

## Ask "So What?"

Nearly every teacher has heard students ask "Why are we doing this?" And nearly every teacher has answered "Because it's on the test" or "Because you'll use it someday." What might these answers communicate to students about the importance of the lesson? Further, what might they communicate about the relevance of school?

Questioning that prompts curiosity, investigation, and thinking extends to teachers asking ourselves key questions. *Why? So what? Who cares?* As reflective practitioners, we should ask ourselves these questions about every unit and lesson we plan. With the many demands teachers must manage, it can be easy to default to just getting through the curriculum, without ensuring that students are engaging in important, meaningful work. But understanding - and being able to articulate to students - why a lesson's content matters is an essential part of planning. Asking "so what" pushes us to be mindful about all aspects of our practice - planning, questioning, assessing, even building social-emotional skills. "So what" is a worthwhile check for teachers - before, during and after each lesson.

### What you will need:

*Time estimate:* 10 minutes

*Materials:* lesson planning tools

### Directions:

1. When designing and planning your next lesson, challenge yourself to find or create a reason that this content or skill matters to your students right now. Even when your school's curriculum requires that you teach a topic at a particular time, find a way to make that topic relevant.
2. Ask yourself: *Why* should students understand adverbs? *Why* should they read this text? *Why* should they write a lab report on this science experiment? Consider, carefully, why the lesson content matters to your particular students, right now in their lives. You might consider asking:
  - Are students curious about this topic? Will they care about it? If not, what can I do to make it fascinating? Do I find this assignment fascinating?
  - How will this lesson challenge my students?
  - How does this lesson connect to my students' goals and dreams?
  - How does this lesson connect with the real world and my students' real lives?
3. Ready to challenge yourself further? Once you have answered your own questions about why the lesson matters, consider how you will communicate that to students. Rather than simply telling them upfront why the topic is important, plan to use questions to facilitate students' discovery on their own. You can involve your students in this effort: when you can see that a lesson "speaks to" them, ask them why it matters. Students are experts in their own learning, and their understanding of why learning matters is the most important perspective of all.

### Resources

[Read one teacher's reflection](#) on asking "So What?" and how it affects her planning process.