

Successful geographic inquiry involves the willingness to ask, speculate on, and answer geographic questions about why things are, where they are, and how they got there. Students need to be able to pose questions about their surroundings: Where is something located? Why is it there? With what is it associated? What are the consequences of its location and associations? What is this place like?

Students should also be asked to speculate about possible answers to questions because speculation leads to the development of hypotheses that link the asking and answering stages of the process. Hypotheses guide the search for information.

Geography is distinguished by the kinds of questions it asks—the “where” and “why there” of a problem. It is important that students develop and practise the skills of asking such questions for themselves. The task can be approached by giving students practice in distinguishing geographic from non-geographic questions and by presenting students with issues and asking them to develop geographic questions. At higher grade levels, students can identify geographic problems and ways in which an application of geography can help solve problems or resolve issues.

A sample of generic geographic questions and how they can be categorized is shown below.

Geographic Questions

Questions dealing with location and extent:

- What is the phenomenon or feature of interest?
- Where is it located?
- Why is it where it is?
- How large an area does it cover?

Questions dealing with distribution and pattern:

- Is there regularity in its distribution?
- Where is it in relation to similar features?
- What kind of distribution does it portray?

Questions dealing with spatial association and interaction:

- What other phenomena are in the same area?
- Do phenomena usually occur together in the same area?
- Is the feature linked to other phenomena?

Questions dealing with spatial change:

- Has the feature always been there?
- How has it changed spatially through time?
- What factors have influenced these changes?

Asking Geographic Questions. Source: Appendix A, “Geographic Skills and Perspectives” in *Canadian National Standards for Geography*. Copyright: The Royal Canadian Geographical Society. Used with permission.

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