Asking and Answering Questions

Inquire: Are there Any Questions?

Overview

After presenting, your audience might have questions for you. Or, maybe you prompt your audience to ask questions so they can further engage with the material you presented. Whatever the case may be, it's important to be able to ask and answer questions effectively in the professional world. This lesson will teach you what effective questions are, how to compose answers to questions, how to prepare answers to questions, and how to answer questions on the fly.

Big Question: What is the hardest part of answering questions?

Watch: A Great Question with an Even Greater Answer

You might not have put much thought into asking and answering questions before now, but it happens to be a very important part of the presentation-giving process! Have you had to give a presentation that ended with questions? If not, you've surely raised your hand and asked a question before! It might have been in class, in a work meeting, or a training session. Regardless of the situation, it is vital to know how and when to ask a question and how to compose an answer, if you're the one being asked.

If you are an audience member, you will have to decide if a constructive, clarifying, or leading question is best for the information you need to know. The more difficult side is usually the presenter's job. If you are giving a presentation, there are ways to prepare for audience questions. If you know the material you are presenting and how to compose a complete answer, you will have no problem answering questions from the audience! Let's watch Victor do it!

Victor is presenting to his colleagues about how to use a new app on their phones. This app will help them perform their everyday work duties. The days leading up to the presentation, Victor does quite a bit of research on his own about the app. Of course, he downloads it and spends time exploring everything it can do. Afterward, he makes a few notes about things he found confusing while conducting his research.

One part of the app he had trouble with was how to navigate between tools. To help his audience, Victor puts together a PowerPoint with screenshots from the app to clarify the location of different tools. After the presentation, Victor is asked how the company will handle the in-app purchases. Victor's answer is, "The company will manage all in-app purchases. They will use the company credit card, and you will meet with Diana, our expense specialist, to document the purchase. This will allow for record keeping and should be fairly easy for all the employees." This answer had all the necessary parts of an answer. Victor prepared well for his presentation. After this lesson, you, too, will know exactly how to ask great questions and prepare great answers!
Read: Answering Questions During a Presentation

Overview
Presentations are meant to teach an audience. One of the most effective teaching methods is to clarify or expand on the concepts you presented. This lesson will cover what an effective question is, how to compose an answer, how to prepare answers before a presentation, and how to prepare answers on the spot in a presentation.

What is an Effective Question?
An effective question helps the audience deepen their understanding of the topic. Effective questions should do at least one of three things: be constructive, be clarifying, or be leading. Constructive questions allow the presenter to provide a more detailed explanation of material in a presentation. Clarifying questions help the audience understand a concept from the presentation. If the audience is confused, clarifying questions can clear up that confusion. Finally, leading questions allow the presenter to move from one concept to the next, or to connect two concepts together.

How to Compose an Answer
When you are asked questions after a presentation, follow this strategy to create complete answers. The first step is to summarize the question. This allows you to check the meaning of the question prior to continuing with your answer. If your summary does not accurately represent the question, the asker has an opportunity to correct you before you flesh out your answer to their question.

It also allows you to have an introduction to your answer. You have time to think on your feet. After you summarize what was asked, provide a brief tagline for your answer. This might be one word, or it might be one sentence. It should just be a short summary of how you are going to answer. Think of this as the thesis of your answer. Once you have provided this thesis, or the claim, it’s time to provide the warrant for that answer. You need to explain not just what the answer is, but why that answer is correct.

For example, when a politician is asked a question about a policy stance, like how they would fund education, they use this pattern to answer questions. They start by summarizing the question: “Thanks for asking! I have a great plan to fund education in our state.” This gives them time to think, and it works like an introduction. Then, they offer a brief tagline for their answer: “I will increase our state’s education budget by 50%.” This tagline gives a brief answer for those who want a brief answer. Then, the politician will explain how and why they will do this: “We will create a new sales tax on certain products that will increase how much we pay teachers so we retain the best people in our state as we shape our future for the better.”

