

Grammar and Style

ASK RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

Rhetorical questions are questions whose answers are considered obvious. Writers use them to drive home a point or create an emotional response. In this excerpt, Carlyle uses rhetorical questions to create interest and emphasize his main idea.

Many men eat finer cookery, drink dearer liquors—with what advantage they can report, and their doctors can: but in the heart of them all, if we go out of the dyspeptic stomach, what increase of blessedness is there? Are they better, beautifuler, stronger, braver? Are they even what they call “happier”? Do they look with satisfaction on more things and human faces in this God’s earth; do more things and human faces look with satisfaction on them? Not so. (lines 87–92)

Carlyle does not expect readers to answer each question. He suggests that the answers are obvious. Rhetorical questions can engage and persuade readers.

Directions: Rewrite the following paragraph, changing at least two sentences into rhetorical questions to make the paragraph more persuasive. Then, add at least one additional rhetorical question.

I often hear people say that recycling cannot work. They do not believe that one person can make a difference. I think this attitude is selfish and lazy. Progress is always made by the combination of many individuals. When we all recycle, we protect Earth’s resources. We owe it to the next generation to take care of the planet. Running away from responsibility only worsens a bad problem. It is true that my two pounds of paper a week does not save a lot of trees. However, when you multiply that amount by the number of students in our school, the result is clear. In fact, I think we should have even stricter recycling policies. We can save huge quantities of resources with just a little effort.