

# A Taxonomy of Socratic Questions

## Questions of Clarification

- What do you mean by \_\_\_\_?
- What is your main point?
- How does \_\_\_\_ relate to \_\_\_\_?
- Could you put that another way?
- What do you think is the main issue here?
- Is your basic point \_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_?
- Let me see if I understand you. Do you mean \_\_\_\_?
- How does this relate to our discussion/problem/issue?
- Would you summarize in your own words what John has said? John, is that what you meant?
- Could you give me an example?
- Would this be an example: \_\_\_\_?
- Could you explain this further?
- Would you say more about that?
- Why do you say that?

## Questions That Probe Assumptions

- What are you assuming?
- What is Susan assuming?
- What could we assume instead?
- You seem to be assuming \_\_\_\_\_. Do I understand you correctly?
- All of your reasoning is dependent on the idea that \_\_\_\_\_. Why have you based your reasoning on \_\_\_\_\_ rather than \_\_\_\_\_?
- You seem to be assuming \_\_\_\_\_. How would you justify taking this for \_\_\_\_\_ granted?
- Is it always the case? Why do you think the assumption holds here?

## Questions That Probe Reason and Evidence

- What would be an example?
- What are your reasons for saying that?
- What other information do we need to know?
- Could you explain your reasons?
- Are those reasons adequate?
- Is there reason to doubt that evidence?
- But is that good evidence to believe that?
- Who is in a position to know if that is the case?
- What would you say to someone who said \_\_\_\_?
- Can someone else give evidence to support that response?
- By what reasoning did you come to that conclusion?
- How could we go about finding out whether that is true?
- How do you know?
- Why did you say that?
- Why do you think that is true?
- What led you to that belief?

- Do you have any evidence for that?
- How does that apply to this case?
- What difference does that make?
- What would convince you otherwise?

## Questions About Viewpoints or Perspectives

- You seem to be approaching this issue from \_\_\_\_ perspective. Why have you chosen this rather than that perspective?
- How would other groups/types of people respond? Why? What would influence them?
- How could you answer the objection that \_\_\_\_ would make?
- Can/did anyone see this another way?
- What would someone who disagrees say?
- What is an alternative?
- How are Tim's and Mary's ideas alike? Different?

## Questions That Probe Implications and Consequences

- What are you implying by that?
- When you say \_\_\_\_\_, are you implying \_\_\_\_\_?
- But if that happened, what else would also happen as a result? Why?
- What effect would that have?
- Would that necessarily happen or only probably happen?
- What is an alternative?
- If this and this are the case, then what else must also be true?

## Questions About the Question

- How can we find out?
- How could someone settle this question?
- Is the question clear? Do we understand it?
- Is this question easy or hard to answer? Why?
- Would \_\_\_\_ put the question differently?
- Does this question ask us to evaluate something?
- Do we all agree that this is the question?
- To answer this question, what questions would we have to answer first?
- I'm not sure I understand how you are interpreting the main question at issue.
- Is this the same issue as \_\_\_\_?
- Can we break this question down at all?
- How would \_\_\_\_ put the issue?
- What does this question assume?
- Why is this question important?

## Socratic Seminar

# Dialogue, not Debate

<b>Dialogue</b>	<b>Debate</b>
<b>Collaborative:</b> multiple sides work toward shared understanding.	<b>Oppositional:</b> two opposing sides try to prove each other wrong.
Participants listen to <b>understand</b> , to <b>make meaning</b> , and to <b>find common ground</b> .	Participants listen to <b>find flaws</b> , to <b>spot differences</b> , and to <b>counter arguments</b> .
<b>Enlarges</b> and <b>possibly changes</b> a participant's point of view.	<b>Affirms</b> a participant's point of view.
Creates an <b>open-minded attitude:</b> an openness to being wrong and an openness to change.	Creates a <b>close-minded attitude</b> , a determination to be right
One submits one's best thinking, expecting the <b>other people's reflections</b> will help <b>thinking</b> rather than threaten it.	One submits one's best thinking and <b>defends it against challenge</b> to <b>show</b> that it is <b>right</b>
<b>Temporarily suspending</b> one's beliefs.	<b>Investing wholeheartedly</b> in one's beliefs.
Search for <b>strengths in all positions</b> .	Search for <b>weaknesses in the other position</b> .
<b>Respects all</b> the other <b>participants</b> and seeks not to alienate or offend.	<b>Rebuts contrary positions</b> and may belittle or deprecate other participants.
Assumes that <b>many people have pieces of answers</b> and that <b>cooperation can lead to a greater understanding</b> .	Assumes a <b>single right answer</b> that somebody already has.

