Open Questions v. Closed Questions

Closed questions can be answered with either a single word or a short phrase.

* Usually the answer is a “yes” or “no” response
* Closed questions have the following characteristics:
  + They give facts
  + They are easy to answer
  + They are quick to answer
  + They give control to the questioner

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | This makes **closed questions** useful in the following situations:     |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Usage** | **Example** | | As opening questions in a conversation: it makes it easy for the other person to answer, and doesn't force them to reveal too much about themselves. | *It's great weather, isn't it?*  *Where do you live?*  *What time is it?* | | For testing their understanding (asking yes/no questions). | *So, are you familiar with the Honor Code? Have you heard of plagiarism?* | | For setting up a desired positive or negative frame of mind in them (asking successive questions with obvious answers either yes or no ). (eg. leading questions). NOTE: this is not a desired goal in honor council hearings! | *“Are you happy with your current wireless provider?”*  *“Do they give you all that you need?”*  *“Would you like to find a better wireless provider?”* | |

Open questions (or statements) can be answered with an explanation or a longer answer

* Usually begin with what, why, how, and describe.
* They have the following characteristics:
  + They ask the person to think and reflect
  + They may gather opinions and feelings
  + They give control to the person responding

This makes open questions useful in the following situations:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Usage** | **Example** |
| As a follow-up from a previous closed question, to develop a conversation and learn more from someone who is quiet. | *What did you do over the holidays?*  *How do you enjoy spending your time?* |
| To find out more about a person, their wants, needs, problems, and so on. | *What things are keeping you awake these days?*  *Tell us about your relationship with your professor.* |
| To help people reflect on a situation. | *What do you think your classmate was trying to do when…?*  *How might you approach this situation if confronted with…?* |
| To demonstrate care or concern about someone. | *How have you been since being out sick?*  *You're looking down. What's up?* |

Adapted from Changing Minds, 2011. Web. 24 Feb 2011. <http://changingminds.org/techniques/questioning/open\_closed\_questions.htm>.