

Open-Ended vs Close-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions are questions that allow for unlimited response options. Open-ended questions do not expect a particular answer.

- Where did you go today?
- What was your childhood like?
- How did you decide to enter this profession?
- When would you like to visit the museum?

Close-ended questions are questions that do not allow for various response options. Close-ended questions have specific answers in mind, and they usually lend themselves to yes/no responses. The answers to close-ended questions are much less involved than those of open questions.

- Did you attend the conference?
- Will you eat dinner with us?
- Do you like vanilla ice cream?
- When were you born?

Open-ended questions and close-ended questions elicit very different responses. Consider the following questions, noting the contrast in the kinds of responses they invite:

- 1 What is your favorite ice cream flavor? / Do you like chocolate ice cream?
- 2 How are you feeling? / Are you feeling well?
- 3 What are your plans this evening? / Do you have dinner plans?
- 4 What homework do you have to complete? / Do you have math homework?
- 5 Where is your shirt? / Is your shirt in the closet?
- 6 Where should I buy a new blouse? / Should I buy a blouse at the mall?
- 7 When is your birthday? / Is your birthday in May?
- 8 What books did you read this summer? / Did you read a book from the suggested list?
- 9 Where is your next vacation? / Do you think you will go to Europe soon?
- 10 How did you meet your husband? / Are you married?

When to use open-ended questions and when to use close-ended questions

Open-ended questions are best used when you are trying to learn about a particular subject or when engaging in a meaningful conversation.

Close-ended questions are best used when you want a short, direct answer to a very specific question. They are less personal in nature and are best used when the person asking wants a quick answer.