

Questioning Cheat Sheet

In order to become effective users of information and ideas, we must become skilled at asking different questions in different ways. Different types of questions give you different types of information. This is very important when looking at information to help you make a decision or solve a problem.

Essential Questions – broad in scope and timeless by nature... important questions that recur throughout one's life... "What kind of person do I want to be?"

Subsidiary Questions - are families of smaller questions which lead to insight about essential questions. "What are the best and worst that can happen?"

Hypothetical Questions - explore possibilities and test relationships. They begin "what if..." "What would you do with an extra hour in your day?"

Telling Questions – highly focused questions to get straight to information... "In similar situations, what has been the result?" or a date might ask "Do you want a large family?"

Planning Questions - ask how you will structure your search. "Where should I look to find..."

Organizing Questions - structure your findings into categories. "How should we structure this?"

Probing Questions - give us details and facts. They do not require a great deal of time to answer, and they are easy to double-check for accuracy. They might begin with who, what, when, where, do you, will you, etc... "When will you graduate?"

Sorting & Sifting Questions - filter out extraneous information to help you find what's meaningful and relevant. "Is this reliable? What's worth keeping?"

Clarification Questions - help us understand confusing and unclear information. They help us understand if the information is reliable or not. They help us convert fog into meaning. "What is meant by...?" ... "Why did you say that?"

Strategic Questions - make meaning. "Am I asking the right questions?"... "What can we do together that none of us can do alone?"

Elaborating Questions - follow the trail. "What is the next step?"

Unanswerable Questions - help us understand when we have reached the limit of our understanding. They may never be answered, but they can illuminate in themselves. "What is friendship?"

Inventive Questions - turn things upside-down or inside-out. "What if we looked at this from the opposite perspective?"

Provocative Questions - challenge the status quo or conventional wisdom. "What if our assumptions are wrong?"

Irrelevant Questions – has nothing to do with the situation at hand... for example, when figuring out what type of gas to use in your car... asking what color is the car?

Divergent Questions – might begin with imagine... suppose... what are some of the possible consequences... what do you predict will happen?

Irreverent Questions - explore off-limits or taboo territory. "Does the emperor have any clothes on at all?"