



Use of Probing Questions

Objectives



To learn the importance of using probing questions during tutoring sessions.



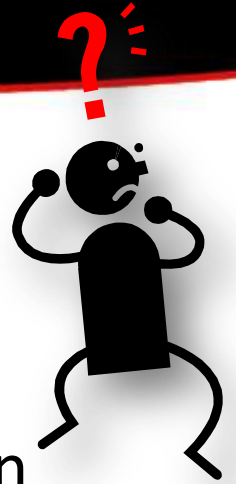
Questioning



Questioning is important in three ways:

1. To evaluate what the tutee knows
2. To help the tutee learn the material
3. To check for comprehension

Why ask questions instead of providing answers?



Asking questions requires the tutee to be **active** in learning using his/her knowledge to solve a problem.

The tutee's answer will also provide information as to what is understood and what needs more work.

Strictly providing answers encourages students to become passive learners.

Active Learning vs. Passive Learning

Studies have shown that learning is retained as follows:

10% of what we **read**

20 % of what we **hear**

30% of what we **see**

50 % of what we **see** and **hear**

70% of what we **say**

90% of what we **say** as we **do**

Evaluate what the tutee knows

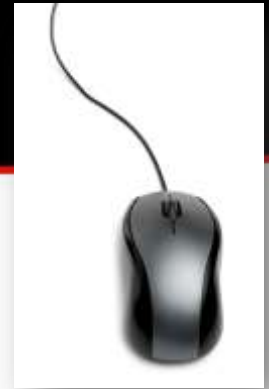
Tutees often claim they know little or nothing about a subject.

At the beginning of every new concept/problem, ask simple questions to assess the tutee's knowledge about the subject.

Tutees almost always know **more** than they think.



Active Learning



Let the tutee **have** the pencil.

Let the tutee **look up** the information in the book.

Let the tutee **draw** the diagram.

Give control back to the tutee.

Let the tutee have control of the mouse/keyboard.

Let Your Tutee Do the Work

Learning is frustrating.

Part of the learning process is getting things incorrect.

If you are “**showing**” everything to your tutee, any successes are yours, not your tutees.

Don't do the thinking for them.

The more independent they become, the better tutor you are.

A tutor should be working his/her way out of a job.



What Are Probing Questions?

Probing questions require tutees to elaborate on the response given to an earlier question.

Such questions indicate to the learner that the original response was in the right direction but was not adequate.

They are intended to help the tutee think more deeply about the issue at hand.

Ask Probing Questions



Probing questions **follow up** on a **tutee's** contribution.

- *“What will happen if what you said is true?”*
- *“What made you think that?”*
- *“What is the opposite of this position?”*
- *“You’re correct. The answer to this question is false. What would be needed to make it true?”*



Clarification

When the tutee gives **vague** answers or **not enough information**, seek to further understand him/her by asking for clarification.

*What exactly did you mean by
_____?*

What, specifically, will you do next week?

Could you tell me more about _____?

Purpose



Sometime tutees say things where the purpose of why they said it is not clear. Ask them to justify their statement or dig for underlying causes.

- *Why did you say that?*
- *What were you thinking about when you said?*

Relevance



If your tutee seems to be going off-topic, you can check whether what he/she is saying is relevant to the main purpose of the inquiry.

Is that relevant to the main question?

How is what you are saying related to what I asked?

Completeness and Accuracy

You can check that they are giving you a full and accurate account by probing for more detail and checking against other information you have. Sometimes people make genuine errors, which you may want to check.

- *Is that all? Is there anything you have left out?*
- *How do you know that is true?*
- *How does that compare with what you said before?*

Repetition

One of the most effective ways of getting more detail is simply by asking the same question again. You can use the same words or you can rephrase the question (perhaps they did not fully understand it the first time).

What did you do next?

What steps did you use?

Probing Questions

A tutor should try to actively engage the tutee in the learning process.

If possible, try to use the tutee's own experience to get him/her involved. Ask questions that will help tutees develop the concept (not memorize the process).

Example: If you take 3 steps north and 2 steps south, how far are you from the starting point?

What math concept is being illustrated in this example?

Probing Questions

Encourage your tutee to think by avoiding questions with a “**yes**” or “**no**” answer.

You must also demonstrate patience with your tutee.

Questions that require thought will take more than the usual **5** to **10** seconds.

Therefore, **WAIT**; give your tutees **TIME TO THINK**.



Silence

A common misconception of new tutors is that your tutee should **ALWAYS** feel comfortable.

Sometimes, just being patient while waiting for a response will yield results.

It is often difficult for a tutor to anticipate the amount of time a tutee needs to process the information.



Listen

- **LISTEN** – Actually listen to your tutee’s responses.
- Listening is an acquired skill.
- Give your full attention to the person speaking.
- Slow down and concentrate on what your tutee is saying.
 - *Is he/she grasping the concept?*
 - *Can he/she explain it easily or does it take some effort?*
 - *Is his/her body language saying anything?*
- Let the tutee finish before you begin to talk.
- Ask questions. This shows that you are listening.

Active Listening



Good tutors are good listeners.

Listening sets the stage for the tutee to be able to learn by his/her own talking, questioning and/or thinking out loud.

The goal of listening is to let the speaker experience being understood.

Gauging Your Tutee's Comprehension

Don't assume knowledge. Start with the basics **FIRST**.

Here are some ways to gauge your tutee's comprehension:

- Start with **vocabulary**.
- Make sure the tutee understands all associated terminology.
- Have the tutee **summarize** what you have said.
- **Quiz** the tutee on information you have covered together.
- Have the tutee explain the topic to you as if he/she were the tutor.
- Ask probing questions.

Use Reinforcement

Notice their successes as well as their mistakes.

Use reinforcements, making sure to reinforce improvement without over-exaggerating the tutee's gain.

The more **specific** you are about the gain, the better.

Examples of Reinforcements

VERBAL

“God job on _____!”

“You are really doing much better with _____!”

“I like the way you did _____!”

“All right!”

NONVERBAL

Nod your head.

High-five or give the thumbs up sign.

Smile, look surprised.

Tutoring Tips



1. Ask one question at a time.
2. Be truthful. If you don't know the answer, don't be afraid to admit it.
3. Concentrate on what the tutee is saying.
4. **Listen much. Talk little.**
5. Be consistent with body, voice, and words.
6. Turn off your cell phone during tutoring sessions.