

Asking Good Questions

The goal of this exercise is to enhance your communication and professionalism as well as your critical thinking skills.

1 General Directions

Starting with homework 2 presentations, you can earn points by asking good questions, in person, during a presentation.

These points will count towards the “participation” part of your grade.

You may earn a maximum of 2 points per class meeting; this is to encourage you to think about your questions, to avoid overwhelming the presenters with questions, and to give everyone a chance.

Questions are to be created and asked individually.

In order to earn points, questions asked must be substantially different than those asked previously.

Points are awarded (subjectively) by the instructor, considering the rules below for good questions.

2 How to Ask a Question

To ask a question during a class meeting, raise your hand. The presenters or the instructor will select questions to be asked if there are several people raising their hands at the same time.

3 Basic Rules

In a professional setting, questions should aim to help the enterprise. (That is, imagine that you are working for the same enterprise that the presenters are working for.)

3.1 Good Questions (Do's)

Do keep your question brief, a single sentence is best.

Do keep your question focused on one thing; the best questions are focused.

Do ask to clarify a point of the presentation that is both unclear and central to the presentation. The best clarification questions bring up points that are essential to the enterprise and the presentation's proposal.

Do try to build on the good points made in the presentation or argument and try to get the presenters to strengthen their proposal.

Do ask questions that lead the presenters to explore missing considerations, such as ethical or financial considerations.

Do ask questions that are open-ended, which would be answered in more than one word.

Do ask questions that bring up missing issues or faulty logic, but do so in a constructive way. For example, ask how the presenters would handle an issue (without saying explicitly that it was missed).

Do use a neutral tone; the best questions use no adjectives.

3.2 Bad Questions (Don'ts)

Don't ask a question that are personal or will harass the presenters, such questions are unprofessional.

Don't try to make a joke or ask a question to be funny.

Don't ask for a clarification of some point that is not important to the presentation.

Don't ask for a clarification that has an obvious answer.

Don't ask questions just to show off your knowledge.

Don't make a statement in the form of a question, instead ask a question that actually seeks some information.

Don't ask questions that would take the presentation in a completely different direction; their goal is not to be questioned, although you may question the extent to which it helps the enterprise or other considerations.

Don't mix multiple topics in a single question, keep the question focused on one topic.

Don't ask questions that will embarrass the presenters.