Dealing with questions and problems in presentations
Part One: Predicting and answering questions

Listen to your partners’ presentations in small groups, asking at least two or three questions afterwards and then giving feedback.

Suggested questions – alphabetical by key words
● Did you *already* explain…?
● Could I *ask*…?
● Can I take you *back* to the place where…?
● I *basically* know what you meant when you said…, but…
● I didn't (quite) *catch* what you said about…
● (Just) to *check* if I (fully) understand you,…
● I’m not (quite) *clear* what you mean by …/ Can I *clear* up whether you mean…?/ Can you *clear* up for me whether…?
● Can I/ you *confirm* (whether)…?
● What's the *connection* between... and…?
● There seems to be a *contradiction* between… and…
● So, would it be *correct* to say that…?
● If I understand/ understood you *correctly*,…
● Do you have any *data* on…?
● How would you *define*…?
● Can you give (me/ us) some more *details* on…?
● I get the general *drift* of what you were saying about…, but…
● Can you *elaborate* on…?
● Can you give (me/ us) an(other) *example* (of what you mean/ of the kind of thing you mean/ of what you are talking about)?
● Can you *explain* a little more about…?/ Can you *explain* what you mean by…?
● What *evidence* do you have that…?
● I’m not (very) *familiar* with the word/ term/ meaning of…
● I couldn’t really *follow*…
● Can you go back to the third/ third or fourth/ last slide?/ Going back to what you were saying about…,…..
● I’m *guessing* that… means…
● I’d be interested in *hearing* more about…
● I was *interested* in the bit/ part where you said…
● What *makes* you think that…?
● Does… *mean*…?
● You did *mention* this in your presentation, but…
● I don't think you *mentioned*…
● Sorry, just one *more* question (about that).
● I *mostly* understand what you’re saying, but…
● … is a *new* term/ *new* concept for me.
● What *precisely*…?
What are your predictions for...?
I have a question about...
What were you referring to when you mentioned...?
Would I be right in saying...?
Could you run through... again?
Did you say...?
So, what you're saying is...
I see what you mean by..., but...
Perhaps you could say something (more) about...
What does... stand for?
How would you summarise...?
Could you tell me...?
Can you explain... in layperson’s terms?
There’s one thing I don’t (quite) understand.
Is it true that...? Isn't it true that...?
I’m afraid I didn’t understand what you meant when you said...

Work together to predict questions you might be asked during your presentation.

Ask each other questions on your presentation topics, using the questions you came up plus other suggested questions below.

What problems might you have when you are asked questions?

How might you deal with those questions? What can you say and do?

Dealing with questions and problems in presentations
Part Two: Dealing with difficult questions etc

What would you do and say in the situations below? Start with discussing the ones which are most likely in your own presentations.

It seems like nobody wants to be the first to ask a question/ Nobody starts the questions

It seems that several/ many people want to ask questions at the same time

One person dominates the questions and it looks like others want to ask questions too

Someone asks a question which you’ve already answered

Someone asks for information that you already gave during your presentation

The information is somewhere in your notes

The information is on a slide

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The answer to the question will be later in the presentation
The question is off topic
The question only interests one person
You don’t know the answer to the question
You aren't 100 percent sure of the answer
You know the answer to the question but can’t share that information (e.g. because it’s private or confidential)
You don’t agree with a comment or the implications behind a question
You don’t understand the question
You meant to give the information that is being asked for in the presentation but forgot
You think your answer will surprise them/ is not what they expect
Your answer (partly) contradicts what you said earlier
You get a question when you are right in the middle of saying something
You have trouble remembering what you were talking about before you were interrupted
A question makes the discussion go off topic
Interruptions means that you are having difficulty getting through your presentation
There seem to be questions or doubts but no one has interrupted you
One person seems to have a question but hasn't put up their hand
The question is too complex to answer quickly
You should’ve been able to predict that question coming up, but didn’t
You couldn’t answer the last two or three questions
Ask your teacher about any which you aren’t sure about.
Suggested answers

Compare your answers with those below. Many more answers are possible, so if you discussed something different, ask your teacher if that is also okay.

It seems like nobody wants to be the first to ask a question/ Nobody starts the questions – Don't be shy./ I’ll be disappointed if I don’t get at least one or two questions./ Absolutely any question at all is okay./ For example, does anyone have any questions about…?

It seems that several/ many people want to ask questions at the same time – Yes, the lady in the corner over there./ Yes, the gentleman with the orange jumper. What would you like to ask me?/ So many questions! Great! If you don’t mind, I’ll start with the people at the back and work my way forward.

