

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, either in person or in the Zoom chat, during a presentation, or in a Webcourses discussion post before the next class meeting.¹

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 chat 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.

If your question is asked during the live class meeting time (in person or in the Zoom chat), then it can earn up to 2 points.

Questions can also be asked after the live class meeting time, in the discussion on Webcourses, but such question can only earn up to 1 point. After the live class meeting, questions can only earn points if asked within 48 hours of the start of the live class meeting that they pertain to.

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 either raise your hand (when in the class in person) or use the “Chat” feature of Zoom and address your message to “Everyone.” Using the chat instead of speaking will avoid interrupting the speaker and allow preservation (and grading) of questions. Addressing your question to “Everyone” will allow the instructor to see it.

Using the chat will be especially valuable if we are running out of time during class for questions, as it will record your question.

The instructor will select some questions from the chat to actually ask the presenters, adjusting for time.

After the live class meeting is over, you can ask a question by posting your question in a discussion on Webcourses within 48 hours of the live class meeting’s start 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.

¹Talk to the instructor if an issue, such as a medical problem or an excused absence, makes this timing impossible for you.

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 highly 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 to show off your knowledge.

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