

Critical Thinking Questions

Dr. Sumaira Rashid
Department of Education

In the current situation, unprecedented challenges are being encountered in all fields of life especially in academia. Instructors, from FCCU as well as other universities, have been expressing concerns with regards to creating an environment for effective online teaching and assessment. Here is a proposal that comprises of Six Types of Socratic Questions suggested by R.W. Paul (2006). These categories of questions may be used in any discipline to engage learners in critical thinking, these also may be used by instructors to assess critical thinking demonstrated by learners.

These questions are likely to minimize remote and rote memory testing.

Questions of Clarification

- What do you mean by...?
- What is your main point...?
- How does relate to...?
- Could you put that another way?
- What do you think is the main issue here?
- Is your basic point or?
- Could you give me an example of?
- Would be an example?
- Could you explain further?
- Would you say more about?
- Why do you say?
- Let me see if I understand you; do you mean or?
- How does relate to our discussion/problem/issue?
- What do you think is meant by remark?
- Student X, would you summarize in your own words what Student Y has said? (Particularly significant for generating online discussions)

Questions that Probe Purpose

- What is the purpose of?
- What was your purpose when you said?
- How do the purposes of these two people vary?
- How do the purposes of these two groups vary?
- What is the purpose of the main concept/character/incident/ theory?

- How can we critique the purpose.....?
- How will you justify the purpose?
- What is the purpose of addressing this question currently?

Questions that Probe Assumptions

- What are you assuming?
- What in your opinion Student X assuming?
- What could we assume instead of?
- You seem to be assuming....., Do I understand you correctly?
- All your reasoning depends on the idea that..... Why have you based your reasoning onrather than.....?
- Is it always the case? Why do you think the assumption holds here?

Questions that Probe Information, Reasons, Evidence, and Causes

- What would be an example of?
- How do you know.....?
- What are your reasons for saying?
- Why did you say?
- What other information do we need to know before we can address this question?
- Why do you think is true? Could you explain your reasons to us?
- What led you to that belief?
- Is good evidence for believing?
- Do you have any evidence to support your assertion?
- Are those reasons adequate?
- How does that information apply to this case?
- Is there reason to doubt that evidence?
- What difference does it make?
- Who is in a position to know if that is the case?
- What would convince you otherwise?
- What would you say to someone who said.....?
- What accounts for.....?
- What do you think is the cause for?
- How did come about?
- By what reasoning did you come to that conclusion?

- How could we go about finding out whether that is true?
- Can someone else give evidence to support that response?

Questions that Probe Viewpoints or Perspectives

- Please explain the perspective you seem to be approaching issue from. Why have you chosen this perspective?
- How in your opinion other groups or types of people would respond to? Why? What would influence them?
 - How could you answer the objection?
- Can/did anyone see this another way?
- What would someone who disagrees say?
- What is an alternative?
- How are Student X's and Student Y's ideas alike/ different?

Questions that Probe Implications and Consequences

- What are you implying by?
- When you say....., are you implying?
- But if that happened, what else would also happen as a result? Why?
- What effect would that have on?
- Would that necessarily happen or only probably happen?
- What is an alternative to?
 - If A and B are facts, what else must be true?

Questions about the Question

- How can we find out?
- Is this the same issue as?
- How could someone settle this question?
- Can we break this question down at all?
 - Is the question clear? Do we understand it?
- Is this question easy or difficult to answer? Why?
 - What does this question assume?
- Would put the question differently?
- Why is this question important?
- Does this question ask us to evaluate something?
 - Do we need facts to answer this?

- Do we all agree that this is the question?
- To answer this question, what other questions would we have to answer first?
- I'm not sure I understand how you are interpreting the main question at issue. Could you explain your interpretation?

Questions that Probe Concepts

- What is the main idea we are dealing with?
- Why/how is this idea important?
- Do these two ideas conflict? If so, how?
- What was the main idea guiding the thinking of the character in this story?
- How is this idea guiding our thinking as we try to reason through this issue? Is this idea causing us problems?
- What main theories do we need to consider in figuring out?
- Which main distinctions should we draw in reasoning through this problem?
- Which idea is this author/ another student using in her/his thinking? Is there a problem with it?

Questions that Probe Inferences and Interpretations

- Which conclusions are we coming to about?
- On what information are we basing this conclusion?
 - Is there a more logical inference we might make in this situation?
- How are you interpreting her behavior? Is there another possible interpretation?
- What do you think of?
- How did you reach that conclusion?
- Given all the facts, what is the best possible conclusion?
- How shall we interpret these data?

References:

Paul, R. W. (1992). Critical thinking: What, why, and how? *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 1992(77), 3–24.

Paul, R. W., & Elder, L. (2006). Critical thinking: The nature of critical and creative thought. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 30(2), 34–35.