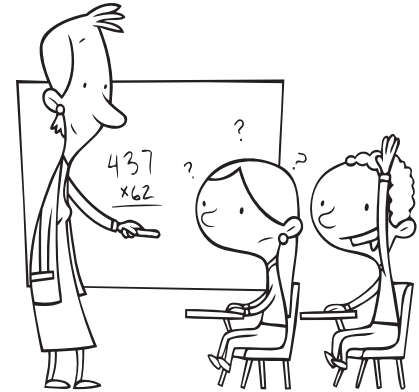


Are Teachers Asking the Right Questions?

By Becky L. Spivey, M.Ed. and Clint Johnson, M.A., CCC-SLP

Questions play an important role in the learning process. Effective questioning helps students to organize their thinking, which in turn, helps them achieve their academic goals. As teachers, we need to plan the questions in our lessons carefully. The questions you ask a student are just as important as the information you are presenting.

There is more to questioning than simply asking students to recall facts. Questioning should stimulate critical thinking, encourage commentary, and inspire ideas. In order to perfect questioning techniques, teachers must be masters in their subject. When preparing questions for your lessons, use the following guidelines.



Questions should:

- Test a student's preparation. (What are some of the topics that you read about in last night's assignment?)
- Arouse interest. (When completing the assignment, what did you discover that you didn't know before?)
- Develop insight. (Why do you think that the number of homeless citizens in this area is so high?)
- Develop attitudes and ideals. (How can building a Habitat house help the entire community?)
- Strengthen learning. (How would you summarize what we discussed today about the need for building more Habitat houses?)
- Stimulate critical thinking. (How might other communities be encouraged to build Habitat houses?)
- Test achievement. (What are three ways to encourage citizens to participate in building or donating money to build Habitat houses?)

Good questions are always:

- Purposeful (asked to achieve a specific purpose).
- Clear (students understand what they mean).
- Brief (stated in as few words as possible, natural and simple, and in conversational English).
- Thought-provoking (stimulating thought and response).
- Limited in scope (students reason through one or two points of the lesson).
- Adapted to the level of the class (tailored to the kinds of students in the class).

Avoid question types that are:

- Yes-No (Did we start the war?)
- Ambiguous (What about the Civil War?)
- Tugging (Come on, think of another reason.)
- Guessing (How long do you think it took man to invent the wheel?)
- Leading (How do vitamins build strong bodies and make us healthy?)
- Vague ("Tell us about the Grand Canyon.")

Questions are most effective when they are:

- Planned.
- Logical and sequential.
- Addressing the entire class.
- Giving the student time to think.
- Balanced between thought and fact.
- Asked in a conversational tone of voice.

One of the most important aspects of proper questioning techniques is to allow students to formulate their answers by giving them enough “wait-time.” In order for students to formulate an answer or opinion, they must be given sufficient time to do so. Prolonging your wait-time to five seconds or longer encourages the length of student responses and gives you the opportunity to hear and evaluate. Wait-time can change your expectations about what students can do. As students get more time to respond, they will try harder to answer questions—especially those students that you think are more challenged or less apt to try.



Use Bloom's Taxonomy to Classify Your Questions

- Knowledge (What is the name of the capital of South Carolina?)
- Comprehension (How would you find the area of a triangle having two sides that are equal?)
- Application (What would happen to this pie if it were baked 5 minutes longer?)
- Analysis (What is the most significant scene in Romeo and Juliet?)
- Synthesis (How would you solve this problem?)
- Evaluation (What hypothesis can you make?)

Encourage students to:

- Speak up.
- Give answers that include fact and reasoning.
- Agree and disagree politely and respect other's opinions.
- Wait to be recognized before speaking.

Finally, remember to ask questions that balance fact and reasoning. Teachers who strive for higher level questions may lose interest in the bread-and-butter memory question. Simple questions for challenged learners are just as necessary as complex ones in all categories. If teachers use questioning effectively, students will be able to assume major roles in their learning process.

Resource

Lewis, Karron G. Developing questioning skills, Section 5 Improving specific teaching techniques. Center for Teaching Effectiveness, Retrieved February 23, 2007 from <http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cte/sourcebook/questioning.html>