

Developing Opening, Guiding, and Closing Questions

Seminar participants and leaders can use the ideas below to help develop questions appropriate to key stages of the Socratic seminar. Opening questions should get the seminar off to a start; guiding questions should help to examine deeper meanings in the text and to adjust the seminar if it is getting off track; and closing questions should help the group bring the seminar to a close, though not necessarily to a conclusion. Use the template on the following page to record questions in preparation for the seminar.

Opening Questions	
<p>Description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stem from context • Direct participants into the text • Elicit more than one-word responses • Are generally concrete questions 	<p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does this text ask us to do? • What is the theme of the reading? • What significance is this to _____? • What are the assumptions of this text? • Could the two main characters have switched places? Why or why not? • What might be some other good titles? • Is it better to be _____ or _____? • In recent times, what well-known people are like _____?
Guiding Questions	
<p>Description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move participants deeper into the text and to examine the content of the text • Help participants examine their own thinking and encourage revision of ideas • Help participants examine the seminar dynamics to keep it/get it on the right track • May ask for the interpretation of a specific line or passage; often “how” or “why” questions • May ask for clarification • May probe for assumptions, reasons, other interpretations, etc. • Generally move the discussion into the abstract 	<p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What other ideas have we learned about that might help us understand this text? • Why does the main character think _____? • How do you support that position from the text? • How does this idea connect to _____? • If _____ is true, then _____? • Can you define what you mean by _____? • Why do you say that? • What do we already know about _____? • How can you verify or disprove that assumption? • What would happen if _____? • Do you agree or disagree with his/her statement? Why? • What would be an example of _____? • What is another way to look at it? • How are your thoughts now different from your initial ideas? • What would you say to someone who said _____? • How are _____ and _____ similar? • Why is _____ important? • How can we move from debate back to dialogue? • Who has another perspective to offer that will help us re-energize the conversation?
Closing Questions	
<p>Description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish relevance • Connect to the real world • Relate to the lives of the participants • Are generally abstract 	<p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can we do with our understanding of this text? • If you were writing this work, what would the ending be? • How does this idea connect to _____? • Explain the consequences of the ideas in the text. • Predict/justify future developments.

Questions Planning Template

The quality of the learning in a Socratic seminar rests on the kinds of questions asked. Keep these guidelines in mind as you prepare questions below and as you think of additional questions while in the middle of the seminar:

- Be sure your questions are based on the text.
- Ask questions that are complex and require participants to think beyond what is directly stated in the text.
- Ask open-ended questions; don't ask YES/NO questions.
- Ask questions to which there are no right or wrong answers.
- Regularly ask "Why?" "How do you know?" and "Why is this important?" to help participants expand their thoughts and responses.
- Ask questions that require participants to explain their reasoning, their assumptions, and to examine possible misunderstandings.

Opening Questions	Guiding Questions	Closing Questions