

Track The Questions You Ask

Teaching through questions is only as good as the quality of the questions. Classrooms often feature a constant stream of comprehension questions and yes/no questions - the kind of questions that elicit only simplistic answers (and tend to suggest that there is only one right answer). In contrast, thoughtfully placed questions that require students to use higher-order thinking skills encourage students to probe deeper, follow their curiosity, solve problems, and construct knowledge and meaning.

What kinds of questions do you ask? Are your questions effectively spurring students' learning? In this Challenge you will track your questions and look for opportunities to insert more-powerful questions into your teaching.

What you will need:

Time estimate: 1 hour + 1 class of recording time

Materials: video camera/audio recorder, paper, pen

Directions:

1. In order to build your practice of using effective questions in your teaching, you first have to know what kinds of questions you already use. Choose a class period (or longer) to record all the questions you ask. You can invite a trusted friend to visit your classroom and track your questions, or you can record yourself on camera or an audio recorder. Write down (or have your visitor write) every question you ask during that period.
2. Then review your questions. What kinds of questions do you hear? Notice some or all of the following:
 - Are your questions open-ended or closed?
 - Do you hear words like *who*, *what*, *when*, *where* or words like *why*, *how*?
 - What sorts of answers do your questions produce - e.g., recall of facts, analysis of a concept, or generation of new connections or ideas?
 - What types of thinking do your questions require of students?
3. Now listen to your recording again (or ask your friend to recall the lesson). Look for moments where you could pose a meaningful, effective question to a student. Imagine what those questions might sound like (maybe even practice them!). Try to formulate questions that have some or all of these characteristics:
 - Begin with *how*, *why*, or *what do you think about...*
 - Ask students to make connections across lessons, concepts, or even content areas.
 - Require students to generate new ideas or solutions to a problem.
 - Prompt students to investigate further.
 - Have more than one right answer.
4. Give yourself time to practice effective questioning. Then, re-evaluate. Continually self-assess to observe your questioning techniques and to strengthen your practice.

Resources

- [Read more](#) about Bloom's Taxonomy and the different types of thinking involved in questions
- The University of Chicago suggests a [step-by-step process](#) for building your own question tool kit.