

# How to ask the right questions: Developing a vital life skill

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Remember how in school, our teachers encouraged us to ask questions. Whenever you speak with an intellectual, or with a person at a higher position than yours, you will notice that they always encourage you to ask questions and clear your doubts. Asking questions, and importantly, asking the right questions is an important part of a healthy and beneficial conversation. When you ask a question, you understand the concept better and put forward your doubts. Also, for the speaker, it is a way of gauging how well she is explaining the concept or putting her point forward. Asking the right questions is a vital life skill, and something people usually struggle with. Especially, if you are a new English speaker, you might lack the confidence of asking questions, thinking your questions are not smart enough. Don't worry, a lot of us go through this process of self-doubting and it is completely okay. After all, it is better to keep quiet than looking and sounding dumb. But you can't go on keeping mum just because you don't know how to ask the right questions! So, I'll share with you some tips to help you ask the right questions.



Before that, you need to understand why you need to learn [the art of effective questioning](#).

- It helps you connect with the speaker
- Helps you understand the concept better
- Helps improve your negotiation/ discussion ability
- Helps share your ideas

Now, getting to the point of effective questioning, let's get started with the tips:

- While 'Why' type of questions will get you the information, but can come as too confrontational and too direct. Also, asking too many 'why's can seem like accusations. 'Why do you think we are facing this problem' or 'why attendance is such an issue with the students'? These questions can seem accusing. You want your questions to be open for discussion.

- 'What' questions are more conversational, and more open to hearing the other person's opinion? 'What do you think is the problem', 'What do you think can be done about it' can help to-
- a. Identify the issue and find solutions and gather more information. 'What seems the main obstacle here', 'what about doing it the X way'.
- b. Focus on the outcome, and ask questions about how you can achieve that. 'What is the desired outcome', 'what can be the best plan to achieve what we have set out for', 'what else should we consider for solving the problem' are questions directed towards finding a solution.

### Listen:



Listening is the key to understanding what the speaker is saying, and then asking appropriate questions. A lot of times, we fail to pay attention because we listen to answer or question, and not for understanding the concept, which should be the real aim. Also, if the speaker is talking about something that you already know about, or have opposing opinion, it is natural to have an urge to interrupt and present your opinion, and that is what also hinders your listening.

Use these tips to ask appropriate questions that will help you understand the concept and help the [speaker](#) clear your doubts.

**-By Shailja Varma**

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