



As the presenter, you need to nurture your audience's questions through these four stages. Here are 8 tips to help make them through:

1. Pitch your presentation at the right level for your audience

If your presentation is too simple for the level of knowledge in your audience, they won't have any questions. If it's too complicated for them, they'll turn off rather than risk asking a question which might make them look stupid.

2. Don't cover every aspect of your topic in the presentation

If you cover everything there is to know on the topic - you won't leave room for questions. So, don't be exhaustive in your coverage.

3. Let your audience know you would like questions and when to ask them

Near the beginning of your presentation let your audience know that you welcome questions. Then let them know when to ask them. There are a number of options:

Take questions throughout your presentation

Tell people they can interrupt you throughout the presentation to ask questions as they come to mind. This has several benefits:

- people won't have to remember their question till later
- if they're uncertain about something they can get that clarified at the time
- questions on a particular issue are dealt with at the same time that you're discussing that issue.

The downside to this strategy is that it can take you off track if people ask irrelevant questions or questions that you're going to cover later in the presentation. If you find it tricky to get back into the flow of your presentation after an interruption it may not be the best strategy for you. Finally, it can throw the timing of your presentation if people ask a lot of questions on a particular issue. This strategy is best used in longer presentations and training courses where timing is less critical.

Take questions at defined points of your presentation

Tell people you will have an opportunity for questions after you've finished each part of your presentation. This option is a useful halfway point between having questions throughout and leaving them till the end of the presentation. You can also decide how long to take questions for during each break in your presentation, and so control the timing better.

4. Let them ask a question as soon as they have one

If you're serious about ensuring that people get their questions answered, invite people to interrupt you and ask their question. It's the only way to ensure this. That's when the question is burning for them. The longer you make people wait, the less likely they are to remember it. Once you've moved onto a new topic, their question will seem less relevant.

5. Invite people to write down their questions as they think of them

If you don't want to take questions throughout, you can help people remember their questions by suggesting that they write them down.

6. Validate every question

It takes courage to ask a question. It's public speaking - just not from the front of the room. People are held back by wondering if their question is stupid or did they miss something and you already answered it. So, you need to do your bit to make it a safe environment for people to ask questions. Do that by responding warmly to all questions that are asked - even if the question is stupid or you had already covered it. I don't recommend saying "Good question". It's become a cliché which is often used when the presenter can't immediately think of the answer.

7. Have people discuss in pairs any questions they may have

If your audience seems a little shy, give them an opportunity to discuss their questions with one other person before they ask them in front of the whole of the audience. This has several benefits:

- It gives people the opportunity to try out their question in front of one person before risking humiliation in front of the whole audience.
- Any questions that are answered by material you've already covered can be answered by their partner.
- It gives people the opportunity to rehearse and fine-tune their question so that it will be shorter and clearer when they ask you.

8. Answer questions clearly and succinctly

If you answer every question with a long-winded and incoherent ramble, people are going to be reluctant to ask you another one. They'll conclude they're unlikely to get a useful answer from you. Nor do they want to subject the rest of the audience to another ramble.

Source: <http://www.speakingaboutpresenting.com/audience/presentation-question-time/>

Exercise 1: Listen to pairs of speakers briefly comparing how they handle questions from the audience. After hearing each pair, underline the speaker you agree with more and explain why to a partner.

- They speak about _____ and I agree with the first/second speaker because _____.
- They speak about _____ and I agree with the first/second speaker because _____.
- They speak about _____ and I agree with the first/second speaker because _____.
- They speak about _____ and I agree with the first/second speaker because _____.
- They speak about _____ and I agree with the first/second speaker because _____.
- They speak about _____ and I agree with the first/second speaker because _____.
- They speak about _____ and I agree with the first/second speaker because _____.
- They speak about _____ and I agree with the first/second speaker because _____.

The speakers refer to different types of question. Complete the main question types:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a) A g__d question | d) an un__ss__y question |
| b) A d____t question | e) a m____le question |
| c) An __ff-t__c question | f) a h____e question |

Exercise 2: Look at Kees Garman's D8 system for handling questions. What strategy or combination of strategies would work best for each type of question?

