

Attitude is everything: Interview Questions & Surveys

No area of study focusing on the human condition is complete or effective without interaction with the “subjects” of study—in this case, with adults over the age of 50—or 65—or 80 or . . . ? And although they may be reluctant to admit it, most people *enjoy* being interviewed—perhaps because they like being the center of attention, being questioned about their experience, views, feelings, or opinions—and/or being listened to carefully.

Here are some typical questions often asked about attitudes toward aging. They can be printed up in questionnaire form.

- ⊕ What do you do for a living—or what did you do before retirement? If you are not working for pay, how do you usually spend your time?
- ⊕ What is your present living situation? What kind of housing do you live in? With whom? Why did you choose this arrangement?
- ⊕ At what age did you decide or admit “I’m getting old?” Explain your answer.
- ⊕ At what age did you recognize your first gray hairs or wrinkles? How did you feel about them? Do you feel any differently now? Why or why not?
- ⊕ What kinds of people are your friends (of any age) or cohorts (people near your age with shared experiences)? Tell a little about them.
- ⊕ How is your family relating to the fact that you are aging? Explain.
- ⊕ In what ways are you still physically active and/or sexual?
- ⊕ When you think about getting old, what are your worst fears? What are your most hopeful expectations or dreams?
- ⊕ Do you have any regrets about your life so far? Why?
- ⊕ What words of wisdom do you have for younger generations? Why did you choose these pieces of advice?

Individually or together, class or group members can interview people—at least one man and one woman each—from different age groups, perhaps 50 to 65, 65 to 80, and over 80. So that the results can be tallied and compared, everyone should be asked the same questions to start with; notes should be taken on the answers. Of course, each conversation can be expanded to include the information that is unique or most interesting about the interviewee.

Participants report on their interview experiences—revealing what was most interesting and instructive about them. In the class discussion that follows, they can point out both the similarities and the differences in the collected answers.

The Game of Wisdom: Using One-Liners for Teaching and Learning Content

The *Game of Wisdom*—an idea in the Authors & Editors publication *Doing Without the Photocopier*—uses sayings, aphorisms, quotes, and other bits of knowledge or thought for teaching and learning purposes. And what better subject matter for an activity of this kind than gerontology—the aging process, during which *everyone* is supposed to gain wisdom?

Here are suggestions for ways to make effective educational use of one- or two-sentence material with a point—on any topic in the *Game of Knowledge*. These steps can be followed as is and/or adapted to particular situations:

- ⊕ For each individual, pair of learners, or team, make one copy of each group of ten one-liners (pages 23-26) that you are going to use for a session. Distribute the copies.
- ⊕ Participants “compete” in matching the beginnings of the lines, numbered 1-10 on the left, with their endings, lettered a-j on the right. They can draw lines to connect the matching sentence parts or write the letters of the matching endings after the beginnings. More important than getting the “right answers” quickly is the conversation that arises during decision making: they can try matching sentence parts according to their language features and/or rely on meaning to add a logical ending to each beginning. *Ellipsis* (. . .) indicates the place that words are missing—*after* the sentence parts on the left and *before* those on the right, which end with the credit lines for quotes or thoughts.
- ⊕ The first competitor to finish gets five points; the second, four; the third, three, and so on until the fifth. Then each person, pair, or team in turn gets a chance to tell a *different* one of the pieces of wisdom, perhaps receiving a point for each correct sentence. For “bonus points,” players can explain the meaning of the item, tell whether or not they agree with its message, and/or give an example of how it applies (or doesn’t apply) to real life or their own experience or sense of wisdom.
- ⊕ **VARIATION:** Here’s an engaging way to adapt the game to particular situations—large groups of learners, classes acquiring language skills while learning content, groups needing “warm-up” or motivated by games, communication classes, etc.
 - *Reproduce a page of “Wisdom” on paper or card stock, enlarging it if desired. Each page of ten items can be used for a group of up to 20; if there are more learners, add sentences from another page. Cut the items apart so that each beginning is on a separate piece, with the matching ending on another. Distribute the sentence parts.*
 - *As fast as they can, participants find their “partners”—those with the matching sentence parts. The formed pairs discuss the meaning of the “wisdom,” copy the item on the chalkboard, and—in turn—read it aloud to the whole group, eliciting discussion on its significance to learning about the topic at hand, real life and experience, etc.*
- ⊕ Everyone involved contributes more wisdom—proverbs, sayings, quotes they have read or heard, their own ideas for one-liners, and the like. One way to do this is to invent new endings for the sentence beginnings on each page—or new beginnings for the endings.

