



THE PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANT SERVICE EXCELLENCE



Asking questions is a vital part of your communication with customers



OBJECTIVES

After studying this module, assistants will:

- Know the difference between open and closed questions
- Understand when to use each type of question to get the necessary information from a customer.

Questions: open or closed?

Questions that begin with 'who', 'what', 'where', 'why', 'when' and 'how' are known as open-ended questions. These encourage customers to share their information and engage in conversation with you while also having time to pause, think and reflect.

Examples include: "What are the symptoms?" "When did you last smoke?" "How often do you get these symptoms?"

The result is that the interaction becomes an exchange between you and the customer, and less like an interview or interrogation.

Sometimes, you may need to ask questions to ascertain facts or confirm information. In these cases, it would be best to use closed questions, which result in 'yes' or 'no' answers.

Examples include: "Are you in pain?" "Do you

smoke?" "Would you like more information?"

In many situations, it's best to use a combination of open and closed questions. For instance, open questions can be used to initiate conversations and closed questions can confirm any information before you make a recommendation. For example: "What are the symptoms of your rash?" Then: "Is it itchy?"



IN ACTION

Read the following scenario and think about the questions and how this interaction could be improved.



01

Mrs Jones: I'd like to buy a cough medicine please.

Assistant: Is this for you?

Mrs Jones: No.

Note: The assistant's question is closed and does not open up the conversation for Mrs Jones to offer any further information. If the assistant had asked an open question, such as: "Who is the medicine for?" it would have enabled Mrs Jones to answer more fully, for example: "It is for my husband, who has had a cough for three days." This way she has told you answers to two of the WWHAM questions already.

02

Assistant: Does he have a non-productive cough?

Mrs Jones: Yes.

Note: Again, this is a closed question and doesn't encourage dialogue. The assistant should ask: "What are his symptoms?" to enable Mrs Jones to describe them in her own words: "It is a tickly and irritating cough that is keeping him awake at night." It is also best to avoid medical terms such as 'non-productive cough', as many people won't know what this means.

03

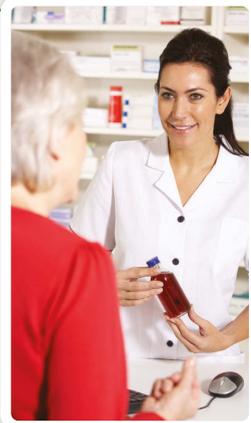
Assistant: Has he tried taking a honey and lemon cough mixture?

Note: This question only elicits a yes or no answer and does not get all of the necessary information. It would have been better for the assistant to ask: "What cough medicine has he tried already?" This would find out if he had used a cough mixture that wasn't appropriate for his symptoms or had not helped.

04

Assistant: Does he take any other medicines?

Note: A closed question is appropriate, but it would be better to ask: "Is he taking any other medication for this or any other reason?" This question is more specific and removes any ambiguity. If the answer is 'yes', you may need to refer to the pharmacist.



Remember!

Use open questions to engage in conversation and elicit full answers; use closed questions to confirm information.

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WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IS TRUE?

- a. The optic nerve takes information from the cornea to the lens
- b. Infective conjunctivitis can be caused by a bacterial or viral infection
- c. A sticky yellow coating on the eyes is a symptom of dry eye syndrome
- d. Artificial tears can treat allergic conjunctivitis



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