

Dealing with questions and problems in presentations

Part One: Predicting and answering questions

Work in small groups. Listen to your partners' presentations, ask at least two or three questions in the Q&A stage, then give feedback on the presentation and Q&A.

Suggested questions in presentations – alphabetical by key words

- Did you **already** explain...?
- Could I **ask**...?
- Can I take you **back** to the place where...?
- I **basically** know what you meant when you said..., but...
- I didn't (quite) **catch** what you said about...
- (Just) to **check** if I (fully) understand you,...
- I'm not (quite) **clear** what you mean by .../ Can I **clear** up whether you mean...?/ Can you **clear** up for me whether...?
- Can I/ you **confirm** (whether)...?
- What's the **connection** between... and...?
- There seems to be a **contradiction** between... and...
- So, would it be **correct** to say that...?
- If I understand/ understood you **correctly**,...
- Do you have any **data** on...?
- How would you **define**...?
- Can you give (me/ us) some more **details** on...?
- I get the general **drift** of what you were saying about..., but...
- Can you **elaborate** on...?
- Can you give (me/ us) an(other) **example** (of what you mean/ of the kind of thing you mean/ of what you are talking about)?
- Can you **explain** a little more about...?/ Can you **explain** what you mean by...?
- What **evidence** do you have that...?
- I'm not (very) **familiar** with the word/ term/ meaning of...
- I couldn't really **follow**...
- Can you **go back** to the third/ third or fourth/ last slide?/ **Going back** to what you were saying about...,...
- I'm **guessing** that... means...
- I'd be interested in **hearing** more about...
- I was **interested** in the bit/ part where you said...
- What **makes** you think that...?
- Does... **mean**...?
- You did **mention** this in your presentation, but...
- I don't think you **mentioned**...
- Sorry, just one **more** question (about that).
- I **mostly** understand what you're saying, but...
- ... is a **new** term/ **new** concept for me.
- What **precisely**...?
- What are your **predictions** for...?
- I have a **question** about...

- What were you **referring to** when you mentioned...?
- Would I be **right** in saying...?
- Could you **run through**... again?
- Did you **say**...?
- So, what you're **saying** is...
- I **see** what you mean by..., but...
- Perhaps you could say **something** (more) about...
- What does... **stand** for?
- How would you **summarise**...?
- Could you **tell** me...?
- Can you explain... in layperson's **terms**?
- There's one **thing** I don't (quite) understand.
- Is it **true** that...?/ Isn't it **true** that...?
- I'm afraid I didn't **understand** what you meant when you said...

Work together to predict questions you might be asked during your presentations.

Ask each other questions on your presentation topics, using the questions you came up with plus other suggested questions above.

What problems might you have when you are asked questions?

How might you deal with those questions? What can you say and do?

Part Two: Dealing with difficult questions etc

Discuss what you could do and say in the situations below, starting with situations which are most likely in your own presentations.

- It seems like nobody wants to be the first to ask a question/ Nobody starts the questions
- It seems that several/ many people want to ask questions at the same time
- One person dominates the questions and it looks like others want to ask questions too
- Someone asks a question which you've already answered
- Someone asks for information that you already gave during your presentation
- The information is somewhere in your notes
- The information is on a slide
- The answer to the question will be later in the presentation
- The question is off topic
- The question only interests one person
- You don't know the answer to the question
- You aren't 100 percent sure of the answer
- You know the answer to the question but can't share that information (e.g. because it's private or confidential)
- You don't agree with a comment or the implications behind a question
- You don't understand the question
- You meant to give the information that is being asked for in the presentation but forgot
- You think your answer will surprise them/ is not what they expect
- Your answer (partly) contradicts what you said earlier
- You get a question when you are right in the middle of saying something
- You have trouble remembering what you were talking about before you were interrupted
- A question makes the discussion go off topic
- Interruptions means that you are having difficulty getting through your presentation
- There seem to be questions or doubts but no one has interrupted you
- One person seems to have a question but hasn't put up their hand
- The question is too complex to answer quickly
- You should've been able to predict that question coming up, but didn't
- You couldn't answer the last two or three questions

Ask about any which you don't understand, are not sure how to cope with, etc, discussing the best responses each time.

Suggested answers

Compare your answers with those below. Many more answers are possible, so if you discussed something different, ask your teacher if that is also okay.

It seems like nobody wants to be the first to ask a question/ Nobody starts the questions – Don't be shy./ I'll be disappointed if I don't get at least one or two questions./ Absolutely any question at all is okay./ For example, does anyone have any questions about...?

It seems that several/ many people want to ask questions at the same time – Yes, the lady in the corner over there./ Yes, the gentleman with the orange jumper. What would you like to ask me?/ So many questions! Great! If you don't mind, I'll start with the people at the back and work my way forward.

