

1. What is a good question?

- ▶It is *authentic*
- ▶It is *researchable*
- ▶The research is *doable* in the time and space constraints under which you operate.
- ▶It will allow you to develop *a good argument*.

2. What is a good argument?

An argument is a public presentation (in writing or in speech) of the assumptions, evidence and train of reasoning through which we arrive at what seems like the best possible answer to a question.

Hence a good argument is one where

- ▶the assumptions are clearly stated
- ▶the evidence presented is appropriate and complete
- ▶the train of reasoning is logical and persuasive

When an argument is well constructed, the conclusion follows from the reason or reasons that support it. From philosophy, we learn that every reason consists, strictly speaking, of two parts, a *major premise* and a *minor premise*

Indigenous peoples have a right to self-determination
(*Major Premise*)

The Cree in Northern Quebec are an indigenous people
(*Minor Premise*)

Thus the Cree in Northern Quebec have a right to self-determination. (*Conclusion*)

Conclusions may be qualified in terms of

- ▶ *probability*
- ▶ *a limiting condition*
- ▶ *a particular point of view*
- ▶ *tentativeness due to limited evidence*

Robert Rubin:

“The reality is that every country has an interest in the economic policies of all other countries. It’s different from how it used to be 10 or 20 years ago.

[Government’s] behaviour can very substantially affect the rest of the world. That creates another type of responsibility, not only to their own citizens but to the citizens of the world.”

Financial Times 13 July 1998

Evaluating Internet Sites

1. Levels of networked information

a. Pointer: address (URL)

e.g. *http://www.socsci.mcmaster.ca*

b. Item: minimal addressable unit of information

e.g. a table of contents or a listing

c. Document: coherent collection of information items and pointers: articles, web pages, video clip, data base record, sound track etc.

d. Resource: coherent, annotated, complex, mosaic of interrelated documents and pointers

▶ an archive, a telephone directory, a book, a journal

e. Information System; coherent, well-annotated, cross-referenced collection of resources and interconnecting pointers: photo archive, a virtual library, a record library, an encyclopedia, a sound archive

Evaluation Criteria for a Web Site

1. How accessible and usable is the site?
2. How easy is to identify a resource, its title, its author, and descriptions of its content, purpose, and intended audiences?
3. What information is provided on the identity of the author?
4. What qualifications does the author have?
5. How is the document designed? Does it state its purpose, describe its scope, incorporate interactivity, or provide a variety of different formats to meet different learning styles?
6. How good is the quality of the information in the document? Does it meet the user's needs in terms of the type and depth of the material provided, does it complement other information available, does it fit into a broader field of knowledge?
7. How much validity does the information in a document have? Are the methods used in obtaining the information identified? Does the author cite original sources for secondary information? Has the document been peer-reviewed?
8. Is there any evidence of bias or inaccuracy in a document?

9. How easy is it to navigate within a document? How do you evaluate its organization, its menu design, its indexes, its table of contents, its search functions, its online “help” (if applicable)?
10. How useful are the links provided by the document? Does it provide a list only or does it provide pointers?
11. How well is the document designed in terms of graphics, readability, and the use of creative elements?

Preparing Closed Questions for Specific Populations

Types of Questions

Open-ended

Closed or structured

- ▶ dichotomy
- ▶ multiple choice
- ▶ scale

Writing Questions

- ▶ avoid talking down
- ▶ avoid use of slang, street terms
- ▶ avoid long marathon questions

Choosing the right word . . .

- ▶ familiar
- ▶ widely used
- ▶ single meaning

The wording of questions will vary depending on your objective.

1. Asking non-threatening questions about behaviour

- ▶ problem here normally is jogging a person's memory
- ▶ socially *desirable* versus socially *undesirable* behaviour

2. Asking threatening questions about behaviour

Problems to overcome:

overstating socially *desirable* behaviour

understating socially *undesirable* behaviour

Load questions to reduce overstatement and to increase understatement.

A) undesirable

- ▶ “everybody does it”
- ▶ use authority figures

B) desirable

- ▶ “did you happen to . . . “
- ▶ offer reasons why not

3. Questions for measuring knowledge

4. Questions for measuring attitudes

- ▶ make certain that the object of the attitude is clear
- ▶ attitudes are normally seen to have three components:
cognitive: what is known about it
evaluative: what is liked about it
action: willingness to do something about it

Problems:

- ▶ how do you assess the *strength* of attitudes?
- ▶ double-barrelled questions
- ▶ Should you explicitly state the alternatives?
- ▶ Should you include the middle ground or not?
- ▶ Does the order in which questions are asked matter or not?

When public sector workers in France went on strike in the fall of 1995, many of their placards and signs read that they were striking “contre mondialisation” or “against globalization.” A similar message has appeared in protests by the labour movement in other OECD countries including Canada.

