

Taken from R. Brian Stanfield, "The Art of Focused Conversation"  
2000, The Canadian Institute for Cultural Affairs

### Objective level

OBJECTIVE level	
Focus of the questions	Data "the facts about the topic, external reality"
What it does for the group	Ensures that everyone deals with the same body of data and all the aspects
Questions are in relation to	The senses: what is seen and heard and touched, etc.
Key questions	What objects do you see? What words or phrases stand out? What happened?
Traps and pitfalls	Asking closed questions, or questions not specific enough; no clear focus; ignoring objective questions because they are "too trivial"
If this level is omitted	There will be no shared image of what the group is discussing; the various comments will seem disrelated

### Reflective level

-participants are asked to actively reflect upon what they had earlier (objective level) been asked only to passively acknowledge.

REFLECTIVE	
Focus of the questions	Internal relationship to the data
What it does for the group	Reveals its initial responses
Questions are in relation to	Feelings, moods, emotional tones, memories or associations
Key questions	What does it remind you of? How does it make you feel? Where were you surprised? Where delighted? Where did you struggle?
Traps and pitfalls	Limiting the discussion to an either/or survey of likes and dislikes
If this level is omitted	The world of intuition, memory, emotion and imagination is ignored

### Interpretive level

Interpretive questions highlight the layers of meaning and purpose that people ascribe to situations and responses.

They invite a group to create the significance of importance of an occasion.

Interpretive questions help people build a story of what is happening.

A clue word is “why?”

The question of values may appear, as in “What values does this reveal?”

INTERPRETIVE	
Focus of the questions	The life meaning of the topic.
What it does for the group	Draws out the significance from the data for the group.
Questions are in relation to	Layers of meaning, purpose, significance, implications, “story”, and values. Considering alternatives, options.
Key questions	What is happening here? What is this all about? What does all this mean for us? How will this affect our work? What are we learning from this? What is the insight?
Traps and pitfalls	Abusing the data by inserting pre-cooked meaning intellectualizing, abstracting, judging responses as right or wrong.
If this level is omitted	Group gets no chance to make sense out of the first two levels. No higher-order thinking goes into decision-making.

### Decisional level

Here, some kind of resolve brings the conversation to a close.

-Decisional questions allow people to choose their own self-conscious relationships to their situation by naming it.

DECISIONAL	
Focus of the questions	Resolution, implications, new directions
What it does for the group	Makes the conversation relevant for the future.
Questions are in relation to	Consensus, implementation, action
Key questions	What is our response? What decisions is called for? What are the next steps?
Traps and pitfalls	Forcing a decision when group is not ready or avoiding pushing group for decision.
If this level is omitted	The responses from the first three levels are not applied or tested in real life.