

NLP: The Six Questions That Expose a Weak Argument

NLP Mastery House

Purpose

Every vague or overreaching statement leaves a trace in the language itself. The Meta Model — the first formal model published in NLP — gives you a precise method for finding that trace and questioning it back to something real. Effective practice does not begin with advice. It begins with the discipline of better questions.

The core principle: a person's words are a surface structure — a compressed version of what they actually mean (the deep structure) and how they represent it internally. Information gets left out, twisted, or blown up into a rule along the way. Your job is not to argue with the sentence. It's to recover what the sentence is missing.

The Six Questions

1. The Universal Quantifier — "He never listens to me." "Everyone thinks that." → Ask: "Never?" or "Was there ever a time when he did?" One counter-example is often enough to loosen an "always" or "never."
2. Mind Reading — "You don't like me." "They think I'm wrong." → Ask: "How do you know?" or "What leads you to believe that?" Recovers the actual source of the claim — usually there isn't one.
3. Cause and Effect — "His voice irritates me." "That film upset me." → Ask: "How specifically does that cause this?" Recovers the imagined mechanism connecting the two things.
4. Complex Equivalence — "She's always yelling at me... she hates me." → Ask: "How does her yelling mean she hates you?" Two experiences are being treated as identical when they aren't.
5. Lost Performative — "It's bad to be inconsistent." "Politicians are liars." → Ask: "According to whom?" or "How do you know that's true?" Recovers the missing source of the opinion — an unowned rule stated as fact.
6. Unspecified Nouns & Verbs — "I want a change." "She rejected me." → Ask: "What change, specifically?" or "How exactly did she reject you?" Recovers the actual content hiding behind a vague word.

The warning that comes with this tool: used without rapport and sensory acuity, the Meta Model "can cause meta muddle, meta mayhem and meta murder." These are questions for gathering information, not for winning arguments. Ask them with genuine curiosity, not to catch someone out.

Quick win – five minutes

Think of one sentence someone said to you recently that made a claim without evidence — an "always," a "that means," a "you should." Write it below, then write the one question from this list that would recover what's missing.

Practice this week

In three conversations, notice one of these six patterns in real time before you respond to the content. Ask the recovery question once, gently, out of genuine curiosity — not to win the point.



"The map is not the territory. Most arguments aren't disagreements about reality — they're disagreements between two incomplete maps."

— Betty Vox, DSΨ

One next action

- ☐ Use one of these six questions in a real conversation this week. Note what it recovered.

Full training in Module 6 of the NLP Practitioner course, including all fourteen Meta Model patterns across deletions, distortions and generalisations.