

Socratic Questioning¹

Socratic Questioning is a particular kind of framework that is useful in all areas (not limited to the classroom) in which we wish to open up the possibilities for thoughtful and intentional, reflective conversation. The value of this work lies in its ability to demonstrate that intelligent questioning and dialogue needn't be limited to areas where one already has background knowledge. In fact, there are certain moves that we can make that can suggest *serious inquiry, debate, critique and contradiction as a means to knowing*, rather than as a demonstration of what one already knows. In the classroom, it is useful to generate questions, to offer as a resource for student-led discussions, and to empower students in demonstrating ways to engage in material that may be very dense and for which they are struggling to relate or find a context.

Facilitator of discussion *selects* a question or issue of interest

Production and Examination of a Central Statement from a source or produced by a student in response to the question or issue

Clarification of the statement and its relationship to the question or issue

Listing and critical examination of Support, Reasons, Evidence, and Assumptions related to the central statement

- *Exploration* of the Origin or Source of the statement
- *Development and critical examination* of the Implications and Consequences of the statement
- *Exploration* of alternative points of view

Clarification Questions:

What do you mean by _____?

What is your main point?

How does _____ relate to _____?

What do you think is the main issue here?

Jane, would you summarize in your own words what Richard has said?...Richard, is that what you meant?

Could you give me an example?

Could you expand upon that?

Questions about the Initial Question or Issue:

How can we find out?

Can we break this question down at all?

Is the question clear? Do we understand it?

Is this question easy or hard to answer? Why? (Is this an open or close-ended question?)

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?

Why is this question important?

Does this question lead to other questions or issues?

Assumption Probes:

¹ This material is both excerpted and abstracted from: R. Paul, Critical Thinking: What Every Person Needs to Survive in a Rapidly Changing World. Rohnert Park, CA: Center for Critical Thinking, 1990.

What does this question assume? How would you justify taking this for granted?

What could we assume instead?

Is it always the case? Why do you think the assumption holds here?

Why would someone make this assumption?

What larger beliefs would one typically adhere to when holding this same assumption?

Reason and Evidence Probes:

What would be an example?

How do you know?

Do you have any evidence for that?

What difference does that make?

What other information do we need?

Could you explain your reasons to us?

Can you explain how you logically got from ____ to ____?

Do you see any difficulties with the reasoning here?

What led you to that belief?

What would change your mind?

Is there reason to doubt that evidence?

Who is in a position to know if that is so?

What would you say to someone who said ____?

Can someone give other evidence to support that response?

How could we find out whether that is true?

Origin or Source Questions:

Where did you get this idea?

What has influenced you in asking this question?

Did you originate this idea or was it originated elsewhere?

Implication and Consequence Probes:

When you say ____, are you implying ____?

But if that happened, what else would happen as a result? Why?

Would that necessarily happen or only probably happen?

What is an alternative consequence?

If this and this are the case, then what else must also be true?

Viewpoint Questions:

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?

What might someone who believed ____ think?

Can/did anyone see this another way?

What would someone who disagrees say?

What is an alternative point of view?