

## **Types Of Questions – Open And Closed Questions**

**"Smart questions are essential technology for those who venture on to the Information Highway."  
Jamie McKenzie (Editor of the educational technology journal, *From Now On*)**

### **Closed questions**

Research shows that teachers sometimes ask a question every 2 to 3 seconds. Unfortunately, these questions are usually just asking students to remember facts. These are called recall questions and often fall into a category of questions known as closed or convergent questions. Closed questions normally have a correct answer and often this is a "yes" or a "no".

Examples of closed questions:

- What is the height of Mount Kenya?
- What is the capital of Guyana?
- What did we do in the last lesson?
- Do you want to go to the soccer match?

### **Learners' Questions**

The best questions in the class are those that are asked by the learners themselves. If learners are encouraged to ask questions they will become lifelong learners. Sometimes learners need some easy, closed questions to get them started. Sometimes teachers use closed questions to test their learners' research skills, in which case the teacher is trying to develop search skills and not necessarily thinking skills.

Closed questions are not always bad. It is sometimes necessary to recap on work done and to assess whether learners understand something. However, if you only ever use closed questions, then you are never going to encourage your learners to think for themselves.

### **Open Questions**

As an educator, you should use open or divergent questions as much as possible to encourage the learners to think. Open questions are not answered with a simple answer. Often there is more than one possible correct answer. Certainly the learner has to think a while before an open question can be answered. Open questions help learners to formulate opinions and allow them to make informed decisions.

Quite often, open questions start with one of the three big questioning words: How? Why? and Which? If we use How, Why and Which, we are very unlikely to get a Yes or No answer. Look back at the table that gave examples of such questions under the previous section called, "Why ask Questions?" Do you notice the importance of the wording?

Examples of open questions are:

- Why do you think that Hitler did not attack the allies at Dunkirk?

Well, only Hitler knows for sure. Historians have grappled with this question for decades. Incidentally, "Why?" is used most commonly by learners in the primary phase. Why do teachers and learners stop using this word in higher school levels?

- Why do schools get vandalised?

The "Why?" question often causes the learner to analyse a situation and offer an opinion based on evidence.

### **How Do I Improve My Questioning Techniques?**

Well, practice makes perfect, but there are several answers to this question. The "How?" question often leaves the learner with a problem to solve and the reply often describes plenty of action.

- What did you like about that movie/ food/ dentist?

This question is more likely to get a detailed response than "Did you like it?"

- Which school should I send my child to?

The word "Which" often leaves the learner with a decision to make.

**"A good question is never answered. It is not a bolt to be tightened into place but a seed to be planted and to bear more seed toward the hope of greening the landscape of idea."**

**John Anthony Ciardi (1916-86), American poet, critic**

Samples of closed and open questions:

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Closed questions</b>	<b>Open questions</b>
<b>History</b>	When did the Soviet Union (USSR) disband?	Why did the USSR disband?
<b>Geography</b>	Who was the first astronaut?	Which planet, other than Earth, would you prefer to visit and why?
<b>Science</b>	What are the two elements of water?	Why is it important to purify water before drinking it?
<b>Maths</b>	What is the definition of a triangle?	How have triangles influenced architecture?

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