

## Encouraging Reflection with Different Types of Client Dispositions

Clients might have a preferred disposition when working with a consultant, or they might show up with different dispositions on different occasions. Regardless of client disposition, the consultant’s role is to ask questions that help the client engage in reflection and get the most out of it.

**Directions:** Select one of the client disposition types and develop 3–5 questions you might use during a conversation with the client to prompt reflection. Include questions that might take advantage of the positive aspects of the client’s disposition or break down any barriers the client’s disposition might pose. Include some questions that help clients achieve deeper levels of reflection so that they learn from and apply learning to improve their practice.

### Task-Oriented Client

Some clients approach work with a consultant as another obligation to complete. They’re often motivated and thoughtful, aiming to answer thoroughly, but answering a question is one task among many in a day to complete. While the client likely isn’t trying to be avoidant, it may feel like it to the consultant. The task-oriented client will answer the question and then look to the consultant for the next. The consultant may find themselves constantly churning out questions to keep the session going.

In this case, it is important for both to remember that answering questions is for the client’s benefit, not the consultant’s.

Possible questions to prompt the *task-oriented* client’s reflection:

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## Verbal Processor Client

Verbal processors work out their thinking aloud. This gives the consultant valuable insight into both *what* and *how* they think. However, their stream of thought can easily drift from the focus of the session. A simple opening question like “What’s on your mind today?” can spark a long, off-topic narrative.

With the verbal processor, the consultant needs to determine when it is most productive to allow the client to continue talking and when to interject a question to focus the client’s thinking.

Possible questions to prompt the *verbal processor* client’s reflection:

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## Shift the Blame Client

Some clients want to collaborate with the consultant by exploring their thinking on a focused goal or topic, but they get stuck on barriers preventing them from achieving their goals. The consultant may pose questions about how the client can take action to work through challenges with systems or other people, but the client consistently dodges responsibility, citing outside roadblocks to success.

In this case, the consultant must ask questions that help the client to recognize the power or control they do have in the situation and think differently about possibilities for overcoming real or perceived barriers.

Possible questions to prompt the *shift the blame* client’s reflection:

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## The Venter Client

Some clients may be facing challenging circumstances or situations they find frustrating. They want their consultant to let them vent. If the consultant starts with a question like “How have things been going since we last met?”, the client might focus on all that is going wrong, whether those events relate to the consulting focus or not.

With the venter client, the consultant needs to acknowledge the client’s concerns and ask a question that shifts the focus to what the client can control and moves them toward their goals.

Possible questions to prompt the *venter* client’s reflection:

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## The Rabbit Trail Client

The rabbit trail client may seem interested in working with the consultant, but is easily distracted. They will start on a point and branch off from it multiple times, going further and further down a trail but not focusing on actions that will lead to accomplishing goals.

With the rabbit trail client, the consultant needs to ask questions that bring the focus back to how the point the client is following will help move the client toward their goals.

Possible questions to prompt the *rabbit trail* client’s reflection:

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## The Non-Talker Client

Getting some clients to respond to questions might feel like pulling teeth. Non-talker clients might be avoiding the consulting relationship—they just do not want to work with a consultant. They might feel vulnerable or not see the value in working with a consultant. They might find reasons not to meet with the consultant or give only short, surface-level answers to questions the consultant poses.

With the non-talker client, the consultant needs to ask questions that tap into the client’s strengths and aspirations.

Possible questions to prompt the *non-talker* client’s reflection:

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