

Socratic Questioning Techniques

Socrates was one of the greatest educators who taught by asking questions and thus drawing out answers from his pupils ('ex duco', means to 'lead out', which is the root of 'education'). The overall purpose of Socratic questioning, is to challenge accuracy and completeness of thinking in a way that acts to move people towards their ultimate goal.

There are six types of questions that Socrates asked his pupils.

Conceptual Clarification Questions "Tell me more" questions which asks them to go deeper.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Why are you saying that?</i>• <i>What exactly does this mean?</i>• <i>How does this relate to what we have been talking about?</i>• <i>What is the nature of...?</i>• <i>What do we already know about this?</i>• <i>Can you give me an example?</i>• <i>Are you saying ... or ... ?</i>• <i>Can you rephrase that, please?</i>
Probing Assumptions Makes them think about their unquestioned beliefs on which they are founding their argument.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>What else could we assume?</i>• <i>You seem to be assuming ... ?</i>• <i>How did you choose those assumptions?</i>• <i>Please explain why/how ... ?</i>• <i>How can you verify or disprove that assumption?</i>• <i>What would happen if ... ?</i>• <i>Do you agree or disagree with ... ?</i>
Probing Rationale, Reason, or Evidence Dig into the reasoning rather than assuming it is a given. People often use un-thought-through or weakly-understood supports for their arguments.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Why is that happening?</i>• <i>How do you know this?</i>• <i>Show me ... ?</i>• <i>Can you give me an example of that?</i>• <i>What do you think causes ... ?</i>• <i>What is the nature of this?</i>

- *Are these reasons good enough?*
- *Would it stand up in court?*
- *How might it be refuted?*
- *How can I be sure of what you are saying?*
- *Why is ... happening?*
- *Why? (keep asking it -- you'll never get past a few times)*
- *What evidence is there to support what you are saying?*

Questioning Viewpoints and Perspectives

Show that there are other, equally valid, viewpoints.

- *Another way of looking at this is ..., does this seem reasonable?*
- *What alternative ways of looking at this are there?*
- *Why it is ... necessary?*
- *Who benefits from this?*
- *What is the difference between... and...?*
- *Why is it better than ...?*
- *What are the strengths and weaknesses of...?*
- *How are ... and ... similar?*
- *What would ... say about it?*
- *What if you compared ... and ... ?*
- *How could you look another way at this?*

Probe Implications and Consequences

The argument that they give may have logical implications that can be forecast. Do these make sense? Are they desirable?

- *Then what would happen?*
- *What are the consequences of that assumption?*
- *How could ... be used to ... ?*
- *What are the implications of ... ?*
- *How does ... affect ... ?*
- *How does ... fit with what we learned before?*
- *Why is ... important?*
- *What is the best ... ? Why?*

Questions About The Question

Digs into metacognition: Thinking about one's thinking

- *What was the point of asking that question?* - *What else might I ask?*
- *Why do you think I asked this question?* - *What does that mean?*
- *Am I making sense? Why not?*

