

# Interlocking Frameworks: Questions, Object-based Learning, and Critical Thinking

Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens  
2024 Garden Docent Training

## Questions

### Closed Questions

Closed questions: Cognitive/memory questions: Ask for what you already know or can see. Answers involve simple recall and are either right or wrong.

Who  
What  
Where  
When

Closed questions: Convergent questions: Ask you to do something with the information you already have or can see. Find similarities, differences, patterns, relationships. They ask you to categorize, to organize information, to find central themes. There are right or wrong answers.

In what ways  
How  
Why

### Open Questions

Open questions: Divergent questions: Ask for new ideas, for inferences. They are open-ended, meaning there is no one right answer. To answer, one must gather information from past experience, link it to new information being explored, and create new understandings and interpretation.

Imagine  
Predict  
How might  
What are some possible consequence

## Object-based Learning (Visual Literacy)

Perception: Use of the senses with links to memory (what does it remind you of?), interests, and attitudes (how do you feel about it?)

Description: Using language to give a systematic inventory of the object's physical attributes; use of a vocabulary that moves from simple to more complex concepts

Analysis: Finding relationships and patterns between the parts and the whole; similarities and differences when comparing two or more objects; probing to find links between objects and people.

Interpretation: Finding new understandings, new meanings; making connections among the past, the present and the future.

## Critical Thinking (Bloom's Taxonomy)

Knowledge: Student collects information; recalls previously learned information; describes what she can see.

Analysis: Student can break ideas down into component parts; understand relationships among parts; classify; categorize; sequence; get the main idea; draw conclusions.

Synthesis: Student can work with parts, combining them to form a new structure, new meanings; infer; predict; create.

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### **How the Frameworks of Object-based Learning, Critical Thinking, and Questions Interlock**

Visitors, or learners, tend to retain more if they are more actively involved in their experiences. Activities from the lowest to highest level of involvement move from reading, hearing, seeing, doing, and, at the highest level of involvement, to seeing and doing.

How then can docents provide a more active experience for visitors? We can use object-based learning. Museums are perfect places to learn from objects, but most people have not been taught how to do it. **Object-based learning**, or learning from things, uses visual literacy. **Visual literacy** is the “reading” of things to help us learn from museum objects. Object-based learning is a series of steps—a process—that begins with perception and ends with interpretation.

These steps are what help visitors use their **critical thinking**, or higher level thinking and reasoning skills, to fully accomplish the “reading” of objects. Docents can facilitate a complete experience by choreographing and designing a conversation that moves visitor through the critical thinking steps of looking, thinking, exploring, listening, and reaching a heightened understanding of the museum, its objects, and their connections to people.

Docents choreograph, or design, the conversation on a tour by leading a flow of guided conversation using inquiry. **Inquiry** is a teaching method that uses a framework of questions, and other components, to foster active participation in the learning experiences. On a guided tour, inquiry drives the conversation forward. **Questions** help to stimulate curiosity, invite active participation, and create a community experience. There are different types of questions to ask, such as closed or open.

Inquiry, in the end, is also **more than asking questions**. Inquiry also uses other communication methods to fully engage visitors actively in learning. Some of the additional communication methods that docents can employ include wait time, probing, good listening, clearly stated questions, praise, and redirection.