

Asking Good Questions

Objective

To enhance your communication skills by asking good questions while engaging in conversations with others.

What to Know

When communicating with others, you have a chance to ask questions to help you understand or get more information. Asking questions is an important part of listening.

You might be unsure how to ask good questions. There are basic guidelines to contribute to good conversation flow with your questions. Good questions:

- get right to the point.
- are concise, descriptive, and not too wordy.
- allow the person you are talking to understand what you mean.
- avoid confusion.
- gives you more information.
- allow the conversation to flow with ease.

There are different types of questions.

1. **Open-ended questions** leave room for discussion and involve more explanation.
2. **Follow-up questions** offer clarity and expand the conversation.
3. **Leading questions** prompt specific responses or steer a conversation in a new direction.

What can you do to make sure you ask good questions?

Know what type of information you need and who is the best person to ask. Be clear about what you're asking, and make sure your questions are appropriate. Choose your words with purpose and ask them at an appropriate time.

Be a good listener. Pay close attention when others are talking to avoid asking general questions that you should probably know the answer to or asking already answered questions. When someone else is speaking, avoid interrupting, make eye contact, and nod to show you understand.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. If you are confused, ask for clarity. If you don't ask your question, you might make an easily avoidable mistake.

Go where the conversation takes you. Sometimes you might get off topic, and that's okay because conversations can flow in many different directions.

Use silence. Pause to listen to give yourself time to think about what was said and ask good follow-up questions. You don't want to rush the conversation, so give yourself time to think.

Avoid assuming you know the answer. Sometimes you might want to confirm you already know the answer. This may not leave room for different perspectives. Try not to lead someone to a specific answer.

Be brief. Long-winded questions can be confusing and show a lack of self-awareness. Provide enough details to summarize what you're looking for and avoid repeating yourself.

Get the sequence right. Think about the order of your questions. You might not want to start with sensitive, emotionally charged, or hard questions. Instead, start by asking basic, easy questions.

Use the appropriate tone. Questions can have different purposes and meanings. Know when to have a professional, serious tone and when you can be lighthearted or casual.

Be flexible and open. Being overly formal can make others uncomfortable and limit their willingness to answer your questions.

And remember...

- Stay on topic and don't abruptly change the subject.
- Avoid asking questions just to speak.
- Think about what you want to say before you say it.
- Make good eye contact.
- Sometimes it's okay to *not* ask a question!

This worksheet will help you ask good questions at appropriate times so you can become a better communicator.

What to Do

Asking good questions takes practice. Find someone who is willing to role play with you. Who can help you with this activity?

Your role play partner will say the following statements to you. On the lines that follow each sentence, write down some good questions to ask. If you can't think of an appropriate question, jot down some comments you can make. Then, ask your role play partner to write down feedback about your questions and comments.

Today the weather is going to be sunny with a high of 90 degrees.

Your questions/comments:

Partner feedback:

My favorite store is having a big sale this weekend.

Your questions/comments:

Partner feedback:

I attended my friend Susan's party last night. Some interesting things happened there!

Your questions/comments:

Partner feedback:

I've been caring for my sick father for the past year.

Your questions/comments:

Partner feedback:

I lost my dog, and I don't know what to do!

Your questions/comments:

Partner feedback:

I was just fired from my job.

Your questions/comments:

Partner feedback:

What did you find challenging about this activity? Easy? Explain.

Was your role play partner's feedback helpful? Why or why not?

Did this exercise help you learn to ask better questions? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
