



## ESL Podcast 170 – Questions and Answers at a Presentation

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### GLOSSARY

**outside firm** – a company that is not part of your company or organization

\* I don't think we have the knowledge and experience to do this project ourselves. Let's hire an outside firm.

**to set up** – to arrange or prepare; to make ready to use

\* Could you come over a little early to help set up for the luncheon?

**to keep track of** – to follow; to be able to see the progress of something over time

\* There are so many kids in this class that it's hard to keep track of their progress.

**afterwards** – the time after an event or action

\* We went to the football game, and then, to dinner afterwards.

**in a nutshell** – a summary; the most important point or idea

\* He talked a lot but, in a nutshell, he didn't like the proposal and wants us to start again.

**From your description, it sounds like...** – From what you say, it appears that...

\* From your description, it sounds like the two of them got along very well on the trip.

**Can you speak to that?** – Can you talk about that?; usually used when asking a question of someone who is giving a presentation

\* Some people think that the plan is too expensive. Can you speak to that?

**I understand your concern, but actually...** – I hear what you are saying, but the real situation is different; a polite way of telling someone that you understand their ideas, but that they are wrong

\* Doctor, I understand your concern, but actually, I feel fine and I want to go back to work next week.



## ESL Podcast 170 – Questions and Answers at a Presentation

---

**on a daily basis** – every day

\* I check my email on a daily basis and can respond quickly to any questions.

**My biggest concern is** – what concerns or worries me the most is

\* My biggest concern is whether the new suppliers can meet the deadline.

**to access** – to get into; to enter

\* The front door is locked. Can I get access to this building any other way?

**How does this affect...?** – What change, difference, or influence will this have on...?

\* My girlfriend is moving to Dallas for her work. I asked her, “How does this affect our relationship?”

**That’s a good question.** – You are asking something important or interesting

\* My girlfriend said, “That’s a good question. I’m not sure how my move to Dallas will affect our relationship.”

**key** – very important or the most important

\* The key reason my application was rejected is that I didn’t include all of the information they asked for.

**his or her** – used when you don’t know if the person being referred to is a man or a woman; sometimes also “they” or “their” is used

\* Each musician has his or her own talents.

**if there are no other questions...** – a way to end a presentation at which you have been answering questions; it tells your audience that you are now going to end your presentation

\* If there are no other questions, we can move on to the next part of our tour.



## ESL Podcast 170 – Questions and Answers at a Presentation

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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. The new system:
  - a) has a lot of features.
  - b) helps to keep track of the company's money.
  - c) was developed by Yuri.
  
2. Cecilia explains that:
  - a) the typical employee uses nearly all of the features on a daily basis.
  - b) anyone can get access to sensitive information.
  - c) project managers can limit access to their projects.

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### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **set up**

The phrase “set up,” in this podcast, means to arrange or to prepare something: “Since the show starts at 8:00, you should arrive by 7:30 to set up.” This phrase is also used to mean match-making, when someone arranges a romantic meeting or relationship for someone else: “Can you set me up on a date with your roommate?” or, “I decided not to go to the dinner party when I found out that I was being set up.”

#### **key**

In this podcast, “key” is used as an adjective to mean something that is very important: “The key strategy is to sell at a low price.” But “key” has many other meanings as a noun. It can mean a small piece of metal that fits into a lock, such as a “house key” or a “car key.” It can also be used to mean a list of explanations of symbols used on a map: “The key tells us the actual distance on this map.” A third meaning for “key,” used as a noun, is to describe the scale, or group of notes, used for music: “His voice is very low. We need to lower the key so he can sing it.”



## ESL Podcast 170 – Questions and Answers at a Presentation

---

### CULTURE NOTE

U.S. business presentations are usually very direct and “to the point” – that is, they don’t waste time with things that are not key to the topic. This means that you will not find a lot of theoretical or philosophical information in an American business presentation. They are simple and “straightforward” (not complicated or elaborate). A common expression in U.S. business communication is “less is more” – that is, talking a long time in a presentation is not necessarily better than keeping the presentation brief.

U.S. businesspeople expect presentations to be limited to the key points or ideas you are trying to communicate. They also expect presentations to be “slick” (very professional looking, like a good TV commercial) and well-practiced. Typically, business presentations (and other types of presentations, such as in school) begin by giving a map or guide to people listening. The presentation begins with a list of the topics that you are going to talk about, usually listed on a piece of paper you give to your audience or on a PowerPoint presentation. This is part of the “direct” approach that U.S. business presentations follow.

There is an old expression about giving presentations in English, which includes three steps:

- Tell them what you are going to tell them
- Tell them
- Tell them what you told them

This means that you begin your talk with a quick overview or list of the topics you will talk about. Next, you talk about those topics and give more information about each one. Finally, you do a review or summary of what your main points were.