Deal with the question straight away
Define exactly what the question is first
Defuse any negativity before answering
Divide up the question into sub-questions
Deflect the question onto someone else
Defer answering the question until later
Disarm the questioner by admitting you don't know
Decline to answer the question but give a reason

Kees Garman, communications coach

Exercise 3: You heard one of the speakers in Exercise 1 talk about the importance of repeating the questions you are asked before answering. Repeat the questions below using the words in *italics* to help you. Then listen and check.

- a) Are you planning to go public with this? *You are asking me whether...*
- b) Are we in a position to take on more work? *You want to know...*
- c) How do you see the market developing? *You ask me...*
- d) What are our chances of success? *You are wondering...*
- e) When is the launch date going to be? *You'd like...*

Exercise 4: You also heard one of the speakers say that hostile questions need to be rephrased. Rephrase the questions below using the words in brackets to help you. Listen and check.

- a) Why did we spend so much on this? (asking - why - scale - investment - necessary)
- b) Are these figures accurate? (like - go through - figures again)
- c) Why is this project six months behind schedule? (have - some concerns - timeframe)
- d) Is this really going to be worth it? (look again - some advantages - new system)
- e) Is anybody actually in charge of this unit? (question - management structure)
- f) Do you honestly expect us to support this? (not fully convinced - benefits - initiative)

Source: Powell, Mark: Dynamic Presentations, Cambridge University Press, 2012

CLARIFICATION

A large audience may not get the chance to ask questions until the presenter has finished the talk. So, if you want to clarify something the presenter said, first focus their attention on the subject you are unclear about.

1 FOCUS *You talked about concentrating on our core business.*

2 CLARIFICATION *Could you say a bit more about that?*

In a longer presentation you may need to contextualize your question more

1 CONTEXT *When you were talking about raising capital,....*

2 FOCUS *..... you mentioned the possibility of a flotation.*

3 CLARIFICATION *Could you clarify your position on that?*

TASK 1

Below you will find the requests for clarification which followed a presentation about foreign investment in China. Complete them using appropriate verbs from the lists. Combining the three parts of number 1 will give you a complete question. Then do the same with numbers 2, 3, 4, and 5: 🎧 CD2/T26

WHEN YOU WERE.....

dealing; talking; telling; describing; showing; summing up

1. _____ about the current level of foreign investment in China,.....
2. _____ to us what kind of future you see for China,.....
3. _____ with the issue of China's communist administration,.....
4. _____ China's economic prospects over the next five years,....
5. _____ us China's trade figures for the last three years,.....
6. _____ us why there's so much interest at the moment in Asian-Pacific markets,

YOU.....

commented; spoke; referred; quoted; made; said

1. _____ a figure of \$34 billion.
2. _____ on the importance of Hong Kong.
3. _____ the point that they had created a free market within a command economy.
4. _____ something about hundreds of billions of dollars still being needed.
5. _____ about private enterprise gradually taking over from state ownership.
6. _____ to a decline in foreign investment elsewhere, particularly in Latin America.

COULD YOU.....

explain; run; be; tell; elaborate; say

1. _____ us how you arrived at that figure?
2. _____ a bit more about that?
3. _____ to us exactly what you meant by that?
4. _____ a little more specific?
5. _____ on that?
6. _____ us through that again?

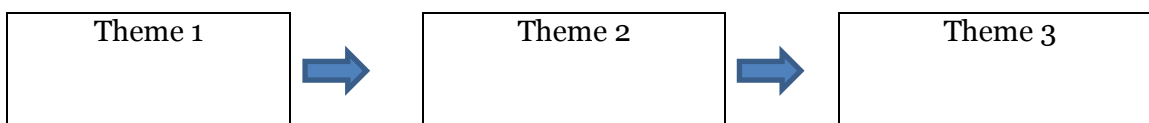
Exercise 5: Read about the two approaches two different people have to a question and answer session.

PERSON A: After you have prepared your material, write down the twenty questions that the audience is most likely to ask. Be prepared to answer them. This may surprise you, but you will have figured out at least ninety percent of the questions.

PERSON B: I don't do much by way of thinking of all the questions they might ask and preparing answers. I do spend a lot of time thinking about the key themes, how they link together and the best way of explaining them.