# *Socratic Questioning Strategies*

- **Pausing-Wait Time-Silence.** Pausing and waiting *slows the conversation down*. Waiting 3-5 seconds gives everyone time to think while also providing space for hesitant speakers to respond or join the conversation.
- **Paraphrasing.** Saying back to students what they have said, using different words and phrases, requires students to think deeply about their ideas, what they have said, and what they mean. Paraphrasing enlarges ideas for the speaker and for all the other students.
- **Serializing.** Asking a series of questions based on the previous response of a student shows that student and others that they are being heard, understood, and valued. Serialized questions engage students into meaningful conversations that enlarge their understanding of the big ideas of a discipline.
- **Clarifying.** While clarifying questions are simple questions of fact, clarifying questions ask students to focus on clarity of expression and thought. Simple questions like, “Do you mean thousands of people or do you mean hundreds of people?” or “Are you suggesting that we start with step 3 to solve the problem?” can move understanding and learning forward for everyone.
- **Probing.** Since probing questions encourage multiple responses, avoid yes/no responses, elicit slow and thoughtful responses, and move thinking from reaction to reflection, asking probing questions requires that students stop, pause, and think closely about the sources of their thoughts and ideas resulting in deep learning and new understanding.
- **Expanding.** Questions of elaboration like ‘Why do you say that? Tell us more about that... What are some examples of what you mean? How is what you are suggesting different from or similar to what you just heard from Sue?’ Expanding questions ask students to go deeper in expressing their thoughts and ideas as they provide clarity and new understanding. Asking questions that expand and enlarge the ideas being offered by students shows students higher levels of understanding.



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## Student Handout

- I have questions about...
- Another point of view is...
- I think it means...
- Do you think...
- What does it mean when the author says...
- Do you agree that...

## How to Conduct a Seminar:

*“Teachers should guide without dictating, participate without dominating.”  
– C.B. Neblette*

### **Pre-Seminar:**

Teach students the “rules of engagement.” The seminar is not a debate, but a discussion. \*These rules have been compiled from experience and from a variety of common knowledge sources found on the World Wide Web.

- Listen carefully.
- Don't raise hands; take turns speaking.
- Don't monopolize the discussion.
- Don't participate if you are not prepared. This should not be a “chat” session or a “bull” session.
- Speak clearly and loudly so that everyone in the circle can hear you.
- Do make notes on what others are saying. If you want to comment on something a classmate has said, write it down before you lose your thought.
- Do refer to the text. This is not a show of memorization. All comments should be grounded in the text.
- Ask for further clarification of a classmate's idea if you do not understand.
- Do not try to take the group on a tangent. Focus on the discussion at hand.
- Talk to one another, not the teacher/leader.
- Understand that a seminar is a discussion of ideas. Participants are responsible for the discussion. And while it is okay to disagree with someone, the goal of a seminar is to think together versus arguing a position.

# Habits of Mind

*The habits of mind below are the keys to critical thinking, perceptive reading, honest discussion, and powerful writing. Rather than getting the "right answer" the goal of a Socratic dialogue is to practice these habits of mind.*

## Evidence

How do you know what you know? Can you provide specific evidence from the reading passage to justify your conclusions or general statements?

## Definitions

How is the author using key terms? Does he use them consistently?

## Viewpoint

Who is the speaker? What is the author's line of argument or bias?

## Connections

How is the reading related to other things? Which things are causes and which are effects? Can they be both at once? What is the relationship between the past and the present? Is there an underlying pattern?

## Conjecture

What if? If this, then what?

## Relevance

So what? Who cares? Is there a valid or compelling reason to adopt a different point of view or make a new connection? Is this argument valid in one context but not appropriate in another?

**Socratic Seminar  
Discussion Partner Evaluation**

Name of person you are observing \_\_\_\_\_

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Seminar Topic \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1) Record a check for each time your partner contributed in a meaningful way: \_\_\_\_\_

2) On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest, how well did your partner do at the following?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Analysis and Reasoning  
Did your partner...  
Cite reasons and evidence for his/her statements with support from the text?  
Demonstrate that they had given thoughtful consideration to the topic?  
Provide relevant and insightful comments?  
Demonstrate organized thinking?  
Move the discussion to a deeper level?

Notes/Comments:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Discussion Skills  
Did your partner...  
Speak loudly and clearly?  
Stay on topic?  
Talk directly to other students rather than the teacher?  
Stay focused on the discussion?  
Invite other people into the discussion?  
Share air time equally with others (didn't talk more than was fair to others)?

Notes/Comments:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Civility  
Did your partner...  
Listen to others respectfully?  
Enter the discussion in a polite manner?  
Avoid inappropriate language (slang, swearing)?  
Avoid hostile exchanges?  
Question others in a civil manner?

Notes/Comments: