As a reminder, SMART questions are

* **Specific:** Questions are simple, significant, and focused on a single topic or a few closely related ideas.
* **Measurable:** Questions can be quantified and assessed.
* **Action**-**oriented:** Questions encourage change.
* **Relevant:** Questions matter, are important, and have significance to the problem you’re trying to solve.
* **Time-bound:** Questions specify the time to be studied.

For instance, if you have a conversation with someone who works in retail, you might lead with questions like:

* **Specific:** Do you currently use data to drive decisions in your business? If so, what kind(s) of data do you collect, and how do you use it?
* **Measurable:** Do you know what percentage of sales is from your top-selling products?
* **Action-oriented:** Are there business decisions or changes that you would make if you had the right information? For example, if you had information about how umbrella sales change with the weather, how would you use it?
* **Relevant:** How often do you review data from your business?
* **Time-bound:** Can you describe how data helped you make good decisions for your store(s) this past year?

If you are having a conversation with a teacher, you might ask different questions, such as:

* **Specific:** What kind of data do you use to build your lessons?
* **Measurable:** How well do student benchmark test scores correlate with their grades?
* **Action-oriented:** Do you share your data with other teachers to improve lessons?
* **Relevant:** Have you shared grading data with an entire class? If so, do students seem to be more or less motivated, or about the same?
* **Time-bound:** In the last five years, how many times did you review data from previous academic years?

If you are having a conversation with a small business owner of an ice cream shop, you could ask:

* **Specific:** What data do you use to help with purchasing and inventory?
* **Measurable:** Can you order (rank) these factors from most to least influential on sales: price, flavor, and time of year (season)?
* **Action-oriented:** Is there a single factor you need more data on so you can potentially increase sales?
* **Relevant:** How do you advertise to or communicate with customers?
* **Time-bound:** What does your year-over-year sales growth look like for the last three years?

Take good notes

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It is important to take good notes during your conversation. Your notes should be comprehensive and useful. To help you capture meaningful notes, you should stick to a process of asking a question, clarifying your understanding of their response, and then briefly recording it in your notes.

Remember: If a question is worth asking, then the answer is worth recording. Commit yourself to taking great notes during your conversation.

Helpful aspects of your conversation to note include:

* **Facts:** Write down any concrete piece of information, such as dates, times, names, and other specifics.
* **Context:** Facts without context are useless. Note any relevant details that are needed in order to understand the information you gather.
* **Unknowns:** Sometimes you may miss an important question during a conversation. Make a note when this happens so you can figure out the answer later.

For example, if the previous SMART questions led the ice cream shop owner to propose a project to analyze customer flavor preferences, your notes might appear something like this:

* **Project**: Collect customer flavor preference data.
* **Overall business goal**: Use data to offer or create more popular flavors.
* **Two data sources**: Cash register receipts and completed customer surveys (email).
* **Target completion date:** Q2
* **To do:** Call back later and speak with the manager about the location of survey data.

The notes you will take will differ greatly based on the data conversation you have. The important thing is that your notes are clear, organized, and concise.

Now you are ready to have a great conversation about data in real life.