ASKING QUESTIONS

By asking questions we engage in worldview apologetics. We are able to go beyond someone's appearance or behavior in order reveal and engage their worldview.

How you ask questions — the attitude revealed in your style of inquiry — will reveal whether you want to persuade someone of the truth or just win arguments. We hope that you will desire the former so that you can graciously demonstrate Christian living to unbelievers.

Asking questions is an excellent strategy for three reasons. First, it is low risk. If your opponent becomes angry or defensive at your questions, then you can simply stop asking questions, or change the subject.

Second, asking questions helps you to understand your opponent's train of thought — where they began their thinking, how their thinking progressed, and the exact conclusion for which they are trying to argue. In other words, asking questions helps you to understand them. And understanding is a primary step in seeking to persuade people of the truth.

Third, asking questions can help someone to have a better understanding of where *they* stand on an issue. In other words, instead of giving them an explanation, you can cause them to think through their position more clearly.

What sort of questions should we be asking? Start with questions that strike at the heart of your opponent's worldview. Such questions force them to back up and defend their assumptions. Along this line, we suggest a series of *tough questions*.

**Question 1: What do you mean by that?**

Always begin by asking your opponents to define their terms. If they say something like, "There is no such thing as a traditional family left in the United States today," then ask, "What do you mean by traditional family?" If they say "God cannot exist because there is too much evil," then ask, "What do you mean by *evil*?"[[8]](http://www.summit.org/resources/essays/critical-thinking/#8)

**Question 2: How did you come to that conclusion?**

This question is especially helpful in coming to understand how people think. You can find out where their thoughts began, how they progressed, and how they arrived at their conclusion. Along the way, you can ask further questions about any of their points of reasoning.

**Question 3: How do you know that to be true?**

Here we are seeking an understanding of why they believe what they believe. Ask them to supply some good support for what they are claiming to be true.

**Question 4: Why do you believe that you are right?**

We should be ready to ask, "Why do you believe as you do?" This question forces one's opponent to admit when they are simply assuming their beliefs and when they have actually reasoned through their beliefs. It also helps to reveal any evidence they might offer for their arguments. Christians should, in turn, always be ready to give rudimentary reasons for their beliefs on any given subject.

**Question 5: Where do you get your information?**

Students should be trained to ask, "Where do you get the information to prove that what you are saying is true?" This question can help distinguish between mere hearsay and documented data.

**Question 6: What happens if you are wrong?**

Nobody likes to think about the consequences if what they believe is wrong. Yet there have been some outstanding examples of people who were willing to do just that. One such person was Blaise Pascal, a brilliant mathematician, known for his famous wager. It goes something like this: "If I become a Christian and live my life in the service of mankind, and then die only to find out that Christianity is not true, I will have lost nothing. But if I do not become a Christian and live my life selfishly, and then die only to discover that Christianity is true, I will have lost everything." Pascal's wager is a direct way of asking, "What do I have to lose if I am wrong?"[[9]](http://www.summit.org/resources/essays/critical-thinking/#9)

**Question 7: Can you give me two sources that disagree with you and explain why they disagree?**

College professors often hold to one position very strongly against all others. In class, they may assert, either implicitly or explicitly, that what they believe to be true is the objective truth. Therefore, they may give little or no merit to any disagreements, or they may even ridicule their opponents. The astute Christian student will ask such professors to explain clearly the opposing viewpoints, along with good documentation, and then explain why they disagree. In this way, you can see if your professors have weighed different sides of the issues and made informed decisions. The professor has two options: give the merits of the opposing side (thus demonstrating to the class that his is not the only way to think about the issue), or, admit that he has not studied the opposing viewpoints, and has thus made an uninformed decision without weighing all the available information.

**Question 8: Why is this significant?**

Many professors will fail, unless challenged by students, to provide the connection between their worldview and the point they are making. For example, if they claim "people are basically good, not sinful, by nature," you might ask why this point is significant. This might prompt them to explain that this justifies another view, maybe a socialistic view of the world, or elimination of the need for a savior.

**Question 9: How do I know you are telling me the truth?**

If the opponent has any hidden agenda, it will surface at this point. We should not trust someone simply because he has a *Ph.D.* after his name. People are fallible, and we all make mistakes. Remember, the Bereans were *nobler* because they checked the Apostle Paul against the Old Testament (Acts 17:11). A poor professor will respond simply by listing his or her qualifications. A good professor will say "Don't take my word for it. Go check it out for yourself."

**Question 10: Can you give me an alternate explanation for this phenomenon?**

This is a good way to move a discussion back onto logical ground. Many individuals will emotionally assert things like, "His budget cuts are responsible for all of the economic ills in this nation." This is an absurd generalization, something that will become evident when asking this question.