

## Learning to Ask the Right Questions

### Essential Questions

These questions offer an organizing focus and are at the center of all other types of questions; all other questions illuminate or help answer Essential Questions. Essential Questions probe complex issues

- What really defines an American family?
- How does America define its role in the world?
- Who and what define women in America?
- How do issues of class define us as Americans?
- How much do we need to give up our individualism to live in a democracy?
- What is the power of place in creating an American identity?
- How does race matter in America?

### Subsidiary Questions

These combine to help us build answers to our Essential Questions. The big questions spawn families of smaller questions which lead to insight. Two strategies helpful for developing a comprehensive list of Subsidiary Questions:

1. Brainstorm and list every question which comes to mind (you did this in your spiral). Later group related questions together using Inspiration software.
2. Look at the list of types of questions below to generate questions for each type

### Hypothetical Questions

Helpful in deciding between a number of choices or when trying to solve a problem

- What if -----?
- Suppose that -----.

### Planning Questions

Help us structure our research and create a plan of action

- Who has done the best work on this subject?
- Which database will provide the most reliable and relevant information most efficiently?
- Which search tool or index will speed the process?
- How much time will the entire project take? Each step take?
- Do some steps require more careful thought than others?
- How should I structure my own time to accomplish the required tasks?

### Sorting & Sifting Questions

Allows us to manage Info-Glut, to cull and keep only pertinent information

- Which of these hits seem to most directly address my questions?
- Is this information reliable? (Check the About Us page on websites, date of article, credentials of writer, etc.)
- Does this article contain much new or different information than I've already found?
- For long articles (10-15pp.), which parts directly address my questions?

### Clarification Questions

Defining words and concepts is essential to making sense of information and how it fits with what you already know

- What does the author mean by ----?
- Is there data to support their claims, and how did they collect it?
- How did the author develop the case being presented? Also, how did he appear to come to this point?
- Are there any questionable assumptions at the base of the argument?

### Organizing Questions

Structure our findings into categories that allow us to construct meaning

- How can my findings be organized into categories?
- Are there any patterns emerging from what I've read?
- What relationships do I see among all these pieces of information?

### Probing Questions

Take us below the surface, to the "heart of the matter" and enable us to take what we find one step further.

### Elaborating Questions

Extend and stretch the meaning of what we find

- What does this mean?
- What might it mean if certain conditions or circumstances changed?
- What is the logical next step? What is missing and/or needs to be filled in
- What are the implied meanings here?

### Inventive Questions

Modify, rearrange, alter, twist & turn the pieces of information to create new meaning

- When I consider all the pieces together, what does it all mean? What picture or insight emerges?
- What needs to be modified or eliminated in order to make better sense of my findings?
- What is still missing?

Source: "A Questioning Toolkit." *From Now On, The Educational Technology Journal*, Vol 7, No. 3. Nov-Dec 1997. <http://questioning.org/Q7/anchor233717> Accessed 29 February 2004.