
Q&A TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

Expert Tips And Techniques To Shine And Master Q&A In Any Situation



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FIA & GREGG FASBINDER

We started with a single goal: to teach authentic performance. When speakers began asking Fia Fasbinder for help with the skills she'd learned at the prestigious NYU Tisch School of the Arts, the need was clear. Fia's husband Gregg Fasbinder—entrepreneur and Fortune 100 executive—saw how better training could meet that need. Every day the team they've built—which includes Emmy award-winning trainers, renowned writers, designers, and entrepreneurs—creates transformation, from the C-suites of Fortune 500 firms to internationally broadcast events.

Our background means we approach all speaking engagements differently.

THE MOXIE INSTITUTE KNOWS HOW TO TAKE YOUR PERFORMANCE FROM BORING TO **BRAVO.**

When you and your team need to deliver world-class performances, **we'll be there.**



Our acting and broadcast experience made us experts in stage presence and on-camera delivery



Our work in higher education made our workshops models of adult learning, based in the latest research in psychology, neuroscience, and performance studies



Our years of live and recorded media events taught us all the tricks of the trade



You'll benefit from all that experience in each line we write, each slide we design, and every minute of our famous coaching and training



Q&A TIPS AND TECHNIQUES: TOOLS TO MASTER



Do you love the Q&A that follows your presentation, or hate it? If you're like most speakers, you probably fall into one of two categories:

- 1 **I can't wait to get to the Q&A** because I hear from my audience and we can at last have a true discussion.
- 2 **I hate Q&A** because I never know what people are going to ask and I'm afraid I won't know the answers

Whichever of these camps you fall into, you should be aware that question-and-answer sessions provide an excellent forum for persuasion. Just like you, your audience realizes that you haven't been able to prepare for questions you couldn't know were coming.

They know that it's much easier to prepare and practice a presentation than it is to field tough challenges suddenly coming your way in real time. Naturally, a person doing that well comes across as more persuasive.

Of course, you can and should anticipate questions and objections you reasonably believe you'll be faced with. But no one can foresee every question that might arise; and however well you prepare, someone in your audience will throw you a challenge you couldn't have seen coming.

Why You Need To Shine In Q&A

So there's no doubt about it: you're at maximum exposure during the question-and-answer session. But your audience's awareness of that fact actually works in your favor. In fact, it can work tremendously in your favor.

Here's why: anyone can give a reasonably successful presentation if they've prepared well and practiced sufficiently. You can even give a good presentation if someone else prepared well and you've practiced sufficiently. Audiences understand, however, that during the question-and-answer dynamic, your knowledge and communication skills are fully and nakedly on display.

You can't rely on your notes, and you don't have the instant (false) credibility provided by your masterly PowerPoint slides. You must respond from your own well of knowledge and experience, create a concise answer that provides appropriate information to the questioner, demonstrate poise and good will, and do so quickly with all eyes upon you.

Do all of the above with style and skill, and you'll go a long way toward strongly bolstering your authority and credibility with your listeners.

Why You Should Look Forward To Q&A

If you're in the "I'd still rather deliver a presentation than answer questions about it" camp, you may not believe that you should actually look forward to Q&A. Yet you should, at least if you want to positively influence audiences.

The truth is that Q&A is critically important to effective business presentations. Question-and-answer sessions give you the chance to enrich and deepen listeners' experience of your talk. That in itself is refreshing for both you and your audience.



4 REASONS WHY Q&A IS A TOOL YOU NEED TO MASTER

► #1 — Your presentation was confusing or unconvincing to the audience.

...Or worse, left them unimpressed with you as a speaker. In such cases, Q&A is your golden opportunity to either continue to inform and convince—or to do so at last as you conclude your presentation. Remember that speakers who handle themselves with style and assurance in the rough-and-tumble of Q&A may win over some listeners for the first time!

► #2 — Clarify your argument and give examples of your solution in action.

