

# Asking Good Questions

Asking questions is a great way to involve your audience in your interpretive program or interaction and to get them thinking, as opposed to just listening. Use the tips below to ensure you are incorporating questions into your programs as effectively as possible.

## Some tips:

- After asking a question, wait a few seconds, even if one or two people have already answered. This gives all visitors time to think and formulate a response.
- Really listen to the answers you get. You'll be surprised what visitors have to say.
- Avoid taking the first right answer. Do some exploring. "Does anyone else have ideas?"
- Always credit the answer. "Great answer", "I never thought of that before."
- Avoid saying "no" or "wrong" for incorrect answers. Instead say, "Good try" or "You're on the right track..."
- Make your first question an easier question. This will make your audience feel good about themselves & want to continue interacting with you.
- Is there a point to your questions? Do they relate to the theme of your program?
- Ask different types of questions to keep the interaction varied & more interesting.
- Avoid too many questions that require a single word answer like "yes" or "no". You are not trying to quiz the visitors, you are trying to draw out new ideas and start a conversation.
- Use questions to gauge how effective your conversation or program is for your audience.
  - If visitors appear engaged, are answering questions & getting involved, you are likely doing a great job and asking appropriate questions.
  - If visitors are having trouble answering questions correctly, adjust the complexity of your questions & the information you are delivering.
    - When this happens, check in with the visitors again by finding out more about them & what they already know
    - Ask open ended questions that don't have a "wrong" answer
  - If visitors are not answering questions, adjust the complexity of your questions & check in with them again – you may be asking questions that are too difficult.
    - If they continue to offer minimal feedback/answers, give them an "out".
      - Tell them about what else might they be interested in seeing in other parts of the museum.
      - To avoid this problem, always remember to PAUSE in your conversations! This makes it easier for visitors to play an equal role in the conversation – they can ask questions about what they are most interested in or end the conversation if they want to move onto something else.
- Questions are good, but... Don't ask too many! Choose your questions carefully and thoughtfully. Balance questions with cool facts & other storytelling/interpretive techniques.

# Types of Questions

## Surveying Questions

- To help you find out more about your audience (usually a quick yes/no question, but may be knowledge testing).
  - “Where are you from?”
  - “What’s the coolest thing you’ve seen in the museum today?”
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ?

## Focusing Questions

- To focus attention on a particular animal or item of interest.
  - “Can you all see the feather pattern on this bird?”
  - “Where do you think the mouth is on this sea star specimen?”
  - “Does anybody know what those bones on the blue whale might be used for?”
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ?

## Comparison Questions

- To bring out the differences and similarities between things.
  - “What are the biggest differences between these moths and these butterflies?”
  - “What do we have in common with whales?”
  - “What does this feel like? Does it remind you of something else?”
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ?

## Application Questions

- To get your audience to see how certain information applies in different circumstances (confirms basic understanding of rules & principles).
  - “Why do you think wolves have teeth like this?”
  - “If Darwin was right when he said that the “fittest” animals survive, what advantage do you think this animal gets being able to run so fast?”
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ?

## Problem Solving Questions

- To get your audience to come up with solutions to problems.
  - “If you were a tropical fish, what are some ways you could protect yourself from predators?”
  - “What could we do to help/protect frogs?”
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ?