

Successful Q&A

Choosing the correct method for your next event will improve your attendee experience.

This guide provides an overview of the options available to today's event planner.

Keys To Success

There are some basic rules to remember to run a successful Q&A.

- Choose your method in advance, and use the same method throughout the program. Consistency of method is key to attendee adoption.
 - Instruct all speakers to communicate the chosen Q&A method to the audience. They should advise attendees if they will be taking questions early on in their presentations, and provide a heads-up several minutes before they expect to take their first question.
 - As an event organizer, be sure to involve your speakers, staff and A/V provider in your plans for how you intend to implement Q&A. Understand the cost and staffing implications of each option to ensure it's the best fit for your event.
- 📌 On the following pages, use the grid at the bottom right to identify the questioning pace, involved costs and required personnel to execute each questioning style.



Written Submissions

How It Works

Attendees write questions on paper which is then collected by staff members, and given directly to talent on stage or is processed for projection.

Benefits


Inexpensive and highly-intuitive, there's nothing more simple or straight-forward. Organizers have the ability to edit and prioritize questions however they see fit. Potential anonymity of attendees may result in better questions. May cost nothing to implement.

Challenges

The physical nature of working with paper results in a slow, disruptive process. Don't underestimate how long it might take to read a question written with poor handwriting. Your technical crew will need a solid plan in place to deal with an influx of questions. Giving papers directly to a moderator on-stage is cumbersome, and is not recommended as they can not pay enough attention to the nuances of each question when they have to filter or decode them on the fly.

📌 Don't forget to provide your attendees paper, pens and a surface to write on!



WRITTEN		
		
SLOW	FREE	3+

Freestyle Questioning

How It Works

Attendees raise their hands and are called on directly by the speaker or moderator.




Benefits

Opens dialogue and discussion within the room; questioning is rapid. Freestyle costs nothing to implement and requires no additional staff.

Challenges

Rooms over 50+ people will lack order. Attendees towards the rear of the room have little to no chance to ask a question, and if they did, the speaker might not be able to hear what they say. Event organizers are unable to prioritize questions from VIPs. Weaker speakers may be unable to control pushy attendees. Recordings of the session will not include the question, and in larger rooms, attendees will not be able to hear the question. Finally without a queue, there is no way to determine how many questions are waiting.



FREESTYLE		
		
FAST	FREE	0

Stationary Microphone

How It Works

One or more microphones are placed on stands in the audience. Attendees walk up to the microphone to ask their question.




Benefits

Intuitive method. Speakers and attendees can ballpark how many questions are waiting to be asked. Aside from paying for microphones, there is little implementation cost and no additional staff required. Best suited for sessions where audience questions are the driver of the event such as town hall meetings and hot topics.

Challenges

Can be excessively slow out of the gate as attendees make their way to the microphone. Some room layouts (especially theater) may make it difficult for attendees to get to the microphone. Some attendees may be intimidated by standing, and less likely to approach the microphone.



STATIONARY		
		
SLOW	\$	0

Directed Questioning

How It Works

A A/V staff member stands in the front of the room and identifies questions on behalf of the speaker. Mic runners are directed to bring microphones directly to audience members at their seats.

Benefits

All attendees regardless of location are given an equal shot at asking a question. When important, a good director can see that VIP attendees are given preferential treatment. Attendees are generally less intimidated by methods where they have to get out of their seat.

Challenges

Training of the speaker is a key to success. The speaker must understand that they are to receive direction from the Technical Director on which questions to take and when. This approach requires extra technology in the form of microphones and sometimes wireless intercoms for the mic runners. It also requires several staff members for successful execution.



DIRECTED



GOOD



\$\$\$



3+

Interactive Systems

How It Works

Attendees submit questions online or through a mobile application.

Benefits




Online systems offer many advantages over traditional methods. Organizers have the ability to edit or reject questions before they're presented and attendees can vote on questions to rank those they deem more important. The ability to remain anonymous in some systems may prompt better questions from your audience.

Challenges

Cost is one of the biggest implications to these systems. Not only do you pay for a license to use the software, but you must also provide internet access to your attendees. Additionally, your technical crew must be able to display the questions digitally for most systems, which may require extra laptops and screens in the tech booth. These systems also require training for your users - so be prepared to run some sample tests with all attendees in your kickoff session. Expect attendees to have challenges with software, downloads or connectivity.




📍 By the way, are you absolutely sure all attendees will have internet-enabled devices available?



INTERACTIVE		
		
FAST	\$\$\$\$	1+

In Conclusion

Though these guidelines provide many intrinsic reasons why you might select one method over another; a true understanding of your audience, and the input of decision makers will likely help you make the ultimate choice as to the method you employ at your next event.

	Pace	Costs	Personnel
Method			
<i>Written Submissions</i>	SLOW	FREE	3+
<i>Freestyle Questioning</i>	FAST	FREE	0
<i>Stationary Microphone</i>	SLOW	\$	0
<i>Directed Questioning</i>	GOOD	\$\$\$	3+
<i>Interactive Systems</i>	FAST	\$\$\$\$	1+