One person dominates the questions and it looks like others want to ask questions too – Can I come back to you in a minute?/ If I could take some other questions.

Someone asks a question which you’ve already answered – That’s similar to the question I answered earlier when…/ As I said earlier,…/ As I said in reply to… question,…..

Someone asks for information that you already gave during your presentation – That’s related to my introduction, where I said…/ You may remember I showed a graph which…/ I only mentioned this briefly, but…

The information is somewhere in your notes – Just a second while I find that information in my notes./ Sorry, I have this information somewhere.

The information is on a slide – That’s in here somewhere. Just a minute while I find the right slide./ If I can just go back a couple of slides to look at that chart in more detail.

The answer to the question will be later in the presentation – That’s a great question, and I'll be coming to that…/ I’m glad you asked me that, because I’m planning to…

The question is off topic – That doesn’t seem to be directly related to…., so maybe you’d be better asking me in person later./ That’s a very interesting question, but not exactly on the topic at hand. I’d love to be able to talk about it later.

The question only interests one person – That’s a great question but perhaps a little specific for most people here. However, I’ll be happy to answer in person later.

You don’t know the answer to the question – I’m afraid I didn’t research that, but…/ I don’t have any actual data on that, but…

You aren’t 100 percent sure of the answer – I can’t guarantee this, but I think it’s something like…

You know the answer to the question but can’t share that information (e.g. because it’s private or confidential) – That’s an interesting question, but hopefully you can understand why I need to keep that information private.

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You don’t agree with a comment or the implications behind a question – That’s an interesting question, but I’d be much more inclined to say…/ Your question seems to suggest you think…, but my own opinion would be more like…

You don’t understand the question – So, are you asking…?/ So, you want to know…

You meant to give the information that is being asked for in the presentation but forgot – Sorry, I meant to mention this in the presentation. The answer is…/ Sorry for not explaining this before.

You think your answer will surprise them/ is not what they expect – You may be (pleasantly/unpleasantly) surprised to hear that…/ You might be expecting the answer to be, but in fact…/ Actually,…/ To be honest,…

Your answer (partly) contradicts what you said earlier – Although I said earlier that…/ I might have confused you earlier when I said…

You get a question when you are right in the middle of saying something – If I can just get to the end of this slide first./ I’ll be very happy to answer just as soon as…

You have trouble remembering what you were talking about before you were interrupted – Where was I? Oh yes,…/ What was I saying? Oh yeah,…

A question makes the discussion go off topic – To get back to the point at hand,…

Interruptions means that you are having difficulty getting through your presentation – Perhaps we can leave any further questions until the end.

There seem to be questions or doubts but no one has interrupted you – As I said earlier, please feel free to interrupt if anything isn’t clear./ Any questions before we go on?

One person seems to have a question but hasn’t put up their hand – I can see that some people have questions./ I get the feeling that there are questions.

The question is too complex to answer quickly – That’s a bit too complicated to go into right now, but…/ It might take me a bit too long to answer that in detail, but…

You should’ve been able to predict that question coming up, but didn’t – I probably should have known that someone would ask me that, but…/ That’s such an obvious question, but unfortunately…

You couldn’t answer the last two or three questions – I hope I can do better with the next question./ Sorry about that. Please don’t let it put you off asking more questions.

Analyse the examples above. What general tips on dealing with questions can you draw from the examples above? What do the good phrases have in common?

Compare your ideas with those on the next page.

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Tactics for good answering of questions
- Being specific when apologising
- Complimenting the questioner/ Being positive about the question
- Being politely indirect
- Using polite language

Find at least one example of each of those things in the examples above.

Circle positive language in the examples.

Underline polite/ softening/ indirect language in examples. Some might be the same as the language you have just circled.

What language can you use to deal with these more common situations?
- Explaining the policy on questions
- Starting the Q&A
- Selecting people to ask questions
- Ending the Q&A

Dealing with questions and problems in presentations
Part Three: Dealing with other kinds of problems

Use similar tactics and language to write at least one phrase to say in each of the situations below.

You find mistakes or out of date information in the slides or handouts
The technology stops working, doesn’t work properly or is slow
People are looking tired/ hot/ cold/ restless
The font of some text is too small for people to see
Someone spills a drink
Everywhere you can stand blocks someone’s view of the screen
You’re going over the allotted time
People can’t find their place in the documents they have in front of them
You lose your place in your notes
You want to use a word which is difficult or impossible to translate into English
Suggested answers – With useful language in bold

It seems like nobody wants to be the first to ask a question/ Nobody starts the questions –
Don’t be shy./ I’ll be disappointed if I don’t get at least one or two questions./ Absolutely
any question at all is okay./ For example, does anyone have any questions about…?

