

Dealing with difficult questions

Responding to a difficult question in business English can be challenging. Within this article we discuss different methods you could use to deal with difficult questions appropriately. Please find below different techniques you could use to deal with difficult questions in business English:

Technique 1: Paraphrasing the question/playing for time.

- So to confirm your question is...
- So what you are saying is that...
- So to clarify your question you are asking is....
- If I have fully understood your question you are asking...

Technique 2: Asking for the question to be restated.

- Would you mind repeating your question?
- Could I ask you to repeat your question?
- I want to make sure I have understood your question; would you mind repeating it?
- To avoid confusion can I ask you to state the question one more time?

Technique 3: Avoiding the question by referring to a higher authority.

- I am afraid I cannot answer this question directly and I would need to refer to my manager/our senior management team etc...

- I am not in a position to answer this question; this is a (regulatory issue, an issue of strategy, an issue for our operations team etc..).
- I think that is best answered by xxx.
- I am not best placed to answer this question and would suggest you ask...

Technique 4: Admitting this is not the speakers' area of expertise/interest/referring to a more knowledgeable source.

- I am not an expert in this area and will need to get back to you.
- I am not an expert in this area and will need to refer this to the... legal team, compliance team.
- I honestly don't know but I will find out and get back to you by...

Technique 5: Building a rapport with the questioner.

- That is a great question, thank you.
- Thanks for your question, may I ask for your name?
- Peter, thank you for the question, to start

Technique 6: Answering the question with a question.

- Before answering I would like to ask you how/what...
- That is an interesting question, may I ask what you would do/consider/...
- Peter before responding, I would really appreciate it if you could share your insights/perspective on this...

Technique 7: Answering the question you want to answer and not the question asked.

- I think a better question could/might/would be...
- A really interesting question is if...
- A slightly different question could be...
- An interesting perspective on this would be to...
- I think it is more important to establish
- If we turn the question on its head and ask....