Sample Questions for Critical Thinkers

Questions for Clarification

- What do you mean by ____?
- How does ____ relate to ____?
- What do you think is the main issue here?
- Would this be an example, ____?
- Let me see if I understand you; do you mean ____ or ____?

Questions that Probe Purpose

- What is the purpose of ____?
- What was your purpose when you said ____?
- What is the purpose of addressing this question at this time?

Questions that Probe Assumptions

- What are you assuming?
- What is __John__ assuming?
- What could we assume instead?
- You seem to be assuming ____. Do I understand you correctly?
- All of your reasoning depends on the idea that ____. Why have you based your reasoning on ____ rather than ____?
- You seem to be assuming ______. How would you justify taking this for granted?
- Is it always the case? Why do you think the assumption holds here?

Questions that Probe Information, Reasons, Evidence and Causes

- What would be an example?
- How do you know?
- What are your reasons for saying that?
- What other information do we need to know before we can address this question?
- Why do you think this is true?
- Could you explain your reasons to us?
- What led you to that belief?
- Is this good evidence for believing that? Why?
- What difference does that make?
- Who is in a position to know if that is the case?
- What would convince you otherwise?
- What would you say to someone who said ______?
- What do you think is the cause?
• How did this come about?
• How could we go about finding out whether that is true?
• Can someone else give evidence to support that response?

Questions About Viewpoints or Perspectives

• You seem to be approaching this issue from ____ perspective. Why have you chosen this rather than that perspective?
• How would you answer the objection that ____ would make?
• Can/did anyone see this another way?
• What would someone who disagrees with you say?

Questions that Probe Implications and Consequences

• What are you implying by that?
• When you say ____, are you implying that ____?
• But if that happened, what else would also happen as a result? Why?
• What effect would that have?
• Would that necessarily happen or only probably happen?

Adapted from A Thinker’s Guide to The Art of Socratic Questioning by Dr. Richard Paul and Dr. Linda Elder. Based on the Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools