

Socratic Questions

Socratic questions¹ are a good way to prompt deeper and more careful thinking. For thousands of years, philosophers have employed them to spark curiosity, foster critical thinking, and build immunity to bad ideas. Socratic questions promote accountable thought, cognitive autonomy, and active open-minded thinking (AOT).

Applications

- When students express views that might turn out to be problematic, ask **clarifying questions**.
- **Ask them why** they believe what they do. Invite them to examine their reasons. Are they good reasons? Why or why not? What assumptions are they making? What are the alternatives?
- Such exchanges should always be **friendly, affirming, and supportive**, never combative. The infographic included here should be a helpful starting point.²

Notes

Use questions to draw out students' *own* ideas about a subject.³ Then use follow-up questions to help them examine those ideas. Be careful, though, not to make students defensive. The interaction should be non-confrontational. Give students the time and space to think things through. Socratic questions should illuminate assumptions. They can call attention to gaps in arguments and reveal the limits of our knowledge. They should foster skepticism of simplistic answers. Wielded skillfully, they will encourage students to be active, curious, and exploratory.

Learn More

[What is the Socratic Method](#) (YouTube video)



THE 6 TYPES OF SOCRATIC QUESTIONS

Socratic questions can be used in influencing, leading and coaching to stimulate critical thinking

- CLARIFYING THINKING & UNDERSTANDING**
 - Can you give me an example?
 - Could you explain further?
 - Are you saying ... ?
 - What is the problem you are trying to solve?
- CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS**
 - Is that always the case?
 - Are you assuming ... ?
 - How could you verify or disprove that?
 - What would happen if ... ?
- EXAMINING EVIDENCE & RATIONALE**
 - Why do you say that?
 - How do you know?
 - Why?
 - What evidence is there that supports ... ?
- CONSIDERING ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES**
 - Are there any alternatives?
 - What is the other side of the argument?
 - What makes your viewpoint better?
 - Who would be affected and what would they think?
- CONSIDERING IMPLICATIONS & CONSEQUENCES**
 - What are the implications/consequences of ... ?
 - How does that affect ... ?
 - What if you are wrong?
 - What does our experience tell us will happen?
- META QUESTIONS**
 - Why do you think I asked that question?
 - What does ... mean?
 - What is the point of the question?
 - What else might I ask?

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT WWW.JAMESBOWMAN.ME
Source: R. W. Paul, L. Elder, The Thinkers Guide to The Art of Socratic Questioning, 2007

¹ Wikipedia, [Socratic questioning](#)

² Jame Bowman, [Socratic questions revisited \[infographic\]](#)

³ Colorado State University, [The Socratic Method: Fostering Critical Thinking](#)