

How to answer a question.

Here are a few comments about the format of your answer if you are asked to answer a question of one of the following types.

- A Yes/No or True/False question.
- A question where you are asked to give an example.
- A question where you are asked to give a definition.

(1) A Yes/No or True/False question.

If asked a Yes or No question, the best way to start your answer is by saying “Yes” or “No”, depending on which is the case. “I don’t know” is also a legitimate answer in many cases. It may be that Yes/No/(I don’t know) is a complete and satisfactory answer to the question, but if more explanation is required, then the explanation should come after the immediate answer of Yes/No/(I don’t know).

The reason it is valuable to state Yes/No/(I don’t know) immediately is that it is easier for a listener or reader to follow an explanation if they know whether the explanation is meant to justify an affirmative answer, a negative answer, or no answer to the question.

(2) A question where you are asked to give an example.

If you are asked to “Give an example”, then you are being asked to describe a particular instance of a concept or object.

You are NOT being asked to define the object nor to describe the characteristics of the object.

(3) A question where you are asked to give a definition.

A definition typically has three components: you should (i) identify the word or phrase being defined, (ii) identify the type of object (i.e., what class does it belong to?), and (iii) identify the characteristics that uniquely distinguish the object from others of its class.

If asked to “Give a definition”, then it is insufficient to simply list true statements about the object. Rather, your goal is to provide the community-accepted information which unambiguously assigns meaning to the object.