



## Asking questions: how to make it easier for people to answer

When we communicate with each other, we use questions all the time. For example:

- 'Do you have anything you want to say?'
- 'What time do you want to meet?'

The way a question is asked may affect whether someone can:

- tell you what they think
- give you the information you require.

There are generally two ways of asking questions.

### Open questions

An open question cannot be answered with just 'yes' or 'no'. For example:

- 'What do you think about the point Mr. Smith just made?'

The person who answers can give as much or as little information as they want or are able to.

### Closed questions

A closed question can be answered with 'yes' or 'no'. For example:

- 'Do you agree with the point Mr. Smith just made?'

Some people with communication support needs will find closed questions easier to understand and answer.

Closed questions focus on one piece of information at a time. They offer a clear choice. They can be answered with a single word. If only 'yes' or 'no' is required, the answer can be given:

- verbally
- with a shake or nod of the head
- by pointing to a word or symbol written on a piece of paper:

✓  
Yes

X  
No

?  
Maybe

## Questions offering two alternatives

Questions can also be easier to answer if just two alternatives are given at one time. For example:

- Do you think we should spend more on housing or transport?’

Just by changing the way you ask a question, you can enable an individual to take a more active role in a variety of situations.

### Examples

Here are some examples of open and closed questions you can use in a variety of situations, including:

- on the telephone
- face to face
- in written or online documents.

Open:	'When shall we arrange to speak again?
Closed:	I can ring again on Thursday. Is that OK? I can ring at 3 o'clock. Is that OK?
Open:	What special requirements do you have?
Closed:	Do you need help finding the meeting room? Do you need a pen and paper?
Open:	What organisation are you with?
Closed:	Are you with (name of organisation)?
Open:	Which documents do you need?
Closed:	Do you need a copy of the agenda?

## Further examples of open and closed questions

Open:	What do you think about what the speaker said?
Closed:	Do you agree with what the speaker said about rubbish collection?
Open:	How would you like the meeting to be recorded?
Closed:	Would you like the meeting recorded in writing? Would you like the meeting recorded on tape?
Open:	What did you think about today? Did you think the meeting room was well-equipped?
Closed:	Did the meeting go on for too long? Did you find the speaker interesting?
Open:	How would you like to follow-up what we just discussed?
Closed:	Will you ask the council about the new rubbish collections? Will you get back to me with their response? Could you let me know by the end of the week?
Open:	What do you think about arranging another meeting?
Closed:	Shall we meet again next Month? Would you like to meet here?

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