



No.10: How to take questions.

A well run Q&A session can really help persuade and win people to your cause. But a baldly run Q&A session can undermine everything you have worked for, so be prepared. As we said in the very first set of Tips: preparation is vital in terms of framing your message, and so preparation is vital too when it comes to defending and selling your message once you've stopped speaking.

- Once you've prepared your presentation, think about the people you are going to present to and what questions they might ask. It's useful to prepare a range of relevant answers.
- When you're taking questions, the most important thing is to stay calm and listen to the WHOLE question. Don't jump in – you may be answering the wrong question and alienating the questioner.
- Repeat the question in your response, in case some audience members did not hear it.
- Don't rush your answer. Take your time – a questioner will almost always prefer a considered response.
- Audiences respond better if they feel you value their questions. Thank individuals for their questions, consider using phrases like 'that's a very good question you've raised here' or 'I'm glad you asked that question'.
- Use the person's name in the answer, if you know it.
- Avoid sounding like a typical politician – answer the question, rather than evading it. If you don't have an answer instantly, say you will come back afterwards with a full response.
- Don't let a tricky, aggressive or barbed question derail you – don't get personal. Give yourself time to reply, and maintain your dignity and professionalism at all times.