
THE ART OF QUESTIONING

Chapter 4: The Art of Questioning



There is certainly an art form to asking good questions, especially in the context of education, creative writing, and AI interactions like those with ChatGPT. Crafting effective questions is a skill that involves clarity, purpose, and a keen understanding of the desired outcome. Here are key aspects of the art of asking good questions:

1. **Clarity and Precision:** Good questions are clear and precise, leaving little room for ambiguity. They directly address what you want to know or explore, making it easier for the respondent (be it a person, an AI, or a character in a story) to supply a relevant answer. Try, “Give me a list of ten themes that could be woven into a novel”.

2. **Open-Ended for Exploration:** In many contexts, particularly in creative and learning environments, open-ended questions are more valuable. They encourage deeper thinking, discussion, and exploration, allowing for a range of responses and ideas. Try, “Should Glitchy become a good guy? And if so, in what way? Give me ideas for a character arc.”
3. **Closed-Ended for Specifics:** Closed-ended questions have their place when specific, concise information is needed. They are straightforward and can help in making decisions or clarifying details. Try, "Is there a historical precedent for virtual worlds influencing real-world behavior?"
4. **Encouraging Critical Thinking:** Well-crafted questions challenge the respondent to think critically and analytically, pushing them to consider different perspectives or deeper implications. Try, "What impact might “Adventures in Bitland” have on young readers, particularly in their understanding of the digital world?"
5. **Engaging and Thought-Provoking:** Good questions often provoke thought and engage interest. They can spark curiosity, leading to further inquiry and exploration. Try, "Is 'Adventures in Bitland' considered science fiction or fantasy?" Paste a chapter or two into ChatGPT so it has read some.
6. **Contextually Appropriate:** The best questions are tailored to their audience. Understanding the audience, the situation, and the goal is crucial. In novel writing, for instance, questions should stimulate creativity and contribute to the development of the plot or characters. Try, “What is my target audience?” Again, this question is only good after some parts of the story have been inserted into the chat thread.
7. **Building Connections:** Questions can be used to build connections between ideas, themes, or characters. In educational settings, they can connect added information to previously learned concepts. Try, “My favorite historical figure is Abraham Lincoln. How can Lachlan take on characteristics of Lincoln in this story?” Be sure ChatGPT knows the historical figure referenced. Asking questions first about Lincoln’s characteristics will confirm that you and ChatGPT agree on what those characteristics are.

8. **Flexibility and Adaptability:** The art of questioning also involves being adaptable. Responses to your questions might lead to new questions, requiring flexibility and responsiveness. Try, “Tell me about Lachlan’s grandma. The house they are in used to be hers during the Great Depression.” Learning about her personality traits might lead one to adapt how Lachlan came upon the word “serendipity” or several other events in the story.”
9. **Empathy and Sensitivity:** Particularly when interacting with people, empathetic and sensitive questioning is key. This means considering how the question might affect the respondent and framing it in a respectful and considerate manner.

1. ChatGPT will not answer all questions. It has been trained to the best of the engineers’ abilities to be unbiased and straightforward, although it is still in development and is imperfect. It is just a tool and must be used ethically by its human. Know that anything typed into it is aligned with the user’s login ID. Do not type anything you would not say aloud. And know that you cannot erase your history. Be ethical in your use of these tools.

2. **Disclaimer: Ethical Use of ChatGPT for Students**

As students engage with ChatGPT, it is important to use this powerful tool ethically and responsibly. Please be aware that your conversations with ChatGPT are typically stored on the service provider's servers, and while they are anonymized for privacy, they are not directly erasable by users. Always be cautious about sharing personal information or sensitive data during your interactions. ChatGPT should be used as a learning aid and not as a substitute for your own critical thinking or academic integrity. When using ChatGPT for school assignments or research, it is essential to acknowledge its assistance in your work, as with any other resource. Remember to follow all relevant privacy laws and school policies, particularly when using AI tools for educational purposes. By adhering to these guidelines, you can ensure a safe, productive, and ethical experience with ChatGPT.

The art of asking good questions is a blend of technique, creativity, and empathy. It is about asking the right kind of question at the right time to elicit the most useful, insightful, or creative response. Whether in a classroom, during a novel-writing process, or when interacting with AI, effective questioning is a powerful tool for learning, exploring, and understanding.

OPEN-ENDED VS CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONS

Teaching the difference between open-ended and closed-ended questions is crucial in crafting effective prompts, especially in creative writing.

Open-Ended vs. Closed-Ended Questions



Open-Ended Questions are broad and allow for a wide range of responses. They encourage deeper thinking and exploration, as they do not restrict the answer to a simple 'yes' or 'no'. In writing, open-ended questions can lead to detailed descriptions, elaborate narratives, and creative thinking.