The Game of Wisdom Instructions:

Match each of the ten sentence beginnings on the left to the best ending on the right. You can draw a line or write the letter a-j. Then explain the point of each quote or thought. Do you agree with its “wisdom?” Why or why not?

1. To me, old age is always is not to be in a hurry about it. <small>http://members.aol.com/mempenny</small>	a
2. Forty is the old age of youth;...	... it can color any situation. <small>http://members.aol.com/mempenny</small>	b
3. Ageing seems to be the only available way fifteen years older than I am. <small>Bernard Baruch (1870-1965), U.S. financier</small>	c
4. The best way to grow old fifty is the youth of old age. <small>French proverb</small>	d
5. Attitude is the mind's paintbrush;...	... for economic reasons instead of romantic ones.	e
6. We don't stop laughing because we grow old;...	... to live a long time. <small>Daniel-François Esprit Auber (1782-1871), French composer</small>	f
7. You know you're getting older when everything	... while watching television and more while watching life. <small>http://members.aol.com/mempenny</small>	g
8. You know you're getting older when you turn out	... we grow old because we stop laughing. <small>http://members.aol.com/mempenny</small>	h
9. If I had my life to live over, I would have talked	... and what doesn't hurt, doesn't work. <small>http://members.aol.com/mempenny</small>	i
10. If I had my life to live over, I would have cried	... and listened more. <small>http://members.aol.com/mempenny</small>	j

Answers to The Game of Wisdom items on page 24:
1. j 2. a 3. g 4. d 5. b 6. c 7. e 8. f 9. i 10. h

Discussion Topic Instructions:

Working with a partner or small group, choose one of the pairs of statements with opposite meanings listed below. In turn, argue the two sides of the issue—based on your own beliefs, thoughts, and feelings—and/or represent a point of view that is not your own. In detail, tell the reasons for your arguments. Listen well to others' reactions and revise your true opinions, if necessary.

One Point of View VERSUS its Opposite

The stereotypes about elderly people are mostly true: most of them are sick or infirm disagreeable old	↔	Stereotypes rarely apply to individuals. The elderly vary greatly in their health, attitudes, and
Because of their knowledge and experience, seniors tend to be highly valuable—and valued—employees or	↔	Because seniors have health problems and adapt to change slowly, they should be forced to retire
Adults over 65 are terrible drivers. They should be banned from streets and highways and forced to rely on	↔	Adults over 65 are safer drivers than younger people because of their experience and sense of
Seniors should be included in, invited to, and honored at all kinds of	↔	Seniors are a bother. They should stay with their own kind and not interfere
The elderly are entitled to be cared for by their grown offspring because they gave them life and raised them.	↔	The elderly should take care of themselves or rely on government help or charity, leaving their children
Older citizens have made this country great, so the government should take care of their financial and health	↔	Older citizens require too many expensive services. The government should not spend any more on them
We should all take good care of ourselves so we can live long, healthy,	↔	We should live life for enjoyment today, not worrying about old age
Doctors should do everything they can to keep people alive as long as	↔	Old, sick people should be allowed to choose when they want to die.

Lighten Up Instructions:

Work in pairs. Tell your partner *one* of these stories. He or she will tell you the other story. Then join another pair. Tell them the stories you have just heard.

An elderly couple was getting ready for bed one night when the wife turned to the husband and said, "I'm soooo hungry for ice cream, and there isn't any in the house." 1

"I'll get you some," the husband offered.

"You're a dear," she said. "Vanilla with chocolate sauce. Write it down—or you'll forget."

"I won't forget," he said.

"With whipped cream and a cherry on top."

"Please write it down," she said. "I know you'll forget."

"I won't forget," he insisted. "Vanilla with chocolate sauce, whipped cream, and a cherry on top."

The husband went off and returned after a while with a paper bag, which he handed to his wife. She opened up the bag and pulled out a ham sandwich.

"I *told* you to write it down," she said. "You forgot the mustard!"

As told by U.S. President Ronald Reagan at a 1985 dinner

A man in Florida, in his 80s, calls his son in New York one November day. 2

The father says to the son, "I hate to tell you, but we've got some troubles here in the house. Your mother and I can't stand each other anymore, and we're getting a divorce. I've had it! I want to live out the rest of my years in peace. I'm telling you now, so you and your sister shouldn't go into shock later when I move out."

