

Quick Guide: Questioning for understanding

'Seek first to understand, then to be understood.' This is just one of the habits of highly effective people taken from Stephen R Covey's book. We primarily ask questions to get information but they are also a powerful communication tool to show that we are interested in the other person; that we care about what's important to them; and that we are trying to understand their situation. So here are the **top ten** types of questions and how to use them.

1. **OPEN** questions begin with **who, when, where, which, what, why and how**. Use these to initiate a conversation, to encourage people to give you information and to clarify situations.
2. **CLOSED** questions will give you a **yes** or **no** answer. They begin with verbs: **do, can, are, will, have etc.** Use these to check facts, bring a conversation back to the point or to close a conversation. (Great for shutting up chatterboxes!)
3. **SPECIFIC** questions are open questions but you use these when you want a specific answer. They usually contain a number - date, money, quantity, etc. So, **When did you buy the product? Who did you speak to earlier?**
4. Use **PROBING** questions to explore the other person's thoughts and feelings. For example, **tell me about ..., explain why ..., describe ...**
5. **CHOICE** questions are useful with indecisive people as they help to move the conversation along. For example, **Would you like me to complete this task first or make a start on the report?**
6. **CLARIFYING** questions are used to check that you have understood what the other person is saying and to show that you are listening. **To help me understand this better, I would like to clarify the points so far. You've said ...?**
7. **LEADING** questions can test reactions and relax nervous people. Beware, though, as others may feel you are leading, or even bullying, them. **I bet you're looking forward to next week? You are pleased with what I've done, aren't you?**
8. Similar to leading questions, **ASSUMPTIVE** questions assume the answer you want is in the question. **I assume you will want this finished by the end of today?**
9. **REFLECTIVE** questions help to find out what someone thinks or feels, help to clarify a tricky situation or encourage others to expand on what they've just said. For example, **You don't seem very happy about that? I feel that you are disappointed?**
10. **HYPOTHETICAL** questions are good for testing reactions to a possible situation. They always start with "if". **If we had to delay delivery how would that affect you?**

Compiled by Judith Di-Castri