

Guidelines For Framing Questions

Questions are an important part of this approach. By paying attention to how you frame your questions, you will clarify your thinking and focus your attention before casting a hexagram.

The central idea of this approach is that of how well a possible course-of-action aligns with the movement or flow of the situation. When your actions are aligned with the movement of the situation then you can *anticipate* making progress more easily than if you were "swimming against the current". Because of this central idea of flowing with the direction of events, questions do not concern results. "Going with the flow" does not guarantee a particular outcome.

The score represents the degree of alignment of a course-of-action with the developing situation so the essential format of a question is:

**How well does _____ (*fill in proposed action*)
align with the flow of the situation?**

This is not the only way to frame a question. If you prefer, you can phrase the question differently as long as the question addresses the alignment of an action or plan with the current of events. For example:

- How well aligned is with the situation?
- How well does flow with the direction of the situation?
- How well does starting (or stopping) match the movement of the situation?
- Changing : how well does this fit with the current of events?
- If I how will this fit with the flow of events?

In some cases, you might want to define a more specific context in your question. For example, if you are deciding on a work-related course-of-action, then you might ask:

- How well does (proposed plan) fit within my career as a whole?
- What is the alignment of with the direction my department is following?
- Our new product launch: how well aligned is it with the trends in our market?

Here are some suggestions on framing questions:

- ◆ The first thing to do is to ask yourself what are you uncertain about. What is it that you really want to know? Use your questions to explore this uncertainty.
- ◆ Your question needs to be centred on actions that are feasible and that you can do.
 - ✗ "How well does going to the moon next week fit with the flow of the situation?"
 - ✓ "How would moving to Brighton this coming summer fit with my financial situation?"
 - ✓ "How well does my plan for changing jobs within six months fit with my family situation?"
- ◆ State your question in a positive, direct and sufficiently specific way. Always ask questions about what you could do and never ask questions about what you will *not do*. If you are tempted to ask a question about *not doing* something, then ask yourself why you are thinking of *not doing* it.
 - ✗ "How well does *not going* to the cinema tonight fit with the flow of events?"
 - ✓ "How well does staying home tonight fit with the flow of events?"
 - ✓ "How well does going to the gym tonight fit with the flow of events?"

- ◆ Avoid questions with irrelevant trivial details. When necessary, specify any pertinent aspects concerning location, people, time-frame (days, weeks, months), etc.
 - ✗ "Do my plans to ask my manager for a raise in their office next Wednesday at 3:20 pm after the tea break match the developments within my department?"
 - Asking for a raise might be a suitable course-of-action. But specifying "in their office next Wednesday at 3:20 pm after the tea break" is detail that adds nothing to the point of the question which concerns your raise and the department.
 - ✓ "How well does asking my manager for a raise next week fit with the flow of events within the department?"
- ◆ Each combination of situation and course-of-action needs its own question and hexagram.
 - ✓ "Running the London Marathon next summer: How well does this fit my situation at home?"
 - ✓ "Running the London Marathon next summer: How well does this fit my work?"
 - ✓ "Running the London Marathon next summer: How well does this fit my health?"
- ◆ Avoid questions that are vague or ambiguous. For example, terms like *beneficial* or *favourable* aren't well defined.

- ✗ "Will ... be beneficial soon?"
- ✗ "Is it favourable to ... ?"
- ✗ "Is it possible to become rich by doing ... ?"
 - These questions concern results and are too vague. What does *beneficial* or *favourable* mean and for whom? When is *soon*? How much money is required to be *rich*?
 - Something may be *possible*, but how well does it fit with the situation?
- ◆ Avoid questions that contain words such as *should*, *must*, *ought to*, *have to*, which imply some kind of decision or interpretation has already been made in your mind.
 - ✗ "Should I go to the leaving party for ... ?"
 - The *should* suggests that perhaps the questioner doesn't want to go but that they have a sense of obligation. What is hidden behind the word "should"?

Remember:

- Framing questions helps to clarify your thinking and focus your attention.
- Questions concern the alignment of a course-of-action with the flow of the situation and never results.
- Questions need to be centred on feasible actions *you* can take, stated in a positive, direct and sufficiently specific way.