He hangs up, and the son immediately calls his sister in California and tells her the news. The sister says, "I'll handle this."

She calls Florida and says to her father, "Don't do ANYTHING till we get there! We'll both be there Wednesday night."

The father agrees, "All right."

He hangs up the phone and hollers to his wife, "Okay, they're coming for Thanksgiving. Now, what are we going to tell them for Christmas?"

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An old couple was just settling into bed one night when the phone rang. The husband got out of bed and went into the living room to answer the phone. His wife could hear him say, "Hello?" Then he said, "Sure is." He hung up the receiver (Remember those?) and went back to bed.

A minute later the phone rang again. The husband got out of bed and went into the other room. His wife could hear him say, "Hello?" again. Then he said, "Sure is," again, hung up the receiver, and went back to bed.

The wife asked who it was. The man said he didn't know. When the phone rang again, the same thing happened. The husband got out of bed, went into the other room, and answered the phone with "Hello?" After he said "Sure is," he hung up and went back to bed.

"Who was it?" asked the wife again.

"No idea," answered the man.

"Well, what did the person say?"

"It's odd. A woman keeps saying 'Long distance from Chicago.'"

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A group of senior citizens were exchanging notes about their ailments.

"My arm is so weak I can hardly hold this coffee cup."

"Yes, I know. My cataracts are so bad I can't see to pour the coffee."

"I can't turn my head because of the arthritis in my neck."

"My blood pressure pills make me dizzy."

"I guess that's the price we pay for getting old."

"Well, it's not all bad. We should be thankful that we can still drive."

jokespin.com.

Informational Resources

The information and ideas in this *Game of Knowledge: Gerontology* come from a variety of sources. Foremost are the syllabus organization and sources provided by Dr. Cecilia Johnson, Human Services Department Chair at the Forest Park Campus of St. Louis Community College (Missouri)—as presented in the Human Services 110 (Intro to Gerontology) and Human Services 118 (Aging and Disabilities) courses in Fall Semester 2001.



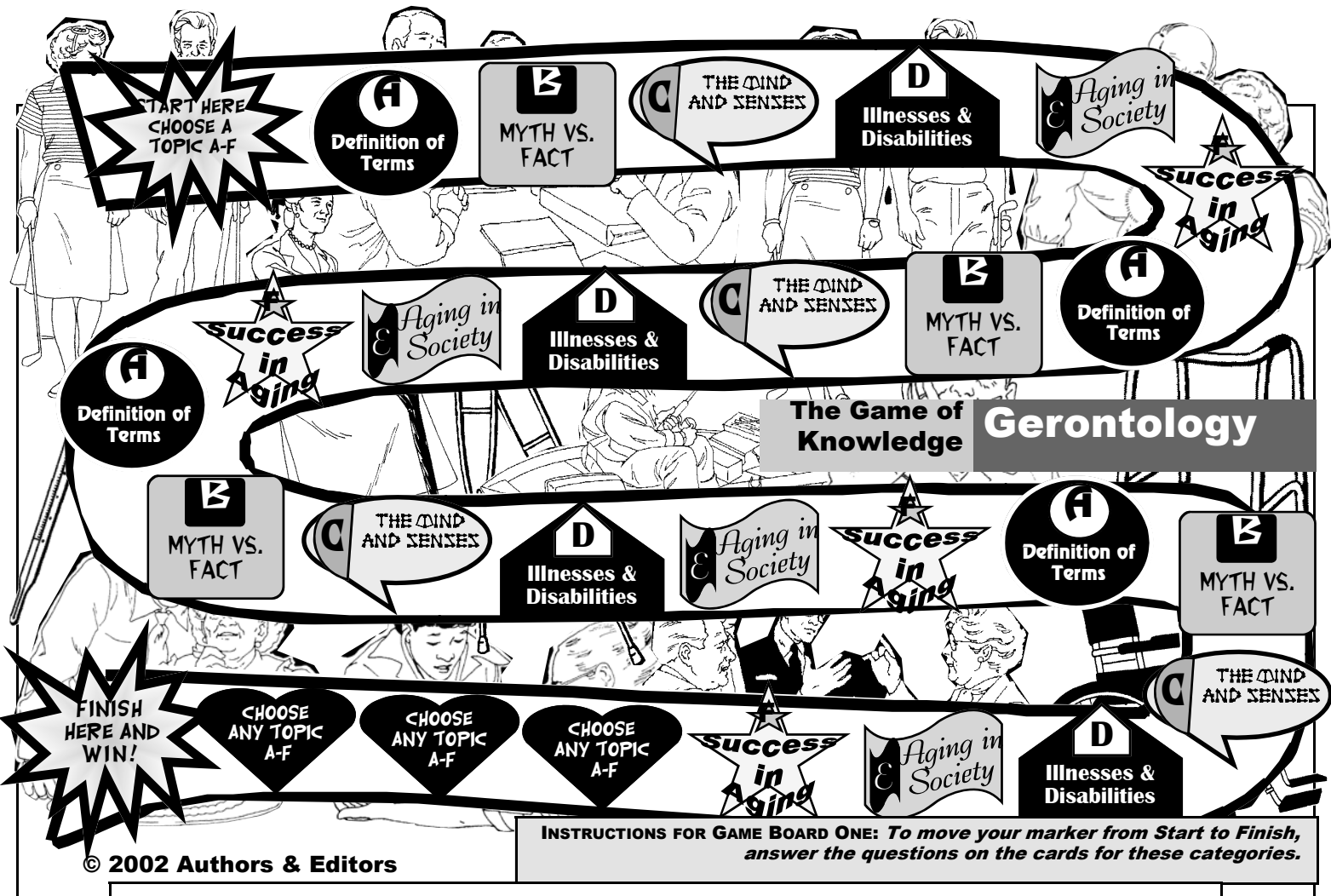
The following books and magazines were of particular interest :