Examples of Open-Ended Questions:

1. **"What challenges might a young wizard face in a world where magic is forbidden, and how would they overcome them?"**
 - This question prompts extensive thought on plot and character development.
2. **"Describe a day in a utopian city where technology caters to every human need."**
 - This encourages the writer to imagine and elaborate on a detailed setting.
3. **"How would the story change if the main character suddenly discovered they had a twin living in a parallel universe?"**
 - This question invites speculation and creative twists in the storyline.

Closed-Ended Questions, on the other hand, are narrow and typically require a specific, concise answer, often 'yes' or 'no'. They are useful for clarifying specific details or making quick decisions but are limited in fostering creative expansion.

Examples of Closed-Ended Questions:

1. **"Is your story set in the future?"**
 - This question expects a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer, supplying specific information about the story's setting.
2. **"Does the main character defeat the antagonist in the end?"**
 - Again, a 'yes' or 'no' response is expected, focusing on a particular plot outcome.
3. **"Is the magical amulet the key to unlocking the secret portal?"**
 - This question seeks a straightforward answer about a plot element.

Understanding and using both types of questions can significantly enhance prompt-crafting skills, helping to explore various aspects of novel writing more effectively. Open-ended questions are particularly valuable in generating rich, detailed content, while closed-ended questions can aid in defining specific elements of their stories.

LEADING QUESTIONS

Leading Questions: Guiding AI Responses



A leading question is a type of question that is phrased in a way to suggest its own answer. It is often used to subtly guide the respondent towards a particular response, either by implying it directly or by framing the question in a specific context. For young novelists, especially when interacting with AI like ChatGPT, leading questions can be a powerful tool to steer the conversation or narrative in a desired direction.

How Leading Questions Work in AI Interaction

- **Directing the Narrative:** Leading questions can help direct the AI towards a specific theme, plot point, or character trait in a story.
- **Prompting Specific Details:** They can be used to elicit detailed descriptions or actions in a narrative.
- **Shaping Character Responses:** Leading questions are useful in shaping how a character might respond or behave in each situation.

Examples of Leading Questions for Guiding AI in Novel Writing

1. **"Considering that my main character is afraid of heights, how might they react when faced with the challenge of crossing a high bridge?"**
 - This question leads the AI to focus on the character's fear of heights, suggesting that their reaction should center around this trait.
2. **"In a world where magic is illegal, how would a young wizard hide their powers when they accidentally reveal them in public?"**
 - The question implies that the setting is a world where magic is forbidden and nudges the AI to think about secrecy and the consequences of using magic.
3. **"Given that the story's antagonist has a secret alliance with the king, what devious plan might they concoct to defeat the protagonist's army?"**
 - This leading question steers the AI towards creating a plot involving a secret alliance and a plan against the protagonist, suggesting a specific kind of conflict and intrigue.

By using leading questions, young novelists can effectively guide AI tools to generate responses that align closely with their creative vision for their story. It allows them to keep control over the narrative direction while still benefiting from the AI's ability to generate creative, detailed content.

AVOIDING AMBIGUITY IN QUESTIONS

Avoiding Ambiguity in Questions



Ambiguity in a prompt occurs when the question or statement is unclear, vague, or has multiple interpretations. This can lead to confusion or varied responses that may not align with the intended purpose. For young novelists, especially when using AI tools like ChatGPT, avoiding ambiguity is crucial to ensure they receive relevant and useful responses for their storytelling.

How to Avoid Ambiguity in Prompts

- **Be Specific:** Supply clear and specific details in your prompts. Specify the context, characters, or the type of information or story you need. Try, “Write a paragraph about a mother and her child having lunch at a park. Write like your audience is in kindergarten.”

- **Avoid Vague Language:** Use precise language rather than general terms or phrases. Write about four sisters as opposed to “a character.”
- **Clarify the Purpose:** Make sure the purpose of the prompt is clear. What do you expect the AI to provide – a story, a character description, facts?

Examples of Ambiguous Prompts and Improved Versions

1. **Ambiguous Prompt:** "Write something about a conflict."
 - **Why It is Ambiguous:** It is unclear what type of conflict, between whom, and in what setting.
 - **Improved Version:** "Write a scene about a conflict between a young wizard and a dragon in a mystical forest over a magical gem."
2. **Ambiguous Prompt:** "Describe a place."
 - **Why It is Ambiguous:** The type of place is not specified. It could be anywhere – a city, a room, a fantasy world.
 - **Improved Version:** "Describe a bustling marketplace in a futuristic city where robots and humans interact freely."
3. **Ambiguous Prompt:** "Create a character."
 - **Why It is Ambiguous:** There are no details on the character's background, personality, or role in the story.
 - **Improved Version:** "Create a character who is a teenage detective with a photographic memory, living in New York City."

