

PAGE 2 Top - Option 2

How to ask the right question

No one has all the answers. That means asking questions is one of the most important skills you can master, whether you're talking to employees, friends, or children. Questions should be short, simple, and concrete—easy to understand and think about. To use questions effectively, though, you must know what kinds of questions to ask. Choose from among these categories:

- **Factual.** “What did you have for lunch?” or, “What is 357 times 62?” Some questions have only one correct answer—a truth that can be objectively confirmed.
- **Interpretive.** “What does that painting look like?” Even if a question has more than one correct answer (“A blue cow,” or “a blue dog”), an interpretive question calls for evidence, some kind of supporting material that others can validate.
- **Evaluative.** “Do you like eggplant parmigiana?” Questions regarding opinions or beliefs have no correct or incorrect answer, but they can tell you a lot about the other person's point of view.
- **Empowering.** “What would you do about Sarah's problem?” Sometimes you want to urge someone to action, without directly telling him or her what to do. In these cases, ask questions to show you're interested in the other person's ideas and trust his or her judgment.
- **Broad vs. focused.** The questions above can be asked in different ways, depending on whether you want a lot of information or a single answer: “How many different animals could that painting look like?” vs. “What specific animal do you see?” Think before you ask, so you don't have to backtrack.
- **Follow-up.** “What do you mean by that?” This is one of the best questions you can ask in almost any category, because it invites the other person to think more deeply and share more information.