Most of the time, you're challenged to cram essential information into a too-brief presentation period. Because Q&A gives the appearance of being audience controlled rather than speaker controlled, it allows you to expand your argument while responding directly to your listeners "off the clock." The atmosphere created should feel more relaxed, while giving you greater scope to deepen your audience's understanding

► #3 — Q&A is more conversational and natural than a one-way speech.

All effective [public speaking](#) is conversational. Audiences want speakers to communicate with them honestly, openly, and in everyday language. Too often, speeches have the feeling of a monologue, delivered through a one-way dynamic to a polite but anesthetized crowd of onlookers.

The back-and-forth of Q&A should feel more comfortable to you AND your listeners. Best of all, when you're conversing about a topic you truly care about, all of your best qualities as a speaker will emerge.

► #4 — Q&A demands your absolute best.

Let's face it: A question-and-answer period is a tremendous challenge. You can practice your presentations to your heart's content—but you can never know what queries and objections may come your way when you invite your listeners to respond.

To excel in Q&A, you have to be 100% focused and able to think nimbly on your feet; sensitive to your audience's feelings and opinions; and empathetic concerning individual questioner's points of view.

Oh, and you must remain spontaneous, flexible, logical, and good natured.

Accomplish all of this—with a dash of humor tossed in if you can manage it—and you may surpass the effectiveness of your presentation itself.

HOW TO SURVIVE THE 7 DANGER ZONES OF Q&A

Q&A is one of the most challenging aspects of [public speaking](#). Yet it's also one of your greatest opportunities to shine as a presenter.

Would you like to field questions easily, think on your feet, and marshal compelling evidence to back up your arguments? If so, keep reading! You'll learn below about the biggest challenges of Q&A—and how to cope with each of them.

► #1 — Hostile Questions

Hostile questions often reflect pent-up anger directed at you simply because you're a convenient target.

"I've been dealing with salespeople like you for 30 years, and I'm sick and tired of it!"

A response like that has little to do with you personally.

The key to handling hostility is to stay in control emotionally. Listen carefully to what is behind or underneath the question. Try to grasp the emotional context or underlying problem, and address yourself to that.

Always remember not to lose sight of your objective of persuading your listeners.

Your purpose is still to advance the goals of your presentation, not to demonstrate your dazzling swordplay.

► #2 — Loaded Questions

Loaded questions are exactly what they sound like: explosive.

And as the speaker, you are being invited to light the fuse!

Since loaded questions are filled with damaging assumptions and conclusions, your job is similar to a Bomb Squad's: to defuse the charge and bring the situation under control.

You can question the assumption behind the question. And here's an important rule: The more damaging the assumption voiced by the questioner (which of course the audience hears), the quicker you must refute it.

If that means interrupting the questioner in the middle of the question—that's-really-an-attack, go right ahead.

► #3 — Leading Questions

A leading question is one in which the preferred answer is embedded in the question itself.

“Isn’t it true that...?” is a classic opening to a leading question, since the questioner obviously believes that “it” is true.

This is a sweet deal for the questioner, since it involves asking and answering the question simultaneously! But you mustn’t let that happen.

Again, listen carefully, so that you can hear when the questioner has slipped in his or her own assumptions. That’s the time to recast any damaging assumptions or assertions.

► #4 — Hypothetical Questions

These are really “swamp” questions, since they usually lead you into a fog-enshrouded bog that’s impossible to find your way out of. So why go there at all?

The standard response of, “I can’t answer a hypothetical question like that” should suffice. The one exception to this advice is to go ahead and answer if the hypothetical situation makes a point you’d like to be heard.

For instance, when Condoleezza Rice said the United States would consider it “a grave threat” if North Korea tested a nuclear device, the Bush administration obviously wanted to get that message out. As you can imagine, diplomats and negotiators use this option in responding to hypotheticals all the time.

► #5 — Multifaceted Questions

This too-many-bites-at-the-apple transgression appears frequently, particularly among audience members who enjoy showing off.

The challenge here is that the many facets of the question(s), or the sheer length of the diatribe can make these interrogatories a real challenge.

Multifaceted questions can work to your advantage, however. That’s because they allow you to answer as many of the facets as you like while ignoring the rest.

