

**Tips for Responding in Oral Qualifiers & Defenses**

Situation	Possible Responses	Why These Responses Work
1. You are asked what you think is a simplistic question.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I'm not sure I understand your question.</i></li> <li>• <i>Can you restate your question for me?</i></li> </ul>	If a communication problem occurs, you will get another chance to understand the question. If not, answer the question respectfully and briefly. Avoid being insulting.
2. You are asked a confusing question. You are not sure what the professor really means.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I'm not sure I understand the question. Could you rephrase it?</i></li> <li>• <i>I didn't understand the question. Did you mean...?</i></li> </ul>	Don't apologize in this situation. Take an active and confident approach to understand the question. The problem may not be due to your language proficiency; the intent of the question may not be clear.
3. You need time to think about how to best answer a question.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>That's a very interesting/challenging question. Let me work it out for a minute so that I can include everything that's relevant.</i></li> </ul>	Start out strong: Take time to abstract the question into formulas or parts.
4. You are asked a question about an area in your field that you know very little about or haven't thought about in a long time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I've been working more on...so my knowledge on this topic is not as deep. However, the issues are related by...and I have some understanding of your question.</i></li> <li>• <i>Let me know if this is what you're looking for.</i></li> </ul>	Think aloud: State the elements of the solution that you are familiar with and say why you think they will eventually fit together. Let your words reflect your reasoning.
5. You are asked what you feel is a key question.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>In my opinion this is crucial because...</i></li> <li>• <i>That's an important question.</i></li> <li>• <i>The answer to this question is key because...</i></li> </ul>	Try to link the question to the most relevant information you know.
6. After you answer a question, you are told that you don't know enough about the subject and should read more about it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>It's possible that I missed some important work in this area.</i></li> <li>• <i>What would you recommend reading?</i></li> <li>• <i>What specifically should I focus on in my reading?</i></li> </ul>	Explicitly recognize that this is a key question in your field. Answer it enthusiastically.