

Questions for a Socratic Dialogue

Recently, R.W. Paul's six types of Socratic Questions were expanded to nine types. These questions are reproduced with permission from the Foundation for Critical Thinking. For a more complete description of Socratic Questioning, see *The Thinker's Guide to the Art of Socratic Questioning* (2006), by Richard Paul and Linda Elder. Details may be found at www.criticalthinking.org.

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 _____ ?
- Could you give me an example?
- Would this be an example: _____ ?
- Could you explain that further?
- Would you say more about that?
- Why do you say that?
- Let me see if I understand you; do you mean _____ or _____ ?
- How does this relate to our discussion/problem/issue?
- What do you think John meant by his remark? What did you take John to mean?
- Jane, would you summarize in your own words what Richard has said? Richard, is that what you meant?

Questions That Probe Purpose

- What is the purpose of _____ ?
- What was your purpose when you said _____ ?
- How do the purposes of these two people vary?
- How do the purposes of these two groups vary?
- What is the purpose of the main character in this story?
- How did the purpose of this character change during the story?
- Was this purpose justifiable?
- What is the purpose of addressing this question at this time?

Questions That Probe Assumptions

- What are you assuming?
- What is Karen assuming?
- What could we assume instead?

- You seem to be assuming _____ . Do I understand you correctly?
- All of your reasoning depends 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 Information, Reasons, Evidence, and Causes

- What would be an example?
- How do you know?
- What are your reasons for saying that?
- Why did you say that?
- What other information do we need to know before we can address this question?
- Why do you think that is true?
- Could you explain your reasons to us?
- What led you to that belief?
- Is this good evidence for believing that?
- Do you have any evidence to support your assertion?
- Are those reasons adequate?
- How does that information apply to this case?
- Is there reason to doubt that evidence?
- What difference does that make?
- Who is in a position to know if that is the case?
- What would convince you otherwise?
- What would you say to someone who said _____ ?
- What accounts for _____ ?
- What do you think is the cause?
- How did this come about?
- By what reasoning did you come to that conclusion?
- How could we go about finding out whether that is true?
- Can someone else give evidence to support that response?

Questions about Viewpoints or Perspectives

- You seem to be approaching this issue from _____ perspective. Why have you chosen this perspective rather than that perspective?
- How would other groups or 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 Ken's and Roxanne'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 be true?

Questions about the Question

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

Questions That Probe Concepts

- What is the main idea we are dealing with?
- Why/how is this idea important?
- Do these two ideas conflict? If so, how?
- What was the main idea guiding the thinking of the character in this story?
- How is this idea guiding our thinking as we try to reason through this issue? Is this idea causing us problems?
- What main theories do we need to consider in figuring out _____ ?

- Are you using this term “_____” in keeping with educated usage?
- Which main distinctions should we draw in reasoning through this problem?
- Which idea is this author using in her or his thinking? This there a problem with it?

Questions That Probe Inferences and Interpretations

- Which conclusions are we coming to about _____ ?
- On what information are we basing this conclusion?
- Is there a more logical inference we might make in this situation?
- How are you interpreting her behavior? Is there another possible interpretation?
- What do you think of _____ ?
- How did you reach that conclusion?
- Given all the facts, what is the best possible conclusion?
- How shall we interpret these data?