If the question is long enough or convoluted, the audience probably won’t notice what you’ve left out!

► #6 — Fuzzy Questions

This one is an All-Time-Greatest-Hits candidate for TV interviews and radio call-in shows

When a questioner thinking is as sharp as the surface of a tennis ball, you should basically give thanks to your Higher Power, and take your answer in any direction you like.

You could ask for a more targeted question from the person, but why give up the chance to state your message all over again?

► #7 — False Choices

A false choice is an example of a fallacy, or an error in reasoning. Here's a typical instance:

"Look, we should use the foundation grant for either a new gym or a parking lot. Those are the things we need most for the school, and we can't afford both. So let's make up our minds!"

Why are those the only two choices?

In reality, there are probably at least a dozen options in such a situation. (How about a performing arts space, a new baseball diamond, an annual field trip, or a scholarship?)

When someone offers you a false choice, simply point out that there are in fact other alternatives, and then begin to discuss your favorites. If you find yourself facing any one of these tough kinds of questions, proceed slowly but surely.

Hesitancy can be as damaging as handling an answer awkwardly. Let your honesty and goodwill be your guide. Reasonableness will always look better.



9 TIPS FOR HANDLING A Q&A SESSION

Whether you run a company or are a one-man band, you probably talk in front of groups, both in prepared presentations and question and answer sessions. Whether it's a room full of people or just a few team members, properly handling the question and answer section will either enforce your message—or undermine it. Bungle an answer and you may lose the credibility you established during your prepared words. It's just as important to prepare for the Q&A as it is to practice what you plan to present.

▶ #1 — Be aware of hidden agendas.

Of course most of the questions asked by the audience are sincere and the asker is looking for a genuine response. But some questions are intended to either:

- ▶ Make the person asking the question look smarter, or
- ▶ Make the responder (you) look dumb.

No matter the intent, answer all questions with the same approach and professionalism. You will come out looking better.

▶ #2 — Be prepared.

It's good practice to write down questions you anticipate may be asked, especially the tough or controversial ones, and to rehearse your answers.

I often run through a mock session with some trusted colleagues. They always come up with questions that I didn't expect. Encourage others to evaluate your responses and body language. Fumble in private so you shine in public.

▶ #3 — Pause.

If you need a moment before answering a question, take it. A quick, snap answer can be doubted. Or if you haven't really thought through what was asked, you may answer the wrong question.

It may feel awkward—silence often does—but your audience won't think less of you for taking a few seconds to collect your thoughts. In fact, they'll appreciate that you took your time to consider the questions, and it won't feel like a scripted answer.

▶ #4 — Be confident.

Smile and look your questioners in the eye. The eye contact shows that you are focusing carefully on the question and the questioner. The smile is an invitation to friendship and connection

► #5 — Don't fidget.

Scratching your nose, excessive blinking, moving around, and other nervous ticks signal that you're lying. I know, you're probably not lying; you're likely just nervous. But perception is reality. Work to minimize these twitches.

► #6 — Answer the question. Straight.

This is a common problem I see in Q&A sessions. The presenter doesn't answer the question that is asked. It may not be intentional—it could be that they weren't listening closely enough.

Or, maybe the speaker didn't know the answer and decided to talk about something tangential he had expertise on instead. The reason doesn't matter.

Nothing erodes the credibility you've built with the audience or makes them doubt your message more than avoiding the question.

► #7 — Confirm you answered the question.

Occasionally throughout the Q&A session ask "Does that answer your question?" or "Is that clear?" It shows your audience you care and that you want to make sure their needs are being met

► #8 — Don't get thrown off by the awkward question.

There's always one, and it's always difficult. That person in the audience who asks a question that really doesn't match to the presentation or is just out in left field.

Handle this question as professionally as you do any of the other questions and try to tie your answer back to your main message.

This takes a little tap dancing, but it may be the answer you are most remembered for. (Remember President Clinton being asked 'boxers or briefs?' on the MTV town hall?)

► #9 — Practice, practice, practice.

Make sure you focus some of your practice time on the Q&A. Usually, it's the last thing you do on stage after a presentation, and it may be the portion you are most remembered for.

