

# The Art and Science of Asking Good Questions



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## Introduction

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The art of asking a good question is an age-old quest. Socrates taught his devout followers not by answering, but by asking a question in return. Shakespeare's Hamlet mused his life's existence with "To be? Or not to be?" Even Winnie the Pooh's friend Eeyore taps into something with his rhetorical pondering, "Why bother?"

### ***Questions are the gateway into relationships and insights.***

While we certainly don't need to wax philosophic on a daily basis, live meetings are the perfect venue to ask good questions for more data-driven purposes. By utilizing engagement technology for polling with strategically crafted queries, we can capture audience insight on a whole new level.

We have designed a high-level guide to explore best practices for surveys, polling, and how to harness the power of both to capture better data that outlasts the event.

Great questions transform live meetings from unilateral events with little interaction into dynamic hubs of mutual engagement. These are the kinds of conferences that attendees love and return to annually. They bring their friends, become brand evangelists, and experience buy-in for events and products in revolutionary ways.



# Surveys v. Polls: What's the Difference?

Despite the misconception, surveys and polls are not the same thing. While they share an inquisitive nature, each gather diverse results using different means.

## SURVEYS

Surveys are collections of questions and are typically presented all at once. Survey creators want to know about their audience and know what their audience knows. Asking multiple questions at one time is a necessary component. Because surveys are longer and more involved, including an unrelated question just for fun is a great way to keep attendees engaged and interested.

## POLLING

Polling is the “quick and dirty” of questionnaires. Polls look to capture information rapidly at a single moment in time. These questions aim for gut-level responses, emotional reactions, and knee-jerk choices. Unlike surveys, polls are typically pushed out to the audience one question at a time.

While polling questions can be serious, they can also be fun, ice-breaker type inquiries that open the door to further conversation. With engagement technology, polling results can be quickly tabulated to serve as a catalyst for conversation.



## SNAP POLLING

Snap polling is an even simpler version of polling that occurs without interrupting the event. Speakers can be leading a session and progressing through a series of slides while “screen-in-screen” snap polling questions appear in the corner. Because of the simplified nature, the attention required to respond does not detract from the presentation itself. Beyond words, snap polls may just ask the audience to choose an emoticon that represents their feelings at that moment.

Surveys, polls and snap polls reveal entirely different types of responses, but used in combination can illustrate an in-depth, comprehensive picture of the audience.

# How Can You Energize Question Asking?

Sometimes audiences are gun-shy about responding to questions. Other times they are bored or ambivalent. How can you overcome these common anti-engagement afflictions to start the dynamic flow of question and response?

## Know Your Audience

Before you write or ask a question, you need to have a firm grasp of the audience. Who are they? What is the age break-down or demographic specifics? Why are they at the event? What motivates them and what makes them interested or passionate? What kind of understanding do they already have about the session content? What are their personal learning objectives?

Good question asking is a give-and-take relationship. Some questions will be asked simply because they start a conversation and provide a low barrier to engagement. Others will truly garner the type of information that is valuable to data users.

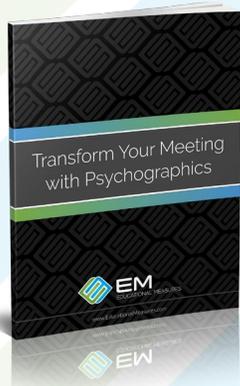
## Go Fishing

Just like successful fishing requires the right bait cast in the right location at the right time, good questions asked appropriately are an art.

One way to get more and better responses or audience-asked questions is simply by inviting them to do so. With an "ask a question" feature already embedded in your engagement app, remind the participants to use it. Sometimes people just need permission to become a part of the experience.

Another surefire way to start a conversation is with controversy. We're not recommending that you alienate audience members for the sake of entertainment, but instead bring up the subjects on which people have definitive opinions. Ask these questions with tact and grace and welcome differing opinions. Engagement will follow.

You can also ask questions before an event to differentiate the breakdown of your audience. By understanding preferences, personality types, and learning styles, [you can craft the questions and context to best generate responses](#).



Competitive learners may be incentivized by a leaderboard or point system, effectively gamifying audience experiences. Introverts might find comfort in anonymity. Auditory learners may prefer spoken questions, while visual learners will want something tangible and written.

The best questions are relevant to the audience and tailored to their preferences and affinities. While relevance may require extra work initially, the effort will pay off exponentially with increased response rates and more comprehensive information on the back end.

# What Kinds of Questions are Possible?

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All questions are not created equal, and your inquiry options are more numerous than many might think. Audiences get bored with predictability and are immune to seeing the same format time and time again. By changing the types of questions and responses, we can insert the necessary excitement to keep the audience's attention throughout a session or course of an event.

