



**That's a good question!**



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## Scope of this talk

- Scope
  - Discuss what technical writers ask SMEs
  - Practice/get comfortable with questioning
  - Improve questioning skills

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## Out of scope

- Survey questions
- Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives
- Linguistics
- Syntax
- Philosophical/ethical questions

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## Agenda

- Why care?
- Who needs discovery skills?
- What types of questions are available to you?
- What to avoid in asking questions?
- How to answer questions most productively?

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## Why should you care?

- You'll save time by preparing questions.
- You'll get the information you need.
- You'll get the right answer to the right question.
- You'll save money.
- You'll avoid unasked, expensive questions.

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## Classical questions

Questions have been important throughout history:

- Cicero's *De Inventione* asks:
  - Quis (who)
  - Quid (what)
  - Quomodo (how)
  - Ubi (where)
  - Quando (when)
  - Cur (why)

Marcus Tullius Cicero, 106-43 B.C.



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## Types of questions

- Permission
- Open-ended
- Closed
- Catchall
- Checking
- Probing
- Encouragers
- Restatement/paraphrase
- Reflecting

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## Good questioning strategy:

Relate to interviewee

- "I care about your issues."
- "I am honest."
- "I do not have an axe to grind."
- "I want to understand your truth."
- "I meet my commitments."

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## To assume = ?

- We often create our own reality
- We make things up
- Example clues
  - House
  - Bars
  - Cold

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## Good questioning strategy

- Lean toward audience.
- Focus on them when not writing.
- Take notes.
- Tape record if possible.

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## Good listening strategy

- Study non-verbals.
  - Adjust your body language.
- Nod head if appropriate.
- Look them in the eye if appropriate.

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## After the interview

- Leave a door open for the SME to contact you if he/she thinks of anything else.
- Ask for the right to do that yourself (get in touch afterwards with further questions)

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## What should you avoid?

Grilling	Aim for dialogue, not interrogation
<u>Leading questions</u>	Don't use questions to state your opinion
<u>Two questions in one (double-barreled)</u>	Separate out
Cultural insensitivity	Not every culture likes being questioned
Inadequate wait time	Count 10 seconds

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## What should you avoid?

Impulse to editorialize	Don't say, "You seemed incensed at that situation..."
Statement masquerading as a question	(Directed at the President): "You have been accused of letting the 9/11 threat mature too far, but not letting the Iraq threat mature far enough. Could you respond to that general criticism?"

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## Learn to question

- Observe, observe, observe!
- Listen, listen, listen!
- Practice, practice, practice!
- Hang out with a 2-year old
- Write down questions all day
- Play 20 Questions online

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## The truth about questions...

The size of your question determines the size of your answer.

Mark Victor Hansen

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## Contact me!

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