



*The*  
**SPEAKING &  
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## Tips for Handling Q&A Sessions

Most presentations you give will have some kind of question and answer section. Think of this as a challenge! Here are some hints on how to handle the Q&A session.

### Preparing for the Session

Chances are you will know beforehand that there is a Question and Answer (Q&A) period directly following your presentation. You can anticipate what those questions will be. Below are some example questions that can be used to prepare yourself for the Q&A session. Experiment with different kinds of questions ahead of time and practice answering them.

- Were there difficult concepts in the presentation?
- Were there any confusing terms discussed in the presentation?
- If presenting research, did you leave out portions of your paper/speech that might be relevant to the audience (literature review, in-depth discussion about methods, suggestions for future research, for example)?
- How did you develop your research question?
- Do you see connections between your research and other class projects or readings?
- Are there any controversial/disputable portions of your presentation?

### During the Session

Keep in mind that you are not expected to know the answer to every question! Most audience members will understand this and will appreciate your honest attempts to answer questions to the best of your abilities. Keep these tips in mind as you answer questions:

- It is helpful to repeat or rephrase the questions asked. This allows other audience members, who may have missed the question the first time, to hear the question. It also serves to clarify your understanding of the question and gives you a chance to take a moment to think about your response.

- Make eye contact with the person who asked the question, but don't forget to talk to the other audience members as well.
- Don't rush in immediately to answer the question. Take a deep breath and think about your response.
- When you respond, make it short and straight to the point. There's no need to reiterate all of your main points. Additionally, if it is a question that other audience members don't find interesting or helpful, they may start to tune you out.
- If you genuinely don't know the answer to a question, don't panic! It is worse to make up an answer than it is to honestly admit you do not know. Saying something like, "That's a good point, but I would have to put some more thought into my answer" or "I'm afraid my research didn't cover that area, but that's something I'll need to look into," is much more effective than bashfully apologizing. When possible, bring the answer back to an area that is more familiar to you.
- Keep in mind that the speaking situation is not over when the Q&A session begins. In other words, if you were giving a formal presentation, standing in front of the audience, now is not the time to lean against a table, lower your voice, incorporate slang, etc. Continue using your speaking skills even as you answer questions.
- What if no one asks a question? There is occasionally an uncomfortable period of time after the session starts when you might be able to hear the crickets chirping outside of the window. Don't think that the audience isn't asking questions because they didn't find your speech interesting or stimulating. It's often the matter of not wanting to be the first person to speak up. After all, the audience has been in listening mode during your presentation. That means that you should be willing to wait patiently until someone speaks up. You can also use that Q&A preparation that you did to your advantage. Suggesting a question ("I know some of you might have questions about...") can often open up the discussion.

### **Ending the Session**

Make sure to end the question and answer session on a strong note, while keeping an eye on your time. End with a summary, or one to two sentences reiterating your main point. It's not enough to stand in front of the audience waiting for someone to dismiss you. Thank the audience for their time, their useful comments, and their attention and then be seated.