7 Handling questions

7.1 Talking points

1 Some presenters think dealing with questions is the hardest part of a presentation.

Do you agree with them? Why / Why not?

How do you deal with difficult questions?

2 While you watch other people talking about the questions above, compare their experience with yours.

7.2 The presentation

3 Patricia Reyes has carried out a survey for Quartz Power Group (QPG) to measure their customer satisfaction ratings. She is answering questions from a group of managers after presenting the results of the survey. While you watch, note down her responses to the questions (*Yes*, *No* or *Can't answer*) and the reasons she gives for her answers.

Questions	Yes / No / Can't answer	Why?
1 Matt: Head of IT Are the customers satisfied with the company's website?		
2 Anna: Customer Services Manager Weren't there any positive comments about the call centre?		
3 Marcus: Managing Director a) Do they need a follow-up survey? b) Should they have asked any other questions as part of the survey?		

7.3 The expert view

4 While you watch Andrew talk about the LEVER model for handling questions, answer the questions and make notes about each part below.

Listen	1 When someone asks a question, what should you say? 2 How can you use body language?

↓

Echo	3 What is the purpose of repeating back the question?
Value	4 How do you show that you value the question? 5 How does this help with nervous or aggressive questioners?
Empathize	6 Why is it important to empathize? 7 Do you always use all of the EVE techniques?

↓

Respond	8 Does Andrew recommend brief or detailed responses? 9 When is it a good idea to check if your answer is clear?

    10 How should you deal with difficult questions?
    11 How should you handle several questions that are asked at the same time?

For a summary of the LEVER model, read the article on page 57.

7.4 Analysis

5 While you watch the presentation again, give Patricia a score from 1 (= very well) to 3 (= not very well) on how well she follows the different aspects of the LEVER model.

Write comments on things she says and does that demonstrate her use of LEVER.

How well does she …?		Comments and examples from her presentation
Listen	1 2 3	
Echo, value and / or empathize	1 2 3	
Respond	1 2 3	

7.5 The expert feedback

6 How does Andrew's analysis of the presentation compare with yours?

Language focus

🔵 7.7 Dealing with questions

1 Look at this extract from the video. Complete the dialogue using phrases a–e below.

Anna: … I find it somewhat difficult to believe as there were positive scores from some participants but no positive comments.

Patricia: ¹_____. You mean why I didn't put any positive comments on the customer feedback on the site?

Anna: Yes. Surely there were some positive comments.

Patricia: Of course. ²_____. ³_____ this is a concern for you. Let me explain. As I said before, I was only presenting the main findings, the full details are in your report. With regard to the feedback on the call centre, however, I'm afraid the responses where either negative or quite neutral.

Anna: But you didn't report any of the neutral comments.

Patricia: ⁴_____. I didn't report any of the neutral comments. But my aim was to give you an overview of the findings – not to go into every single detail. But my comments are representative of the majority, though I accept don't tell the whole story. ⁵_____.

Anna: I guess so. Thanks.

a You're quite right.	**d** Does that make sense?
b It's a good question.	**e** I can understand how …
c Can I check if I've understood you properly?	

2 Now watch the video and check your answers.

3 Put expressions a–e in **1** into these four categories.
  1 Check your understanding of the question: _____
  2 Show you value the question: _____
  3 Show empathy and understanding: _____
  4 Check the questioner is satisfied with your answer: _____

4 Re-order these words to make expressions. Then add them to the four categories in **3**.

  f have you correctly I understood ?

  _____

  g understand your I concern can .

  _____

  h let be sure you I've followed me correctly .

  _____

  i answer that query your does ?

  _____

  j that would be problem I can a see .

  _____

  k important that's point an – raising thanks for it .

  _____

> **TIP**
>
> **Predicting questions**
>
> When you prepare a presentation, write down the questions that you think your audience will ask at the end. Prepare answers for these questions.

Managing questions and clarifying meaning

5 It is important that you manage the questioning stage and ensure that everyone clearly hears and understands the question. Look at the sentences below about dealing with questions. Replace the verbs in *italics* with the verbs below that have a similar meaning.

catch   put up   clarify   elaborate   repeat it

1 We're going to pass round a microphone so please *raise* _____ your hand if you have a question.
2 Sorry, I didn't *hear* _____ what you said. Could your repeat your question?
3 Thanks for bringing this up. But could you just *explain* _____ what it is exactly that you disagree with?
4 That's a great question. I'll just *say it again* _____ in case some people didn't hear.
5 I don't quite follow what you mean. Could you *expand on what you were saying* _____ slightly?

