



20 Techniques to Improve Teacher Questioning

Skilful questioning lies at the heart of great teaching. These techniques and strategies will improve your planning and practice, and ensure students' engagement improves and progress accelerates. Get more details at www.coreteaching.co.uk

Planning Questions		Process	Benefits
1	The Question Matrix The 'must have' resource for all question planning. Get yours at www.coreteaching.co.uk	A grid shared by teacher and pupils. Question your way through the Matrix from probable to possible, and from factual to hypothetical	Supports planning for stretch and challenge, and develops pupils' independent questioning skills, inquisitive disposition and reflective approach to learning
2	Question Taxonomy Tiered questions to focus on higher order thinking and challenging concepts	Pre-plan questions to sequentially address the stages of a given taxonomy, e.g. in Bloom's, synthesis, evaluation then creativity	Provides high challenge thinking, requiring more careful thought; excellent for creative and more able pupils
3	The Big Question Setting the substantial and thought provoking question	Usually set at the beginning of the lesson, these can't be answered when posed – only at the end of the lesson, using all of the information and contributions to the lesson	Develop deeper and more profound thinking, these require collaborative thinking and a careful interpretation of the information; great for moral issues or speculative questions
4	The Next Big Question Pupils pose next lesson's Big Question	The perfect plenary and evolution of The Big Question: pupils identify the Next Big Question as the basis of next lesson	Democratic and encourages independence; students form and prioritise the questions to help them move forward
Posing Questions		Process	Benefits
5	Cold Calling The good old 'no hands-up' rule	Randomised and non-directed questioning. Tell pupils you are 'Cold Calling' and keep them on their toes	Improves engagement and challenges all pupils to think; reduces dependence on a few keen/able students
6	Half 'n' half Mix things up with equal amount of random and directed questions	Accept hands-up, but for every volunteered answer, teacher must select one not volunteered	Establishes better answers and builds from strong base. Enhances engagement and allows for more able/confident to share
7	Q Ball Throw the Question Ball around the room to develop collaboration	Teacher holds ball to pose the question and throws. Pupils respond, and then throw to another pupil, or back to the teacher	Engages more pupils. Stops teacher being focus for all questioning. Develops connected thinking and depth of ideas
8	Pose, Pause, Pounce, Bounce The modern-day classic	Pose the question, wait (see 'Thinking Time, over), pick your student, and then 'bounce' the responses around to other students	Maximises engagement across the class, and reduces/negates the number of 'I don't knows'
9	A.P.P.L.E. Ask, Pause, Pick, Listen, Expand	As with PPPB (above) with more emphasis on the listening, and expanding upon peer responses	As with PPPB (above), but with a more helpful mnemonic for pupils to engage and deepen understanding
10	Coming Soon Previewing questions in advance	Question is shared a few minutes before being asked, or the start of the lesson	Prepares pupils for the nature of the question, and develops a deeper, more considered response

20 Ways to Improve Teacher Questioning

Posing Questions (cont)		Process	Benefits
11	Hot-seating Great for more than just drama	One pupil assumes the ‘hot-seat’ to take a sequence of questions from the class and teacher	Builds self-esteem and encourages listening; provides challenge, especially for more able or dramatic students; great for empathetic and/or hypothetical answers
12	Heads-up Signal an impending question to one pupil	For important questions, give one pupil the heads-up to get prepared, e.g. ‘Martha, I’m going to ask you about Viking burials in about one minute, OK?’	Elicits deeper responses, even through the specific question if not revealed; builds confidence in quieter students
13	Pepper – whole class Rapid-fire Q&A practice	Quickly and randomly fire closed questions to the class. Do not dwell on answers, and if the answer is incorrect, just re-ask another student	Fast and fun, energetic and inclusive. Great for recap, and for the more competitive students
14	Pepper – differentiated Small group version of the above	As above, but extract a group of pupils and tailor the challenge appropriately, e.g. HA mathematicians, EAL vocabulary/picture flashcards	As above, but even more productive when targeted to same-ability pupils
15	Break-it-down Share the ‘working-out’ of bigger questions	If pupils struggle to answer bigger or more complex questions, ask constituent questions to lead the student through steps in the thinking	Develops confidence and allows students to reveal the stages in their understanding
Improving Responses		Process	Benefits
16	Thinking Time Highlight the amount of time given to think of an answer	Provide time between setting the question and requiring an answer. You may alert pupils to the approach and the time available to develop an answer	Promotes depth of thought and ensures all pupils have a view or opinion
17	Thinking and Linking Time As above, with discussion and research	Increased time provided for thinking and talking to peers, or going through notes, before seeking answers	Pupils actively think and collaborate to form answers; targeted pupils can ‘link’ with teachers or TAs
18	ABC Agree, Build, Challenge	One pupil responds and others must vote (flashcards or mini-wbs) to Agree with, Build on or Challenge their answer. Each can be expanded	Builds engagement in a way which allows for depth of thought and challenge; works best with open and theoretical questions
19	23 Word Answers Seeking a minimum answer	Pupils are given a very precise target length for their answer, e.g. 23 words, or no fewer than 15 words. Alternatively, they must use a particular word or phrase	Focuses the minds, and develops speaking and reasoning skills, the correct use of critical and technical language
20	Phone a friend The alternative to ‘I don’t know’.	Pupils who ‘don’t know’ can nominate a peer to answer on their behalf, but they still have to evaluate that answer, perhaps using ABC (above)	Encourages listening and participation; removes ‘I don’t know’ responses and associated stress; builds self-esteem

