

Asking Good Questions – Transcript

Contents

Asking Good Questions.....	2
Overview: Asking good questions.....	2
Asking good questions	2
What makes it a good question	3
Applying the characteristics	4
Apply the characteristic - clear	4
Apply the characteristic - relevant	4
Apply the characteristic - single dimensional	4
Compare your results.....	5
Some additional examples	5
Why ask good questions.....	6
The benefits of asking good questions.....	6
Decide the benefits gained exercise	6
Your results.....	8
How to ask good questions.....	9
Do your research.....	9
Factors to consider.....	9
Reflection	10
Summary	11
Your results.....	11
Resources.....	12
How to ask good questions: checklist.....	13
Resources for Asking Good Questions.....	14
The basics of asking good questions	14
Broader implications of asking good questions	14
Asking better questions help us build our capacity to decide	14

Asking Good Questions

How it contributes to your success

Turn on sound.

CC button.

UTM Career Centre logo.

Overview of the tabs across the top from left to right.

Module Contents: A static reference for topics and subtopics in this module.

Resources: To download additional documents and an annotated bibliography, go to the resources tab on the top right of your screen under the module title.

Print: Print tab, above on the right, to print or save everything that appears on the screen.

Exit: Use Exit tab to close the module. Exit tab is located above to the right of Print Help tab. You may exit the module at anytime. When you return to the module, you may be prompted to resume the module. The resume prompt depends on whether you cleared your browser history. Clearing the browser history will restart the module from the beginning. Note: Exit button may not work in Firefox.

Video Transcripts: Found under Resources tab.

Keyboard users: Press the tab key to move to the selection and press the space bar.

Overview: Asking good questions

Video script:

Asking good questions can help us in all aspects of our lives: work, school and personal situations. Using good questions, we can solve problems more effectively and increase our understanding of others' perspectives. Sometimes we don't ask questions because we are afraid of being embarrassed; but if we don't ask, sometimes the consequences are worse. This module will help you understand the benefits of asking good questions, what makes a question a good one and when, why and how to ask.

Asking good questions

Let's begin learning about what makes it a good question, the benefits gained and how to ask a good question.

Choose either What or Why as your starting point. When both sections are complete, then the How section will be available.

What —What makes it a good question.

Why — Benefits gained by asking good questions.

How — How to ask good questions.

What makes it a good question

Asking questions works well when they are “good questions” but what does that mean? Here are some characteristics of good questions. Select the characteristic to display the explanation and to view an example.

Clear

Clarification: A good question is asked in plain language that is easy to understand and emphasizes the information being sought.

Example: Can you tell me the key goals of the project that I’ll be involved in?

Relevant

Clarification: Helps advance the discussion of the topic and doesn’t take the discussion away from the work that needs to be done.

Example: (When asked to produce a report.) How would you like the report to be formatted?

Concise

Clarification: The question gets to the point and doesn’t introduce extraneous information.

Example: Can you tell me which result you want to highlight in this section?

Guide but not lead

Clarification: Offers some direction but doesn’t lead just to one answer.

Example: Given the shortness of our timeline, which aspect do we want to focus on?

Stimulates thinking

Clarification: Prompts the listener to analyze information when responding.

Example: If we look at the pros and cons of Option A, which do we want to pursue?

Single dimensional

Clarification: Asks one question at a time, splits multiple issues up between questions.

Example: Does the system work for the supplier?

Applying the characteristics

Now that you have reviewed the characteristics, how can they help you create a good question? See the example below.

Speaker: The results showed many changes, just like the work we did last term when we discovered those errors. I'm wondering if there is anything similar this time?

The above question has been rewritten to make it concise. It now reads -

Are we confident that we have accurate data?

Apply the characteristic - clear

Now it is your turn to rewrite questions applying a specific characteristic. Take a look at this question.

Speaker: There will be a lot of work here and we need to get our ducks in a row, what actions are needed to be taken?

Rewrite the above question so that the message is clear.

Apply the characteristic - relevant

Consider the following question.

Speaker: Could we consider all the presentation possibilities?

Rewrite the above question so that the message is relevant.

Apply the characteristic - single dimensional

Read the question below.

Speaker: Does this solution work for Accounting and the Vice President HR?

Rewrite the above question so that the message is single dimensional.

Compare your results

Take a look at what you wrote and our suggestions. Reflect on how similar or different the rewrites are. Did your rewrite meet the goal for applying the characteristic?

Clear: There will be a lot of work here and we need to get our ducks in a row, what actions are needed to be taken?

