A Few (of Many) Sentence Patterns for Questions

(Who? What? When? Where? Why? Which? How? How many? How much?)

# Practice to make sure that you can:

# use these sentence patterns to ask questions (Note: In your exam session, you get marks for clearly asking a question, even a simple question. For top marks, your questions need to be interesting.)

* understand and answer questions made using these patterns

1. What do you mean by <word or concept>?
2. On your third slide, in the first equation, what does the second term represent?
3. Under what conditions does <some phenomenon> occur?
4. When was this problem first posed?
5. When is <option, thing, method> better than the other standard ways?
6. On slide <number> where does the factor of \_\_\_ in your equation come from?
7. Where do you see this research leading?
8. Why has this question stayed open for so long? Why is this problem so hard?
9. Why is your <method, proof, thing> better than previous solutions?
10. Which of these methods is <superlative>? (e.g. cheapest, fastest, easiest, most popular)
11. How does a/the <piece of equipment> work?
12. How does your work relate to <some previous paper or work>?

*Questions can be formed by reordering a statement’s words. “This is true.” / “Is this true?”*

1. Is <name of technique> a well-known method?
2. Is <thing, technique> a recent discovery? Has <thing> been known for long?
3. Does this work have significant practical benefits or is it of purely theoretical interest?
4. Have you tried <some technique> to <do something>?
5. I’m unclear about <this part, technique>. Could you explain further?
6. Could you explain <this part> again?
7. Would you please repeat your explanation of \_\_\_?

**What if you can’t answer a question? (It is considered poor form to just say “~~I don’t know~~.”)**

*Note: You are not allowed to ignore the question and just go on to the next question.*

Why can’t you answer the question?

* Maybe the person has a bad English accent and you don’t *understand* the question
* Maybe the person is very confused and the question doesn’t make sense
* Maybe the question is new to you and you can’t think up an answer right away
* Maybe the question is known to you but the answer is very difficult or you don’t know a good answer

First, ask the questioner to repeat the question (even if you understood it the first time).

“Would you please repeat the question?”

* That gives you some time to think and to listen for words you do recognize.
* Listen for **key words** to help you guess what the question is or to find a related, simpler question that you *can* answer.
* Note: You can only ask the questioner to repeat the question ONCE.
* Note: You cannot ask *every* questioner to repeat his/her question.

So, you’ve got the question repeated and you now know a couple of key words in it. How do you respond?

**Option 1:** Answer a simpler question related to key word(s) you recognize in the question.

* “This is related to the question of ... For that we know …”
* “If we limit this question to … the answer is … For the general case nobody knows.”

E.g. If the question is about an *n*-dimensional case, maybe you can answer it for the 2-dimensional case.

**Option 2:** Give an appropriate “non‑answer”, one that fits the situation.

* “That is an interesting question that I hope to investigate later.”
* “This is a good open question. The answer is unknown.”
* “That’s a good question. Unfortunately, I don’t have enough information to comment on it at this time.”
* “My data does not supply an answer for that question.”
* “That question is an excellent one, but it is beyond the scope of our research.”
* “That question is too complex to answer here but I’d be glad to discuss it with you after this session.”
* “Let’s discuss this issue after the session” can be used at most once but **can handle almost any problem**. ***Remember it as your emergency option!*** Saying it is much better than freezing or saying “I don’t know”.