- **Multiple Choice, Choose One:** This is about as basic as it gets - every high school student's favorite test type. Predetermined answers are offered, and the attendee simply chooses the one that best represents his or her opinion.
- **Multiple Choice, Choose Many:** A variation on the common theme of multiple choice, this type of questioning allows for a broader spectrum of response. Audience members can select from a specific number of responses, with as many choices as they prefer.
- **Multiple Choice with a Right Answer:** Unlike the other two types of multiple choice, this type of question has a right answer and multiple wrong answers. Questions like these are good indicators of prior knowledge or knowledge retention from an information session.
- **Open Text:** These types of questions allow for an even greater freedom of response. The presenter asks a question and audience members reply with long or short open text responses. In contrast with the strict parameters of multiple choice questions, expect wide variation in response and more than a few outlier answers.
- **Priority Ranking:** Ranking questions are less about selection and more about preferences. From a predetermined list of options, participants gauge their responses by listing answers in a specific order and weighing priorities.
- **Matrix:** A matrix question is a closed-ended question that utilizes a table format. With this set list of column choices, attendees can respond to multiple topics while using a single, standard scale. Some forms of Matrix questioning allow respondents to weight their answers as well. This is the perfect format for evaluations or comparisons.

# The “How” and “Why” Behind Good Questions

We know that good questions are important, and we know that understanding the audience is the first step in writing those questions, but what comes next? After forming a clear picture of audience needs and the type of data that you want to capture, utilize these best practices while writing the questions themselves:

## How to Write Questions

- **Be relevant** | Make sure your questions are relevant to the audience, topic and learning objectives.
- **Be clear** | Use terminology that gets right to the point; don't confuse the issue with superfluous words or concepts.
- **Be concise** | Keep questions concise so that the major point is not missed or obscured.
- **Be brief** | Limit answers to no more than five choices. If you cannot limit choices, make sure that the response options are brief so the audience does not get lost reading each choice.
- **Maintain flow** | Include short bursts of 3-4 questions mixed in with your slides to keep the audience engaged. Don't take them out of the session flow too long or interrupt too often.
- **Be consistent** | Consider pre- and post-test questions. Include a questionnaire at the beginning of the lecture and summarize your presentation with post-test questions followed by a comparative analysis of both sets of answers.



## Why Utilize Surveys and Polls?

Ultimately, asking questions increases engagement. It enables the audience to understand that they are valuable participants instead of mere spectators. Speakers should utilize various engagement tactics throughout their presentation to keep things fresh and relevant in order to capture the most information from second screen technology. A few of these strategies include:

- **Knowledge Gap Identification** | By asking questions aimed at core concepts at the beginning of a session, speakers can understand what their audience knows and use the results to adjust their instructional approach accordingly.
- **Measurement of Knowledge Transfer** | We can gauge how much the audience gleaned from a session by asking the same questions at the beginning and end of the session. An increase in correct responses or information detail is a positive sign of effective knowledge transfer.
- **Participant Profiling** | Asking demographic or psychographic questions is a great way to understand your audience and target specific needs and preferences.
- **Subject Understanding** | Private polling is a more accurate measurement of subject knowledge because the results are anonymous. It avoids the "crowd psychology" effect of hand-raising where people tend to group around the most popular choice even though it may not be their personal opinion.
- **Research** | When you have acquired a highly-specialized audience, you can use surveys to do research on industry trends. In many cases, these results can be mutually beneficial and helpful when shared with the audience as well.
- **Fun** | Beyond official data needs and information requirements, questions are fun. Keep the audience on their toes and promote camaraderie by asking silly questions that drive interaction. People who are having fun are more engaged.



## Applying Your Knowledge

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The simple addition of questions in your presentation is the first step toward increasing engagement. More advanced techniques can be integrated over time to drive better data capture. As you get comfortable with the various surveying and polling options, don't be afraid to take risks and try new things.

Innovation is the final step toward effective question asking. Once you have a solid understanding of your audience and your information goals, be creative and have fun.

Good questions produce good data. Great questions produce amazing insight.





## About Educational Measures

Educational Measures is the leading provider of live meeting analytics and engagement technology. Our next-generation EM ARRAY® second screen technology takes ordinary meetings and turns them into dynamic experiences. Live meeting data and analytics drive actionable insight for continual improvement. Our customers increase audience engagement by up to 20X, surprise attendees with more than 25 interactive capabilities and continually improve meeting impact with data-driven insight. Educational Measures® and Educational Measures ARRAY® are trademarks of Educational Measures LLC.

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