Your rewrite:

Our suggestion: What are the key tasks we need to do?

Relevant: Could we consider all the presentation possibilities?

Your rewrite:

Our suggestions: Is there a preferred format?

Or

Is the board room available

Single dimensional: Does this solution work for Accounting and the Vice President HR?

Your rewrite:

Our suggestions: Have we checked that this works for Accounting?

Or

Did you check that this will work for the VP HR?

Some additional examples

For further thought, take a look at these examples.

Guiding but not Leading

Original question: If we consider all the pros of this option, don't we just want to move forward with it?

Rewritten as: Can we review the pros and cons of this option?

Stimulates Thinking

Original question: This is a simple decision, who agrees?

Rewritten as: What are the aspects we need to consider in making this decision?

Why ask good questions

Asking good questions can help you do a better job; with more relevant information you can better address projects, questions and challenges.

Think about your classes; were there times you could have asked more questions and been more successful? Or times you did ask questions and had more success?

It's the same in the workplace; asking good questions can help you be more successful in your role. Sometimes we hesitate to ask as we don't want to appear foolish but, we have to remember gaining more clarity will help us do better.

The benefits of asking good questions

Consider these six benefits gained by asking good questions.

Select the benefit to see the description.

Increase Understanding: Good questions can increase understanding – of the project strategy or context.

Build Bridges: Good questions can build bridges – help you form relationships with people you don't work with often, leading to more connections.

Prep Your Brain: Good questions can prep your brain – stimulate your brain, making you more productive.

Open up Possibilities: Good questions can open up possibilities – eliciting answers that might surprise you and opens up unforeseen opportunities.

Introduce Change: Good questions can introduce change – deliberately raising different perspectives so alternative answers/actions are considered.

Demonstrate Curiosity: Good questions can demonstrate curiosity – others hear curiosity rather than resistance or stubbornness, making a more positive impression.

Decide the benefits gained exercise

As you have just read, there are many benefits in asking good questions. Now take a look at the following two scenarios and decide which benefits the person asking the question will gain. Asking a good question can have more than one benefit.

Scenario 1:

1. Review the scene.
2. Select as many benefits as apply from the list on the right. (in transcript the list appears below.)
3. State your reason for your choices.

Working on a project lead by someone in another department. (Wording above a 2 panel scenario.)

In own office (title of first panel).

Employee (thinking): Not sure about the responsibilities. What's expected of me?

Later, in another department (title of second panel).

Employee (saying): Could we discuss my role in this project?

Brain preparation

Builds bridges

Demonstrates curiosity

Increases understanding

Introduce change

Open to possibilities

Why did you select those benefits?

Scenario 2:

1. Review the scene.
2. Select as many benefits as apply from the list on the right. (in transcript the list appears below.)

New policy for dealing with customer requests. (Wording above a 2 panel scenario.)

In own office (first panel title).

Employee (thinking): I definitely could help!

Speaking to supervisor (second panel title).

Employee (saying): Would it be feasible for me to help on the support line more than I do now?

Brain preparation
Builds bridges
Demonstrates curiosity
Increases understanding
Introduce change
Open to possibilities

Your results

Benefits you selected correctly are marked with a check mark. Transcript: marked with 'Selected

Benefits of asking the question: Could we discuss my role in this project?

Build bridges
Increase understanding
Open to possibilities

Reasons for your choice.

Benefits of asking the question: Would it be feasible for me to help on the support line more than I do now?

Build bridges
Demonstrate curiosity
Introduce change
Open to possibilities

Our reasons for the benefits shown to the left.

I think asking about a potential change in duties opens up possibilities for change in my role and how my department handles an increased demand, and builds bridges with my supervisor who might be looking for support to solve this issue.

How to ask good questions

It starts with preparation.

Employers say...

...while they don't mind answering questions, what annoys them is answering questions where the person should already have the information.

Preparation demonstrates that you have thought about your question. Let's look at two examples.

Do your research

Before you ask, think, 'was this information that might have been included in my orientation packages', 'is this information in policy binders' or 'did I already receive training on this'.

In this scene, notice the supervisor's reaction to the question.

Employee asks: Is there a dress code?

Supervisor, looking puzzled, thinks: Did they read the orientation package?

Now read the scene below. The employee has refined the question to a very specific aspect and is demonstrating he has done his preparation. Notice the reaction of the employer this time. Spending a moment to prepare your question can result in a better opinion of you.

Employee asks: I read about the dress code, and I wonder if for this event....

Supervisor, smiling, says: Right, for these types of events....