Softening disagreements and opinions

6 Sometimes an audience member may ask an aggressive question or make a hostile comment. In order to avoid an argument, you can use language that 'softens' your disagreement or which states your opinion less forcefully. Here are some examples:

Softening a disagreement	Softening your opinion
I can see what you mean (about sth), but …	In my opinion / view …
I take your point (about sth / that …), but …	(Personally) I think / believe …
Your concern (about sth / that …) is understandable, however …	To my mind … / As I see it …
I understand your concern (about sth / that …), but …	It seems to me that …
I'm afraid I disagree with your view that …	Past experience / The evidence suggests to me that …

Make the responses below less direct by using some of the phrases above. Use a polite disagreement phrase for the first part, and a 'soft' opinion for the second. For example:

> Your worry about losing customers is wrong. The new marketing strategy will bring in new customers, not lose existing ones.
>
> *I can understand your concern about losing customers, but I'm afraid I disagree with your opinion. In my view, the new marketing strategy will bring in new customers, not lose existing ones.*

1 I disagree with you about the investment costs. These investments are essential for our long-term survival.

_____

2 I disagree with you about staff bonuses. Bonuses should be performance-related and only be given when employees have earned them.

_____

3 You're wrong about relocating our factory to Asia. Relocations are generally expensive and cost as much as they save.

_____

Presentation task

You are an entrepreneur. You are going to give a three-minute presentation to a group of potential investors. You would like to find an investor who will put money into your latest idea. Choose from one of these ideas or think of your own:

- a robot that cleans the house
- a type of yoghurt for people who cannot drink milk products
- a website that makes and sends personalized greetings cards
- a social networking site for business people
- an easy-to-fit wind turbine for the tops of houses.

Prepare a three-minute presentation. Briefly summarize your business idea. Your main points should cover:

- the invention (name? purpose?)
- the target customer (e.g. young people, middle-aged, high earners)
- the investment you want (e.g. $50,000) and the share of the business in return (e.g. 40%).

After your presentation, there will be five minutes for questions so think about the questions your audience might ask. When you are ready, give your presentation and then ask for questions. After the questions, choose an investor and try to agree a deal.

Further practice

Give a short presentation about one of the following topics:
- your job and key responsibilities
- an introduction to your company
- a businessperson or company that you admire
- a favourite hobby or pastime.

At the end of your presentation, take questions for five minutes.

Useful phrases

Inviting questions

Are there any questions? / Does anyone have any questions?

If anyone has any questions, I'd be happy to try and answer them.

Checking your understanding

Sorry, I couldn't hear you / I didn't quite catch that.

Could you repeat that / say that again?

I don't think I quite follow you. Could you give me an example?

I don't quite understand what you mean.

Can I check that I've understood your question?

Have I understood you correctly? / Is that right?

Valuing the question

That's a good / great / important question.

Thats an interesting point.

Thanks for raising this issue.

Checking the questioner is satisfied

Does that answer your question / query?

Does that make sense?

Have I answered your question?

Understanding an opinion

I see what you mean (about …), but …

I take your point (about …), but …

I understand your concern (about …), but …

That's an understandable concern, but …

Stating your opinion

As I see it / to my mind, …

(Personally) I think / believe / feel that …

In my opinion / view … / It seems to me that …

Responding or explaining that you cannot answer a question

Let me deal with your question about … first, then I'll reply to your other points afterwards.

I'll try to answer your first point and then I'll come back to your other question later.

If you don't mind, I'd like to answer that question at the end.

I'm afraid I simply can't answer that at this time.

Can I get back to you on that one?

Ending the questions stage of the presentation

Anyone else? / Are there any more questions?

If you have any further questions, feel free to email me. My email address is …

I'll be here for a few minutes afterwards so feel free to come up and talk to me.

Analysis

Give this form to someone in your audience to complete. During your question and answer period at the end, they should make notes in each part of the form and comment on how successfully you dealt with each question or comment.

	What was the question about?	How well did the presenter listen?	Did the presenter echo, value or empathize?	Was the response satisfactory?	Could the presenter handle this question more successfully? If so, how?
Question 1					
Question 2					
Question 3					
Question 4					
Question 5					

Self-assessment

After your presentation, spend a few minutes thinking about your performance and make notes about the questions below.

1 What did I do well?

2 What do I need to work on for next time?

3 What have I learned from watching other people answering questions?