

# Socratic questioning prompts

Socratic questioning is the process of using a set of disciplined questions to explore complex ideas. It is named after classic Greek philosopher Socrates.

## Conceptual clarification questions

These help you think more about what exactly you are asking and prove the concepts behind your argument. They are basic 'tell me more' questions that get you to go deeper.

- *Why are you saying that?*
- *What exactly does this mean?*
- *How does this relate to what we have been talking about?*
- *What is the nature of...?*
- *What do we already know about this?*
- *Can you give me an example?*
- *Are you saying ... or...?*
- *Can you rephrase that, please?*

## Probing assumptions

Probing of assumptions makes you think about the presuppositions and unquestioned beliefs on which you are founding an argument.

- *What else could we assume?*
- *You seem to be assuming...?*
- *How did you choose those assumptions?*
- *Please explain why/how...?*
- *How can you verify or disprove that assumption?*
- *What would happen if...?*
- *Do you agree or disagree with...?*

## Probing rationale, reasons and evidence

When you give a rationale for an arguments, dig into that reasoning rather than assuming it is a given. People often use un-thought-through or weakly understood supports for their arguments.

- *Why is that happening?*
- *How do you know this?*
- *Could you show me...?*
- *Can you give me an example of that?*
- *What do you think causes...?*
- *What is the nature of this?*
- *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?*
- *On what authority are you basing your argument?*

### Questioning viewpoints and perspectives

Most arguments are given from a particular position. So attack the position. 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 is ... necessary?*
- *Who benefits from this?*
- *What is the difference between... and...?*
- *Why is... 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 you 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

You can also get reflexive about the whole thing, turning the question in on itself.

- *What was the point of asking that question?*
- *Why do you think I asked this question?*
- *What does that mean?*

These question prompts are taken from: [www.changingminds.org](http://www.changingminds.org)  
Available at: [http://changingminds.org/techniques/questioning/socratic\\_questions.htm](http://changingminds.org/techniques/questioning/socratic_questions.htm)