Suppose that you had the funds necessary to survey a random sample of public sector workers in France. You are interested in learning more about the meaning to them of the term “globalization”. Let us assume that you begin your questioning with the following open-ended question:

You hear a lot about globalization these days. When you yourself use this term, what does it mean for you?

Your task is to devise three more questions that you might use to explore what workers understand “globalization” to mean. These questions might be about attitudes, about behaviour, or about level of information. It is your choice.

Elite Interviewing

conduct of interviews where a person is given special, non-standardized treatment

▶ instead of the investigator defining the problem, emphasis is on the interviewee teaching about the problem and the important issues

Factors to consider

1. How do you choose whom to interview?
2. How do you make the contact? Contact letters should:
 - ▶ describe the nature of the project
 - ▶ explain why you are interested in speaking with the person
 - ▶ give some indication of the likely line of questioning
 - ▶ indicate whether you are self-financed and autonomous or financed by some organization
 - ▶ suggest some possible times
 - ▶ offer a guarantee of confidentiality if necessary
 - ▶ include a brief biographical statement if necessary
3. Subsequent contacts (“snowball technique”)
4. Beginning the interview
5. Should you tape record the interview or not?

Determining Boundary Rules of Policy Communities Possible Elite Interview Questions

1. Turning now to the making of {insert policy area} in the U.S., who in the executive branch, which branches of {insert relevant government department(s)} and which other agencies or government organizations, in your view, are *central* to the policy process? By *central*, we mean that their views are regularly and systematically taken into account?

Probe for details and names of individuals

- 1a. In addition to those executive branch agencies that you see as central to the policy process, are there any others that are *active*? By *active*, we mean government agencies that will have something to say from time to time.
- 1e. Still thinking about the making of {insert policy area}, who in Congress, which sub-committees and committees, and which members of Congress in your view are *central* to the policy process?
- 1f. Are there any other Congressional committees or members of Congress that are *active* in this area?

- 1i. Still thinking about the making of {insert policy area}, which non-governmental organizations, that is interest groups, think tanks, other individuals outside of government, in your view are *central* to the policy process?
- 1j. Are there any other non-governmental organizations that are *active* in this area?

Determining Beliefs, Values and Norms: Elite Interviews

1. Some people argue that agriculture should be viewed as an economic sector like any other. Others say that agriculture remains an exceptional or special sector, meriting its own particular programs and policies. What is your view on this question?
2. The United States government has supported agricultural prices and incomes since the 1930s. Does there continue to be a rationale for this kind of policy in the mid-1990s? If so, how would you summarize that rationale? If not, why not?

Advantages of small groups.

Research has shown that the following conditions foster learning:

1. Get learners actively involved; don't have them listen passively to one speaker.
2. Have learners work cooperatively; make success depend on teamwork and helping one another.
3. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning. Individuals learn differently.
4. Emphasize goal setting and time on task.
5. Provide prompt feedback on performance.
6. Empower the learners to have a role in the assessment.
7. Work in an environment that expects success.
8. Have frequent and rich interaction with a tutor
9. Problem-solving skills, processing skills and group skills are not developed by observing others nor by providing an 'unstructured opportunity' to do it on one's own.

Working in groups tends to provide more of these conditions than listening to lectures.

What is good group behaviour?

For *effective* group work, the following are important:

1. Know yourself, your strengths, your weaknesses and your preferences. Become comfortable with yourself.
2. Value diversity in others.
3. Know and apply the fundamental underpinnings of interpersonal relationships. We all have certain personal rights: the right to choose, to have opinions, to be respected, to have needs, to have and express feelings, to make mistakes (and be forgiven), to accept these rights in others.
4. Be a good empathetic communicator
5. Know the attributes of groups, know how you function in a group
6. Know the role of chairperson and be skilled in playing that role for the group.
7. Know how to cope creatively with conflict
8. Know how to cope effectively with difficult behaviours
9. Know how to convert a group into a team

How do you become *a valued member* of a group?

- attend to both morale and task components
- don't fight for leadership; leadership rotates among members
- help the chairperson to be effective
- help the group evolve through the maturing process

Five students have been working together on a group project when the following conversation takes place.

A: F___! What a stupid thing to say! Homer Simpson lives!

B: At least I say *something* once in a while, you b_____.

C: Okay, okay, you guys. Can't you at least talk to one another with a little respect.

B: Well, I have just about had it with her.

D: I have just about had it with all of you. I feel like I have been doing all of the work. My usual luck--I get saddled with the Three Stooges.

C: What do you mean? I did my part, here look at my notes.

D: Sure, we have been working on this thing for three weeks and this is the first time you have looked at the campus map to find the library.

B: I'm walking, man. If I want to listen to a lot of b__ching, I might as well do it at a bar, sipping a long cold one.

D: But we have to finish this project by next week. It's worth 20% of our grade.

A: If you are so worried, you do it, doll. I'll join this wordless lug in the bar.

C: What about E? He hasn't even come to our last two meetings.

B: I appreciated the silence. Ciao, guys.

