



sharing CURIOSITY

CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2017 National Humanities Conference session

“Conversations, Not Lectures”

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We guide conversations with Four Ground Rules:

1. **Active listening.** Pause and repeat back in your head what you heard, before speaking or raising your hand.
Don't just hear: absorb all you observed.
2. Ask questions based on **genuine curiosity.**
3. Think and speak with empathy. Be a historian: that is, understand that the life circumstances swirling around a person is what led them to a decision. **Think about these conditions** before passing judgement.
4. Be specific. Describe **concrete details and your own experiences**, and avoid abstractions. This is good -- practice particularly when discussing issues that are difficult, and helps us all avoid assumptions. This isn't the same thing as assuming that your personal experience is the most important; it's about **being clear about what you mean**, open about what you know and the limits of your own experience.

WHAT ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT?

try writing it in the form of a question, in FIVE DIFFERENT WAYS.

A large rectangular box with a thin black border, containing five large, bold, black question marks scattered across the space. The question marks are positioned at approximately: top-left, top-right, middle-left, middle-right, and bottom-center.

HOW TO ASK A GOOD QUESTION

listen + observe

notice patterns: what do you keep hearing? what surprises you?

what makes you **CURIOUS**?



ELEMENTS OF A GOOD QUESTION

just the right balance of broadness and vagueness

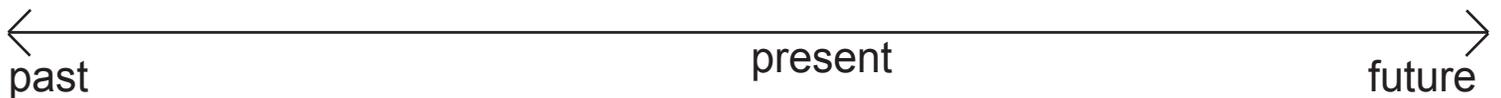
reflective in tone

timely: captures movement and momentum

what emotions does your question inspire?

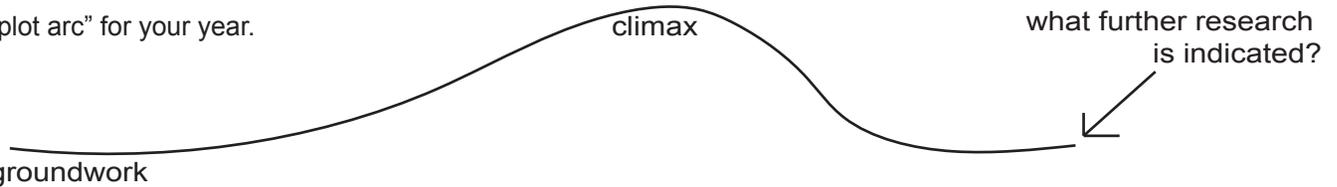
what follow up questions does it make you think of?

what is the past, present, and future of your question?



how do people usually talk about this topic? what does that leave out? what will be difficult, contentious?

draw a "plot arc" for your year.



what assets do you have to help with this? what audience will this attract?

who do you already know? who do you need to meet?

ASSESSMENT

how you covered the range of your question (internal)

how you affected audience understanding (external)

how will you address questions about comprehensiveness (to yourselves, your audience, your board, funders)?