Don't give it short shrift.

4 WAYS TO RESPOND TO AN ANSWERLESS QUESTION

When "I don't know." or "Let me get back to you." doesn't work, try these four ways to answer difficult and unexpected questions without sounding incompetent and clueless.

▶ #1 — Answer from your own level.

When you're a leader or a manager, you might have a broad understanding of your team's work but not its every detail. But when you're asked a question that's a few layers down from your level of responsibility you still need to do more than just say, "Let me get back to you on that."

That answer is a surefire way to position yourself as a human search engine, not a leader.

▶ #2 — Project your answer into the future.

If you're asked for your opinion about a subject you haven't thought much about, you might stumble trying to come up with something thoughtful, or worse, say something you regret that you didn't mean.

In these situations, the key is to think in the moment and then immediately look forward from there, not backward.

Let's say you're talking about authenticity and leadership when someone asks you, "Superheroes change into costumes when they're going to use their powers. Do you think business leaders change into 'corporate' costumes when they speak in front of audiences?"

If you go backward and try to recall a previous example of this type of thing to reflect on, you'll get yourself into a maze of confusion, and you won't deliver a coherent response.

But if you stay in the moment, you'll allow your thoughts to flow forward with your speculations. This way, instead of getting tied up recounting past experiences—which may not even be a good fit for the question—you can answer more hypothetically and strike a positive, forward-looking note at the same time.

So for example, you might acknowledge how leaders might need to "suit up" to have the confidence they need, or point out that some feel they need to hide behind a "costume because" they feel like they can't be themselves.

Then you can say how you hope that, eventually, most leaders manage to shed those impulses and become more authentic.

▶ **#3 — Use questions about others to share your own views.**

Other times, you'll get asked a question that has nothing to do with what you've just said. Perhaps it's someone who isn't familiar with your industry or who has a different perspective on the issue.

I recently worked with an executive from a Major League Baseball team. He was speaking about increasing ticket sales when, out of nowhere, somebody ask him about a trade that another team had made.

Rather than just saying he hadn't given it much thought, he should've said, "I can't speak to what they were thinking regarding that particular deal, but here are some of the considerations we make when thinking about making a trade."

That type of answer turns an unrelated question about someone else into an opportunity to display leadership yourself.

▶ **#4 — Show gratitude for questions you can't answer.**

It's impossible to prepare for every possible question. Nobody's perfect, and every once in a while you're going to be asked a perfectly legitimate question that you unfortunately can't answer.

When this happens, first acknowledge the value of the question. Then be honest and explain that you're going to need to look into it more.

"I'm going to explore that because I think there are a lot of valuable insights we could gain by examining this area further."

They may not be satisfied with your answer, but this is a much better response than, "I don't know" or changing the subject altogether. By making it clear that you're committed to looking into it, you're showing that you care and take their question seriously.

Classifying tricky questions into categories like these helps you avoid panic and answer more analytically.

Just remember, questions are seldom just requests for information, they're also great opportunities to showcase your thinking and show leadership—even when you don't have a ready answer.

WORDS AND PHRASES TO AVOID

"I" or "Me"	<p>This presentation is not about you!</p> <p>Even though you may be self-consciousness and feel anxious, it's still all about the audience. Replace every "I" or "me" with "you," "we," or "us." Keep the focus on your listeners, and you'll serve them and you.</p>
"A little bit"	<p>This is a phrase guaranteed to water down your content. "I'd like to talk a little bit about . . ." pales next to, "Let's discuss this year's important industry trends."</p>
"Just"	<p>Similar problem as with #2. For instance, compare these two options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) "I just want to say that I think we face some problems"b) "Listen! —Our backs are to the wall here regarding these profit margins."
"So"	<p>Is this frequently the first word out of your mouth? Why? "So" indicates a continuation of a previous thought. Since this is the start of your presentation, what is there to be continuing?</p>
"Talk about"	<p>Often used repetitively and monotonously, sometimes with bullet points:</p> <p>"First, I'll talk about our competition. Then I'll talk about why we have to think differently. Then, I'll talk about our new initiatives. Then, I'll talk about how I'm watching you all now shoot yourselves!"</p>
"My topic is"	<p>If you want to engage listeners immediately, you need to launch your presentation strongly. An opening that blandly announces your topic will fail in this respect. What's engaging about telling people something they already know?</p>
"I've been asked to speak about"	<p>A variation of item #6. Sometimes an attempt by the speaker to seem important.</p>

