

Questions Assignment

For each class session in which there is a discussion, you will need to submit one of two kinds of question:

- Clarificatory Question
- Critical Question

The question must be submitted prior to class.

Quota Requirement

Over the course, you will submit a set number of questions. *At least* two-thirds *must* be Critical Questions; *at most* one-third may be Clarificatory Questions.

IMPORTANT: Any Clarificatory Question submitted after you've used your allocation will be considered a non-submission and will not count toward your assignment completion.

Clarificatory Questions

Clarificatory questions identify places where the reading itself blocked your understanding. These questions express “I don't understand...” – they capture moments where you hit a wall in comprehension.

Submit a question about something in the assigned reading that genuinely confused you: where the text became opaque, where you lost the thread of an argument, where terminology was unclear, or where you couldn't figure out what the author was trying to say.

Examples:

- “On page 47, what does the author mean by ‘thick ethical concepts’? I can't tell if this is technical terminology or just descriptive.”
- “I lost the argument in the third paragraph of section 2. How does the claim about X lead to the conclusion about Y?”
- “What's the difference between how ‘autonomy’ is being used here versus how we used it last week?”

These questions help identify what needs clarification in class. I (the professor) will try to explain and answer Clarificatory Questions at the beginning of class. In other words, Clarificatory Questions are what we use to ensure that everyone is on the same page; that we have a decent foundation on which to build our class discussions.

Critical Questions

As you read, you will naturally have reactions to things in the readings. These might be moments where something strikes you, puzzles you, bothers you, or makes you want to push back. These reactions are the raw material for your questions. Make a note of them as you go, and afterwards transform them into questions. The question is just the articulated form of a reaction you already had; it isn't something you generate separately, after the fact, by staring at the reading and trying to think of something to ask.

This means the orientation you bring to the assignment matters more than anything else. You are *not* writing these questions to impress me (the professor), and you are not writing them to impress your classmates. So, don't ask yourself "what does the professor want?" or "what would sound clever?" Ask yourself: *what am I actually curious about here? What did I genuinely wonder about as I read?*

If you find yourself stressed about this assignment, or spending a long time on it, that is a sign you're approaching it with the wrong orientation. A genuine question about something that struck you should not be hard to produce, since you already had the reaction; formulating the question is simply a matter of getting at what generated that reaction. If it feels like hard work, you have probably slipped into trying to manufacture an impressive question rather than reporting a real one. Stop, go back to the reading, and notice what you actually responded to.

In short, your questions should stem from the assigned readings and/or our discussion of them. They should demonstrate your personal attempt to engage with the material and think through the concepts presented. While there is no specific framework for engaging with the reading, it is essential that you show a genuine effort to understand and reflect on the material in your own way. Avoid submitting questions that are unrelated to the reading or that indicate a lack of proper preparation. Questions that merely rely on the title or a brief glance at the text will not be accepted.

Critical Questions become the candidate questions for class discussion, and the class votes on which to discuss. If you ask about something you are truly curious about, you have a real chance of having the thing you actually want to think about become the main focus of the class. The assignment is, in a quite direct sense, your opportunity to steer the course towards the questions that matter to you.