

Types of Questions

The only way to learn what the other person needs is to ask questions and LISTEN. Questions stimulate the mind and cause people to think. All types of questions are useful, but some encourage conversations and move a dialogue forward better.

Closed questions invite a short answer, frequently “yes” or “no.” *Closed* questions tend to close off discussion. *Closed* questions extract a piece of information but preclude further discussion. Beginning a question with “Can you..?” “Will you...?” creates a closed question. *Closed* questions save time and direct conversation.

e.g. “Any questions?”
 “Does everyone agree with the recommendation on the table?”
 “Can/may I ask you to share your thoughts?”

Why questions seek the motivation or reasons behind some action or thought. They tend to invite others to defend their actions or may be hard for others to answer. *Why* questions frequently cut off communication because they can sound judgmental or condescending if not phrased carefully. *Why* questions can almost always be rephrased as “what” or “how” and achieve the purpose without the possible downside of *why* questions.

e.g. “Why do you think that? vs “What lead you to your decision?”
 “Why are you doing it that way?”

Leading questions has the questioner’s “answer” embedded in the question. It tells the other person what he/she “should” say. These questions are “contaminated” because they might influence the thinking of the other person. Leading questions tend to be assumptive—that is the question assumes a fact. *Leading* questions discourage conversation.

e.g. “Don’t you think a good teacher would be better prepared for ARDs?”
 “Wouldn’t an apology help right now?”

Open-ended questions encourage others to give more information and expand the discussion. They allow many different responses and help draw people’s ideas and feelings out. *Open-ended* questions show interest in the other person. *Open-ended* questions are the “essay” question of conversations. They provide space for thinking and clarification.

e.g. “What would you like to see happen today?”
 “How do you see that working?”
 “What do you want / need?”

Questions without question marks are statements using active verbs which tend to get people thinking on two levels: facts and feelings

e.g. “Explain / Tell / Describe / Clarify / Elaborate / Expand / Show”