One person dominates the questions and it looks like others want to ask questions too – Can I come back to you in a minute?/ If I could take some other questions.

Someone asks a question which you've already answered – That's similar to the question I answered earlier when.../ As I said earlier,.../ As I said in reply to... question,....

Someone asks for information that you already gave during your presentation – That's related to my introduction, where I said.../ You may remember I showed a graph which.../ I only mentioned this briefly, but...

The information is somewhere in your notes – Just a second while I find that information in my notes./ Sorry, I have this information somewhere.

The information is on a slide – That's in here somewhere. Just a minute while I find the right slide./ If I can just go back a couple of slides to look at that chart in more detail.

The answer to the question will be later in the presentation – That's a great question, and I'll be coming to that.../ I'm glad you asked me that, because I'm planning to...

The question is off topic – That doesn't seem to be directly related to..., so maybe you'd be better asking me in person later./ That's a very interesting question, but not exactly on the topic at hand. I'd love to be able to talk about it later.

The question only interests one person – That's a great question but perhaps a little specific for most people here. However, I'll be happy to answer in person later.

You don't know the answer to the question – I'm afraid I didn't research that, but.../ I don't have any actual data on that, but...

You aren't 100 percent sure of the answer – I can't guarantee this, but I think it's something like...

You know the answer to the question but can't share that information (e.g. because it's private or confidential) – That's an interesting question, but hopefully you can understand why I need to keep that information private.

You don't agree with a comment or the implications behind a question – That's an interesting question, but I'd be much more inclined to say.../ Your question seems to suggest you think..., but my own opinion would be more like...

You don't understand the question – So, are you asking...?/ So, you want to know...

You meant to give the information that is being asked for in the presentation but forgot – Sorry, I meant to mention this in the presentation. The answer is.../ Sorry for not explaining this before.

You think your answer will surprise them/ is not what they expect – You may be (pleasantly/ unpleasantly) surprised to hear that.../ You might be expecting the answer to be, but in fact.../ Actually,.../ To be honest,...

Your answer (partly) contradicts what you said earlier – Although I said earlier that.../ I might have confused you earlier when I said...

You get a question when you are right in the middle of saying something – If I can just get to the end of this slide first./ I'll be very happy to answer just as soon as...

You have trouble remembering what you were talking about before you were interrupted – Where was I? Oh yes,.../ What was I saying? Oh yeah,...

A question makes the discussion go off topic – To get back to the point at hand,...

Interruptions means that you are having difficulty getting through your presentation – Perhaps we can leave any further questions until the end.

There seem to be questions or doubts but no one has interrupted you – As I said earlier, please feel free to interrupt if anything isn't clear./ Any questions before we go on?

One person seems to have a question but hasn't put up their hand – I can see that some people have questions./ I get the feeling that there are questions.

The question is too complex to answer quickly – That's a bit too complicated to go into right now, but.../ It might take me a bit too long to answer that in detail, but...

You should've been able to predict that question coming up, but didn't – I probably should have known that someone would ask me that, but.../ That's such an obvious question, but unfortunately...

You couldn't answer the last two or three questions – I hope I can do better with the next question./ Sorry about that. Please don't let it put you off asking more questions.
Analyse the examples above. What general tips on dealing with questions can you draw from the examples above? What do the good phrases have in common?

Compare your ideas with those on the next page.

Tactics for good answering of questions

- Be specific when apologising
- Compliment the questioner/ Be positive about the question
- Be politely indirect
- Use polite language

Find at least one example of each of those things in the examples above.

***Circle** positive language in the examples.*

Underline polite/ softening/ indirect language in the examples. Some might be the same as the language you have just circled.

What language can you use to deal with these more common situations?

- Explaining the policy on questions
- Starting the Q&A
- Selecting people to ask questions
- Ending the Q&A

Part Three: Dealing with other kinds of problems in presentations

Use similar tactics and language to write at least one phrase to say in each of the situations below.

You find mistakes or out of date information in the slides or handouts

The technology stops working, doesn't work properly or is slow

People are looking tired/ hot/ cold/ restless

The font of some text is too small for people to see

Someone spills a drink

Everywhere you can stand blocks someone's view of the screen

You're going over the allotted time

People can't find their place in the documents they have in front of them

You lose your place in your notes

You want to use a word which is difficult or impossible to translate into English

Suggested answers

with useful language in bold

It seems like nobody wants to be the first to ask a question/ Nobody starts the questions – Don't be shy./ I'll be disappointed if I don't get **at least** one or two questions./ Absolutely any question at all is **okay**./ For example, does **anyone** have **any** questions about...?

