



Glossary of Protocol Terms (and related suggestions)

Developed in the field by educators affiliated with NSRF.

Clarifying Questions

Clarifying Questions have brief, factual answers. They ask the presenters “who, what, where, when and how.” These are not “why” or “what other approaches have you considered” questions. They can be answered quickly and succinctly, often with a phrase or two. The purpose of clarifying questions is to help the questioner better understand the presenter’s situation; these questions are not likely to offer any “food for thought” to the presenter.

Probing Questions

The purpose of Probing Questions is to help the presenters clarify and expand their own thinking about the matter they have presented to the group. This is the time to ask open-ended questions such as:

- Why...?
- What other approaches have you considered regarding...?”
- What do you think would happen if...?

These questions take longer to answer, and often require deep thought on the part of the presenter(s) before they speak.

Group Discussion

The group talks with each other while the presenter(s) listen and take notes; the presenter(s) are not allowed to speak at this time. It is helpful for the presenters to pull their chairs back slightly away from the group where they can more easily attend to listening and note taking without feeling the need to give eye contact or any other kind of response to the speakers. The group talks about the presenter(s) in the third person, almost as if they are not there. As awkward as this may feel at first, it often opens up a richer conversation, and it is only for fifteen minutes or less! It is the group’s job to offer an analysis of the situation; it is not necessary to solve the problem or offer a definitive answer. Members of the group may wish to characterize their comments as “warm” or “cool” feedback if they wish. Cool feedback is often best received if expressed with some qualification, or asked in the form of a question, e.g. “I wonder if...” rather than “I think he should.” By the same token, it is important for the presenter(s) to listen in a non-defensive manner.

Presenter Response

The point of this time period is *not* for the presenter(s) to respond to everything the group said. Rather, this is a time for the presenter(s) to talk about what were, for them, the most significant comments, ideas and questions they heard. They can also share any new thoughts or questions *they* had while listening to the group. Once the presenter(s) have responded to their satisfaction and wish to engage in a more free-flowing dialogue, they indicate so to the group by inviting group members to share additional comments, ideas and questions.

Reflection/Debrief

It’s important to give everyone a chance to discuss their feelings about the process. Often hearing others talk about how the process worked for them helps people see the value of using a structured protocol.