



## Enhancing Student Support: Personal Tutor group sessions

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### Graduate Attributes: Research and Enquiry: Questioning and Rational Enquiry

The **aim** of this short session is to discuss the importance of good questioning skills and exercising rational enquiry in the context of students' own academic discipline and also as an integral part of developing employability. Notes to tutors do include some ideas on adaptation or modification: the plan below outlines potential activities that may be undertaken by the tutor during the session in order to meet the objective and the outcomes; *it isn't however a fixed structure and should be adjusted according to the needs and expectations of the learners (and their particular discipline and research culture!)*.

This introductory session is planned to take between 45 and 60 minutes (depending on group size, level and needs of students, etc), with an interactive, student-centred focus from the start and reflective aspects enabling the students to translate their learning into their own unique context. Tutees will be encouraged to record and share any reflections with their peer group after the session and possibly design a plan for working with those abilities, if relevant.

#### SESSION OBJECTIVES

By the end of the session learners/tutees will have:

1. Discussed common issues and challenges around questioning skills in general: e.g. is it easy to ask a good question?
2. Identified basic types of questions and discussed when and how to use them
3. Defined the concept of rational enquiry and discussed the culture of rational enquiry in own disciplinary context: to what extent can you question, what evidence do you need, what are the benefits and risks/challenges of exercising rational enquiry

4. Explored the relevance and value of questioning skills and exercising rational enquiry in the context of own employability
5. Reflected on own motivations and aspirations with regards to developing questioning skills and exercising rational enquiry

Activity and proposed timing	Learning approaches or methods used	Resources	Objective	Comments (e.g. ideas for adaptation)	Potential challenges	Potential benefits
Reflective intro  10 mins	<p>Explain aims of session (<u>slide 2</u>) and lead into the topic, getting students to think and engage: you may start with an open 'agree/disagree' question to get students thinking: '<b>University study is all about answering questions</b>'. Quick open voting or small and focused group discussions may be used here.</p> <p>Follow with <u>slide 3</u>: remaining reflective questions.</p> <p>The tutor may now ask more scaffolded reflective questions, to expand on the topic, e.g.  <i>- is it easy to ask a good question? Why/why not? What makes a good question?</i></p>	PowerPoint, projector, handout with reflective questions	1 and 3	This section has been scaffolded and should be adapted to suit the students and their level of university life awareness.		
Types of questions	<p><u>Slide 4</u>: Proposed activities:</p> <p>Students get into small groups of 3 or 4 They can either:</p>	Blank sheets of paper (one	n/a	The first option may work better	Timing should be kept to 10 mins max to	Engages the students into problem-

<p>Up to 7 mins max</p>	<p>- get a problem (or mystery) scenario, preferably from own discipline or sector, and list as many questions as they would ask in order to try and solve the problem (they should write these questions down). To save time, the problem scenario should be prepared by the tutor beforehand</p> <p>- for a more light-hearted option (and with no tutor prep required), students can take turns to present an 'a little known fact' about themselves and the rest of the group ask them questions to find out more; OR they can present a fact from their life and the rest of the group try to establish whether it is true or a lie. Again, they should write these questions down.</p>	<p>per group), pens: to note the questions. Problem-solving activity: printout of the scenario</p>		<p>with students from later years and can be differentiated further to make it challenging and engaging enough. The other two options are more of ice-breakers and may work better with new students</p>	<p>keep the activity focused</p>	<p>solving processes at the same time; motivates to ask a variety of questions</p>
<p>Questioning and enquiring in HE: shifting the focus 10 minutes</p>	<p><u>Slide 5:</u> Depending on the group, tutor may elicit the types of questions from the students (give students some guidance or prompts if needed). They should be able to look back at their questions from the previous activity and at least mark 'c' (closed) and 'o' (open) next to each.</p> <p>Depending on group, this activity can be developed to include other types of questions such as probing, leading and rhetorical questions (see PowerPoint)</p>	<p>PowerPoint (enclosed), projector</p>	<p>2 and 3</p>	<p>The tutor can choose the level of complexity in questioning types to suit the group</p>	<p>With so many types of questions, this stage in the session needs to be very <b>focused not to lose the central theme and emphasis of the session (shifting focus onto HE</b></p>	<p>Eliciting rather than 'telling them' engages students as active participants and builds on their prior knowledge and peer learning</p>

	<p>Each question type should be briefly discussed: e.g. when to ask which type of question (purpose)</p> <p>The students could then identify the types of questions asked in their discipline most frequently and explain reasons for it.</p> <p>This should be followed <u>by slide 6</u> and a small group discussion, aimed to shift the students' thinking from simple questioning to exercising critical enquiry and understanding the cultures of research and enquiry.</p>				<b>and employability)</b>	
<p>Wider context: Employability 10 -15 mins</p>	<p>Students produce a mind map or a diagram<sup>1</sup> in small groups to identify as many reasons <b>WHY</b> the ability to ask good questions <b>AND</b> exercise rational enquiry may be useful in their academic life as a student and in their prospective work and/or career, and <b>HOW</b>. This is aimed at students practising <b>translating</b> their Graduate Attribute to their specific and personal employability context</p> <p>It is important to leave at least 5</p>	<p>PowerPoint, projector. A3 pieces of paper for mind map/diagram</p>	<p>3, 4 and 5</p>	<p>It is important to leave at least 5 minutes at the end of this activity for students to be able to share their ideas with a wider student group and the tutor.</p>		<p><i>Note: a separate session has been designed to focus more on the University's Graduate Attributes and employability and can be used to introduce</i></p>

<sup>1</sup> Helpful guide to making various types of diagrams: [http://www.open.edu/openlearn/money-management/management/guide-diagrams?LKCAMPAIGN=Google\\_grant\\_GenericOU&MEDIA=olexplore&gclid=CPGI39KirsACFSQXwwodpl4AcQ](http://www.open.edu/openlearn/money-management/management/guide-diagrams?LKCAMPAIGN=Google_grant_GenericOU&MEDIA=olexplore&gclid=CPGI39KirsACFSQXwwodpl4AcQ)

	minutes for students to be able to share their ideas with a wider student group and the tutor. Mind maps could be put on the wall for sharing.					<i>students to these concepts</i>
Close and very short reflection  5 mins	<p>On post it notes ask the students to write:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-one (or two) useful things they've learned from the session</li> <li>-one (or two) aspects they may want to improve in their questioning and enquiring abilities: goals for development</li> <li>-one good question they would like to ask (relating to the content or context of the session)</li> </ul> <p>They can leave the questions on the wall/board or drop them in a 'hat' or box when leaving the room</p>	Power Point, projector	5		This should be short (hence post it notes); however the students should be encouraged to practise more in-depth reflection on an ongoing basis (e.g Pebble Pad, My EdGE workbook)	This gives the tutor a bit of feedback on what the students have learned and would like to know about more: may inform the content of further sessions