Taken from: Powell, M. (2010) Dynamic Presentations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 48.

Think of a presentation you may have to give in the near future. Take Person's B advice and list the key themes of your talk - list no more than three. Work out how you could link them together.



Taken from: Powell, M. (2010) Dynamic Presentations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 48.

Now think about Person's A advice and write down three questions you think your audience would be likely to ask about each theme.

Q1	Q1	Q1
Q2	Q2	Q2
Q3	Q3	Q3

Taken from: Powell, M. (2010) Dynamic Presentations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 48.

Phrases to use in various situations

Repeating or paraphrasing questions

- If I understand you correctly, your question is...
- Put in a different way, your question is...
- Just to check if I got everything right - you want to know...
- In other words, you're asking....
- This is a rather complex question. Let me see if I understand what you said.

Postponing questions

- I'll touch upon this particular issue later in my presentation.
- If you bear with me for a few minutes, you'll see that...
- I'll answer this question as we go along.
- In case the next point of my presentation doesn't answer your question, feel free to ask me again during the question period.

Admitting that you do not know

- I'm afraid I don't know the answer to your question.
- Unfortunately, I'm not in a position to answer this question.
- I'm not sure if I can answer this, since I'm not directly involved in this area. However, I'll be very happy to find out and get back to you later.
- The person who would know is not here today, but I'll try to find out for you.

Taken from: Klarer, M. (2007). Působivá prezentace a přednáška v angličtině. Praha: Grada.

- I'm afraid I'm not in a position to comment on that.
- I don't know that off the top of my head.
- Can I get back to you on that?
- I wish I knew.
- I'm afraid I don't have that information with me.

Challenging the question

- I'm afraid I don't see the connection.
- I think I answered that earlier.
- Sorry, I don't follow you.
- To be honest, I think that raises a different issue.

Complimenting the questioner

- Good point.
- I'm glad you asked that.
- That's a very good question.

Taken from: Powell, M. (1996). Presenting in English – How to Give Successful Presentations, Thomson Heinle.

Question frames

1. What exactly did you mean by _____?
2. Could you go back to what you were saying about _____?
3. How did you arrive at the figure of _____?
4. I think I misunderstood you. Did you say _____?
5. You spoke about _____. Could you explain that in more detail?
6. Going back to the question of _____. Can you be more specific?
7. You didn't mention _____. Why not?
8. If I understood you correctly, _____. Is that right?
9. I'm not sure I fully understood _____. Can you run through that again, please?
10. There's one thing I'm not clear about _____. Could you go over that again, please?

Taken from: Powell, M. (1996). Presenting in English – How to Give Successful Presentations, Thomson Heinle.

Exercise 6: Sometimes, especially in less individualistic cultures, an invitation to ask questions can initially be met with silence! Listen to three speakers trying to deal with this. Whose approach would suit you best?

Exercise 7: Match the expressions A-J below to their functions by writing in the corresponding letter. The first has been done for you as an example.

A: You claimed that... Could you tell u show you arrived at that figure? E	B: Going back for a moment to what you were saying about....	C: But you still haven't answered my question which is...	D: I want to take you up on what you said about...
E: You told us... Do you have any data to support that?	F: I think you mentioned... . Could you just elaborate on that?	G: OK, then. Well, let me put it in another way...	H: Oh, OK, fair enough. Point taken. I see what you are saying.
I: When you were outlining... you said... . What exactly did you mean?	J: One think I'm still not clear about. Did you say... or am I mistaken?		

Functions:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| A asking for an explanation | F asking for a proof |
| B making a criticism | G clearing up a misunderstanding |
| C referring to an earlier point | H pushing for an answer |
| D rephrasing a question | I conceding a point |
| E querying a point | J asking for more detail |

Taken from: Powell, M. (2010) Dynamic Presentations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 48-49.

Exercise 8: A management consultant has just given a presentation on marketing strategy. Listen to five short exchanges from the Q&A which followed. Write the functions listed in the preceding exercise you hear the audience members using them. The first one has been done for you as an example.

- Extract 1 C _
- Extract 2 _ _
- Extract 3 _ _
- Extract 4 _ _
- Extract 5 _ _