

The Question Sharpener

GAME

SKILL: PRECISE QUESTIONING

45 MINUTES

RECOMMENDED AGE RANGE

Best for ages 8 to 14. Younger kids can participate with a parent helping them rewrite their question slip. Older teens often find the final round — identifying the question they could not sharpen — the most interesting part.

WHAT YOU NEED

A phone, tablet, or computer with AI chatbot access

Paper and pencil for each player

A timer

5–6 vague question slips (small pieces of paper, written before you start)

ACTIVITY STEPS

- 01 Write the Question Slips (3 min).** Before starting, write 5–6 vague questions on small pieces of paper. Good examples: "Tell me about dogs," "How do I get better at something?," "What causes rain?," "Why do people make mistakes?," "How does a phone work?" Fold them and put them in a bowl. Each player draws one.
- 02 Sharpen Your Question (4 min).** Each player reads their question aloud. Set the timer for 4 minutes. Each person rewrites their question to be as specific as possible without asking more than one thing. No looking anything up. Work from what you already know. The question has to be specific enough that a stranger could understand exactly what you want.
- 03 Test Both Versions (15 min).** Ask AI the original vague question. Read the answer aloud. Then ask AI the sharpened version. Read that answer aloud. Take 2 minutes of silence. Each player writes down: which answer was more useful, and why? Did the better question change what AI focused on?
- 04 Vote and Discuss (10 min).** The table votes on which version of the question was sharper and why. Then each player explains one thing they added to make their question more specific. Were there questions that were impossible to sharpen? What made those hard?
- 05 Find the Hard One (13 min).** Go around the table one more time. Each player answers: what was the question you tried to sharpen but could not, and what made it hard? A question that cannot be sharpened is a discovery — it means the person trying does not yet know enough about the topic to know what to ask. That moment of realization is the most valuable thing that happens in this game.

THE DEEPER LESSON

A vague question requires nothing of the asker. A precise question requires the asker to know what they already understand, what they are confused about, and what kind of answer would actually address the gap. The Question Sharpener makes that invisible cognitive work visible, because the difference between the two AI answers shows up immediately on screen. When a kid sees that their specific version produced a more useful response, the lesson does not need explaining. They saw it happen. The moment someone says "I could not sharpen this one because I do not know enough about it" is the highest-value moment of the game. That sentence is the skill forming in real time.

CONVERSATION STARTER

What was the question tonight that you tried to make more specific but could not, and what would you need to learn first before you could sharpen it?

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You cannot out-compete AI. But you can out-human it.

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