Teaching Skills

Question Your Questioning
What kinds of questions do you ask of the learner? This is an important question.

Research demonstrates that using questions to ask learners to problem solve is one of the best ways to teach clinical reasoning. Questioning forms a basis for interactive learning.

Questions help the learner organize and clarify concepts, correct misunderstandings, recognize relationships, and synthesize and analyze information.

As a general rule, we need to talk far less and ask more questions.

- Avoid closed end or pimping (i.e, intimidating minutiae) questions.
- Rather, ask open-ended and divergent questions. Questions that start with "why," "what more," how," "describe," explain" and "what if" will cause the learner to take the next step in thinking through a case.

Teachers Engaged in a Socratic Dialog Should:

- Respond to all answers with a further question (that calls upon the respondent to develop his/her thinking in a fuller and deeper way)

- Seek to understand–where possible–the ultimate foundations for what is said or believed and follow the implications of those foundations through further questions

- Treat all assertions as a connecting point to further thoughts

- Treat all thoughts as in need of development

- Recognize that any thought can only exist fully in a network of connected thoughts. Stimulate students — through your questions — to pursue those connections

Teachers should systematically raise questions based on the following recognitions/assumptions:

- Recognize that all thought reflects an agenda. Assume that you do not fully understand the thought until you understand the agenda behind it. (What are you trying to accomplish in saying this? What is your central aim in this line of thought?)

- Recognize that all thoughts presuppose an information base. Assume that you do not fully understand the thought until you understand the background information that supports or informs it. (What information are you basing that comment on? What experience convinced you of this? How do we know this information is accurate?)

- Recognize that all thought requires the making of inferences, the drawing of conclusions, the creation of meaning. Assume that you do not fully understand a thought until you understand the inferences that have shaped it. (How did you reach that conclusion? Could you explain your reasoning? Is there an alternative plausible conclusion?)

- Recognize that all thought involves the application of concepts. Assume that you do not fully understand a thought until you understand the concepts that define and shape it. (What is the main idea you are putting forth? Could you explain that idea?)

- Recognize that all thought rests upon other thoughts (which are taken for granted or assumed). Assume that you do not fully understand a thought until you understand what it takes for granted. (What exactly are you taking for granted here? Why are you assuming that?)

- Recognize that all thought is headed in a direction. It not only rests upon something (assumptions), it is also going somewhere (implications and consequences). Assume that you do not fully understand a thought unless you know the implications and consequences that follow from it. (What are you implying when you say that? Are you implying that . . . ?)

- Recognize that all thought takes place within a point of view or frame of reference. Assume that you do not fully understand a thought until you understand the point of view or frame of reference which places it on an intellectual map. (From what point of view are you looking at this? Is there another point of view we should consider?)

- Recognize that all thought is responsive to a question. Assume that you do not fully understand the thought until you understand the question that gives rise to it. (I am not sure exactly what question you are raising. Could you explain it?)

If you need help in developing this skill, ask one of your learners at the next teaching rounds to keep track of the kinds of questions you ask.

Sources:
Schwenk TL, Whitman N. The physician as teacher. Williams and Wilkins, 1987.

http://www.criticalthinking.org/articles/the-role-socratic-questioning-ttl.cfm