"Sorry if" or "Sorry for"	Uh-oh. The speaker is apologizing for his or her presentation? "Sorry for this lengthy explanation. I couldn't figure out a way to say it simply." Okay, I invented that last sentence—but isn't that what it sounds like?
"That's all I have"	"And so I didn't give any thought to considering how to end this talk. So I'll just jump off this cliff, and take you all with me!"
"I'm running out of time, so I'll go through this quickly"	It's probably not a good idea to announce to everyone your lack of time management skills in this presentation, wouldn't you say?
"Excuse the eye chart"	(Variation: "I know this slide is really busy.") Boy, haven't you heard that one before? Here, the speaker actually is apologizing for making a PowerPoint slide incomprehensible. If a presenter can't speak to everything on a slide in the time he or she shows it, the slide doesn't work. It needs to be boiled down or broken up into more slides, or the speaker needs to tell the audience that the full data are in the handout.
"I'd like to start out with a story."	Actually, this is only half-bad. A story is one of the flat-out most effective ways to open a speech or presentation. Its effect is considerably weakened, however, if you announce that you're about to tell a story. I call it "introducing the Introduction."
"There's a funny joke"	Well, there may be. But you're setting yourself up for failure if the one you're now about to tell isn't funny. Just get right to it, i.e., start telling the joke as if you're relating something serious. When the audience recognizes the humor, it will be that much funnier. Even better than all that: use humor rather than a joke. It won't contain a punch-line, but it's much easier to relate to your actual topic.
"Excuse me if I seem nervous"	Although some people think saying this will get an audience on your side, I think announcing your nerves is a bad idea. Most nervousness isn't visible. Let the audience make the decision as to whether you look nervous. If they don't notice it, why tip your hand?

"I'm not good at public speaking"

Then go away.

"I'm not a speaker"

Yes, you are. Aren't you giving a presentation? Besides, you don't need to be a speaker unless you're on the speaking circuit. Just share what you have to say with us. We'll probably love it.

"I've never done this before"

You guessed it: this is instant death to your credibility. Again, do a good job and we'll L-O-V-E you!

"I think I've bored you enough"

Oh, let's hope you haven't bored your audience at all. And if you have, do you have to twist the knife this way?

"Here are our key differentiators"

A fine phrase except those last two words have been used a gazillion times and are now meaningless. Besides, your company's "key differentiators" are probably exactly the same as the next guy's.

"I've divided them into 3 buckets"

Unless you work on a farm, are wearing a pail on your head, or are planning to kick said bucket as part of the entertainment value of your talk, I would avoid the "buckets" cliché.

"Bear with me"

Typically said when the speaker is experiencing technical difficulties. We all do, of course. Why not have a back-up plan for keeping your audience interested if the technology doesn't cooperate? I tell my clients—and I really mean it—that they should be prepared to give their talk if they leave their laptop with their slides on it in the cab on the way in from the airport.

"The next slide shows"

Transitions are vital elements of your speech or presentation. They help audience members negotiate the logic of your argument. You need to think about how to organically link your previous talking point with the one you're about to discuss. Don't appear to discover yourself what the next segment is all about only when the slide pops onto the screen.

"Moving right along"

Truly the worst example of throwing one's hands up in the air because you don't know how to transition to your next point.

**"Obstacles!"
or
"Mergers!"**

Or any single word or phrase that you blurt out to indicate what you're going to talk about next. Find that organic and logical transition, per item #19 above.



To continue to elevate your professional skills and accelerate your career goals or to just learn more about our industry-leading training and services, you can visit our website, send us an email or give us a call!

We look forward to supporting you on your journey!



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