Closed Questions

Closed questions tend to seek only a one or two word answer (often simply 'yes' or 'no') and, in doing so, limit the scope of the response. Closed questions can be useful for focusing discussion and obtaining clear, concise answers when needed.

Open Questions

Open questions broaden the scope for response since they demand further discussion and elaboration. Open questions will take longer to answer, but they do give the other person far more scope for self-expression and encourage involvement in the conversation.

Reflecting and Clarifying

Reflecting is the process of feeding-back to another person your understanding of what has been said. Reflecting often involves paraphrasing the message communicated to you by the speaker in your own words, capturing the essence of the facts and feelings expressed, and communicating your understanding back to the speaker. It is a useful skill because:

- You can check that you have understood the message clearly.
- The speaker gets feedback as to how the message is received.
- It shows interest in, and respect for, what the other person has to say.
- You are demonstrating that you are considering the other person’s viewpoint.

Summarising

A summary is an overview of the main points or issues raised. Summarising can also serve the same purpose as ‘reflecting’. However, summarising allows both parties to review and agree the communication exchanged between them up to that point in time. When used effectively, summaries may also serve as a guide to the next steps forward.