presentations!

Many public speakers make their biggest mistakes during their question and answer sessions. The presenter has a great program, does a powerful close, opens the floor up to questions, answers them well, and then ... fades off the stage into oblivion, never to be seen again. OK maybe not that dramatic, but still a big mistake. If you don't have a second powerful close after the Q&A period, it could have a negative impact on your whole presentation. Make sure you have two good closes whenever there is a possibility of a Q&A session.

Tom Antion, professional public speaker, AmazingPublicSpeaking.com