Preparing Answers Before the Speech
You don’t always have to come up with answers on the spot! Sometimes, you can anticipate what sort of questions you will be asked so you can prepare your answer in advance. The first step in preparing answers is understanding your audience. Knowing who you expect to show up to a presentation will help you anticipate what they will ask. If your audience is marketing representatives, they will ask you questions that are influenced by their marketing backgrounds. If you know who is coming, you can know what they want.
Additionally, you can get feedback from others when you practice. Practice for a family member, and see what questions they have. If one person has a question, it’s safe to assume someone else might have that same question. You can incorporate your answer into the presentation to answer the question before it’s asked, or you can hope someone asks the question and answer it when they do.

Finally, you can answer questions you had before creating the presentation. When you start creating a presentation, you aren’t an expert at the subject. There are things you want to know, and not all of those things make it into the presentation. You can use your own questions to prepare for possible questions others might have as you present.

Preparing Answers on the Fly

You won’t always be able to predict what questions come your way. In addition to following the three steps for answering a question above, here are some tips to help you feel confident in your ability to prepare answers on the fly. The first thing is to stay on point. You want to be direct in your answer to the question, and you shouldn’t get too far afield. This is one of the biggest benefits to summarizing the question before you answer it.

You also want to keep answers succinct. Don’t ramble. Providing a thesis is a great way to keep your answer short. Finally, you should consider using an example as the basis for your answer. An audience won’t always easily understand data or statistics. If you can provide an example the audience can relate to, it is easier for them to understand the answer. If you do not know an answer to a question, it is okay to be honest and say you aren’t sure. If this happens, find the answer after the presentation, and follow up with the person who asked the question.

Reflect Poll: Giving a Presentation

What kind of question is the most helpful during a presentation?

- Constructive question
- Clarifying question
- Leading question

Expand: The Components of an Answer

Overview

Questions are a vital part of a presentation. Our advice above allows for some easy shortcuts for developing answers as you present. But, those shortcuts are built on specific components that allow for your answers, or arguments, to be most effective. This lesson will cover those components so you know the essential parts of an answer, if you want to branch out from what you learned earlier.

Parts of an Answer

Questions are an interactive part of a presentation. They are also an opportunity to engage directly with specific audience members. Thinking of answers as arguments that support your presentation’s thesis is a great way to use question and answer sessions to their fullest. Remember, argument isn’t a dirty word. Rather, it’s the specific way you try to convince someone of your thesis.
Answers should consist of four elements: a summary of the question, a claim, a warrant, and an impact. The claim should be the actual answer to the question asked. Have an answer that someone can remember and that time-oriented listeners can point to if they don’t have the interest in listening to the long answer. After the claim, you need a warrant. This warrant is the data, example, or statistic that you use to prove your claim.

This is something that will convince a content- or action-oriented listener. Finally, the impact is how you relate the answer back to your audience. You help them realize why the answer is important to them and important to the presentation. This is where you get your people-oriented listeners involved.

Having these four components will ensure you not only have a complete, satisfactory answer for the person that asked, but also that you appeal to the most members of your audience as possible by touching on each style of listening.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings

A video explaining how to answer a question with multiple parts
- Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TS5Q0fdprJA

A video explaining how to answer a very long question
- Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0O65oM6FTg0

A video providing ways to manage difficult questions people may ask
- Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HG1rw-obHDc

Lesson Glossary

effective question: helps the audience deepen their understanding of the topic

constructive questions: allow the presenter to provide a more detailed explanation of the material in a presentation

clarifying questions: help the audience understand a concept from the presentation

leading questions: allow the presenter to move from one concept to the next or connect two concepts together

Check Your Knowledge

1. Questions are just a way to prove you know more than the speaker.
   a. True
   b. False

2. You can prepare answers to questions as you prepare the presentation.
   a. True
   b. False

3. Questions can connect ideas within a presentation together.
   a. True
   b. False
Answer Key:

Citations

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