

Information Literacy Skills: Backdoor Questions to Elicit Critical Thinking

Frontdoor Question:

- Find a reference book that is useful and share why this resource is useful.

Backdoor Question:

- Throughout your education you have probably used quite a few reference books (e.g., handbooks, dictionaries, thesauri, atlases, encyclopedias, etc.).
- Name two types of reference books you have used at some point in your education. Explain why these reference materials were helpful to you and/or your classmates.

Frontdoor Question:

- What tools are useful to you in an Online Retail site like Amazon.com? Why are they useful to you?
- What tools in databases are useful to you? Why are they useful to you?

Backdoor Questions:

- Online retail sites have many tools to simplify shopping. Name three tools that are useful to you. Explain why and why not.
- Think of your favorite retail site and your favorite features on this site. Why do you like this tool(s)? Could such a tool(s) be useful to you in a research database that you find on the library web site?
- Now, think of your favorite social media site? Why do you like this site? Which features make sharing information or media easy and fun? Compare these features to those of a database? How are they similar? How are they different?
- Databases have many tools that are useful to users. Name three tools that are useful to you. Explain why and why not. Is there another tool you would like added to databases?

Frontdoor Questions:

- Why are quotation marks useful in searching?

Backdoor Questions:

Using quotation marks <"..."> (e.g., "critical thinking skills") in a search query can facilitate getting good search results and save time.

- Think of when you used quotation marks in a phrase search and retrieved excellent search results.
- Then, think of a time you conducted a phrase search without quotation marks, but became completely frustrated with the search results and gave up!
- Think of what happened without the quotation marks! How did you proceed?
- Or, did you end the research because it was too complicated and frustrating?
- What Internet resource (Google) do we use every day for personal and professional reasons? Try using quotation marks to narrow your searches.

Observations: Backdoor Questions

- Some students were very responsive to the backdoor questions and were even able to make further correlations to work or internship situations where they could use different database tools, reference materials, narrowing search results with quotation marks on the Internet or in databases, etc.
- Sometimes backdoor questions require more time, so I don't get to use all of them.
- Integrating backdoor questions during reference interviews and research advisory consultations also helps to lower the *affective filter* for students who are anxious or stressed. When backdoor questions are *well scaffolded*, they have proven to be very successful.
- Students find them fun and remember how to search for the next assignment or personal research project.
- Once students demonstrate that their information seeking, information evaluating and information literacy skills have improved, the scaffolding may be decreased and eventually removed.