

Audience Response System Tip Sheet

What is an Audience Response System?

An audience response system (ARS) is a wireless network of remote handheld keypads that enables everyone in an audience to be an active participant in anonymously communicating their thoughts and opinions while simultaneously displaying the results on a video screen.

The ARS network works by keypads communicating via radio frequency with a receiver that is linked to a computer. The computer, running a software program that integrates with PowerPoint, is in turn linked to a video projector that displays questions and their corresponding audience responses within seconds for all to see. All the data is captured in a database and are converted into both graphic displays and Excel spread sheet format for further follow-up study and planning.

Why use an Audience Response System?

An ARS can be a powerful technology to engage your audience through interaction and promote learning. It can be used to:

- Improve attentiveness
- Increase knowledge retention
- Poll anonymously
- Display polling responses immediately
- Confirm audience understanding of key points immediately

How does a Wireless Audience Response System Work?

Question or polling slides are integrated within the speaker's PowerPoint presentation. As each question comes up in the presentation, the audience is invited to enter their response using a small keypad given to them in advance. Results are then instantly tabulated and projected in slide form onto the screen in a graph or chart format showing the response percentages and/or the actual number of respondents. The typical order of an audience response question:

- Question is displayed on the screen
- Question is read aloud by the speaker
- Countdown clock is started
- Audience enters their respective choices on their keypads
- Results are displayed in graphic form on the screen
- Responses are reviewed and discussed

What Should I Know about Writing Questions?

Crafting the wording of a question or statement requiring a response is the most important factor in obtaining objective and usable responses. The best questions often don't have a right or wrong answer, but illustrate the diversity of opinion that relates to your forthcoming remarks.

- Use questions or declarative statements that are short and to the point.
- Pose questions or statements that are easily understood.
- Ask questions that are relevant to the topic and will contribute meaning to the experience. Avoid questions that are superficial or have obvious answers.
- Questions with multiple, legitimate and controversial answer choices are best for engaging your audience in discussion.
- Never ask anything that might demean someone or that you do not want publicly answered.
- Use positive statements and phrasing when asking for evaluation or measure of agreement.

- A few questions effectively discussed are better than a lot that are glossed over.
- Use case studies in order to encourage active discussion with your audience.

How Important is the Role of the Speaker/Facilitator?

The role of the speaker/facilitator in engaging the audience and encouraging their ongoing involvement is a critical one. It goes beyond simply reading the questions and the accompanying response results. It is the speaker/facilitator who transforms a mere technological exercise into meaningful communication between all participants and a solid learning experience. The following are key ingredients that make for a successful speaker/facilitator role:

- Translate the results graphs into sentences that accurately capture the participants' sentiments.
- Draw conclusions from the results and suggest applications where appropriate.
- Affirm everyone's answer choice no matter how they responded or whether or not the answer was in a minority answer choice category.
- When giving a message be prepared to adjust the order of your points based on the corresponding prioritized response result of each question.
- Be sure to emphasize how important the results are as an integral part of your message.
- When appropriate, encourage audience discussion based on the response results.
- Don't wait too long for everyone in the audience to respond to a given question. Typically a small percentage (5% - 15%) of the participants will abstain or fail to respond within the time limit of 10 to 20 seconds.
- Do monitor and be sensitive to a significant fall-off in responses as the meeting progresses, and when necessary, address the issue and/or make adjustments as you go.
- At the conclusion of the presentation, consider using a few knowledge assessment or presentation evaluation questions to gauge your success in communicating your information.

What are some Tips & Best Practices for Using ARS?

- Ask one or two "ice-breaker" questions to introduce the use of the interactive system and the keypads.
- Keep the technology in the background, never prominent, to enable the facilitator to reach into the audience for thoughts, ideas, reactions, prioritizations, opinions, knowledge etc.
- Only ask questions that offer value or are used as training, icebreaker or entertainment type questions.
- Control the tone and culture of the question by crafting the wording of the question and choices to achieve the desired objective.
- Never pose open-ended questions or questions with negative choices if you have any concerns about viewing worst case results.
- Follow and model your culture and meeting messages – use humor, music, assessment, graphics, demographics, and participation to reinforce your desired environment.
- Insert and use impromptu questions to follow-up points that need clarification or further consideration.
- Highlight the "correct answer" for those questions that have only one correct answer.
- Late in the presentation, consider asking a repeat question to compare side by side whether opinion was changed during the course of the presentation.
- At the end of the presentation use a question that summarizes the messages key points asking the listeners to indicate which point helped them the most. This provides the speaker with an accurate evaluation of the effectiveness of the message and helps for future message planning.
- After the program, all results and all demographic data can be analyzed for additional value.