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Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a ; 2 – c



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### COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast Number 170, “Questions and Answers at a Presentation.”

You're listening to English as a Second Language Podcast Episode 170. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California. Remember to visit our website at [eslpod.com](http://eslpod.com) for information about our new Learning Guide service, where you can get a 8-10 page guide for every podcast with additional information, with vocabulary words, with cultural notes, and with a complete transcript of this podcast. And that is available on our website.

Today's podcast is going to be about someone who is giving a talk or a presentation in front of a group of business colleagues or people they work with. Let's get started.

<start of story>

Our company hired an outside firm to set up a computer system, to help us keep track of the progress on major projects. The company gave us a presentation on how the new system worked. Afterwards, the employees got a chance to ask questions.

Cecilia: So, in a nutshell, those are the features of the new system. Any questions?

Yuri: Yes, I have a question. From your description, it sounds like the new system may be difficult to use. Can you speak to that?

Cecilia: I understand your concern, but actually, the system is very simple to use. I mentioned a lot of features that the system has, but the typical employee won't be using more than two or three on a daily basis. Yes, you have a question?

Alessandro: Yeah, my biggest concern is that all of the employees in the company will have access to the system. How does this affect my projects that have sensitive information?



## ESL Podcast 170 – Questions and Answers at a Presentation

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Cecilia: That's a good question. One of the key features of the program is that it allows the project manager to limit access for any of his or her projects. Now, if there are no other questions, thank you all for coming and we look forward to working with you in the future.

<end of story>

We heard Cecilia give a presentation to a group of employees for a company. The story begins by saying that, “Our company hired a outside firm to set up a computer system.” A “firm” is another word for a company, an organization. We sometimes use that word, especially for companies that provide services, such as a group of lawyers. We would call that a “law firm.” It's a company, a business that has lawyers in it and does whatever lawyers do, which is...hmm...I'm not sure. Well, an outside firm is an outside company. When we say “outside,” we mean a company that is not part of our company, a different company. That's a term we'll often use when we are referring to someone or some company that is not part of your current organization. You may say, for example, “We're going to bring someone in from outside to look at our accounting procedures.” It means we're going to take someone from a different company who doesn't work for us and bring them in to look at our accounting.

Well, the company they've hired is going to set up a computer system. To “set up” means to get something working, to make sure that something is working correctly. You can set up a television, for example. You plug it in, you put the cable in the back for the antenna, and so forth. Well, they're setting up a computer system to help keep track of the progress on major projects. To “keep track of” something means to follow something, to be able to see how something is going over time. For example: “I want to keep track of my weight.” I want to know how much I weigh everyday. So, every morning, I get up and I weigh myself. “To weigh yourself” means to see how much you weigh. I look down at what we would call the “scale,” that's what you stand on to find how much you weigh. I see, oh, 120 pounds! Wonderful! That's not true, of course. I wish it were 120 pounds. But, that would be to keep track of, so I would write it down everyday. I'm following how much I weigh everyday.

Well, here, they're keeping track of progress or how they're doing on some major projects. The company they hired gave a presentation on how their new system was going to operate, how it was going to work. Afterwards, the employees got a chance to answer questions. “Afterwards” means after that time, the time after something else. For example, “I took my wife to a movie” ...(be)cause I'm a good



## ESL Podcast 170 – Questions and Answers at a Presentation

---

husband...“I took my wife to a movie. Afterwards, we went and had a nice dinner.” In the time after the movie, we had a nice dinner.

Well, the dialogue part of our story begins with Cecilia, who is the representative, the person from the outside firm, who's giving the presentation. She's now going to take some questions. “To take questions” means to answer questions, to let people ask you questions. Usually, we use that expression if you are standing in front of a group of 3 or 4 or 500 people, however many people are in your presentation, you can take questions. So she decides to take some questions. She says, “So, in a nutshell, those are the features of our new system.” “In a nutshell,” and “nutshell” is all one word, a nutshell is the shell or the case, what a nut is in. For example, a walnut, an almond, pecans - these are all nuts that you can eat, a type of food, and they come in a little case - but we call that case a shell. Peanuts, for example, come in a peanut shell. It's the outside of the peanut that holds it in. Well, a nutshell is, of course, the shell of any nut; but the expression means because a nutshell is a small place, there's not very much inside a nutshell. The expression “in a nutshell” means to summarize, to give you a very short, small, if you will, version or small explanation of what it is. It's when you want to tell someone the main idea in a very shortened or very summary-like manner. So, Cecilia says, “In a nutshell, those are the features of our new system. Any questions?”

