

Asking & Answering Clarifying / Probing Questions

CLARIFYING QUESTIONS: are simple questions of fact. They are for the purpose of assisting the question asker with additional information in order that s/he more completely understand the topic or issue.

Clarification

When they are vague or have not given enough information, seek to further understand them by asking for clarification.

What exactly did you mean by 'XXX'?

Please help me understand exactly what you mean when you say XXX?

Can you rephrase that for me? In other words...

PROBING QUESTIONS: These are intended to help the presenter think more deeply about the issue at hand. It may also help the questioner develop understanding, but the intention is to push the presenter to address their topic and issues more thoughtfully and thoroughly.

Probing Purpose

Sometimes they say things where the purpose of why they said it is not clear. Ask them to justify their statement or dig for underlying causes.

Why did you say that?

What were you thinking about when you said XX?

Probing Completeness and Accuracy

You can check that they are giving you a full and accurate account by probing for more detail and checking against other information you have. Sometimes people make genuine errors, which you should check.

Is that all? Is there anything you have left out?

How do you know that is true?

Probing rationale, reasons, and evidence

When they give a rationale for their arguments, dig into that reasoning rather than assuming it is a given. People often use unthought-through or weakly understood supports for their arguments.

How can I be sure of what you are saying?

What evidence is there to support what you are saying?

Probe viewpoints and perspectives

Most arguments are given from a particular position. So attack the position (not the person). Show that there are other, equally valid, viewpoints.

What alternative ways of looking at this are there?

Have you considered these alternatives?

Who benefits from this?

Why should it be important to the rest of us?

Probe implications and consequences

The argument that they give may have logical implications that can be forecast. Do these make sense? Are they desirable?

What are the likely consequences?

What do you see as the likely impact of passing this measure? Of not passing it?