

Universal Intellectual Standards

Clarity

Questions that focus on clarity include:

- Could you elaborate on that point?
- Could you express that point in another way?
- Could you give me an illustration?
- Could you give me an example?
- Let me state in my own words what I think you just said. Tell me if I am clear about your meaning.

If a statement is not clear, you cannot tell whether it is accurate or relevant.

Accuracy

Questions focusing on making thinking more accurate include:

- Is that really true?
- How could we check to see whether that is accurate?
- How could we find out whether that is true?

A statement may be clear but not accurate. To be accurate is to represent something in accordance with the way it actually is.

Precision

Questions focusing on making thinking more precise include:

- Could you give me more details?
- Could you be more specific?

A statement can be both clear and accurate but not precise. To be precise is to give the details necessary for someone to understand exactly what is meant. Be sure the level of specificity, or precision, matches the situation.

Relevance

Questions focusing on relevance include:

- How is this idea connected to the question?
- How does that bear on the issue?
- How does this idea relate to this other idea?

- How does your question relate to the issue we are dealing with?

A statement can be clear, accurate, and precise but not relevant to the question at issue. Something is relevant when it is directly connected with and bears upon the issue at hand.

Depth

Questions focusing on depth of thought include:

- How does your answer address the complexities in the question?
- How are you taking into account the problems in the question?
- How are you dealing with the most significant factors in the problem?

A statement can be clear, accurate, precise, and relevant, but superficial – lacking in depth.

Breadth

Questions focusing on making thinking broad include:

- Do we need to consider another point of view?
- Is there another way to look at this question?
- What would this look like from a conservative standpoint?
- What would this look like from the point of view of ...?

A line of reasoning may be clear, accurate, precise, relevant, and deep but lack breadth. For example, you represent only one viewpoint.

Logic

Questions that focus on making things more logical include:

- Does all of this fit together logically?
- Does this really make sense?
- Does that follow from what you said?
- How does that follow from the evidence?
- Before you implied this, and now you are saying that. I don't see how both can be true.

Significance

Questions that focus on making thinking more significant include:

- What is the most significant information we need to address this issue?
- How is that fact important in context?
- Which of these questions is the most significant?
- Which of these ideas or concepts is the most important?

Fairness

Questions that focus on ensuring that thinking is fair include:

- Is my thinking justified given the evidence?
- Am I taking into account the weight of the evidence that others might advance in the situation?
- Are these assumptions justified?
- Is my purpose fair given the implications of my behavior?
- Is the manner in which I am addressing the problem fair – or is my vested interest keeping me from considering the problem from alternative viewpoints?
- Am I using concepts justifiably, or am I using them unfairly to manipulate someone (to selfishly get what I want)?

To be justified is to think fairly in context and in accord with reason. If you are vigilant in using the other intellectual standards, you will (by implication) satisfy the standard of justifiability.

Excerpt from: Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2012). *Critical thinking: Tools for taking charge of your learning and your life*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc., pages 92 – 101.