

Open-Ended Questions

Point of the Assignment: To learn that open-ended questions promote greater critical thinking and generate more information.

You can learn to improve your critical thinking skills by learning to ask the right kind of questions. There are two types of questions you can ask that will generate very different responses:

1. **Closed-Ended Questions** – can be answered with either Yes or No.

Answering closed-ended questions requires little or no mental energy on the part of the responder. They can answer a question without having to think about it. The responder often will put their mind in “automatic pilot” and simply respond with the first thing that comes to mind – whether or not it is even true.

2. **Open-Ended Questions** – can *NOT* be answered with either Yes or No.

Answering open-ended questions requires the responder to actively engage in a thinking process, and generally prevents an automatic, non-reflective answer. Open-ended questions are relatively easy to generate, since they often begin with one of the following words: **WHO....?**

WHAT...?

WHEN...?

WHY.....?

WHERE..?

HOW.....?

Example: To help you see the power of asking open-ended questions, imagine the following scenario: A 12-year-old daughter asks her mother for permission to go out with her friends. The mother responds, “Not until you clean your room.” The daughter agrees, and disappears for an hour or two. She then comes back to her mother and says, “Can I go to my friend’s house?” However, Mom knows fully well that she did not clean her room. The mother can respond with either a closed-ended question, or an open ended question. Notice the daughter’s response to both, and the different results of these two questions.

Mother’s Question	Daughter’s Response	Mother’s Response to Daughter
Closed-ended: <i>“DID you clean your room?”</i>	Automatic, non-reflective: “Yes”	Not knowing how to respond she says, <i>“Ok, I guess you can go.”</i>
Open-ended: <i>“WHAT did I say you need to do first?”</i>	Reflective response: <i>“Clean my room.”</i>	Standing firm the mother responds: <i>“Like I said, when it’s done, you can go.”</i>

Open-Ended Questions

You are now going to practice generating open-ended questions. For this exercise, you will do this assignment based on the clip from the original movie, "Jurassic Park," using the dialog between John (the visionary old man) and the three scientists as they discussed the possible ramifications of having created a live dinosaur theme park.

In order to help you glean more critical thought about what you are understanding, you will answer open-ended questions that start with each word: Who, What, When Why, Where and How. **As you watch the movie, look for the answers!!!!** Write down the answers to the questions below.

Close-Ended Question:

Q: Does anyone get hurt in this movie?

A: _____

*Follow up question to the close-ended question: **Do you need to watch the entire movie, or pay attention, to be able to answer this question?** (Explain your response.)*

A: _____

Open-Ended Questions:

WHO QUESTION:

Q: Who first raised an objection to Jurassic Park?

A: _____

WHAT QUESTION:

Q: What suggestions did Donald (the lawyer) make about Jurassic Park?

A: _____

WHEN QUESTION:

Q: When is the park scheduled to open?

A: _____

WHY QUESTION:

Q: Why was Dr. Malcolm (Jeff Goldblum) troubled by Jurassic Park?

A: _____

WHERE QUESTION:

Q: Where is this conversation taking place?

A: _____

HOW QUESTION:

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Q: How many people were sitting at the table?

A: _____

*Follow up question for the open-ended questions: **How much thinking did you need to do to be able to come up with your answers?** (Explain your response.)*

A: _____

Application to learning in general:

Relate this assignment, which you just completed, to the standard questions listed below.

What do you see?

Why would these questions be listed at the end of the assignment?

How is this related to the topic of “critical thinking?”

How is this related to learning and developing good study skills?

Test your understanding:

What is the main point of this assignment?

Why were you expected to do this exercise?

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What type of person would need to do this exercise?

How well do you fit the profile of the person for whom this assignment was created?

Reflection: *(Write down your response after completing this assignment.)*