Self-Directed Learning Skills that are useful to have and that we wish to develop further in the course.

1. To know and be able to apply the fundamentals of learning, both for independent learning on your own and for interdependent learning.
2. To be able to create learning objectives that are consistent with measurable criteria that explain the degree to which the goals will be achieved.
3. To be able to identify and locate good resources for information.
4. To be able to critically and creatively assess the information and to resolve what you believe to be true.
5. To have the patience, initiative and skill to sort out difficult topics.
6. To express your knowledge in a form so that others may learn that knowledge efficiently, effectively and accurately and so that they each have learned all the fundamentals
7. To be skilled at asking questions and at soliciting information from others so that you learn all the fundamentals of a new topic. You do not feel that you have to learn it on your own.
8. To be able to use the combined new knowledge to solve the problem.
9. To value your peers as valid resources of information.

How do we know whether our group is working?

Coalition of Interests	Team
Each person represents a different constituency and has her or his own agenda. Will seek to benefit herself or himself first.	Each person accepts the group's goals and willingly foregoes person goals for the benefit of the group
Each person is unsure of her or his role, other than to represent her or his own interests.	Each has a role to play. Each knows that role and understands how it contributes to the group.
Decisions are taken by a vote, with the dominant persons coalescing to protect their interests	Decisions are made by consensus in the best interests of the group as a whole.
If interpersonal conflicts occur, the best strategy is to ignore them, "because I won't be in this group forever." The group has no method other than embarrassment for resolving conflicts.	Most conflicts must be addressed and resolved. The group has an accepted method of resolving conflicts. The ability to resolve conflicts is understood to be a key skill.
If I miss a meeting, so what? Who cares?	I must not miss a meeting because every person is needed for the success of the group.
All tend to put on a happy face and accept the median or common skills. $2+2=3$	The group does better than a collection of individual efforts because all contribute all their skills. They accept one another, "warts and all." $2+2=7$
"I" attitude	"We" attitude

Most groups will go through a kind of development process.

Stage	Orientation	Conflict Control	Emerging capacity to work together	Reinforce team work	Separation
Task	All agree; tend to make vague ambiguous comments	Nitpick, storm, polarize, challenge	Use ambiguity as an outlet for dissent	Strong agreement as to task; make decisions by consensus	
Morale	Am I in this group?	Who is the boss?	Am I comfortable in this group? How close do I want to get?	Conflict improves our answers; conflict helps build trust	What happens now?

4. What are the tasks for interdependent, small-group, problem-based learning?

Eleven tasks that must normally be completed in self-directed, interdependent, small group, problem-based learning.

A. Agenda Setting Meeting

1. Explore the problem, create hypotheses, identify issues, elaborate
2. Identify what you know already that is pertinent.
3. Identify what you do not know.
4. As a group, prioritize the learning needs, set learning goals and objectives, and allocate resources, members identify which tasks each will do.
5. Individual self-study and preparation.

B. Information-Sharing Meeting

6. Return to the group, share the new knowledge effectively so that all the group learn the information.
7. Apply the knowledge to solve the problem

C. Sharing Learning and Evaluation Meeting

8. Return to the group with your part of the problem addressed. Distribute copies to all members, preferably beforehand. Present your ideas and receive feedback.
9. Assess the new knowledge developed by the group, and the problem solution that you have prepared. Is your report coherent and well-integrated? How might it be improved? What steps remain to be taken to produce a coherent, acceptable final draft?
10. Discuss your performance as a learning group. What were your strengths? What were your weaknesses? What will you work on as a group to improve for the next problem session?
11. Complete evaluation form for individual members of the group.

5. How do you be an effective chairperson?

The chairperson for the group facilitates *growth and the learning process*. The chairperson is not the **leader**, but the **facilitator**.

The agenda should include:

Purpose:

List of participants:

Reminder of pre-meeting preparation that must be done:

What to bring:

Agenda: sequencing of topics and task and with suggested time allotted for each item.

Sample Agenda: First Meeting

Purpose: Given the problem assigned, plan a method for acquiring the needed knowledge using self-directed learning concepts

Type of Meeting: Planning

When: Thursday, January ?, 1999

Where: BSB 236

Who: {list members}

Premeeting Preparation: Review hints on good group behaviour

Objectives

1. Create a learning contract among members: diagnose where the group needs to learn more, translate these needs into objectives, identify possible resources, and suggest what kind of evidence might be needed.
2. Assign research tasks to group members for learning individually and for teaching the group at the next meeting.

Agenda

1. Introduction: allocate roles, review purpose and objectives, review agenda, establish any ground rules that you wish to use. (5 minutes)
2. Read over the problem (5 minutes)
3. Discussion: what do we know about the problem and what don't we know? (30 minutes)
4. Create a learning contract: what do we need to know and where might we find the information? (15 minutes)
5. Divide learning and teaching responsibilities (5 minutes)
6. Assessment of group's working. Where might we improve? (10 minutes). Assessment of the chairperson's work.