

Tips for Answering Audience Questions

1. Remain standing at the front of the room following your presentation. Don't run off, or start heading to the edge of the speaking area with your notes in your hand. Convey confidence, and a willingness to entertain questions.
2. Be aware of your body position; the audience is watching you. Avoid playing with your clothing, hair, notes, or writing implements. If your partner is answering a question, pay respectful attention.
3. Try to select questions from different parts of the room. In most question situations it's best to try to include the entire audience by using this method. Even if a particular person doesn't get his or her question answered, they won't feel ignored if you took questions from their area.
4. Repeat the question before you answer it, so everyone can hear. Paraphrasing serves three crucial functions: (1) it allows everyone in the audience to hear the question, (2) it gives you time to think of your response, (3) it ensures that you understand exactly what is being asked of you. You probably don't want to use this technique after every question, but it can sometimes be quite useful.
5. Answer the question clearly and move on. Provide an efficient and accurate response, and move to the next question. Try not to ramble or wander into a related topic.
6. Signal when you'll accept one last question. To avoid the perception that you are trying to escape a particularly nasty question, it is a good idea to warn the audience in advance that your time for questions is quickly passing. In a classroom setting, however, this role usually falls to the instructor.
7. Brainstorm possible questions in advance. The best way to prepare for a question period is to think of possible questions ahead of time. You may not accurately guess what your audience will ask, but you will feel more confident. In addition, you may very well guess accurately, and then your answer will sparkle with professionalism.
8. Don't assume that tough questions are hostile questions. You may have simply gotten someone really thinking! If the question is long, complicated, or you just don't understand it, don't try to bluff your way through an answer. Admit that you hadn't "thought of that" or "studied that" as part of your work, and *offer to speak with the questioner privately* after the session.
9. Practice answering questions as a part of rehearsal. If you practice with an audience member (and you should), have that person ask you questions about the presentation. This will help simulate the actual presentation experience and will boost your confidence.
10. Remember that the Q&A can be the most valuable part of the presentation for you. You learn new perspectives and ideas, and you get feedback on the direction of your work or approach to a problem. And when someone says publicly (as will happen) that he or she really enjoyed your presentation, you'll feel *great*.

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