THE ART OF ASKING QUESTIONS

Purpose
• To clarify what has value by exploring question asking and interviewing
• To build vocabulary related to asking purposeful questions
• To develop research skills through directed question asking and interviewing
• To recognize elements of interaction and communication that model respect, clarity, and fairness

Materials
Student documents:
• Asking Questions
• The Art of Interviewing: Asking Questions
Optional student document:
• The Art of Interviewing: Putting Ideas into Practice

Time
60 minutes

Terms
• probing, pushing, and naive questions

Background
Asking purposeful questions is at the heart of learning and a 21st century skill for life. Creating environments conducive for asking questions enables students to exhibit curiosity and inquiry. Question asking leads students to be more self-directed when investigating and following a personal interest whether subject-related or eventually career-related.

In the article How We Learn referenced in the Orientation section, Alison Gopnick describes how learning occurs through guided discovery and mastery. Students learn from observing adults ask a variety of questions. In this lesson, they examine the process of asking questions and observe an interview, all leading toward conducting an interviewing to add understanding and confidence. When interviewing, students examine the purpose of questions, consider what questions can elicit, discover different ways to pose a question, apply skills, and raise more questions about questions.

Interviewing skills can be used in a myriad of ways, for example, with a guest speaker or expert met in the field. Transform typical guest lectures into a journalistic approach with students as question askers. This idea is referenced in The Complete Guide to Service Learning page 24, Success with Speakers–Guaranteed! Look for everyday teachable moments to increase opportunities for asking questions, conducting interviews with peers and others, and elevating learning through engagement.

Keep in mind that asking questions and interviewing is also a cornerstone of action research and meaningful service learning.

Opening
• Select a current class topic. For example, ask, “Yesterday we discussed reflection; who has a question?” Typically few students raise their hands. Have students turn to a partner; give them
one minute to come up with a question on the topic. Ask, How many came up with a question?

- Repeat this One Minute Think Tank experience. This time students, with partners, come up with a question about questions.
- On the document Asking Questions, students write their question on the sidebar. As students share their questions, record them. Reference these during and beyond the lesson.
- Optional: With their partner, have students answer What is helpful about the one minute think tank? and How could I use this again?

**Process**

**Asking Questions**

- On the document Asking Questions, have students complete the section Every Day Questions. Allow about five minutes. Discuss how questions are essential in everyday activity. Challenge students to be observant and in search of questions for the rest of the day. Where are they: in school hallways, on television, over dinner, in social media they use. Begin the next class with a review of so many questions!
- Ask, Why do questions matter? After two ideas have generated, stop. Have students form groups of four. Have them again reference Asking Questions. Each person in the small group is responsible to make sure ideas are generated for each section: Why questions matter, When questions matter, What keeps us from asking questions, and What supports us to ask questions. Let them know they will have one minute to produce ideas for each section. Time each section and let them know when to move on. At the end, ask if they need any more time to review and complete.
- Discuss each section, especially what keeps us from asking questions and what supports us. Consider adapting a Class Agreement to encourage support for questions.
- Read Eugene Ionesco’s quote. Do they agree? Disagree? Do they have a way to revise or adapt the quote to be even more relevant? This can go in the box, A Worthwhile Quest.
- Reference the line on their document about origin of . Considering the term quest shares the word root with question, what personal quest could be enhanced through asking questions?
- Optional: Have student pairs return to sidebar on this document and, with their initial partner, respond to the prompts. Note that unanswered questions may be answered in the next segment.

**The Art of Interviewing: Asking Questions**

- Of course students are familiar with the ideas of interviews. Ask, Where do they see interviews happening? (on television with news and sports programming, in movies) Have they ever been interviewed? Discuss what this looks like and feels like.
- Knowing how to be an interviewer assists with skills of asking questions—important in every learning situations—and is preparation for jobs or college interviews. Guide students through questioning techniques using The Art of Interviewing: Asking Questions. This includes different kinds of questions, tone and style, and listening. At times have students work in pairs, other times on their own. Vary the interactions. Have students summarize in pairs, give examples, role play; integrate diverse engaging teaching strategies as you move through the content.

**Optional: Putting Ideas into Practice**

- Reference the document The Art of Interviewing: Putting Ideas into Practice. In class with a prepared video or Internet example, or with an at-home assignment, have students observe two interviews. This could be on a news program or a documentary. This experience increases
observation skills and assists students gain topic information for conducting an interview.