- ⊕ *AARP 55 Alive Driver Safety Program: Student Workbook, Edition 5*, by the AARP, 601 E. Street, NW, Washington D.C. 20049, and the related Website www.aarp.org/55alive.
- ⊕ *Aging Successfully*, a newsletter of the Division of Geriatric Medicine, Department of Internal Medicine, Saint Louis University School of Medicine—and others.
- ⊕ *A Good Age*, by Alex Comfort. Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, 1976.
- ⊕ *The Graying of America: An Encyclopedia of Aging, Health, Mind, and Behavior*, by Donald H. Kausler & Barry C. Kausler, University of Illinois Press, Urbana & Chicago, 1996.
- ⊕ *Gerontology*, by Kenneth F. Ferraro, Springer Publishing Company, 1997.
- ⊕ *Gerontology for the Health Care Professional*, by Walter C. Chop (Southern Maine Technical College) & Regula H. Robnett (University of New England), F.A. Davis Company, Philadelphia, 1999.
- ⊕ *New Choices*, part of the *Reader's Digest Special Interest Magazine Group*
- ⊕ *The Merck Manual of Medical Information: Home Edition*, Merck Research Laboratories, West Point PA, 1997

The websites consulted for definitions, statistics, “second opinions,” and other details are too numerous to mention, but the following proved especially useful:

- ⊕ allhealth.com, healthAtoZ.com, mayoclinic.com, medicineNet.com, and lifeclinic.com
- ⊕ “Aging.” Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2001 <http://encarta.msn.com>
- ⊕ agingsuccess@slu.edu and slu.edu/departments/medicine/gec/editor1.html
- ⊕ the *GALE Encyclopedia of Medicine* and the *GALE Encyclopedia of Alternate Medicine*, at www.findarticles.com
- ⊕ [healthAto Z.com](http://healthAtoZ.com)
- ⊕ healthandage.com—website of the Novartis Foundation for Gerontology and the American Geriatrics Society
- ⊕ merckhomeedition.com
- ⊕ seniorresource.com, especially “Oh, My Aging Funny Bone”

THE GAME OF KNOWLEDGE: GERONTOLOGY. ISBN NO.1-891077-46-5



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INSTRUCTIONS FOR GAME BOARD ONE: To move your marker from Start to Finish, answer the questions on the cards for these categories.

Some reduced-sized copies of the Game Boards in this Game of Knowledge.

 Definition of Terms Question 1 Question 2 Question 3	 MYTH VS. FACT QUESTION 3 QUESTION 2 QUESTION 1
 THE MIND AND SENSES QUESTION 1 QUESTION 2 QUESTION 3	 Illnesses & Disabilities Question 1 Question 2 Question 3
 Aging in Society Question 1 Question 2 Question 3	 Success in Aging Question 1 Question 2 Question 3

INSTRUCTIONS FOR GAME BOARD TWO: To cover the 18 question symbols, answer 3 questions from the cards for each category.

Names: Player(s) or Team

1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
	TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL

Total of Points in 6 Categories: