

“WHY ASK QUESTIONS?”

It's important to understand why you're asking questions. Remember, the key to facilitation is “Asking the right questions”, not “giving the right answers”.

1. **To Discuss** - to examine various options. For example, “Can anyone give other ideas around this?”
2. **To Verify** - To ask for support for a statement. For example, “Can you give me some examples of how this has worked for you in the past?”
3. **To Analyze** - To have someone explain in more detail. For example, “Carol, what does all this mean? Can you tell me more about that?”
4. **To Review** - to summarize. For example, “Would someone be willing to recap the discussion?”
5. **To Explain** - To clear up a misunderstanding of a subject. For example, “Jim, would you take us through how you did that, one step at a time?”
6. **To Classify** - to organize. For example, “Mary, can you make sense of this and help us see how it fits into the big picture?”
7. **To Illustrate** - To get examples, to simplify or clarify. For example, “Chuck, give us an example of how it works.”
8. **To Compare/Contrast** - To identify similarities/ differences. For example, “How will this approach work as compared to how we've traditionally done it?”
9. **To Define** - To ask for and provide a definition. For example, “Linda, what does that mean?”

HOW DO I ASK EFFECTIVE QUESTIONS?

Use a variety of types of questions.

General Question: This type of question is directed to the whole group. For example, “What resonated with you the most from this section of scripture?”

The positive of a general question is: no one person feels singled out and everyone can be involved in the conversation. The negative of a general question is you may not get an answer or you may sit in some awkward silence until you get to the answer.

Use general questions to:

- Get more people involved
- Relax the group in discussion
- Slow down the pace

Direct Question: This type of question is directed at a particular person. For example, “Jen, how have you seen this happen in your life?”

The positive outcome of a direct question is the person will answer you and open the discussion. However; the person may feel, “on the spot” and not have an answer. And when you ask a direct question to someone in your group, the rest of the group does not have to think about the answer.

Use direct questions to:

- Gain control of the conversation if someone is “overtalking”
- Get specific individuals engaged in the conversation.

Open Questions: This type of question is open in nature and requires no right or wrong answer. It is usually one that the entire group can openly respond to. For example, “Would anyone be willing to comment on their experiences with the study this week?”

Open questions usually result in lots of participation and there is no wrong answer. Open questions can lead to getting off-topic so try and keep the conversation focused on the main points from the study.

Use open questions to:

- Get more participation
- Give the group opportunities to share

Return Questions: This type of question is one that is redirected back to the person who asked it. For example, “Frank, what’s an interesting question and there are many ways to look at that situation. What’s been your experience?”

Return questions allow participants to reflect upon their question, to see if they have some ideas about it themselves. However; If the participant truly doesn’t know the answer they may feel awkward responding and think you are avoiding the answer. Help them get to the answer without telling them exactly how to handle the situation.

Use return questions to:

- Assist the participants in thinking through the desired outcome and coming up with the answer

themselves

Relay Questions: This type of question is redirected to another person in the group or the entire group. For example, “Julie, asked which aspects of the reading were most challenging to implement. Sammy, I think you have discussed this before, what challenged you with this topic and how did you process through it?”

Relay questions keeps all participants actively involved and it calls upon the expertise and experience of other people in the group, other than the leader.

Use relay questions to:

- Increase group participation
- Involve people who might have the information or expertise but, for whatever reasons, are not participating.
- Acknowledge the expertise that is in the group and take the focus off the leader.

Checking Questions: This type of question is used to monitor the individual's or group's understanding of what is going on. For example, “Does this make sense to you? Are there any loose ends out there or any questions?”

Checking questions allows the leader to determine whether the participants understand the discussion of the group content. This also allows time to ask clarifying questions for anyone who has them. Make sure you allow time to ask the checking questions and give clarifying answers. Over time if you find there is always a little confusion after you've discussed a topic you may need to address what is happening in group and provide more clarity in the discussion time.

Use checking questions to:

- Check for understanding and verify the group is ready to move on.
- Gather information from the group to see where it stands
- Check the status of the group.