

# What is so Important About Asking Questions

Most successful executive, team leaders, and yes, networkers or entrepreneurs spend much of their days asking questions: WHY?

Seeking for information  
Requesting status updates  
Discovering needs and wants  
Just getting to know someone

Now unlike professionals such as lawyers, policeman, journalists, and doctors, who are taught how to ask questions as an essential part of their training, few of us think of questioning as a skill that can be honed.

Few consider how their own answers to questions could make conversations more productive.

What a missed opportunity. Just think what asking questions can do:

1. It is a uniquely powerful tool for unlocking values.
2. It spurs learning and the exchange of ideas,
3. It fuels innovation and performance improvement.
4. It builds rapport and trust among team members.
5. And it can mitigate business risk by uncovering unforeseen pitfalls and hazards.

“Be a good listener,” Dale Carnegie advised in his *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. “Ask questions the other person will enjoy answering.”

Tell me what is the favorite topic most people like to talk about?

Asking questions is a basic way to gather information. Like everything else, there is a skill to it. Asking [open-ended questions](#) is a friendly way to engage people in a conversation. Knowing the difference between open-ended and close-ended questions will help you tremendously in your career and social life.

The ability to ask well-structured open-ended questions is important. Open-ended questions help us to draw out opinions and thoughts from individuals and groups. It’s a skill one can develop, especially for leaders seeking to create an open culture focusing on coaching and support.

Before you can start rightly ask open-ended questions, you need to know what that is. An open-ended question is a question that requires a full answer, using the subject's own knowledge or feelings. These questions are objective, do not lead the person being asked, and result in an answer that requires an explanation.

Examples of open-ended questions include:

- "What happened after I left?"
- "Why did Jim leave before Susan?"
- "What did you do at work today?"
- "What do you think about the new season of this TV show?"

Open-ended questions start with “why?” “how?” and “what if” Open-ended questions encourage a full answer, rather than a simple “yes” or “no.” Closed-ended questions can be answered with “yes” or “no.” Open-ended questions and closed-ended questions can be used together in order to create fuller answers from respondents.

A closed-ended question can be answered in a short or single-word answer. They are used to obtain facts and specific pieces of information.

Examples of closed-ended questions are:

- "Who will you choose?"
- "What brand of car do you own?"
- "Did you speak to Bob?"
- "Did Susan leave with Jim?"
- "Who finished the cake?"
- Closed-ended questions bring conversations to a halt. They do not invite or encourage people to elaborate, talk about themselves, or give the questioner any detailed information.

Sometimes, people think they have asked open-ended questions when they have not. To successfully ask open-ended questions in conversation, be knowledgeable of the characteristics of an open-ended question.

- They require a person to pause, think, and reflect. Let them!
- Answers, typically, will not be facts, but personal feelings, opinions, or ideas about a subject.
- When using open-ended questions, the control of the conversation switches over to the person being asked the question, which begins an exchange between people. If the control of the conversation stays with the person asking questions, you are asking closed-ended questions. This technique makes it feel more like an interview or interrogation than a conversation.

- Avoid questions that have the following characteristics:
  - answers that provide facts
  - easy to answer questions
  - answers that can be given quickly and require little to no thought.
 Questions that reflect these things are closed-ended.

To make sure you actually ask open-ended questions, you need to understand the language involved. Open-ended questions begin in very specific ways.

- Open-ended questions or statements begin with the following words: why, how, what, describe, explain, tell me about..., or what do you think about...
- Although "tell me about" or "describe" does not begin a question, the result is the same as asking an open-ended question.
- Closed-ended questions also have a specific language. If you want to avoid closed-ended questions, do not start questions with the following verbs: are/was, did/do, will, won't, didn't, aren't, would, if.

**How to create open-ended questions** Here are some tips for asking open-ended questions:

**Be genuinely interested in your audience.**

A genuine curiosity will help you to create open-ended questions that are meaningful and will help you to reach your goal or get the information you need. When writing your questions, spend time thinking about what you would really like to know from your respondents.

Generally, questions that start with 'what' are good, non-biased open-ended questions. For example, "What did you think of today's workshop?" or "What would you like to learn more about?" give the respondent the opportunity to answer without being influenced by the person asking the question.

Questions that start with "how" are good for understanding the thought process of the respondent or how things were done over a period of time.

**Pro tip:** While "why" questions are in fact open-ended, they can often trigger a defensive answer from the respondent. For example "Why did you do that?" sounds accusatory, whereas "What did you use as the basis of your decision?" does not.

