

## NAVIGATING QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

The questions you are asked by the audience may depend on many things such as their knowledge of your story and cause or their attitude toward your topic. Here are some examples of how to handle common types of questions in preparation for your presentation.

Type of Question	For Example	How to Respond
Closed	Straight yes and no questions. “Did you actually see this happen?” “The prognosis is really bleak, isn’t it?”	Respond or deflect, then bridge to your story or message: “I did. And it just underscored for me the importance of...” “Advances have been made with treatments, and the good news is...”
Open	An open-ended question that is designed to elicit a full response. “What happened?”	Score! Take it where you’d like: go to your story, your headline or your key messages.
Rapid-Fire	Several questions, one after another.	Choose one question and answer it; ignore the rest or return to them later if you’d like. “You touched on several good points including what could be done to help solve this problem. The good news is...”
Interruption	A question asked before you finish your point that steers you away from your story or message and on to another question.	Be polite. Acknowledge the question, but return to and finish the story moment or point you were making. “I’ll come back to that question. What I was saying was...”
Darts	Negative questions that challenge: “How could you have been so irresponsible?”	Refocus the question: “It’s not really a matter of responsibility. Like many others, I was ill-informed...” Avoid using the negative language yourself.

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*Note.* Adapted From “Handling Questions from an Interviewer: Common Queries and Agile Answers” by J. Capecci and T. Cage, 2015, *Living Proof*, p. 260.

Vague	Often from an underprepared reporter, these questions require you to provide a lot of background before you can get to your key message.	Score! Steer the interview in the direction you want it to go. Rephrase the question to make it more specific. “By your question, I think you’re referring to the damage this kind of pollution can cause...”
Off-topic	Irrelevant or tangential question that leads you and the interview off track.	Deflect/block and bridge. “That’s interesting. However, in this presentation, we’ll be focusing on...”
Loaded Preface	A question that starts with negative or incorrect information. “As a Centre for women with heart disease, what kinds of programs are available at the CWHHC?”	Correct the incorrect information in a positive way. “The great thing about the CWHHC is that some of its programs and offerings are open to anyone with heart disease such as the Virtual Care Program. While others primarily focus on women, offerings such as the Community Advocate Toolkit encourage engagement from women with lived experience, men who are caregivers to women with lived experience and other family members, as well as friends.”
Impossible	A question you do not know the answer to.	Acknowledge that you cannot answer it, and say why. Offer to find the answer, if possible. “I’m not a scientist, so I can’t answer that question, though I know someone at the Center who could. But what I can tell you is...”
Gut-Punch	A question designed to engage your emotions. “Can you tell me what it felt like when you first got the news of her death?”	Look to your emotional preparation and what you felt you can sagely and honestly say while maintaining focus on your goal. Answer and bridge, or deflect and bridge. “It felt like my world had ended. But of course it didn’t. So two months later...” “It was really hard, but what I now realize is...”