

Asking the Right Questions

Effective questioning is a key to effective facilitation

Knowing how and when to ask great probing questions is a key facilitation skill. Questions invite participation and get people thinking about issues from a different perspective. Questions are essential to stimulating a good conversation and for getting feedback from participants.

There are two basic types of questions: open-ended and closed-ended.

Type of Question	Description	Example
Closed	Requires a one-word answer Closes off discussion Usually begins with "is," "can," "how many," or "does"	"Does everyone understand all of the agreements we have just listed?" "Are we ready to move on?"
Open	Requires more than a "yes" or "no" or other one-word answer Stimulates thinking Usually begins with "what," "how," "when," or "why"	"Which agreements may pose the greatest challenge, and why?" "What remaining questions do you have?"

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When selecting questions to ask, there is a broad range you can choose from. Each of these types of questions achieves a different type of outcome for a different purpose. Choose wisely!

Type of Question	Description	Example
Fact-Finding Questions	<p>Targeted at verifiable data such as who, what, where, when, how, and how much.</p> <p>Use to gather information about the current situation.</p>	<p>“What is the new structure of your organization?”</p> <p>“How much training has your team received this year?”</p>
Feeling-Finding Questions	<p>Ask subjective information that gets at opinions, feelings, values, and beliefs.</p> <p>Help you understand views, beliefs, and culture.</p>	<p>“How do you feel about the effectiveness of the new structure?”</p> <p>“Do you think the team feels prepared?”</p>
Tell Me More Questions	<p>Help you get more information.</p> <p>Encourage the participants to provide more details.</p>	<p>“Tell me more?”</p> <p>“Can you elaborate on that?”</p> <p>“Can you be more specific?”</p>
Best/Least Questions	<p>Help you understand potential opportunities in the present situation.</p> <p>Let you test the limits of the participants’ needs and wants.</p>	<p>“What is the best thing about the new organizational structure?”</p> <p>“What is the worst thing about the training you have received?”</p>
Third-Party Questions	<p>Help uncover thoughts in an indirect manner.</p> <p>Are designed to help people express sensitive issues.</p>	<p>“Some people find the new structure is too restrictive. How does that sound to you?”</p> <p>“There is concern about not training people enough for their positions. Can you relate to that concern?”</p>
“Magic Word” Questions	<p>Let you explore people’s true desires. Useful in removing temporary obstacles from a person’s mind.</p>	<p>“If time and money were no obstacle, what type of training would you design for your team?”</p>