It seems that several/ many people want to ask questions at the same time – Yes, the **lady** in the corner over there./ Yes, the **gentleman** with the orange jumper. What would you like to ask me?/ So many questions! **Great! If you don't mind**, I'll start with the people at the back and work my way forward.

One person dominates the questions and it looks like others want to ask questions too – **Can I** come back to you in a minute?/ **If I could** take some other questions.

Someone asks a question which you've already answered – That's **similar** to the question I answered earlier when.../ As I said earlier,.../ As I said in reply to... question,....

Someone asks for information that you already gave during your presentation – That's related to my introduction, where I said.../ You **may** remember I showed a graph which.../ I **only** mentioned this **briefly**, but...

The information is somewhere in your notes – **Just a second** while I find that information in my notes./ **Sorry**, I have this information somewhere.

The information is on a slide – That's in here somewhere. **Just a minute while** I find the right slide./ **If I can just** go back a couple of slides to look at that chart in more detail.

The answer to the question will be later in the presentation – That's a **great** question, and I'll be coming to that.../ I'm **glad** you asked me that, because I'm planning to...

The question is off topic – That **doesn't seem to** be directly related to..., so **maybe you'd be better** asking me in person later./ That's a **very interesting** question, but **not exactly** on the topic at hand. **I'd love to be able** to talk about it later.

The question only interests one person – That's a **great** question but **perhaps a little** specific for most people here. However, **I'll be happy to** answer in person later.

You don't know the answer to the question – **I'm afraid** I didn't research that, but.../ I don't have any actual data on that, but...

You aren't 100 percent sure of the answer – I can't guarantee this, but I **think** it's **something like**...

You know the answer to the question but can't share that information (e.g. because it's private or confidential) – That's an **interesting** question, but **hopefully you can understand** why I need to keep that information private.

You don't agree with a comment or the implications behind a question – That's an **interesting** question, but I'd be **much more inclined** to say.../ Your question **seems to suggest** you think..., but my own opinion would be **more like**...

You don't understand the question – So, are you asking...?/ So, you want to know...

You meant to give the information that is being asked for in the presentation but forgot – **Sorry**, I meant to mention this in the presentation. The answer is.../ **Sorry for** not explaining this before.

You think your answer will surprise them/ is not what they expect – You **may** be (pleasantly/ unpleasantly) surprised to hear that.../ You **might** be expecting the answer to be, but in fact.../ Actually,.../ To be honest,...

Your answer (partly) contradicts what you said earlier – Although I said earlier that.../ I **might** have confused you earlier when I said...

You get a question when you are right in the middle of saying something – **If I can just** get to the end of this slide first./ **I'll be very happy to** answer just as soon as...

You have trouble remembering what you were talking about before you were interrupted – Where was I? Oh yes,.../ What was I saying? Oh yeah,...

A question makes the discussion go off topic – To get back to the point at hand,...

Interruptions means that you are having difficulty getting through your presentation – **Perhaps we can** leave any further questions until the end.

There seem to be questions or doubts but no one has interrupted you – As I said earlier, **please feel free to** interrupt if anything isn't clear./ Any questions before we go on?

One person seems to have a question but hasn't put up their hand – I can see that **some** people have questions./ I **get the feeling that** there are questions.

The question is too complex to answer quickly – That's **a bit** too complicated to go into right now, but.../ It **might** take me **a bit** too long to answer that in detail, but...

You should've been able to predict that question coming up, but didn't – I **probably** should have known that someone would ask me that, but.../ That's such an obvious question, but **unfortunately**...

You couldn't answer the last two or three questions – I **hope** I can do better with the next question./ **Sorry** about that. **Please** don't let it put you off asking more questions.

Dealing with questions in presentations politeness competition game

Choose one of the phrases below and take turns making it longer and more polite. You can change the words there as much as you like as long as the function remains the same. Stop whenever everyone gives up making it more polite or whenever the next attempt is not as long or polite as those that came before. Discuss which was actually the best phrase for your own presentations, then do the same for other lines below.

- Ask me questions, please!
- Yes, you. Ask me your question.
- Please let other people ask questions.
- I've already answered that question.
- I already told you that in the presentation.
- Wait. I have that information in my notes.
- Wait. That's on a slide.
- I'm going to talk about that later.
- Your question is off topic.
- The other people aren't interested in your question.
- I don't know.
- It's... or something like that.
- I can't tell you. It's a secret.
- Your question shows that you have the wrong opinion on this.
- I can't understand your question.
- I know I said... but...
- Let me finish this first.
- I forgotten what I was saying before you interrupted me.
- You've made us go off topic.
- I'll never finish if there are more interruptions.
- You look like you don't understand. No questions? Really?