

S P E A K E A S Y



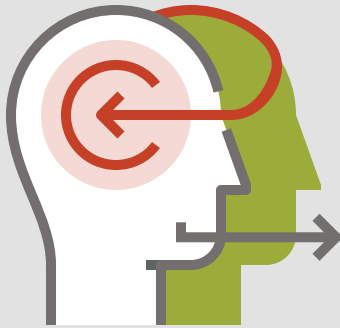
# HANDLING QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSIONS WITH AUTHENTICITY AND AUTHORITY

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Interpersonal communication involves both speaking and listening. Effective communicators prepare for speaking engagements by not only outlining their message and considering how they will deliver it to their audience, but also how they will respond to potential questions. In high stakes presentations and conversations, how you handle questions is equally as important as how you share information. Being ill-prepared to thoroughly and clearly answer questions can reduce your credibility and authority.

Business communication consultants advise professionals to spend time practicing pausing to actively listen in order to be able to accurately answer questions. This can be a difficult skill to master in part because of an evolutionary component.

Humans can listen at a rate of 125-250 words per minute, but can think much faster, at a rate of 1,000-3,000 words per minute.<sup>1</sup>



The natural inclination during a conversation may be to anticipate the question and rush to think of a response.

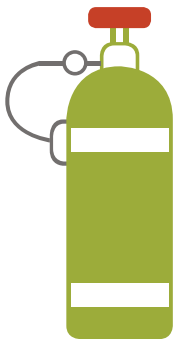
The interpersonal communication specialists at Speakeasy recommend taking a different approach to ensure you are able to listen first so you can effectively handle questions.

## 1 BREATHE AND FOCUS ON LISTENING FIRST

**Before** you receive a question, take time to breathe deeply to calm your body and release any thoughts in your mind. It is essential to clear as much mental clutter as possible so you are able to hear the question.

**Keep in mind** that you must listen carefully and intently to be sure of the question being asked. As you listen, focus on the speaker, and wait to consider your response until the question has been asked and the speaker is finished.

**Focusing on breathing and listening** also reduces your urge to interrupt the speaker. Too often, speakers listen for a brief second and then immediately begin thinking of their response without fully hearing the question.



**Remember,** you are the listener, so listen and breathe. If you keep breathing you will hear the question better and your brain will have the oxygen necessary to offer a complete response.

## 2 PAUSE TO PROCESS THE QUESTION AND THINK OF A RESPONSE



**Before** you answer the question, take a few seconds to pause.

During this time, consider the question and ensure your response is truly addressing the question. By taking this pause, you are conveying the importance of the question and showing the audience that you are considering their point of view. In some instances, you may need more than a few seconds to gather your thoughts. In these cases, be sure to inform your

**If you are asked a question and do not know how to respond,** acknowledge this as well and ask the audience permission to follow-up with them later once you have researched the question or consulted with others. It is acceptable to say that you do not know the answer to a question,

audience by saying, *“That is a great question. Please give me a moment to think about this.”*

**Taking a pause does not discredit you as a speaker,** in fact, it illustrates your commitment to being an effective and authentic communicator. Keep in mind that your pause will always seem a lot longer to you than to your listeners. It is better to gather your thoughts and deliver a cohesive answer, than to rush an answer that may be confusing or incomplete.

but a good practice to provide the audience with guidance as to how you will find the answer for them. For example, *“I do not know the answer to your question, but I will speak with my team and get back with you by tomorrow morning with an answer.”*

## 3 ANSWER THE QUESTION CLEARLY AND SUCCINCTLY

**Speakers often rush to answer a question without fully understanding the question.** Be sure you understand the question before you begin to respond. If the question is unclear, do not be afraid to ask for further clarification or for the speaker to repeat the question. Effective communicators are able to both focus on and structure their response to answer the question being asked and only the question being asked.

**Whenever possible, answer the question simply and directly, then stop.** Wait for the audience to ask for further elaboration, otherwise seek to make only one point per question. Providing more information than needed based on the question asked can suggest that you were either not listening, or may be trying to push an alternative motive.

**Answer your audience's questions genuinely and clearly.**

**For questions that may require a complex response,** consider using an example or an analogy to make the information easier to understand for the audience.

**However,** keep the example short and to the point, avoid going off on tangents or using excessive jargon.



**The key** is to give the audience enough information to satisfy their questions, but to also spark their interest to want to learn more and engage in further discussion. By being succinct with your responses, you are opening the door for two-way communication.

# CONCLUSION



Communication has always been, and will continue to be, an important component of workplace dynamics, professional development, and business productivity. Whether you are giving a presentation, speaking with a key stakeholder, or leading a team meeting, how you handle questions is key in establishing yourself as an effective communicator. For your next presentation or conversation, remember to take a few minutes to prepare yourself for how you will receive and answer questions. This preparation can mean the difference between ending a talk on a high note with confidence and authority, or concluding a presentation having lost credibility with your audience. At Speakeasy, our business communication trainings are designed to meet your communication goals. Our full-time Faculty are dedicated to providing communicators, at all levels, the opportunity to learn and practice key interpersonal communication skills such as preparing for high profile speaking engagements and fielding questions. Contact Speakeasy today to claim your seat in our next communication program, to take your business communication skills to the next level.

To learn more about our dynamic communication classes visit our website at <http://www.speakeasyinc.com/>, or call one of our communication advisors at **1-888-375-1801**.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.prdaily.com/Main/Articles/Listening\\_facts\\_you\\_never\\_knew\\_14645.aspx](http://www.prdaily.com/Main/Articles/Listening_facts_you_never_knew_14645.aspx)