

## Other Useful Focus Questions

Reference Chapter 9, section “Using Focus Questions,” in  
*Requirements by Collaboration* by Ellen Gottesdiener, Addison-Wesley, 2002.

In addition to focus questions to start modeling activities in the workshop, facilitators and participants can use other focus questions to modulate group dynamics, focus the group, explore ideas, and move a group toward closure. Well-placed questions help to create an environment in which participants themselves have the freedom and honesty to ask questions of one another. Some examples are provided in the table.

Type of Question	Uses	Examples
Direct	Seeking specific information, challenging, probing for understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What makes that important?</li> <li>• What is your understanding of the problem?</li> <li>• When did that become evident?</li> <li>• What steps are needed?</li> </ul>
Open-ended	Stimulating discussion, getting more information, generating ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What concerns you?</li> <li>• What would be helpful?</li> <li>• What would be the best possible outcome?</li> <li>• Why do you believe that?</li> </ul>
Clarifying	Mirroring, rephrasing, or playing back a speaker’s words or actions to confirm understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let me see if I understand your point... &lt;rephrase&gt;</li> <li>• So you are saying... Is that right?</li> <li>• Do I hear you saying that...?</li> <li>• Earlier you said &lt;x&gt;, and now I hear you saying &lt;y&gt; about that same matter. Can you clarify your interests in that matter?</li> </ul>
Leading	Aligning others to a point of view or answer; proposing new action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What about...?</li> <li>• I think it might be helpful to &lt;a&gt;. Do you agree?</li> <li>• Would you consider...?</li> <li>• What other ideas are there in the area of...?</li> </ul>
Refocusing	Redirecting the group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That sounds like a good thought to capture on our parking lot. What other ideas are there for &lt;original topic&gt;?</li> <li>• That is an issue/action/idea for our &lt;x&gt; activity.</li> <li>• Would you be willing to hold on to that until then?</li> </ul>

Process	Reflecting on the group process and ways to improve it (see the Self-Reflect collaboration pattern)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this a good way to discover the business rule requirements?</li> <li>• Does the sequence of the activities we are doing make sense?</li> <li>• In what ways could we have accelerated creating the deliverable we just finished?</li> <li>• What is your reaction to our process thus far?</li> <li>• When were you feeling most productive?</li> <li>• When did your energy drop?</li> <li>• What excites you about what we're doing?</li> </ul>
Meta	Asking questions about questions that raise unknown issues or information that might have been implied (Gause and Weinberg, 1989)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are these questions helpful to us? What other questions should I be asking?</li> <li>• Do you have questions about my questions?</li> </ul>