

Q&A Considerations in Non-Academic Environments

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to handle various scenarios that may arise during a Q&A session. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Q&A Considerations in Non-Academic Environments
2. Q&A with Small Audience Co-Located with Speaker
3. Leading a Successful Q&A
4. The Unfamiliar Question
5. Controversial or Unconventional Questions

1. Q&A Considerations in Non-Academic Environments

Question and answer sessions are unpredictable and, for many speakers, intimidating. The Q&A leaves the prepared script behind and enters uncharted territory, demanding quick thinking and flexibility.

After all of the careful planning that goes into preparing a speech, the loss of control in the Q&A session can be frustrating. However, it is possible to prepare for a variety of Q&A scenarios.

2. Preparing for the Q&A

A speaker cannot predict every question, but he or she can identify likely questions and prepare responses in advance. As part of the speechwriting process, make a list of potential questions and answers.

The following are a few tips for anticipating questions and drafting answers.

Fortify key terms and concepts: Identify any terms, concepts or acronyms in the speech that might cause confusion or disagreement in the audience. Always define key terms and concepts in the speech, unless the audience is a homogeneous group of specialists. However, even specialists may disagree on basic definitions; if there is any controversy surrounding a foundational term or concept, be prepared to take sides or explain

why the controversy does not affect your issue.

Prepare for basic questions: When speaking to an audience with mixed levels of expertise, be prepared for questions about basic principles and concepts. The assumptions and truths that speakers take for granted may not be obvious to beginners. Sometimes, basic questions are actually the hardest questions to answer. Most people are so used to the status quo that explaining why they think the way they do can be difficult.

Cater to mixed audiences: If a specialist asks a complex question in a mixed audience, do not leave the **neophytes** in the dust. Begin by explaining the question in **layman's** terms. Then give an answer on the specialist's level, followed by a "translation" that extracts something meaningful for less-knowledgeable audience members.

Investigate related issues: Basic research about issues related to the topic may help speakers prepare for unexpected questions. Here are some questions that pinpoint logical expansions of an issue: How does the issue work in other places? How did the issue work in the past? How might it work in the future? Has the definition or common conception of the issue changed over time? How do other issues affect the issue? Is the issue connected to any controversies? Are any of the speech's positions unconventional or controversial?

Prepare for time constraints: Are there any points that the speech passes over quickly due to time constraints? Be prepared to expand on those points, because they are likely targets for audience questions.



TERMS TO KNOW

Layman

A person who is untrained or lacks knowledge of a subject.

Neophyte

A novice or recent convert.

3. Leading a Successful Q&A

To help the Q&A session run smoothly, communicate effectively with the audience. The following techniques will help the audience stay with you.

Announce the Q&A session early on to give the audience time to prepare questions. Say something like, "I look forward to answering your questions after I explain my main points."

Repeat each question loudly and clearly before answering. If the audience cannot hear the question, they will not understand the answer.

To take a moment to think about a question, stall with a phrase like, "That's an interesting question." Be careful with this tactic, though— if the speaker praises one question too much, the other audience members may feel insulted if he or she does not give their questions equal praise.

If someone asks a yes-or-no question, keep the answer simple. Otherwise, try to say something beyond a curt one-word answer. Do not give the impression of dismissing audience members or discouraging questions.

There is no such thing as a bad question. This may not *actually* be true, but public speakers should pretend it

is! Do not embarrass anyone asking a question; it could create a negative atmosphere in which others are too uncomfortable to ask questions.

4. The Unfamiliar Question

Many speakers get flustered when an unfamiliar question comes up. Public speakers should prepare so they do not panic if someone asks this type of question.

It is impossible to read every paper or know every name that may come up. Speakers who accept that fact can make unfamiliar questions work in their favor by demonstrating humility and interest in learning new things; do not forget that speakers are allowed to ask questions too!

Furthermore, in the case of unfamiliar material, the questioner may be relying on false information or unfounded assumptions, and it would be a mistake to accept the information without understanding the context.

5. Controversial or Unconventional Questions

If someone asks a question that relies on inappropriate ideas or assumptions, the speaker should find a polite way to distance him- or herself from that perspective before answering the question.

Otherwise, the audience may assume the speaker shares the questioner's offensive opinion.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned how to **prepare for the Q&A session** by anticipating likely questions and drafting answers to those questions. When **leading a Q&A session**, repeat each question loudly and clearly to make sure everyone in the audience hears the discussion. If someone asks a **question based on information that is unfamiliar**, do not be afraid to ask for more details about the context of the question.

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