• Practice makes for a good experience. Students work in threes to role play the interview process. Each interview can last two minutes. As noted, students rotate through the roles.

Closing
• Before students complete the reflection section, ask them to read the questions. Do they have a different question they would prefer answering? Do they have changes they want to make to the ones presented? Use their question asking skills to improve or replace the questions provided. Crossing out on the page is acceptable.
• Discuss, in pairs, How could being better at interviewing assist in classes and with learning in general? Share responses.

Follow-up
• Two weeks later, conduct a Plus Delta about how asking questions is improving in class.
• Suggest students to continue to listen to and read interviews in different media, for example, on radio or television, or in newspapers or magazines. For one interview have them pay more attention to the interviewer; for another interview have them be more attentive to the responder. What do they notice and learn about successful interviews?
• Teaching interviewing skills to others could grow into a service learning opportunity.
### Asking Questions

*Question* from the Latin *quarrier, to seek*, shares a word root with *quest*.

#### Every Day Questions
Are questions part of your life?
List situations where you ask questions every day. What do you ask?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>My Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

What questions are you asked on most days?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Questions I am Asked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### Why Questions Matter

---

#### When Questions Matter

---

#### What Keeps Us from Asking

---

#### What Supports Us to Ask Questions

---

---

**A Worthwhile Quest**

---

**It is not the answer that enlightens, but the question.**

*Eugene Ionesco from his play, Découvertes*
The Art of Interviewing: Asking Questions

The Naive Question
A naive question lets the interviewee do the telling or explaining. Which is a naive question:

- Given that the coral reefs are in jeopardy from ocean acidification, trawling by the seafood industry, and tourism, how would you describe what is going on?
- What causes coral reefs to be at risk?

From the Expert:
Scott Simon, of National Public Radio, in the United States, says, “Naive questions ask people to explain basic meanings or implied understandings that often go unstated. They can force people to look at something from a different perspective or uncover simple, but powerful, feelings, and responses.”

Writing Naive Questions on ______________________
With a partner develop three naive questions on a topic of your choice.

1. 
2. 
3. 

Partner with another pair. Tell each other your questions. Exchange feedback.

Open, Neutral, Lean, Fair
With your partner, review the three naive questions you wrote above. Review and edit to be certain these questions are direct, uncluttered, and:
- open = Who, what, when, where, why, and how
- neutral = non-controversial and unbiased
- lean = one question at a time, very simple
- fair = straightforward, not tricky, clear

Tone and Style
“Oh!” Short and simple. With a partner, respond with “Oh” to each of the following situations:
- You just got the birthday present you’ve been wishing for.
- Someone walks up behind you and scares you.
- You got an A on your school assignment.

Style matters during an interview. Select three styles you want to adopt during an interview.
- aggressive
- thoughtful
- leading
- reflective
- judgmental

Listening
Does listening matter during an interview? Listening helps us know what to ask next. Listening means we ask for clarification. Listening helps us find out what matters most.

Probe and Push
A probing question asks for more information and clarity. For, “What do you do outside?” and the response is, “Sports,” the probing question could be, “What kind of sport?”

A question with push encourages the detail. For example, “You mentioned liking the movie. What exactly did you like?” Or, an interviewer can say, “I don’t think you answered what I was asking; let me try again.”
Watch and Learn! Watch two interviews on television or the Internet. For each one:
- Describe the tone and style.
- Write down one or more great questions.
- Note where you saw evidence of a probe and a push.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tone and Style</th>
<th>Great Question</th>
<th>Probing</th>
<th>Pushing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe the Interview</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe the Interview</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conduct Practice Interviews
In small groups, one student becomes a well-known person; two others prepare and conduct an interview. One observes. Change roles so all students get to be an interviewer. As an observer, note:

- Which questions promoted thorough answers?
- Which kinds of questions got surprising or memorable responses?
- Did you notice how the interviewer's tone influenced the interview?
- Were there different questioning styles used?

Reflecting
For you, what is most important to remember about asking questions?

What two questions would you want someone to ask you?

We make our world significant by the courage of our questions and by the depth of our answers.
Carl Sagan, author and scientist

The Art of Interviewing: Putting Ideas into Practice