

Other Types of Questioning

Knowing which types of questions to use in different situations will help to facilitate effective group discussion. Some question types and their uses are outlined below.

Open questions, an invitation to talk

Facilitators should normally use open questions. Open questions allow the other person to elaborate on information of their choice. A closed question, on the other hand, emphasises content and can often be answered in a few words or with a yes or no. Open questions are preferred to stimulate conversation as they allow the person to whom you are listening to 'lead' the conversation. For instance, 'Did you understand the main points of the first lecture on EU law?' is a closed question. An open equivalent might be 'Could you explain to me what you thought the most important features of the lecture were?' How, where, why, what, who, which, can you etc. can all be useful ways of starting an open question.

While open questions are normally preferable, closed questions can also be very useful. You can initiate a conversation with a closed question before asking more open questions around that topic, or you can check for understanding.

Socratic questioning

This type of questioning can be a useful tool to lead students to correct answers. This is where the facilitator uses open questions to break down difficult concepts into small chunks of information that students can answer more easily. Instead of asking "How do we address this whole problem?" ask first "What is the first thing we need to do to understand this?" It is much more effective to spend a session closely dissecting a lecture or exercise bit by bit than trying to answer the big question at the start.

Intervention questions

Students may ask for help or Facilitators may become aware that there is a problem from the behaviour of the group. To make it easy for students to admit they are having difficulty the Facilitator should think about open questions that can promote discussion. The closed question, 'Is everything OK?' prompts the answer 'Yes.' Instead, try the open question, 'What can I do to help?'

Clarifying questions

Clarifying questions can be used when a student's answer is vague or unclear. The Facilitator asks the student for meaning or more information. Use a mixture of open questions, reflective questions (questions which encourage the student to develop a line of thought further) and closed questions (questions used to check

facts). Often the simple process of telling you about the problem will make it clear to the group where they went wrong. It's important to listen carefully and check your own understanding

- Are you saying that...?
- Could you explain that in a little more detail?
- Can you be a bit clearer about that? Can you be more specific?
- How would you explain that in an essay or exam?
- Anything else you would like to add?

Refocusing questions

Another way to clarify student ideas is to use refocusing questions. These encourage the student to see a concept from another perspective by focusing on relationships.

- How is that related to...?
- How does that tie into...?
- How does that compare with...?
- If that is true, then what would happen if...?

Encouraging/probing questions

The facilitator can help students to begin to process information beyond the superficial level of delivering the 'right' answer. This will happen when students begin to genuinely interact with the material by clarifying it, thinking critically about it, putting it in their own words and relating it to other knowledge. Ask questions which encourage students to find the next steps for themselves using open and hypothetical questions:

- What had you planned to do next?
- What do you think would happen if...?
- Do you think that will work?
- How did you arrive at that answer?
- Can you suggest another way to think about this?
- When have you done something like this before?