Well, the first question comes from Yuri, and he says, “Yes, I have a question. From your description, it sounds like the new system may be difficult to use.” “From your description,” from what you have said, “it sounds like,” means it appears to me, it seems that, “it may be difficult to use.” Now, notice that Yuri is asking a question which is something of a criticism. He's saying, well, I think your system may be difficult to use. But he wants to ask it politely, and in American business culture, especially, it's very important to be polite, to not criticize or attack someone openly. That is, you want to make sure that you are asking a question in a way that is respectful of the other person. So, you do not want to say, “I have a question. Why is this so difficult to use?” or “I think this is going to be too difficult to use.” Instead, Yuri says, “From your description, it sounds like the system may be difficult to use.” In other words, that's what I think - that's the appearance, but maybe I'm wrong - is the idea. He then says to Cecilia, “Can you speak to that?” “Can you speak to that” means “Can you talk about that?” And that's an expression you would use in a formal situation, usually, when you are asking a presenter, someone who is presenting to a group of people, to answer a question. You wouldn't say it probably if you were just talking to one other





## ESL Podcast 170 – Questions and Answers at a Presentation

---

person; you would say it when you are asking a question of someone who is presenting to a group.

Well, Cecilia says, “I understand your concern, but actually, the system is very simple to use.” “I understand your concern” is a polite way of saying, I’m listening to you; I understand what you’re saying, but you’re wrong. But, you see, you can’t say, “Oh no, you’re wrong.” We want to first say, “Oh yes, I understand your concern.” You’re saying to that person that they have a good reason to say what they are saying, but actually, meaning the truth is, the system is easy to use; it’s very simple to use. So, “I understand your concern” is a good expression to know when you are answering a question that you disagree with or you want to tell someone that they’re wrong. First, you want to say, I understand your concern; I understand what you’re worried about, but actually, it’s the opposite.

Cecilia says she mentioned a lot of features, but the typical or the average employee won’t be using more than two or three features. And a “feature” is a part of the program. They won’t be using more than two or three parts on a daily basis. “Daily,” you probably know, means everyday. So, she could have said more than two or three times daily, but there’s a little more formal expression that they use in business more, called “on a daily basis” - means everyday; “basis” on a daily basis. You could also say on a weekly basis or on a monthly basis, on a yearly basis. It just means every month, or every year, or every week.

Alessandro asks a question. He says, “Well, my biggest concern is that all of the employees will have access to the system.” “My biggest concern” means what I am worried about most. It’s a little more direct, but still, it’s a polite way of saying I’m worried about something, I have a problem with this. My biggest, my most important, my main, my principle concern - all those mean the same - is that all of the employees will have access to the system. They’ll be able to get in to this new computer system. Alessandro says, “How does this affect my projects that have sensitive information?” How does this “affect,” you’re saying, what is the impact on or how is this going to influence the things that I am doing. And his concern is that his projects have sensitive information. When we say you have “sensitive information” means that it’s secret information. It’s information that you do not want everyone to know. Usually, it’s a word that we use for a business or the government. The government has sensitive information about the Center for Educational Development, secret information. I hope not...uh...but, that’s the meaning of sensitive here. It means information that you want to keep as secret.





## ESL Podcast 170 – Questions and Answers at a Presentation

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Cecilia answers this question by saying, “That’s a good question.” Again, that’s a very common way in an American business meeting to say to the person, “Oh yes, I understand what you’re saying.” Thank you for asking that question, that’s a good question. She’s complimenting, she’s saying something nice to the person who’s asking the question. That’s especially important when people ask questions that are difficult, or that you need to disagree with them about. So, she says, “That’s a good question. One of the key features of the program is that it allows the project manager to limit access.” One of the “key” features means one of the main features, one of the most important features or parts of our program, is that it allows or permits the project manager to limit, to restrict, to make less people able to access, to limit access, for any of his or her projects. Notice she says, “his or her.” It’s common now in American English to use both the masculine and feminine forms of the pronoun or when we say his or her; that, of course, would be the possessive adjective. So, that is a way of saying, well, if it’s a man or a woman, I don’t want to assume it’s a man or assume, or guess that it’s a woman. It’s something of a change in English over the last 20-25 years or so. People used to just use the masculine. If you didn’t know, you would say his or him for an object pronoun. But, now we often use his or her, him or her.

Cecilia says, “If there are no other questions, thank you for coming...” “If there are no other questions” is the way that you end a presentation. If you’ve been answering questions, you are telling the people, if you have a question, ask me right away because I’m going to stop answering questions now. So she says, “If there are no other questions,” and sometimes when people say that, someone will say, “Oh, I have a question,” “Before you stop, I want to ask a question.” So, that’s giving them the opportunity to do that. She says, “If there are no other questions, thank you for coming and we look forward to working with you in the future.” “We look forward to” - we are waiting to, we think it will be good for us to work together in the future.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a native rate of speech.

<start of story>

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## ESL Podcast 170 – Questions and Answers at a Presentation

---

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<end of story>

The script for today's dialogue was written by Dr. Lucy Tse. Thank you, Lucy, for your work. From Los Angeles, California, I am Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on ESLPodcast.

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