Factors to consider

Take time to think about how to ask your question. Consider how these factors will help you create a good question. Display the checklist by clicking the factor or use tab key to move to factor and select it.

Focus

Focus on what you want to ask.

- ✓ What specifically do I want to know?
- ✓ What information am I missing?
- ✓ Is this more than a simple YES or NO question?
- ✓ Am I going for deeper knowledge?

Purpose

Think about why you are asking the question.

- ✓ Do I want facts or opinions?
- ✓ Do I need a simple clarification or deeper information?
- ✓ What is the result I'm hoping for?
- ✓ Am I trying to introduce something I think the group is missing?

Timing

Timing is important for both your first and follow-up questions.

- ✓ Initial questions: when to ask e.g. in a meeting -- individual or group, texting, hallway conversation, email
- ✓ Do I have any more specific questions to add?
- ✓ When and how do I need to ask more questions?
- ✓ Who do I ask?

Reflection

Now you have some basic knowledge about how focus, purpose and timing can affect your question. The checklist* for each factor will help you ask a good question.

Think about a time when you worked on a project (in class or at work) when you asked a question and didn't get the information you needed. Could you have done something differently in the focus, purpose or timing of the question that would have given you better results? Write your response in the box below.

*How to ask good questions checklist is included in Resources. Resources tab is located in upper left under the title. In transcript, Checklist is included at end of the document.

Summary

From this module you've learned how you can benefit from asking questions, what makes it a good question and the when, why and how of asking.

To save your results for your records, or as proof that you have completed the module, take a screen shot or create a pdf of the next page.

Your results

When asked about reasons for selecting specific benefits gained from asking a question you responded.

This is what you stated about using the factors of focus, purpose and timing when asking a question.

Keep a copy of your results. Use Print to make a pdf or take a screen shot.

Transcript instructions: Go to File menu and save the completed transcript.

Resources

Interested in reading more about asking good questions?

Download the annotated bibliography for this module.

Interested in more e-modules related to Professionalism in the Workplace? Visit the Professionalism in the Workplace page on the the University of Toronto Experiential Learning Hub.

How to ask good questions: checklist

Focus

Focus on what you want to ask.

- What specifically do I want to know?
- What information am I missing?
- Is this more than a simple YES or NO question?
- Am I going for deeper knowledge?

Purpose

Think about why you are asking the question.

- Do I want facts or opinions?
- Do I need a simple clarification or deeper information?
- What is the result I'm hoping for?
- Am I trying to introduce something I think the group is missing?

Timing

Timing is important for both your first and follow-up questions.

- Initial questions: when to ask e.g. in a meeting --individual or group, texting, hallway conversation, email
- Do I have any more specific questions to add?
- When and how do I need to ask more questions?
- Who do I ask?

Resources for Asking Good Questions

The basics of asking good questions

7 Characteristics of Good Questions

Isha Sood, eLearning Industry

<https://elearningindustry.com/characteristics-of-a-good-question-7>

How to Be Amazingly Good at Asking Questions

Mike Martel, Lifehack

Highlights: techniques for developing the skill of asking good questions.

<https://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/how-amazingly-good-asking-questions.html>

How asking questions at work can help you

Warren Berger, A More Beautiful Question

Highlights: ideas for asking your supervisor questions.

<http://amorebeautifulquestion.com/how-it-can-help-you-to-ask-questions-at-work/>

The Importance of Tone of Voice and Why You Should Get It Right

Highlights: how your tone of voice can affect your questions.

<https://www.pixus.uk/blog/the-importance-of-tone-of-voice-and-why-you-should-get-it-right/>

Broader implications of asking good questions

The value of asking questions

Karen Maeyens, TEDx UFM

Highlights: asking good questions as keys to opening up possibilities.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZluAQw8RA4>

Asking better questions help us build our capacity to decide.

How to Ask Better Questions

Mike Vaughan, TEDx MileHigh

Highlights: how to solve big problems with the power of good questions.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8xfuCcXZu8>

5 TED talks on asking questions to be a better leader

Jennifer Riggins, Management 3.0

<https://management30.com/blog/ted-talks-how-to-ask-better-questions/>

The Surprising Power of Questions

Alison Wood Brooks, Leslie K. John, May–June 2018 Issue- The Harvard Business Review

Highlights: the power and benefits of asking questions.

<https://hbr.org/2018/05/the-surprising-power-of-questions>

The Power of Questions

Steve Aguirre, TEDx Bergen Community College

Highlights: why do we stop asking questions and why we should start again

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5K842cXNIEI>