

Follow-Up Question Response Template

Stay structured when the interviewer changes constraints

Use this 4-step script whenever you're interrupted by a follow-up question or a new constraint.

1 Acknowledge the Question

3-5s

- Pause. Confirm what was asked in one sentence.
 - Buy time by paraphrasing — don't answer immediately.
- Example: "That's a great question — you're asking what happens if the cache goes down."

2 Anchor Back to the Existing Design

10-15s

- Point to the relevant box/flow in your current diagram.
 - State the current assumption briefly (baseline).
- Example: "In our current design, reads go through Redis first, then fall back to the database."

3 Explain the Incremental Change

30-45s

- Number the changes (1, 2, 3). Keep it incremental.
 - Connect each change to the new requirement.
- Example: "I'd make two changes: (1) add TTL + circuit breaker, (2) add request coalescing to protect the DB."

4 Call Out New Trade-Offs

15-20s

- State what this costs (latency, complexity, money).
 - Mention mitigations if relevant (rate limits, queues, fallbacks).
- Example: "This adds a bit of complexity and some latency on misses, but it protects availability during cache failures."

Common Patterns (quick mental model)

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| • Scale multiplier: | "100x traffic?" | • Constraint flip: | "Need strong consistency?" |
| • Feature addition: | "Add analytics?" | • Failure scenario: | "Cache goes down?" |