It seems that several/ many people want to ask questions at the same time – Yes, the lady
in the corner over there./ Yes, the gentleman with the orange jumper. What would you like
to ask me?/ So many questions! Great! If you don’t mind, I’ll start with the people at the
back and work my way forward.

One person dominates the questions and it looks like others want to ask questions too –
Can I come back to you in a minute?/ If I could take some other questions.

Someone asks a question which you’ve already answered – That’s similar to the question
I answered earlier when…/ As I said earlier,…/ As I said in reply to… question,…..

Someone asks for information that you already gave during your presentation – That’s
related to my introduction, where I said…/ You may remember I showed a graph which…/ I
only mentioned this briefly, but…

The information is somewhere in your notes – Just a second while I find that information
in my notes./ Sorry, I have this information somewhere.

The information is on a slide – That’s in here somewhere. Just a minute while I find the
right slide./ If I can just go back a couple of slides to look at that chart in more detail.

The answer to the question will be later in the presentation – That’s a great question, and
I’ll be coming to that…/ I’m glad you asked me that, because I’m planning to…

The question is off topic – That doesn’t seem to be directly related to…, so maybe you’d
be better asking me in person later./ That’s a very interesting question, but not exactly
on the topic at hand. I’d love to be able to talk about it later.

The question only interests one person – That’s a great question but perhaps a little
specific for most people here. However, I’ll be happy to answer in person later.

You don’t know the answer to the question – I’m afraid I didn’t research that, but…/ I don’t
have any actual data on that, but…

You aren’t 100 percent sure of the answer – I can’t guarantee this, but I think it’s
something like…

You know the answer to the question but can’t share that information (e.g. because it’s
private or confidential) – That’s an interesting question, but hopefully you can understand
why I need to keep that information private.
You don’t agree with a comment or the implications behind a question – That’s an interesting question, but I’d be much more inclined to say…/ Your question seems to suggest you think…, but my own opinion would be more like…

You don’t understand the question – So, are you asking…?/ So, you want to know…

You meant to give the information that is being asked for in the presentation but forgot – Sorry, I meant to mention this in the presentation. The answer is…/ Sorry for not explaining this before.

You think your answer will surprise them/ is not what they expect – You may be (pleasantly/ unpleasantly) surprised to hear that…/ You might be expecting the answer to be, but in fact…/ Actually,…/ To be honest,…

Your answer (partly) contradicts what you said earlier – Although I said earlier that…/ I might have confused you earlier when I said…

You get a question when you are right in the middle of saying something – If I can just get to the end of this slide first./ I’ll be very happy to answer just as soon as…

You have trouble remembering what you were talking about before you were interrupted – Where was I? Oh yes,…/ What was I saying? Oh yeah,…

A question makes the discussion go off topic – To get back to the point at hand,…

Interruptions means that you are having difficulty getting through your presentation – Perhaps we can leave any further questions until the end.

There seem to be questions or doubts but no one has interrupted you – As I said earlier, please feel free to interrupt if anything isn’t clear./ Any questions before we go on?

One person seems to have a question but hasn’t put up their hand – I can see that some people have questions./ I get the feeling that there are questions.

The question is too complex to answer quickly – That’s a bit too complicated to go into right now, but…/ It might take me a bit too long to answer that in detail, but…

You should’ve been able to predict that question coming up, but didn’t – I probably should have known that someone would ask me that, but…/ That’s such an obvious question, but unfortunately…

You couldn’t answer the last two or three questions – I hope I can do better with the next question./ Sorry about that. Please don’t let it put you off asking more questions.
Dealing with questions in presentations politeness competition game

Choose one of the phrases below and take turns making it longer and more polite. You can change the words there as much as you like as long as the function remains the same. Stop whenever everyone gives up making it more so or the attempts are not as long or polite as those that came before, then discuss which the best phrase actually was.

Ask me questions, please!

Yes, you. Ask me your question.

Please let other people ask questions.

I’ve already answered that question.

I already told you that in the presentation.

Wait. I have that information in my notes.

Wait. That’s on a slide.

I’m going to talk about that later.

Your question is off topic.

The other people aren’t interested in your question.

I don’t know.

It’s… or something like that.

I can’t tell you. It’s a secret.

Your question shows that you have the wrong opinion on this.

I can’t understand your question.

I know I said… but…

Let me finish this first.

I forgotten what I was saying before you interrupted me.

You’ve made us go off topic.

I’ll never finish if there are more interruptions.

You look like you don’t understand. No questions? Really?