

## Questions

A good way to help other people think about a subject is to ask them a question about it. Being asked a good question can really help us put information together, evaluate our existing ideas and create new ideas.

Asking questions that are specifically intended to help others learn is known as *Socratic questioning*, named after Socrates in Ancient Greece.

Socratic questions require you to listen very carefully to the other person to help you judge and phrase your question in a helpful, constructive, and hopefully non-confrontational way.

Here are some examples of such questions:

### Questions of clarification

- What do you mean when you say \_\_\_\_\_?
- What is your main point?
- How does \_\_\_\_\_ relate to \_\_\_\_\_?
- Could you put that another way?
- Let me see if I understand you; do you mean \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_?
- How does this relate to our problem/discussion/issue?
- Jane, can you summarize in your own words what Richard said? ... Richard, is this what you meant?
- Could you give me an example?
- Would \_\_\_\_\_ be a good example of that?

### Questions that probe assumptions

- What are you assuming here?
- What is Jenny assuming?
- What could we assume instead?
- You seem to be assuming \_\_\_\_\_. Do I understand you correctly?
- All of your reasoning depends on the idea that \_\_\_\_\_. Why have you based your reasoning on \_\_\_\_\_ instead of \_\_\_\_\_?
- You seem to be assuming \_\_\_\_\_. How do you justify taking that for granted?
- Is that always the case? Why do you think the assumption holds here?
- Why would someone make that assumption?

## Questions that probe reasons and evidence

- Could you explain your reasons to us?
- How does that apply to this case?
- Is there a reason to doubt that evidence?
- Who is in a position to know that is true?
- What would you say to someone who said that \_\_\_\_?
- Can someone else give evidence to support that view?
- By what reasoning did you come to that conclusion?
- How could we find out if that is true?

## Questions about viewpoints or perspectives

- What are you implying by that?
- When you say \_\_\_\_\_, are you implying \_\_\_\_\_?
- But, if that happened, what else would happen as a result? Why?
- What effect would that have?
- Would that necessarily happen or only possibly/probably happen?
- What is an alternative?
- If \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are the case, then what might also be true?
- If we say that \_\_\_\_\_ is ethical, how about \_\_\_\_\_?

## Questions that probe implications and consequences

- How can we find out?
- What does this question assume?
- Would \_\_\_\_\_ ask this question differently?
- How could someone settle this question?
- Can we break this question down at all?
- Is this question clear? Do we understand it?
- Is this question easy or hard to answer? Why?
- Do we all agree that this is the question?
- To answer this question, what other questions must we answer first?
- How would \_\_\_\_\_ state the issue?
- Why is this issue important?
- Is this the most important question, or is there an underlying question?
- Can you see how this might relate to \_\_\_\_\_?

*Questions adapted from Paul, R. (1993). Critical Thinking: How To Prepare Students for a Rapidly Changing World: Foundation for Critical Thinking, Santa Rosa, CA.*