

## Know the Art of Asking Questions

There's a knack to asking questions, encouraging visitors to participate, and limiting discussion time. Here are a few hints:

### It Takes All Kinds of Questions

To facilitate a conversation, docents are encouraged to lead "inquiry-based" tours. So instead of reading from note cards or tour outline, involve your visitors by asking them different types of questions.

Here are some types of questions (based on the Aschner/Gallagher System of Classifying Questions) you can ask on your Historical Perspectives tours.

- **Cognitive/Memory questions** ask what visitors already know or can see. Answers involve simple recall and are either right or wrong.
  - For example, "Have you ever played an instrument?" or "What are the well-known or famous kinds of music in your region?"
- **Convergent questions** ask visitors to do something with the information they already have or can see. They involve finding similarities, differences, patterns, and/or relationships. Convergent questions ask visitors to categorize, to organize information, or to find a central theme.
  - For example, "Why do you think Detroit is famous for Motown music?"
- **Divergent questions** ask visitors for new ideas or inferences; they are open-ended (no one right answer). To answer divergent questions, visitors must gather information from past experiences, link it to information being explored in the exhibition, and create new understanding and interpretations.
  - For example, "How can new generations be introduced to Motown music and encouraged to create their own Motown sound?"
- **Evaluative questions** ask visitors for judgments, choices, or conclusions. Answers should not be casual opinions. To be valid, answers must come at the end of time spent considering the subject.
  - For example, "Do you think that music festivals help build a sense of community or a shared sense of identity? Why or why not?"

You have probably asked and answered questions like this all your life. It's not important to memorize the names of these types of questions. You'll find that asking questions of all types will come naturally to you as you explore the gallery spaces. Try to use a combination of these types of questions on your tours to keep the discussion lively and interesting.

### It's Worth the Wait

After asking a question, give your visitors some time to respond. Usually, someone will speak up in about ten seconds. This "wait time" may seem endless, but it's worth the wait. If, after ten seconds, your group remains silent, a little coaxing is in order. Rephrase the question or redirect it to an individual. If you still don't get an answer, try someone else. It is important, however, not to intimidate anyone when you address them directly. If no one has a response, you may answer the question yourself and then ask, "Does anyone agree or disagree?" You very likely will get a response. Remember, when asking questions to individuals, make sure to vary your audience sampling. Try to pose your questions to visitors of various ages, genders, ethnicities, and cultures.