

The Importance of Questions: Past, Present & Future Questioning

Why is it important to ask questions throughout the sales process?

The questions we ask prospective clients, help us to uncover their needs, desires and pain points, connect with them on a personal level, *and* demonstrate our expertise in tutoring (helping us to achieve [trusted advisor](#) status). By asking questions, we can discover a prospect's buying process and pinpoint where they are in their [buyer's journey](#). Questions allow us to identify [buying signals](#), which tell us if a prospect is ready to commit or not and help us to qualify leads before they even get to the consultation stage. Questions help us to build a comprehensive profile of a prospect, which acts as a roadmap leading us to the best possible outcome for all parties involved.

This guide is an overview of the value of questioning in our own sales process, the School is Easy consultation. It focuses on the questioning technique we use at School is Easy ('Past, Present, Future'), explaining the methodology behind each part of this strategy.

The guide demonstrates how, by using a series of effective questions throughout the consultation, we are able to make informed recommendations and enrol students on to the most appropriate packages of tuition for their needs. As well as helping us to assess the student's academic needs, valuable PPF questioning helps us to determine their personality and learning style, allowing us to match the ideal tutor for any given student. This ensures the tutor/student relationship is strong from the outset, providing a solid platform for success.

Refer to our other questioning resources: [Overview Of Information To Be Obtained In The Consultation form](#), our Past, Present & Future Questions – [Example Questions: Sheet 1](#) and [Example Questions: Sheet 2](#), our [objection-based questions](#) and our [School is Easy Consultation Process – Written Guide](#), for more information on effective questioning and how questions form the foundation of any successful consultation.



Past, Present, Future

Why ask questions about the past?

Looking into the past, is all about getting access to previous experiences. In our case, we want to learn about any struggles the family may have experienced and what impact if any, that had. What has their experience of tutoring been and how did they make their buying decisions? What are they biased towards or against? What baggage will you have to face when selling to them?

Answering these questions helps you understand why your prospects are looking for a solution/new solution in the first place—and it provides a direction for the next stages of your sales conversation.

If a past buying experience was positive, associate your solution with that success and use it as a model for the way you sell. If a past buying experience was disappointing, frame your solution as something completely different/new/alternative. Use the information you gain from your prospect's answers to understand where they are coming from and importantly, where they want to go. Understand why your offer is better and how you will communicate this value to them later in the sales process. Why won't they have to worry about making another bad choice if they choose you?

Example:

EC: *What was your previous experience of tutoring?*

Prospect: *Terrible! We didn't see any significant progress and Tommy didn't really get along with his tutor or enjoy the sessions. Sometimes the tutor didn't show up!*

EC: *Oh! that's a shame. The relationship between student and tutor is so important. We've found out plenty about Tommy's goals and personality already and a little later on we'll assess Tommy's learning style, so we're be able to match him with a tutor who's a perfect fit! This will ensure their tutoring sessions are enjoyable and highly effective.*

Why ask questions about the present?

Uncovering the Current State:

The goal of asking questions about the present is to gauge how content the prospect is with the current situation. Keep in mind that if your prospect is perfectly happy with their current state then there really isn't much you can do about it. However, it is unlikely you would have reached the consultation stage, if there were no problems. The real power of these questions lies in how you ask them and how well you actively listen to your prospect's replies and record the information in your [Success Recommendation form](#), for use in the Recommend stage.

- *How content are you with the current situation?*
- *Which issues need to be addressed today?*
- *How happy are you with the results of your academic support so far?*
- *How confident are you in your existing provider?*

Notice these questions are broad in nature and could be applied across multiple industries/scenarios. Also, they intentionally don't require the prospect to share any sensitive or confidential information. For specific examples of PPF questions that can be used in a School is Easy consultation, see:

- Past, Present & Future Questions – [Example Questions: Sheet 1](#)
- Past, Present & Future Questions – [Example Questions: Sheet 2](#)

Why ask questions about the future?

You don't just need to know what obstacles your prospects have faced – you also need to know what obstacles you face and where the prospect wants to get to.

If questions about the past answer *Why?* questions about the future answer *How?* They provide opportunities to learn more about a prospect's buying process, so that you stand a better chance of ultimately closing the deal.

The EC's job now is to determine what the prospect's desired future state is. In other words, where does the family want to get to, what are trying to achieve here? You might ask questions like:

- *Do you see Tommy's grades improving this year without extra support?*
- *How do you think tutoring might help you achieve the goals/ambitions you mentioned earlier?*
- *How do you think a good tutor would affect Tommy directly in terms of his confidence, overall academic ability, grades, and outlook?*

Future questions help us understand the client's vision, and what they want to achieve. The EC's job is to guide the client to the best way of arriving at their desired outcome. Bear in mind the EC's job is NOT to be the "solution architect" who prescribes the answer. Their job is to ask the right questions to help the client determine:

- If solving this problem is worth the investment.
- The best course of action for solving the problem and arriving at their desired future state.
- Which solution is the right one to achieve their goals or objective.

Pitfalls

Questions are valuable, because they elicit responses from our prospects which provide us with useful information. However, often times, when a prospect answers a question and tells a salesperson they have an issue, the salesperson assumes they need to resolve that issue immediately, and they prematurely launch into a sales pitch. This is sometimes referred to as being a "heat-seeker"!

It is important to understand that customer needs, goals, and fears go unfulfilled every day and therefore more often than not, prospects are wary of sales reps who are over-eager to fulfil their every need! On the whole, a prospect's mindset is "*If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is*"!

So instead of launching into hard-sell mode every time a prospect answers one of your questions, use your questioning to extract valuable information from prospects who need your help, and quietly record that information and store it for more effective use later on in the consultation, in the form of a valuable recommendation for tutoring.

Summary

Remember, above all else, the art of using questions in your sales process is to obtain information that you can use to build a solid case for a prospect to buy your product or service. In our case, we use questions to help us create that all important tutoring recommendation for our students and match them with the ideal tutor.

When executed skilfully, our questioning will produce a win-win scenario for you and the client.

- The client will receive a package of tutoring appropriate for their specific needs, from a tutor who is perfectly matched to the student.
- The franchisee will win a valuable new client for their business, who will receive the best possible service (due to the information you have discovered about them) and will therefore have the highest chance of re-enrolling *and* providing valuable referrals and testimonials.

The Past, Present, Future technique of questioning fits our model extremely well, as it leads the client on a journey, where they reveal pertinent information about their fears, needs and goals –

- Looking into the past, is all about getting access to previous experiences, such as how long they have been struggling with a problem and whether they have ever sought help.
- Looking at the present gauges how content a prospect is with their current situation. For example, how did they feel about their son's recent report card, and do they feel confident in helping with homework.
- Looking into the future shows us what obstacles you may face and where the prospect wants to get to – their desired future state.

The better we become at asking questions and interpreting the responses, the more clients we will enrol. However, the art of good questioning will also produce happier customers, which will mean a higher volume of re-enrolment business, a greater number of good quality reviews *and* more referral business for us all.

Focus on the power of questions!