By avoiding ambiguity and providing clear, specific prompts, students can guide AI more effectively, resulting in responses that are more aligned with their creative objectives and helpful for their novel writing.

Adventures in Bitland: The Tale of Chatty, Middy, and Lachlan



Part 4: The Power Surge Party

As Lachlan, Chatty, and Middy delved deeper into their storytelling, the digital world suddenly pulsated with a burst of unexpected energy. The screens flickered wildly, and their words and images began to jumble and dance as if alive.

"What's happening now?" Lachlan asked, startled by the sudden chaos.

Chatty, trying to keep composure amidst the digital whirlwind, explained, "It's a power surge! They happen occasionally, but this one's unusually strong. It's jumbling everything!"

Middy's illustrations were transforming into abstract shapes and colors, moving across the screen in a mesmerizing dance. "I can't control my art tools! They have a mind of their own!"

Lachlan, his eyes alight with an idea, said, "Wait, this could be another opportunity! What if we turn this surge into a celebration in our story? A festival of lights and colors in the digital world!"

The power surge enveloped the digital realm in a spectacular display of vibrant chaos. Streams of electric blue and neon green light zigzagged across the virtual landscape, illuminating the digital horizon with flashes of brilliant color. The very air seemed to pulse with energy, each wave carrying a kaleidoscope of hues that painted the world in a rainbow of light.

In the heart of this luminous maelstrom, Middy's illustrations came alive, each line and curve detaching from the confines of the screen to join the wild dance of the surge. Geometric shapes, once part of a structured design, now floated freely, morphing into dazzling patterns that defied the laws of physics. Colors blended and separated in a fluid, ever-changing spectacle, creating a breathtaking visual symphony.

The characters and elements of the story, touched by the surge, transformed as well. Trees sprouted leaves of shimmering silver, their branches swaying to the rhythm of the pulsating lights. Digital creatures, from pixelated birds to wireframe deer, glowed with an inner luminescence, adding to the ethereal beauty of the scene.

As Lachlan watched, a sense of awe and inspiration took hold of him. The chaotic energy of the power surge had created a wonderland of creativity and possibility. It was as if the digital world itself was celebrating, its every pixel and byte rejoicing in the freedom and creativity unleashed by the surge. In this moment of unbridled energy, Lachlan saw not just a challenge, but a magnificent opportunity to craft a story that celebrated the vibrant heart of the digital realm.

Chatty, inspired by Lachlan's optimism, added, "Yes, a chapter where our characters discover the beauty in chaos and learn to harness it!"

Middy, embracing the situation, watched as her art took on new, unexpected forms. "I love it! Let's create a scene where the characters join in a grand celebration, uniting in the midst of this surge."

Working together, they crafted a narrative where their characters, initially overwhelmed by the surge, found joy and connection in the vibrant chaos. Lachlan's technological ability helped stabilize the jumbled words, weaving them into descriptions of a grand festival.

Chatty's dialogue echoed the theme of unity. "In the midst of this luminous dance, we find each other," one character exclaimed in the story.

Middy's illustrations captured the essence of the power surge, with vivid colors and dynamic shapes that conveyed the energy and excitement of the moment.

As the crescendo of the power surge reached its peak, the chaotic energy that had engulfed the digital realm began to ebb. The vibrant streams of electric blue and neon green slowly started to fade, their wild dance calming into gentle, rhythmic pulses. The once erratic shapes and colors birthed from Middy's illustrations gradually found their way back to the screen, their movements becoming more deliberate and controlled, as if each line and hue were finding its place in the world once again.

The digital creatures and trees, aglow with the surge's energy, began to dim, returning to their original forms but keeping a faint sparkle, a remnant of the magic they had just experienced. The air, charged with the surge's kaleidoscopic light, settled into a soft, ambient glow, casting the digital landscape in a serene, twilight hue.

As the last vestiges of the surge's brilliance faded, a sense of tranquility settled over the digital realm. The characters and elements of the story, once part of the wild celebration, now stood in quiet reflection of the extraordinary event they had seen. The power surge, which had started as a disruptive force, had transformed into a spectacle of beauty and inspiration, leaving behind a digital world enriched by its presence and more connected in its aftermath.

As they concluded the chapter, the power surge subsided, leaving behind a sense of accomplishment and camaraderie among the trio.

"This chapter is more than just a celebration," Lachlan reflected. "It's a symbol of how unity and creativity can turn a chaotic moment into something beautiful and memorable."

Chatty beeped in agreement. "It shows that in our world, even a surge can become a source of joy and connection."

Middy added, "And it's a reminder that together, we can navigate any challenge and turn it into a reason to celebrate our collective spirit."

The chapter, born out of an unforeseen power surge, became a vibrant and meaningful part of their novel, embodying the spirit of unity in the face of unpredictability yet again.