

Learn the Socratic Method

A practical guide to having deeper, calmer, more thoughtful conversations

The basic idea: Instead of telling someone what to think, use thoughtful questions to help them examine their own thinking.

What the Socratic Method Is

The Socratic method is a way of exploring ideas through questions. You are not trying to prove that you are right. You are helping another person slow down, examine assumptions, consider evidence, and reach a clearer conclusion.

Think of yourself as a guide, not a prosecutor. Your job is to create curiosity—not win the argument.

The 7-Step Conversation Framework

1. START WITH CURIOSITY	"Help me understand how you came to that conclusion."
2. CLARIFY	"What exactly do you mean by that?"
3. IDENTIFY THE ASSUMPTION	"What are you assuming has to be true?"
4. EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE	"What makes you think that?" "What evidence supports that?"
5. LOOK FOR ANOTHER VIEW	"What is another possible explanation?"
6. TEST THE IDEA	"Would that still be true if the situation were different?"
7. INVITE REFLECTION	"After thinking about it, has anything changed for you?"

The Most Important Skill: Ask, Then Pause

A common mistake is asking a question and immediately answering it yourself. Give the other person time to think. You do not need to fill every silence.

Question → Pause → Listen → Reflect → Ask the next question.

Questions That Encourage Thinking

Clarify	"What do you mean by that?"
Explore	"Can you tell me more about that?"
Evidence	"How do you know that?"
Assumptions	"What are you taking for granted?"
Perspective	"How might someone else see this?"
Exceptions	"Is there an example that doesn't fit?"
Consequences	"If that were true, what would follow?"
Values	"Why is that important to you?"

Reflection	"What are you thinking now?"
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How to Use It in a Real Conversation

Imagine someone says: **“Everyone is against me.”**

Instead of: “That’s not true. You’re being dramatic.”

Try:

“What makes you feel that everyone is against you?”

“Is there anyone who isn’t against you?”

“What happened that led you to that conclusion?”

“Is there another explanation for what happened?”

“What information would change your mind?”

A Conversation Map

Person says...	You might ask...
“They don’t respect me.”	“What does respect look like to you?”
“I always mess things up.”	“Always? Can you think of a time when that wasn’t true?”
“I have no choice.”	“What choices do you have, even if none are ideal?”
“They made me angry.”	“What did they do, and what did you choose to do with the anger?”
“That’s just how I am.”	“Do you believe that can never change?”

What NOT to Do

The Socratic method becomes ineffective when it turns into an interrogation or a disguised attempt to make someone admit you are right.

Avoid:

- Asking “gotcha” questions
- Asking five questions at once
- Using sarcasm or ridicule
- Interrupting the person’s answer
- Arguing with every response
- Pretending to be curious when you have already decided the answer
- Using questions to pressure someone into agreeing with you

The Difference Between Curiosity and Manipulation

Curiosity: “What makes you see it that way?”

Manipulation: “Don’t you realize how ridiculous that sounds?”

Curiosity: “What evidence would change your mind?”

Manipulation: “So you admit you have no proof, right?”

Practice Exercise

Choose a belief or statement someone might make. Write three questions that explore it without telling them what they should think.

Statement: _____

Question 1: _____

Question 2: _____

Question 3: _____

Your Socratic Question Toolkit

Use this page as a quick reference during practice.

To clarify	What do you mean? / Can you give me an example?
To explore	What led you to that belief? / Tell me more.
To examine evidence	How do you know? / What supports that conclusion?
To identify assumptions	What are we assuming? / Is that necessarily true?
To broaden perspective	How might another person see it? / What else could be true?
To test consistency	Would that apply in every situation? / What about this example?
To consider consequences	What happens if we follow that idea?
To encourage reflection	What do you think now? / Has your view changed at all?
To move forward	What would you like to do differently?

The Golden Rules

1. Be genuinely curious.
2. Ask one question at a time.
3. Listen to the answer.
4. Do not turn questions into accusations.
5. Let the person discover the contradiction or new possibility themselves.
6. Know when to stop. A good conversation does not require agreement.

A Simple Formula to Remember

Clarify → Explore → Examine → Consider → Reflect

The Socratic method works best when the relationship is respectful and the other person is willing to participate. It is not a substitute for safety, professional intervention, or clear boundaries when those are needed.