Tips to Writing Good Questions

The goal of good questions is to engage the learner in the activity, think through problems, and develop strategies to complete the learning objectives and change their practice. Questions should strive to measure competence, not just knowledge or verbatim memorization.

Pitfalls to Avoid

Avoid the following pitfalls when developing questions:
- Refrain from True/False questions - learners have an increase change of guessing the correct answer
- Avoid using vignettes of actual cases that may contain atypical features
- Avoid providing extraneous wording in the vignette (question stem)
- Avoid negative phrasing in the question. For example, "Each of the following statements about blood pressure is true EXCEPT:"
- Avoid overly long and complicated response options
- Avoid having the correct option being more specific or longer than other response options
- Do not use "All of the above" as a response option
- Avoid using "None of the above" as a response option
- Avoid vague language in the response options like "usually" or "frequently"
- Avoid use of absolute terms like "Always" and "Never"
- Avoid questions that ask the learner to repeat the presentation back verbatim

Tips

With a little time and consideration of your learner, your questions can have a big impact. Follow these tips to create meaningful learning:
- Design questions to expose misconceptions. Cognitive dissonance piques interest and immediately engages the learner in opening up to new ideas.
- Make questions highly relevant to real-world practice: What would "You" do or frame questions in relationship to the learner's experience or practice.
- Create social comparisons to create a personal baseline and leverage competition. If you can use polling that populates results on screen, use it!
- Ask questions that get your learners to think about how they compare to others.
- Focus on case studies.
- Ask the learner to think through the information they are receiving and apply it to specific scenarios.
- Cite sources and studies to provide opportunities for future learning.
- Provide discussion or rationale for different options.
- Consider how to make "it" stick so learners change behavior.

Consider these examples on how to rewrite certain questions using the tips above. Which is more likely to engage the learner:

OLD Question 1
Studies have shown that what percent of women turning 65 had bone density tests?
    A) 25%
    B) 30%
    C) 50%
    D) 65%
Answer: B

REWRITTEN Question 1
What percent of women do you think ***actually*** get a bone density test?
    A) 25%
    B) 30%
    C) 50%
    D) 65%
Answer: B

Follow-up to Question 1
Which risk is higher? Osteoporosis or breast cancer?
    A) Osteoporosis
    B) Breast Cancer
Correct Answer: Osteoporosis risk is 1 in 4 women. Breast cancer is 1 in 9.

Take it further and ask about the learner's practice:
Follow-up to Question 1: This is a great polling question to show results during a presentation to create social comparisons and make the learning highly relevant.
Have all women in your practice received a bone density test?
    A) Yes
    B) No
    C) Unsure

OLD Question 2
Which of the below statements would build empathy?
   A) See their world
   B) Appreciate them as human beings
   C) Understand Feelings
   D) All of the above

REWRITTEN Question 2
A member of your staff is having a hard time complying with certain new procedures. This staff member is usually a change agent, actively engages in QAPI meetings, and really enjoys developing policies and procedures. This change in behavior and outlook is starting to affect some other staff in a detrimental way. You need this staff member's leadership and excitement about change to encourage other staff to embrace change and comply with new procedures.

How could you engage this staff member without causing further harm?
   A) Invite the staff member to your office and let them know that you are on their side and that it's ok when life gets hard sometimes and that you just need to push through it.
      a. Rationale: This answer is incorrect. Dismissing a staff member's experience can cause resentment and anger. An already burnt-out staff member may take this type of response personally negatively effecting the organization's work culture.

         References:
         Reference 1
         Reference 2
         Reference 3

   B) Invite the staff member to coffee in the lunchroom and ask him/her what's going on. Then explain why the new procedures are important and that you really need the his/her help to get the rest of the team on board.
      a. Rationale: This answer is also incorrect. You did not practice empathy. Although you let the staff member air his/her grievance and explained his/her value to the organization, you failed to really listen, validate their interests/experience, and see their world.

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   C) Ask the staff member to come into your office to chat. Tell the staff member that you appreciate that he/she has always been a driver for change and a great encouragement to other staff. Ask him/her what's different about these new procedures.
      a. Rationale: This answer is correct. You exhibited all of the characteristics of empathy: appreciating the him/her as a human being, understanding his/her feelings, showing him/her that they are valued, and encouraged him/her to share their opinions about the new procedures.

         References:
         Reference 1
         Reference 2
         Reference 3