

## Constructing and Asking Effective Questions

Questions are a valuable tool to help you and your audience stay focused, engaged and challenged. Questions provide the audience with the opportunity to play with ideas, construct meaning and discover new relationships between ideas. The use of questions will move your audience from passively accepting information to exploring ideas.

### Planning questions

Effective questions take time and energy to develop. Consider these points when developing questions;

- questions need to be clear and specific, with appropriate vocabulary
- make sure your questions match the purpose
- develop one driving investigative question (“umbrella question”). This question will provide a framework on which the audience can hang their new knowledge and ideas.
- be aware of your preconceived answers to questions
- plan open ended questions (How?, Why?) instead of closed questions (Did?). This will generate more discussion and will help you determine your audience's level of understanding.
- "why" questions are critical because they leap to the heart of learning: the spirit of curiosity

### Developing an ideal climate for questions

The audience needs to feel comfortable and confident with you as their "facilitator" before they will actively answer and ask questions. When working with people;

- start with questions they can easily answer. This will help them develop their own confidence and a relationship of trust with you.
- ensure they have a base of knowledge before asking them reflective questions.
- **provide opportunities to ask or answer questions about things or events for which there is no one right answer** (or there are many potentially correct answers). This will help them develop an attitude of appreciation for the complexity of the world.
- limit the number of factual questions - avoid an "Inquisition".

### Asking and answering questions

The best planned question can be destroyed in its delivery. When posing questions think about how you ask them and how you respond to the audience's answers and questions.

- Do you always use the same pattern of questioning? Have your strategies become stale?
- Do you feel that you are giving up control of the learning by using questions? Who should be controlling the learning?
- **Do you ask questions to get your audience to the “right answers”?**
- Do the students expect you to have all the answers? How does that make you feel?
- Do you give the audience time to think and respond after you ask questions? Do you allow the audience to ask and answer questions of each other?
- How do you praise responses to your questions? Does you praise encourage or discourage answers from other audience members? How?
- When you are stumped by a question do you make up answers? What impact might that have?

Reference: *The Art of Inquiry. Questioning Strategies for K - 6 Classrooms.* Nancy Lee Cecil. 1995.